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# Dictionary of Storms

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

DICTIONARY OF STORMS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in

CREATIVE WRITING

by

Marci Calabretta

2014

To: Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Marci Calabretta, and entitled Dictionary of Storms, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Julie Marie Wade

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Vernon Dickson

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Campbell McGrath, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 5, 2014

The thesis of Marci Calabretta is approved.

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Dean Kenneth G. Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

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Dean Lakshmi N. Reddi  
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2014

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DEDICATION

For every brother I've ever had,  
remembered or not

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Many thanks to the editors of the following journal in which this poem first appeared.

Chautauqua: “All the Sheep Have Scattered”

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

DICTIONARY OF STORMS

by

Marci Calabretta

Florida International University, 2014

Miami, Florida

Professor Campbell McGrath, Major Professor

DICTIONARY OF STORMS is a collection of poetry that explores the dynamics of one family through their son's absence. Using recurring images of skin, water, dragonflies, and pearls, the poems examine distance and absence, wanderlust and filial obligation from different family members' perspectives. Desires are sloughed off, replaced by new ones, re-cultivated as mythos.

The architecture of many individual poems, and the collection as a whole, are structured by meditative lyricism reminiscent of Li-Young Lee. Robert Hass's poems and translations serve as a model for articulating both the difficulty and beauty of longing. Personae such as "Admonishing Brother Returns as Chrysanthemum" and "Hungry Brother Returns as Octopus" are influenced by Ai and Louise Glück. In the spirit of Emily Dickinson and John Keats, DICTIONARY OF STORMS reflects upon longing, grief, and desire.

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I.

## OLD COUNTRY, NEW WORLD

Although my sweaters were already rolled  
and tucked around stone cooking pots,  
packages of dried, flat squid and fish  
in a borrowed, half-centuried suitcase,  
Mama burned a bouquet of candles  
that last night, plucking pearls from the cold  
bowl of water to string on waxed red threads.  
I said Americans do not barter, everything costs  
exactly what it says. In silence  
she clipped each loose end carefully, close  
to the knots, with large, ancient shears.

Although I did not know it, Mama sewed  
pearls into my skin: each vertebra, each  
tooth and eyelash stitched in salt-laced dew  
and the ash of incanted incense, strung  
with the thread of old blood. She said white  
is funerary back home. Red is for good luck,  
still unraveling in her hands and across her lap.  
Entire tapestries between us. *Mama, don't*

*miss me. I will eat enough*, I said to the phone,  
because I did, and didn't, could still taste desire  
taut as the skin of an umbrella over its ribs.

Here, darkness is pinned back like long, black hair  
from the phosphorescence of this new city.

Enormous apples, umbral faces,  
a thousand languages in the same breath.

Even the air spins its own guttural songs in coral  
and gold, malachite green and porcelain blue.

Of all the colors oiled into the crows' feathers,  
only their throats are crimson.

Once more I roll my tongue over the old  
grain of longing, patient as an oyster with its seed.

POSTMARKED

I am writing to you in favor of storms fanned from the ears of elephants,  
stretched against the sky in this month when dragonflies shake off their skins.

Imagine that your walls are the greatest wonders of the world,  
a hotel made of ash or ice or endangered rainforest leaves,

and that I am waiting for you in the curved glass bubble of air  
sixty-six feet beneath Persian sand draped in waves like lace and light.

The white sip of champagne distilled by sunrise carries you on the tide  
of a thousand sidelong glances from your island to mine.

Your bed is laid with sheets soft as the membrane of a jellyfish  
and lined with the whisper of saltwater just beginning to wake.

You cannot feel the crash of the horizon here in the darkness.

Your rust-wrapped windows are a chandelier of stingray tails

pointing the wind in all the wrong directions.

At the foot of this bed, lulled by the undertow of sunrise and set,

there is a coffee table for your tea, which will steam and cool until each window, kissed by bottomfeeders and undiscovered fish, has fogged.

See, I am writing your name into the breath of the storm, next to all the others who have drowned in this room, our room, your room.

The wallpaper is wrinkled with the wet murmur and sway of seaweed.  
The ceilings are transparent and broad as the moment in which we realize

we have grown old together in this room beneath the sea  
where there is no one but us and the sonic knocking of waves on our wall.

We cannot confine our solitary selves to this,  
so I am waiting for you from here, in favor of storms,

drawn in and out by your eyelashes as they flutter and still, alone in this room,  
our room, your room, made of ocean and air and selfish letters.

## BONSAI

As a bent man with insubstantial hands  
wires the skin of a miniature myrtle,  
  
waiting a year to break the bark,  
and another to undo the trunk's mistakes,  
  
so my father was neither kind  
nor strong in his bruising, only patient.

## RESTITUTION FOR THE GRANDSON

If, in the hour of the ox, you had passed  
from your own bright life into ours,  
  
or perhaps if your mother had begged  
more fervently for you during the spring tide,  
  
when the sea cannot help but give  
and give for its fullness,  
  
even if you had not been born  
in the ruinous hour of the boar,  
  
as the shore emptied its cupped hands  
back into the breakers of neap tide,  
  
if your father had not shut himself up  
with the bark and bone of small forests,  
  
had instead cultivated patriarchies  
tenderly and fiercely, if and if and yet—



here I stand, lifting my empty net,  
slinging into the sea from this precipice

your sister's scrolls, your mother's oath,  
the spent cockleshells of clams,

insufficient recompense for what  
the sea asks us to return.

ALL THE SHEEP HAVE SCATTERED

1:25 a.m.

The memory of your hair's whorl  
reminds me of a snail  
shouldering a staircase toward the inner ear  
where a storm or a dream is brewing.

2:26 a.m.

One thousand tiny orchids  
prick open my pores  
as I chew the darkness.

3:27 a.m.

and still I sprawl in this damn bed  
thinking of you.

4:28 a.m.

Sleep, the light sown into your skin  
shimmers like holy water—  
why do you touch everything but me?