



SATURDAY, AUGUST 27, 2005

Shadow woke me by poking the back of my head with his muzzled snout. Because the windows were boarded up, my room was pitch dark except for a teeny beam of light that had let itself in through an itty-bitty hole in the wood. It was morning and hot. The clock read 9:30. "Mama musta won," I told him.

Downstairs, the TV blared and Pops, like a stamp to a letter, was glued to it. I fed Shadow, gave him water, and joined my pops in front of the box. The hurricane with the pretty name was now a Category Three, and the chance of a direct hit on New Orleans was about 30 percent. President Bush had declared a state of emergency in Louisiana, Mississippi,

and Alabama, but so far no mandatory evacuations had been ordered.

"Most folks with an ounce of good sense and the means are leavin' soon or are already gone." Pops shook his head. "Your mama's a soft touch," he sighed. "Always been a soft touch."

"Unless you get her real mad," I reminded him.

"Yep."

"If you can't make her leave today, what are we gonna do?"

"We came to a compromise," he said.

"What's a compromise?"

"An understanding. I gave her till three o'clock. If she's not here by then, we're goin' to get her."

"Did she promise?" I asked.

"She promised."

I spent the rest of the morning snacking, practicing some advanced musical scales, and watching both the TV and the clock.

After lunch, Pops, Shadow, and I headed outside for a game of Frisbee and Pops was showing off, doing a back-handed catch, when the Jupiters drove up. Their SUV was packed full. Jupi waved and hollered, "Hey, Saint!"

I responded with a cool-brother nod and went with Pops as he approached the curb. "Y'all leavin'?" he asked.

Do you think they packed up their stuff to stay? I almost said.

Jupi and I must have been thinking the same thing because we both rolled our eyes.

"Yeah, got family up in Waterproof," Miz Jupiter answered.

I chuckled. "Waterproof? Where's that?" I'd never heard of it.

But Pops had, because he answered for them, "Podunk town north of Baton Rouge in Tensas Parish, not far from Natchez."

"Where're y'all headed?" Jupi's father asked.

"To my mama's in Baton Rouge," Pops told them.

"Be safe then and we'll look forward to seein' y'all sometime next week," Miz Jupiter said. They waved and grinned like they were going on a family vacation, and as they sped off, Jupi blew me a kiss.

"That girl's sweet on you," Pops noted.

"I know," I replied.

At 3:05 P.M., I peered into our driveway. Mama's car wasn't there yet. "Pops," I said, yanking on his shirttail, "it's past three o'clock."

"Grab your stuff and c'mon," Pops commanded. And with dispatch, we left.

Right away, Pops called Mama on her cell, but she didn't pick up, so he left a message telling her we were on our way. Hurriedly, we packed the car and drove off. We passed Miz

Moran, who was resting on her porch. She smiled, then waved at us like nothing was wrong and everything was wonderful.

"What about Miz Moran?" I asked.

"Mr. Tiberon already talked to her family. They're comin' after her later today."

"But what if she won't go?"

"She'll go. Now stop your worrying and buckle your seat belt."

As we screeched away, Shadow, minus the muzzle, barked three times. Pops clenched his teeth.

Of course, dogs weren't allowed in the hospital and I had to stay outside with Shadow. Pops directed us to a tree where I was told to stay and keep my eyes on the car in case someone tried to break in. "I won't be long," Pops said.

An hour later, Pops strolled through the automatic doors—alone.

"Thought you had a compromise?" I spouted flippantly.

"Watch your mouth, now," Pops scolded, and made his way to the car. I was right behind him.

"Well?" I asked.

Pops turned on the ignition. "Well what?"

I shrugged. "What's the plan?"

Pops gazed up at the sky. "The plan is we'll evacuate as soon as it's mandatory."

When we got home, we immediately turned on the television. Hurricane Katrina was now being called dangerous. On one channel the weather people were predicting that the storm surge would top the levees. If that happened, most of the city would be flooded. On another channel they said the levees could crack. I was beginning to get worried. Outside, it turned dark and still no Mama.

"Maybe if I ask," I told Pops.

"Maybe if you ask what?"

"Maybe if I ask her to come home so we can leave, she will."

Pops smiled and handed me his cell. After three rings, Mama picked up.

"Mama, I think we should leave soon. Okay?"

"I'm doing my best, Saint. But try to understand. Some of the nurses are gone, so the ER and ORs are close to shutting down. A lot of other staff members are leaving tonight and evacuation's not even mandatory yet," Mama responded.

"I know, but according to the news, it probably will be tomorrow," I said.

"As soon as it is, we'll leave."

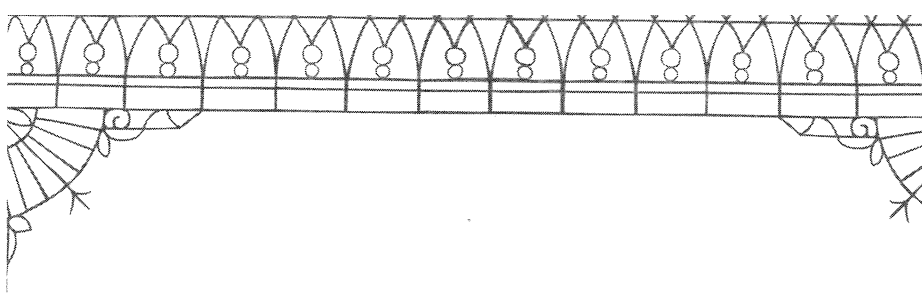
"You promise, Mama?"

"I promise."

"So you're comin' home pretty soon?"

"As soon as I can."

I should have been asleep when Mama finally got home, but I'd intentionally stayed awake. I glanced at my watch. The hands glowed in the dark. Mama's *as soon as I can* was two o'clock in the morning. Because I expected them to have another fight, I stayed awake for a while. But surprisingly, all was quiet in Tremé.



EVACUATE

"Where's Mama?" I asked Pops as I poured milk on my Cheerios on Sunday morning.

"That's a silly question, Saint."

"At the hospital, huh?"

With his eyes on the TV, he nodded.

"The block is pretty much a ghost town," he said. "Only two families left are the Tiberons and us. Perry's tryin' to wait it out. He and Squirrel are holed up over there with a generator and plenty of provisions."

"And Miz Moran?"

"No sign of her. Not on her porch . . . must be gone."

"You spoze her daughter came to get her?"

"I spoze."

Suddenly there was a special news flash. Hurricane Katrina had been upgraded again, this time to a catastrophic Category Five, and was headed straight for New Orleans.

Then it finally happened. Mayor Nagin's worried face was on the screen, ordering mandatory evacuation. "Katrina is a storm that most of us have long feared," he said.

To help people leave faster, Interstate 10 going west was turned into all one way leading out of the city. They did the same thing with Interstates 55 and 59 going north.

"What about folks who don't have a way to get out of here?" Pops asked the TV.

As if Mayor Nagin had heard him, he said the Superdome was being set up as a "refuge of last resort."

Pops flicked off the TV. "Get dressed!" he ordered.

"Okay," I replied, and flew upstairs.

"And hurry!"

The outside of the hospital was buzzing like a beehive, people rushing here, there, and everywhere. No one seemed to be following any rules and traffic was wacko. Some patients were being pushed in wheelchairs to cars and loaded in. Others hobbled out with walkers and crutches. A few waited on benches. Shadow and I were once again told to plant ourselves. Helicopters came and went. Even though there were clouds in the sky, it still was hot and muggy.

As ordered, I was staying put when I noticed a tiny lady

struggling to get an old man who had only one leg into a car. I knew I had to help her. I looped Shadow's leash around the tree and clasped it. "Sit!" I commanded. For once, he listened.

"You need some help?" I asked the woman.

"Lord yes, child," she answered.

"He'll have more room in the backseat," I advised her, and she agreed.

It took us a while, but we finally got him inside. She told me thank you and was about to hop in her car to drive off without the chair.

"What about the wheelchair?" I reminded her.

She motioned. "It's too big. Got no room for it."

"If we fold it up, it might fit," I said, and proceeded to fold it the way I'd seen them do around the hospital.

She opened the trunk and we lifted it in. There was just enough room.

The tiny lady hugged me tight. "You must be some kinda saint."

"I am," I replied. "Saint Beach."

That got her laughing. "Thank you, Saint Beach," she said as she reached into her purse and smashed an almost brand-new twenty-dollar bill into my hand. With a nod of his head, the old man in the backseat also thanked me, and she screeched off into the traffic mess.

For Juilliard, I told myself as I stuffed the bill into my pocket. I wondered how much it cost to go to school there. I already had the grand I'd saved for the Leblanc. New York City, here I come.

I glanced over at Shadow, who was snoozing, then toward the hospital doors, but Mercedes and Valentine Beach were nowhere in sight. I patted the twenty-dollar bill in my pocket and checked out the area. There she was, a really old woman who desperately needed my assistance. Quickly, I trotted over to where she was trying, without success, to get another old lady, who I figured had to be her sister because they looked just alike, into a car.

"Maybe I could help you," I offered.

"My sis had heart surgery just a few days ago. We're identical twins," she told me as we carefully positioned her sister in what little space was left in the car. And when we were done, she called me an angel and slipped me a ten, which I added to the twenty. This being-helpful stuff was really paying off.

I was scanning my surroundings for another generous person in need of aid when someone tapped me on the shoulder. Startled, I whipped around. It was my uncle Hugo.

"Hey, Uncle Hugo."

Uncle Hugo and Pops had the same big smile. "Hey, Saint. You got your things?" he asked.

My mouth was open to ask why when Pops showed up. The expression on his face told me he'd cooked something up and it wasn't tasty. He and Hugo grinned and butted knuckles. "Thanks for helpin' me out," Pops told him.

"Ain't nuthin'," Hugo replied, then added, "but we're in a hurry."

That's when all four of their eyes landed on me. *Oh no, here it comes.*

"Saint?" Pops said.

"Huh?"

"I'm going to stay here with your mama till this evening."

"And?"

"You're leavin' for Baton Rouge with Hugo right now."

"But what about Shadow?"

"I'll take good care of him. We'll bring him with us," Pops assured me.

"No you won't!" I said as I turned to bolt. But before I could get away, Pops grabbed the back of my collar. He yanked so hard that I almost fell.

Pops raised his voice and put his finger in my face. "This ain't no time to play, Saint!" He was more than serious. "I promise . . . I'll bring the dog. But *you* are leavin' with my brother right now."

"But—" I said.

"But what?"

My eyes began to water and my tears flowed. "I don't wanna go with them. I wanna stay here with you," I sniveled.

Right then, the hospital doors opened and out walked Mama. Hoping she would save me, I ran to her. She wiped my tears.

"Don't make me go," I pleaded.

She glanced at my pops. "We made a decision, Saint."

"What about Shadow? You know he can't stand him. I'm not just leavin' him here to drown or something."

With her arm around my shoulder, we headed to the tree Shadow was sitting under and walked him, well, actually dragged him back to where Pops and Uncle Hugo were standing.

"Hugo . . . is there any way y'all can take the dog?" Mama asked.

"Sorry, Mercedes, we ain't got no room for no big-ass dog like that."

"He's not a big-ass dog," I said.

"Watch your mouth, Saint," Pops warned.

"Plus, Kalisha has that crazy cat she won't go anywhere without." Kalisha is my oldest freckle-face cousin. She has two younger twin sisters, Kalinda and Kiley, who always sing along nonstop with the radio. Hugo shook his head. "Sorry, there just ain't enough room."

Mama stared into my eyes. "I give you my word, Saint. As soon as I'm finished here, we'll leave—"

"And Shadow'll be with you, right?" I interrupted.

"And Shadow will be with us," Mama vowed.

Uncle Hugo fidgeted and glanced at his watch.

"Time to go, Saint," Pops said.

I knelt down and hugged Shadow tightly. "I love you, boy," I whispered.

Pops reached for the leash. "Lemme have him, now."

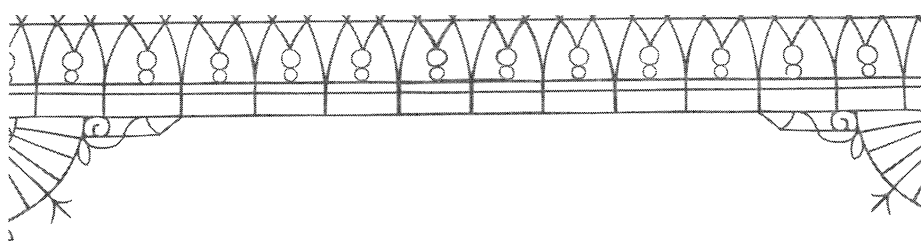
"Okay," I said, but as I released my grip, Shadow pulled away hard, got loose, and ran. "Shadow, come back!" I yelled. Pops and I ran after him, but it was no use. Tired of being in one place for too long, Shadow fled like a bullet.

I tried not to cry, but my eyes began to water, and soon, two trails of tears were streaming down my face.

Pops patted my shoulder. "I'm sorry, Saint."

I jerked away. "No you're not!"

And as I sobbed, I realized that the how-to-keep-Shadow game was finally over and I, Saint Louis Armstrong Beach, was the loser. Maybe I'm not so smart after all.



ON THE ROAD

Like it or not, I was forced to leave with Uncle Hugo. Mama kissed me over and over.

Pops rubbed my head. "I know you don't believe me, but I am sorry. I'll go back to the house and see if I can find him."

"You will?"

"I promise."

"Hi, Saint," my three girl cousins and their mama, Auntie Vi, said as I climbed into their car. The cat was snoozing in a cage beside Kalisha.

"Hey," I replied. "Hi, Auntie Vi," I added as she tilted her cheek toward my lips for a kiss. She smelled like whatever kind of mint gum she was chewing.

"Seems like we ain't seen you in forever," Kalisha declared.

Even if Kalisha did have a stinky cat, I still liked her. I smiled. "For real, huh?"

From where she stood on the curb with Pops, Mama made the sign of the cross and tossed me a kiss. "See y'all tonight," they hollered.

Seconds later, we slowly headed north, away from New Orleans.

"Did I ever tell you we almost named you Katrina?" Uncle Hugo informed Kalisha.

She frowned. "Sure glad you didn't."

"You hungry, Saint?" Aunt Vi asked.

Shadow was gone and I might never see him again. "Naw," I replied.

Auntie Vi turned around. A kind look shone in her eyes. "Your dog will be just fine."

With that, I started crying again.

Kalisha rolled her eyes. "Would you cut it out, Saint? It's just a dog."

Just a dog, huh? Maybe your just-a-stinky-cat needs to mysteriously disappear.

"Be nice, Kalisha," Uncle Hugo warned.

"I am nice. It's bad enough that I'm gonna have to listen nonstop to the *American Idol* twins all the way to Baton Rouge. And now this?"

"Apologize to your cousin," Auntie Vi commanded.

Kalisha pursed her lips tightly.

"Now!" Auntie Vi added.

Her eyes narrowed. "Sorry," she huffed.

"Now, Saint, I'll ask you again. You hungry?" Auntie Vi repeated.

"Yes," I replied.

"You want a sandwich or fried chicken?"

"What kinda sandwich?"

"Liverwurst."

"What's liverwurst?" I asked.

"It's an acquired taste," Uncle Hugo answered.

"Tastes like liver. You won't like it. I promise," Kalisha added.

"Chicken, please."

"All we got are legs and wings."

"A leg, please."

"Want some soda?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Clumps of folks on the side of the road held signs, mostly asking for rides to Baton Rouge, Lafayette, Atlanta, and Birmingham. One said New York City. Another said *Destination: Wherever You're Going—Will Help With Gas*. A group of men on bicycles zoomed past. I looked up. More clouds were filling the sky.

Kalinda, one of the wannabe singers, proclaimed, "I gotta pee, bad!"

"What'd I tell you about sayin' *pee*?" Auntie Vi scolded.

"I havta go to the restroom, like, right now. Is that better?" she sassed.

"Don't you start with me, Kalinda," Auntie Vi warned her.

Luckily there was a gas station straight ahead and everyone was told to get out and use the facilities, whether they had to or not, because this was the last time we were stopping until we got to Gramma Beach's house.

Instantly, I decided. We'd only come a few miles. It was now or never. As I climbed out, I grabbed my duffel bag and, of course, Kalisha noticed. "We're comin' right back, Saint."

"Where I go, this goes. Got it?"

"Whatever."

As soon as Uncle Hugo went into the men's room, I snuck around to the back of the station and sprinted. There were plenty of trees and bushes, so I had lots of cover and I was sure no one could see me. I ran so fast, my lungs started to burn. Finally, I had to slow to a trot.

That was when I pictured poor Uncle Hugo and Aunt Vi, searching, wondering if somebody had snatched me. Soon he'll be on his cell, talking to my pops. I felt so bad for him. And he couldn't turn back to look for me because both sides

of the interstate were one way unless they use the back roads. Those were probably crammed too.

He probably called the police. With everything that was happening, searching for a lost eleven-year-old probably wasn't high on the po-po's list.

Stop worrying, Saint. Pops'll figure out that nuthin' bad happened. That I'm simply an escapee. Before long I'll find Shadow and get back with Mama and Pops where I belong and we'll call Uncle Hugo. Everything's gonna be fine. Just fine.

I ate up the road, and in what seemed like no time, Saint Louis Armstrong Beach was back in Tremé.

Figuring that the Tiberons were still holed up, I had to come up with a strategy. If Perry Tiberon or Squirrel caught wind of me, they'd be on the phone to my pops in a hurry. Then I might never find Shadow. My search for my dog would need to be quiet, especially on my block.

As I made my way down one block and then another, I saw stragglers who'd waited until the last minute to pack their cars to evacuate. Some, like the Tiberons, were staying put, I overheard them brag. Others were going to the Superdome, just in case. One woman, cradling a tiny baby, was walking there. Most of the houses were vacant. Some were boarded, some weren't. A helicopter circled above but soon whirled away. Every so often a car rolled by. But mostly it was quiet.

"Shadow . . . here, boy." I whistled. Nothing.

Finally there was only one place I hadn't searched, the block where I live. Shadow must be there. To avoid the Tiberons, I went around to the block that backs up to ours, because the house behind Miz Moran's has a fence with three missing planks and it's very easy to crawl through. Good, it didn't look like anyone was home. As I squeezed into Miz Moran's yard, I lost my balance and fell hard on my butt. For some reason, that got me laughing.

Then I saw her—Miz Moran, sitting on her back porch, a metal baseball bat resting in her lap. "What's so funny?" she asked.

"Miz Moran? I thought you were gone."

"You thought wrong." She stared at my bag, then shook the bat at me. "You lootin'? Never woulda thought it."

"I'm not a looter, Miz Moran!"

"Then what you doin' here?"

"I came to find Shadow. Soon as I do, I'm goin' to the hospital with my mama and pops."

"They was all up and down here till half an hour ago. Your mama was cryin' and carryin' on somethin' terrible. I peeked at 'em and was 'bout to ask what was wrong, but I know your daddy woulda tried to drag me away from here, so I didn't. What'd you do, run off?"

I hung my head. "Yeah."

"You get in here right now and call 'em 'fore they lose their

minds. And be quick about it so they can't trace the call. Like I told ya, I ain't budgin'. And as soon as you find that dog, you call 'em again and wait for 'em on your front porch."

"All right," I said, and followed her inside.

I hoped she was finished, but she kept rambling. "Just don't let that dog be the death of you, you hear me?"

I took a quick look at my life line. "I don't plan to," I replied as I grabbed the portable phone, pushed in the code on the phone that blocks the number you're calling from, then punched in Mama's cell phone number. It didn't even get a full ring out before she picked up.

"Hello?" Her voice was sad.

"Mama, don't worry. I'm okay," I blurted, and hung up fast.

"You got good sense, Saint?" Miz Moran asked.

"Yeah," I replied.

"Don't seem like it. The guv'ment is tellin' y'all to leave and you come here lookin' for a dog."

Do I have good sense? I couldn't believe this. "I only came back for Shadow, Miz Moran. What about you?"

"What 'bout me? Told you I'm not goin' nowheres. I'm old . . ."

"You should still leave."

Miz Moran glanced away. "If the Lord calls me, I'm ready to meet him. Plus I got everything I need right up there." She pointed up.

"In heaven?"

"No, you goofball, in my attic. It's where I hid when my daughter came for me. Got an emergency kit up there. If this Katrina gets ugly and the floodin' goes high like they claimin', I'll be just fine. Yessir, I will."

"You sure?"

"Lemme tell you something, Mister Saint. I'm prepared for the very worst. My emergency kit got everything: a flashlight, lantern, a box of flare sticks, a few of them solar blankets, plenty water, canned and freeze-dried food—"

"Wow," I interrupted. "You're even a better planner than me. Sounds like you really do have everything you need."

She grinned and continued, "Even got one a them inflatable boats with two oars, a battery-operated fan, baby wipes to wash up, toilet paper, plastic bags to hold my waste . . ."

I really didn't want to think about anybody's waste, especially Miz Moran's, and the look on my face must have told her so, because she instantly changed the subject.

"Here, take these scraps and put 'em outside," she said as she handed me a plate of leftover food. "Maybe your Shadow'll get a whiff and come runnin'."

At least she was trying to help me. "You think that'll work?"

"I do. But if you ain't found him by sundown, I'ma make

you call your mama and that's all I got to say to you 'bout it, cuz I'm tired and fixin' to watch my show and close the screen so flies don't get in."

"Yes, Miz Moran," I said, but just in case she changed her mind and tried to pull a fast one and call my parents, I grabbed her portable phone and hid it inside my jacket.

Once outside, I headed around to her front porch and set the plate and myself down. "Shadow," I called softly. I had to be very careful. Pops had most definitely alerted the Tiberons, and if either of them saw me, I was cooked.

The clouds kept coming, rolling across the sky, the blue slowly disappearing. I'd been in a few bad storms but never in a hurricane. People died in hurricanes. I examined my very short life line and considered calling Mama and Pops right then. But I was pretty scared. Saint Louis Armstrong Beach had pulled some stunts before, but nothing like this. This spelled supersize trouble. I remembered MonaLisa's house arrest. Naw, I'll wait—because if I find Shadow, whatever they come up with as punishment will be a ton easier to deal with. Yeah, I'll definitely wait.

Cautiously, I crept out to the sidewalk and surveyed the block from one end to the other. Like a mall at midnight, it seemed deserted. But just like a mall, it had security guards, Perry and Squirrel Tiberon. I crossed to their side of the street. If I avoided their house and the one right next door,

I could probably make my way to the end of the street without being seen. Then I'd circle and come up the other way, steering clear of the house on that side of them and out of plain sight. I put my plan in motion.

"Shadow, here, boy," I said over and over. No Shadow. I figured I must have said the words *Shadow* and *here, boy* more than two hundred times. Yeah, way more than two hundred. It was almost as if he'd disappeared. By the time I got back to Miz Moran's, I'd pretty much given up. I was ready to call my parents and accept my sentence. But when I went to grab the plate with the scraps from the porch to bring it inside, I gawked in disbelief. The plate had been licked clean. Without thinking, I shrieked, "Shadow!"

Quickly I ran around to Miz Moran's backyard. "Shadow!" I said sternly. "I know you're around here somewhere. I'm leaving in a few minutes. So you'd better come on." Nothing. I hurried inside.

"You have any more scraps, Miz Moran?"

She glanced up from the television. "What happened to the ones I gave you?"

"He ate them."

"So you found him. That's nice. Now call your mama, tell her to come get you."

"I didn't find Shadow . . . but Shadow found the food. This time I'll sit with it and wait."

"What you shoulda done the first time. But you know somethin'?"

"What?"

"Coulda been some other critter ate that food. He ain't the only-est dog in Tremé. You know that, don't you?"

"Miz Moran, can I have the scraps or not?"

"You ain't got to get huffy, little Saint. Look in the icebox. Got some ham pieces I was 'bouta throw out."

I grabbed the bag of ham, said, "Thank you," dashed outside, and settled on the back porch. The sun was just about down, and while I waited for Shadow's return to the scene of the crime, I got drowsy. I was wiped out.

"You tired, ain't you, chile," Miz Moran asked sweetly from the other side of the screen door.

There was no denying it. "Yeah, I am."

"Bring that plate on in here. That dog gets hungry, he'll come scratchin' at my door with his tail waggin' like he always does. I'ma fix you somethin' to eat, and when you're done, we gonna call your mama 'n' daddy so they can come get you, unless they already left New Orleans."

"Left New Orleans? They wouldn't leave without me."

Miz Moran snickered. "You sure 'bout that?"

I nodded.

"Good, cuz I'm just funnin' with you."

I cracked a smile.

"Got some red beans and rice left over from yesterday. You want some a that or somethin' else?"

"Red beans, please."

"And if your dog shows up, I'll do my best to keep him here for you. That all right?"

"Yeah—thanks, Miz Moran."

While I ate, Miz Moran retreated to her reclining chair in front of the TV. By the time I was done, she was out like a light. Quietly, I washed and dried the dishes. It was the least I could do. I reached in my jacket and put her phone back.

"Miz Moran," I said gently, trying to wake her, but she was sound asleep.

I picked up the phone to call, but it just chirped and words lit up saying the battery was dead. It probably needs a few minutes in the charger, I told myself.

I turned down the volume on the TV and plopped on the sofa. Miz Moran was snoring. She sure is nice, I thought. And I was hoping nothing bad would happen to her when sleep triumphed and I snoozed.



DAY ONE OF THE DURING

There was no mistaking the bark that woke me up. It was Shadow.

The TV was off and it was almost pitch dark. Rain was beating the house. I wondered what time it was. It felt like I'd been asleep a long time. I needed to call my mama and pops right away. "Miz Moran," I called out. Nothing. Where was she? "Miz Moran!" I hollered.

"That you, Saint?" she asked drowsily from the other side of the room. She must have slept in her chair.

Who else would it be? "Yes, it's me."

"What you still doin' here? Thought your people came and got you."

"I was going to call, but the phone's battery was dead. I musta fallen asleep."

"Me too?"

Shadow barked over and over and scratched at the back door.

"That's your dog. You can keep him in the service porch."

"But I can't hardly see nuthin'."

"Power's out," she claimed. Then I heard a click and a light, as bright as a candle, shone. "Got these push lights all over the house. Told ya I was prepared."

On my way to the door, I stopped and picked up the phone. Now the line was dead. Great.

Shadow kept scratching and barking. I rushed to the door and he squeezed inside. It was close to sunrise, but the sky was black. The wind was howling and I had to lean into the door to shut it. Shadow, dripping wet, nuzzled my leg and I patted his head. "You sure got me in a bunch of trouble," I told him. He looked hungry. "Stay!" I commanded as I closed the service porch door.

Miz Moran had gone through the house, pushing on this light and that one. I could actually see. I opened the refrigerator and grabbed the ham from last night.

"You have something I can put this in?" I asked.

She rummaged through her cabinets and handed me a plastic container. Lickety-split, Shadow gobbled it up.

"You got a raincoat and some rain boots I could borrow, Miz Moran?"

"For what?"

"I'ma take Shadow and go to the hospital . . . see if I can find 'em."

"You ain't goin' nowheres in all this. It's nasty out there. Water gets too high, it's gonna go overtop them levees. That wind is already blowin' faster'n you can run." She went into the service porch and put a key into the back-door deadbolt, locking us inside. The front door was boarded up. She was now the warden and I was her prisoner.

"But—"

"But what?"

"It ain't flooded yet. If I go now, I could get there."

Just then, a bad gust of wind jarred the house.

"Ain't you had enough trouble? You tryin' to die young or somethin'? I'm goin' to the toilet and I expect you to be here when I get out. You understand me?"

I glanced at my peewee life line and replied, "Yeah, I understand."

While she was in there for what seemed like forever, I wondered if she had a cell phone and asked her when she was done.

"My daughter been tryin' to give me one, but I ain't had no use for it."

Disappointed, I plopped down in a chair and sulked.

"Now, that's what I call a pout. Stop your worryin'. We fine so far, ain't we?"

"Yeah."

"Soon as this little trick of nature is done with us, you'll find 'em if they don't find you first. You got what you come here for, didn't ya?"

I knew she meant Shadow. "Yeah," I replied.

"So try bein' happy 'bout that. I'm gonna have some cereal. May as well use this milk 'fore it goes sour. You want some?"

"Okay."

I'd just swallowed my first mouthful when the wind began to blow harder and faster. Miz Moran's tiny Creole cottage rattled like it was about to fall down. I shuddered. The windows in the house next door hadn't been boarded up. Glass shattered. All around, the rain crashed, fighting like a crazy man with the wild wind. Shadow let loose a howl as long as a yawn.

"Katrina's here!" Miz Moran shouted.

"What do we do now?"

Miz Moran put her arm around me and led me to the front room. "Hope the gal shows us some mercy."

All morning it sounded like the house was going to get ripped to pieces, like the wind was about to blow it and

everything in it, including me, clear to another country. Katrina was nothing like a regular storm that gets tired and gives up for a while. Katrina was just like the Energizer Bunny, she never got tired and I mean never. I was scared. Naw, I was terrified. I couldn't sleep.

"The radio," I said. "Where is it? Maybe there's news or something."

Miz Moran handed me the radio. "Here, and make sure you put the batteries in the right way."

Quickly, I clicked the batteries into place, turned it on, and surfed the channels. Loud static, soft static, every kind of static. Part of me got mad and wanted to throw the radio into the wall, but I figured we needed it, so I didn't.

After I'd played with it for another twenty minutes, Miz Moran snapped. "That's enough aggravation for a while."

"You want me to turn it off?"

"Yes indeed. Why don't you read a book or something?"

Though we had some light, the house was way too dark to read. Plus, the rain and wind were pounding so loud, it was even hard to think about much except when was this going to be over.

"I think I'll go check on Shadow," I told her.

"You might wanna say a prayer."

"I will," I promised.

Despite what was going on outside, Shadow was calm. I

nestled on the floor beside him and rambled, "Miz Moran says everything's gonna be fine, so don't you worry. She's survived more than a few hurricanes, so I think she's right. In no time I'll find Mama and Pops and they'll be so glad to see me, they won't even be mad or nothing and Pops will finally let you come and live with us because I'm going to use part of the money I've been saving for the Leblanc to send you to dog obedience school so you can learn how to listen and stop barking all the time. But one day I'm going away to New York to Juilliard to really learn music and you can't come with me, so sorry about that."

Shadow raised his head.

"Don't worry. When I graduate, I'm coming straight back to New Orleans, maybe start my own music school or teach at Xavier or Tulane. How's that sound?" Right then I remembered that dogs don't live as long as most people and I wished I had a brother or a sister. "I can't wait until MonaLisa gets back." Miz Moran's advice to say a prayer rang in my ear, and for the first day in a while I decided not to use my one white lie a day. I folded my hands and kept my promise. "God, if you can hear me over all this racket, please take care of Mama and Pops and MonaLisa. Amen."

"Saint, get up and bring Shadow with you!"

"Wassup?" I asked.

"This Katrina's the devil. Just gettin' her steam. That back door's not boarded up, might give way. C'mon, help me. Grab a chair."

We pushed one chair under the back door knob.

She stood beside the refrigerator. "Help me move this."

"Where to?"

"In front of the service porch door."

I smiled. "Miz Moran, you're not strong enough."

"Don't tell me what I'm not. You gonna help me or not?"

I wouldn't have believed it, but we moved it and butted it against the door.

"There," she said with satisfaction. "Think that'll work?"

"Should."

"Y'all come stay with me in the front room, and bring that newspaper." She pointed to a pile. "That dog needs to go pee or poo, make sure he goes on the paper, not on my carpet. He goes on my carpet, I'll have a fit and put him out, you understand?"

"Yes."

Shadow glanced up at me like he understood what she'd said.

"How long you think it'll last?" I asked.

"Depends. Got quick hurricanes that get it over with fast and slow ones that like to take their time."

"I hope Katrina's a quick one."

"Me too, little Saint . . . me too."

With the back door blocked, I couldn't see outside anymore. "Miz Moran, you think this is what it feels like to be in a submarine?"

"Never been in one, never wanna be in one. Ain't much for water, 'cept to look at it. Cain't even swim."

"I'm a real good swimmer," I bragged.

"That so?"

"Yeah. And when I go to high school, I might try to get on the swim team."

"I'm hungry," she said. "You?"

"What you got?"

"Canned soup—beef or chicken?"

After all the good food I was used to eating, neither sounded very tasty. "Chicken."

I popped the top and ate. It was cold and too salty.

Miz Moran swallowed a spoonful of hers and coughed. "Lord have mercy. Sure could go for some gumbo and potato salad."

I nodded. "Or beans and rice or fried chicken from Willie Mae's."

"Quit it, boy, you makin' my mouth water. New Orleans got the best food, don't it."

“And music.”

“Lord, yes. It’s got the magic. Nuthin’ else like New Orleans.” She took another mouthful, then got still. “Listen.”

“To what?”

“The wind is slackin’ up. If it don’t get much worse, New Orleans gonna be okay.”

Hoping she was right, I smiled.

Then Miz Moran turned her ear toward the window. “But the water’s rising.”

Shadow scratched at the door like he wanted out. I couldn’t blame him. I did too.

I stopped eating and pulled my duffel bag close.

“What’s in there that you can’t live without, little Saint?”

“Cash, a lot of it,” I said as I unzipped the bag. “And this.” To protect it, I’d wrapped it in thick plastic. Carefully, I removed it from its case and held it up for her to see.

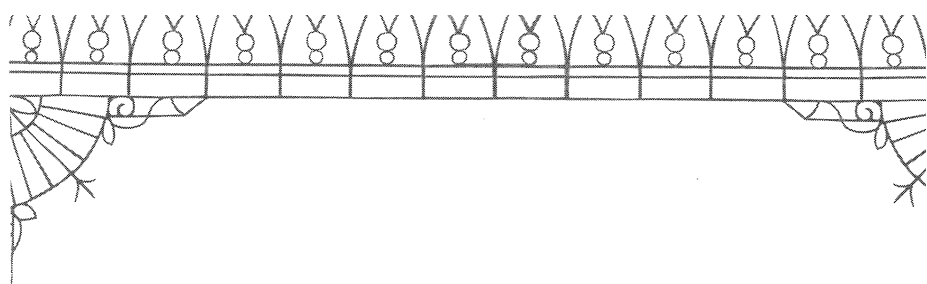
“That’s a mighty fine clarinet.”

“It’s a Leblanc L1020 Step-Up Pro. But I call it Smokey because that’s the name of the friend who gave it to me,” I said proudly. “If you like, I could play something.”

“I’d like that.”

I put on the mouthpiece, and as I played, old Miz Moran closed her eyes and moved to the music.

Playing the Leblanc started me thinking we just might get out of this mess.



THE WATER RISES

By the afternoon, there was still no water in the house. Miz Moran said that was a good sign.

All of a sudden there was a sound louder than anything I'd ever heard before—like a meteor had crashed or a giant alien spaceship had taken a nosedive.

Miz Moran screamed.

I darted into the kitchen. "What was that?"

"That big tree that was in my backyard musta fell," she said, and she began tugging at the refrigerator.

Together, we moved it, opened the service porch door, and peered out through the window in the rickety back door. Her backyard looked like a lake and the fierce wind was making ripples in the water. Smack dab in the middle was a huge

uprooted tree lying on its side. The top of it had crushed the roof of her back neighbor's house in two.

"Lord have mercy!" She shook her head like she didn't believe what she was seeing.

"No one's home there. I checked," I told her.

"Thank God for that." She studied the water. "Just a little more than three feet now. Don't get no worse, New Orleans might make out okay."

"I guess the levees are doin' their job," I said happily as we stepped into the kitchen and pushed the refrigerator back in front of the service porch door.

"Spoze they are."

Suddenly the wind turned gruesome again, and as if someone had blasted it with a cannon, the back door finally blew in. The glass shattered. Shadow flew under the table and Miz Moran held me tight. "I want my mama and pops," I whispered.

As we retreated to the front room, she consoled me, "Now, now."

I was wondering what would happen next when somewhere far-off it sounded like a bomb had exploded—then another.

"What was that?" I asked.

"Cain't say."

But minutes later, when the water started coming in through

the floor and under the doors, rising fast, Miz Moran got frantic. I'd never heard her cuss before, but her mouth got going like a motor. Some were words I was surprised she knew, and she didn't even apologize like most grown-ups do. Once she was done swearing, she took a deep breath and sighed, "The levees. They musta gone and broke. New Orleans is finished."

"What do we do now?"

"Get the dog and c'mon."

I grabbed my duffel bag. "Shadow!" I hollered, but he wouldn't come out from under the table.

"Didn't I tell you not to let that dog be the death of you?"

"He'll come," I argued, then grabbed his collar and yanked hard. "Now!" I ordered. Thankfully, Shadow listened and, with me at the rear, we followed Miz Moran up into her refuge.

"Toasty up here in my little crow's nest, ain't it?"

You would have thought with all the wind that was blowing outside it wouldn't have been hot, but it was.

"Yeah," I agreed.

"Because heat rises to the top, just like cream." She paused and pointed. "See that window right there?"

I nodded. Like all of the windows in the house, it was boarded up.

"There's a little balcony out there. Me and Mr. Moran used to stand out there and admire the view."

Oh no, here we go with old-people memories. I have to stop her now or just like my grandma, she'll go on nonstop. "Can we turn on the fan?" I asked as I eyed it in the corner. "Unless you don't want to burn out the battery."

"Got plenty batteries," she assured me.

I turned it on, sat in front of it, and grinned.

But Miz Moran didn't smile back, and her eyes looked like she wanted to cry. "We gonna get outta this, little Saint. I promise."

In the morning we opened the attic hatch and shined the flashlight downstairs. The water looked knee-deep.

"Close it," Miz Moran moaned. "Mosta my things is ruined."

"You can always get more."

"But I cain't get another house. Where'm I gonna go?"

"Your daughter'll take care of you."

That seemed to calm her down, but right then her face turned pale and she sat down hard on the floor. She looked sick.

"What's wrong?"

"My blood sugar's sky high. I can always tell."

She may as well have been speaking Russian. "Huh?"

"My diabetes. I forgot to take my insulin shot."

I'd heard about diabetes and knew people took medicine for it. "You should take it now."

"I cain't . . . it's in the refrigerator."

The next question I kind of had the answer to, but I asked it anyway. "What'll happen if you don't take it?"

"I'll probably die."

Quickly, I grabbed a flashlight and opened the hatch.

"Saint . . . you cain't go down there," she protested.

I ignored her and went anyway.

Some of the battery-powered push lights were still going, so it wasn't totally dark. Carefully, I lowered myself off the attic ladder. By the time my feet touched the hallway floor, the water was to my knees. One of Miz Moran's wooden chairs floated by, and all around, knickknacks and books sat atop the black water. A pair of saltshakers bobbed. I stepped on something that had sunk, lost my balance, tripped, and nearly fell.

"Be careful! Watch your step!" Miz Moran screamed.

"I will! By the way, what's insulin look like?"

"Two small glass bottles 'bout as tall as your pinkie finger. One says Novolin with a capital letter R. The other says Novolin with a capital letter N. I need 'em both."

Slowly, I waded into the kitchen. Thinking the refrigerator would open easily, I gripped the handle and pulled. No

such luck. The water holding it shut was a lot stronger than I was. No matter what I did, I couldn't get it open. Finally, I figured out what I had to do. With all my might I pushed and pushed until the refrigerator fell on its back. The door part was now above water and opened easily.

Unfortunately, everything inside the refrigerator was jumbled. I rummaged through all the stuff until I found one little bottle and then the other. I grabbed a floating plastic grocery bag and filled it with the medicine, cans of soda, a pack of bologna, mayonnaise, and a loaf of bread. Yes! Victory! I liked the way it felt.

"Got 'em, Miz Moran!"

Before I headed back, I made a quick detour to the bathroom and peed in the toilet, which of course wouldn't flush. Oh, well.

I watched as she took a needle out of her emergency kit, filled it with medicine, and gave herself the shot. "Thank you, Saint," she said.

"Will you be okay now?"

"Should be. I'll check my sugar after we have sandwiches. Got an extra machine right here. Now you get out them wet things."

"Into what?"

"There's a bag of my husband's old clothes over there. He wasn't a big man, so something oughta fit you."

Something did, including a pair of his two-tone shoes. These are sweet, I thought.

Inside my head I calculated what day it was—Tuesday. I took out my notebook from my duffel bag and wrote.

Ten places I'd rather be on a Tuesday in the summertime

1. At the pool, diving off the high board.
2. On Moon Walk or in the Quarter, jiving with Smokey.
3. At Willie Mae's Scotch House or the Wing Shack, eating like a pig.
4. At Congo Square in Louis Armstrong Park with Shadow at my side.
5. Sitting on the curb outside Joe's Cozy Corner, enjoying the music.
6. On MonaLisa's back porch, goofing off, hoping she'd kiss me again.
7. Up in my room, playing my clarinet or computer games.
8. Hanging out with Pops while he does odd jobs around the house.
9. Listening to Mama sing along with the radio while she does the dishes.
10. Anywhere but here.

As the afternoon passed, Shadow stayed pretty quiet and I hoped he would stay that way. Mostly I kept my fingers crossed that he wouldn't poop. Just in case, I put down newspaper.

I pointed to a box that had a picture of a boat on it. "Maybe we should put air in the boat," I told Miz Moran. By the way she was acting, I could tell she was feeling better, and I was glad.

"You think we oughta?"

It seemed like the smart thing to do. "Sure," I replied.

I pulled the bright yellow boat out of its box. "Where's the air pump?"

"I don't have no pump. You can blow it up, cain't you?"

"No way. That'll take forever." I continued reading the directions. "This says a foot pump is included."

"Mighta been. Check that box in the corner."

We were in luck. I attached the pump and soon had the boat filled with air. It wasn't big and the stuff it was made out of felt kind of flimsy, but it looked like it would hold the three of us. If we had to, I figured we could lower it into the house, out the door, and row to dry land. There had to be dry land somewhere.

At the sight of it, Shadow, probably thinking it was a toy, got frisky. He pranced over to the boat and jumped inside.

"Get outta there, Shadow!" I yelled. But instead of getting out, he bit into the rim. There was a loud pop and lickety-split, the yellow lifeboat deflated.

My mouth flew open and so did Miz Moran's.

"Oh my Jesus," Miz Moran whispered.

I was pissed. "You are one dead dog," I said as I leaped through the air and grabbed his neck.

"Saint, stoppit! Not like he knew what he was doing. He's just an animal! Hopefully the water will recede and we'll be outta here tomorrow." Miz Moran began panting and put her hand to her heart.

Immediately, I let go of Shadow and turned my attention to Miz Moran. "What's wrong now?"

"Just a little chest pain. It'll pass. If it don't, I'll take a nitro pill."

Please let that not be downstairs.

She must have heard me thinking, because she waved a small brown bottle at me. "I have it right here. Been using it now and then since I had my first heart attack."

"Your first? How many have you had?"

"Three, but they was mild ones."

This is not happening to me. None of this is real. There is no hurricane and I'm not stuck in an attic with a dumb-ass dog and an old lady who might drop dead any minute.

Miz Moran called my name. "Saint?"

"Huh?"

"You okay, son?"

"Yeah, I'm okay."

Outside, the wind seemed like it was letting up a little, but when I lifted the hatch and peered down into the house, the water was a lot higher. A little more and it would be to the ceiling. "About six feet," Miz Moran claimed.

I'm barely five feet tall, I thought, and glanced at the airless lifeboat. I'd never been a nail biter, but I plopped down and began to chew them to the nubs.

"Here," Miz Moran said. "Let's try some of this freeze-dried ice cream. Says it's what the astronauts eat on the shuttle."

Number eleven of places I'd rather be—anywhere in outer space. I tore open the package and took a bite. It tasted just like chocolate ice cream but without the cold. And like hot chocolate without the hot, it wasn't the same. As I sat there, eating make-believe ice cream, I pictured myself in a space suit with a power pack. I imagined pushing forcefully through the boarded-up attic window and making my escape.



ALMOST THE END OF ME . . . OR NOT

A horrible smell greeted me as I opened my eyes. Shadow or someone had pooped. The fan wasn't going and it was way too hot. Even the push lights were out. My stomach got that hard knot inside that comes right before you throw up and I puked, a lot. From somewhere in the dark attic, Shadow howled.

"Lord Jesus!" Miz Moran exclaimed. "You sick?"

I wiped at my mouth with my sleeve. "I dunno . . . the smell."

"Dog musta done his business."

From a teeny hole in the plywood board that covered the window, I saw light. It was morning.

Miz Moran lit the butane lantern and there it was—a huge pile of dog crap. I vomited again.

“Batteries in the fan must be dead.” But when she replaced the batteries, it still wouldn’t start. “Motor’s burned out.”

“Sorry,” I said, “about throwing up.”

“Nuthin’ to be sorry about.”

First, we cleaned up Shadow’s mess and then mine. The attic was just one room, so we bagged it and dropped it through the hatch into the lake of water that had filled the house.

“Got another little fan somewheres,” she said as she searched. “Here it is.” She popped in the batteries and we had air. In a few minutes, the knot in my stomach disappeared. But the bad smell was going to be around for a while.

“Okay if I feed Shadow a coupla cans of this tuna?” I asked a little later. There wasn’t that much food left. I supposed Miz Moran hadn’t planned on having to feed anyone but herself.

“One can now and save one later,” she advised.

As I fed Shadow, she carefully pricked her finger to get her blood sugar reading. “Dammit!” she blurted.

That could only mean one thing and it definitely wasn’t good.

“Four seventy-five.”

“Is that really bad?”

She nodded and reached for her insulin bottles. "Dammit!"

Again—not good.

"Almost empty."

"And there's no more, huh?"

"No, I didn't have time to get my refill."

The water was too high to wade through, the lifeboat was useless, and Miz Moran was out of medicine. I stared at my palm and tears got in my eyes. My life line looked like it had gotten even shorter. Was that possible? "No way!" I exclaimed.

"What, Saint?"

"No way am I dying up here. I'm not even twelve yet. Plus, I have lots of stuff I wanna do."

Miz Moran stared into my eyes and made the sign of the cross. "This is not the end of you, Mister Saint. No matter what happens to me, don't give up. You gonna make it," she whispered.

That was when I decided—Katrina was not going to be the end of Saint Louis Armstrong Beach or Miz Moran or Shadow either. Somehow I was going to get us out of this. My eyes darted around the room and landed on the window. That had to be the answer.

"We have to get that window open," I told her.

"But it's boarded up from the outside."

"Yeah, I know, but there has to be a way," I told her as I

twisted the latch and opened the small window. I leaned into the wood with all my might.

"Be careful, Saint. If that wood gives way, you could fall."

For some reason I felt very sure of myself. "I won't fall," I told her. But the piece of wood didn't budge, so I got on the floor and pushed with my feet. The plywood gave a little. "It moved, did you see?" I asked her.

"Maybe if I help?"

Soon Miz Moran was on her back beside me and we were pressing hard when I heard it—a helicopter. "You hear that?" I asked.

Miz Moran smiled.

The copter was getting closer. I jumped up and yelled, "Move out the way!" I backed up to the farthest side of the attic, and like a mad bull I ran full force and butted into the board. If Miz Moran hadn't been there to grab my arm, I would have flown out the window right behind it.

"Whew!"

Together we huddled on the small balcony and Shadow nuzzled between us, sniffing at the air. Compared to what I'd been breathing in the attic, it smelled wonderful. We were out. Free. But the helicopter had disappeared.

"Oh my God," Miz Moran whispered, and put her hand to her mouth. For as far as we could see, water was everywhere. Fallen trees were on their sides. Roofs and huge parts of

houses were gone. Cars were turned belly-up. Garbage and debris floated.

"Next time the helicopter shows up, we have to be ready. Where are the flares?" I asked.

She pointed. "Right there." The box was full.

"Put everything you need close by. Okay?" I advised her as I grabbed the box of flares and my bag.

I kept my ears open for the copter, but hours passed and Miz Moran wasn't looking so good. "You're sick, huh?" I said.

"I'll be fine."

I could tell she was lying. Hoping it might make her feel better, I got out the Leblanc and played.

Seven songs later, she told me I really had a gift.

"Smokey says one day I'll be a virtuoso."

"Seems to me you already are."

After a few more songs, I tucked the clarinet away.

In silence we waited.

"Finally!" I hollered, and quickly went onto the balcony. With the cigarette lighter I lit the flare.

Madly, I waved at the helicopter. "Here we are!" I shrieked. Soon Miz Moran joined me and lit another flare. They must have seen us, because they headed our way. Excitedly, I leaped up and nearly fell from the balcony into the murky water. Again, Miz Moran yanked my arm and saved me.

In a flash, the copter was directly overhead. Then, just like

you see on TV, this guy was lowered down on a rope thing. We backed inside so he'd have somewhere to land.

The rescue guy glanced up. "We only have room for one more person. Have to come back for one a y'all!"

"Take the boy!" Miz Moran shouted over the noise.

That was when she went squiggly like cooked spaghetti and passed out on the floor.

"She has diabetes and she ran out of insulin! You have to take her to a hospital right away or she's gonna die!" I screamed.

"You okay here for a while?" he asked.

I nodded. "Yeah."

Hastily, he attached himself to her limp body and with her purse around her neck Miz Moran was slowly airlifted. Sadly, I watched as the big noisy bird flew away. "They'll be back," I told Shadow, "I hope."

From the balcony my ears picked up every sound, and as if I were sitting in front of a huge movie screen, my eyes saw it all: torn-up houses, cars scattered every which way, all kinds of stuff drifting in the muddy water, trees snapped in half. A pelican flapped by.

I couldn't see my house, but I figured that like all of the others nearby it was flooded to the ceiling, that Mama's antiques and fancy furniture were ruined. I wondered if the

water would ever go back down or stay this way forever. Maybe, like Miz Moran claimed, New Orleans was finished.

Tears filled up my eyes. "Where are Pops and Mama?" I asked the sky. And I was wishing I was with them when I leaned against the railing, fell asleep, and dreamed.

It was Fat Tuesday and King Daddy Saint was leading the Mardi Gras parade. He was really going to town on the trumpet. Louis Armstrong was beside him, grinning. I was on the sidelines with my Leblanc, watching as they strode toward me, and when they got close, I stepped into the street to join them. All of a sudden the parade came to a halt. King Daddy Saint put his hand to my chest and said, "No, little Saint, we ain't nowheres near ready for you yet."

Louis Armstrong waved his handkerchief in my face. "Nowheres near," he repeated.

King Daddy Saint raised the trumpet to his lips, hit a few high notes, then spoke again. "Don't go inside the Dome," he warned.

As if they were lyrics, Louis Armstrong sang, "Don't go inside the Dome."

"Get yourself to the Jazz Shack . . . promise?" King Daddy Saint asked.

"I promise," I told him, and stepped back into the crowd of onlookers.

. . .

Shadow's barking woke me up. "Stay away from the Dome. Get to the Jazz Shack," I echoed drowsily. The Dome? He must have meant the Superdome, the "refuge of last resort."

Suddenly, I heard something. I sprang up and searched the horizon. *Is that what I hope it is?* It was—a rescue copter, headed our way.

Of course I had to shed a bunch of tears and refuse to leave unless they brought Shadow. "He's my best friend," I sniveled, then added my white lie of the day, "Plus, he saved Miz Moran's life." Shadow wagged his tail.

"So he's a hero?" the rescue guy asked, petting Shadow's head.

"Yessir."

The guy cracked a smile. "Okay. We'll bring him."

But just in case the guy tried to pull a fast one, I made him take Shadow up first.

Already inside were a man and a woman who, like me, were tired and very dirty. They didn't say a word, just stared ahead with huge round eyes.

"They're in shock," the man who'd saved me said.

I had no clue what that meant, but I replied, "Oh."

From the copter I could see for miles. "Everything's flooded," I told the rescuer.

"Yeah." He pointed. "But the Quarter's not too bad."

I scanned the Quarter; he was right.

"Where you taking us?" I asked.

"To the Superdome," he said.

The Dome? Oh no.

"Can you take me to Tulane University Hospital instead?
My mama's a social worker there. They even have a helipad."

"Nope. Gotta take you to the Dome."

"But I can't go there. I need to find my parents."

"There are people there to help you."

"But—"

"Those are our orders. Sorry, kid."



TO THE JAZZ SHACK

Seems like we weren't out of the copter for even a minute when they whirled off to search for more stranded people. No one seemed to care where I went or who I was with. From a distance, I saw lots of people outside the Dome, some pacing, others sitting, more lying on the pavement. I heard screaming, wailing, and loud talking. And when the couple with the blank robot eyes headed there, I didn't follow.

As almost everyone who lives in New Orleans can tell you, the Superdome isn't that far from the Quarter, not even two miles. "C'mon, boy, we gotta go." I yanked Shadow's leash and headed toward the Jazz Shack.

But after trudging through only two blocks of thigh-high water, my legs turned to jelly and I fell. My duffel bag floated

away, but frantically I swam after it and with Shadow's help got to my feet. I needed to take a rest, but there was no place to even sit. Now wet from head to toe, I slogged on.

All around, people were looting and the cops were busy trying to stop them. A spattering of gunshots rang out. Frightened, I wobbled and took another spill. Again, Shadow tugged on the leash and pulled me up. Slowly, I made my way to the sidewalk, leaned against a building, and sobbed. We had more than a mile to go and I didn't think I could make it, but like a tugboat, Shadow led me on.

More looters, cops, stragglers, and newspeople crossed my path. The few who did glance my way *kept on truckin'*, as Pops would say.

Then, up ahead, one of the looters dropped a box of something. I rushed toward it and grabbed it before it sank. Chocolate chip cookies. I ripped it open, chomped, and gave some to Shadow. "We can make it, boy," I told him. His tail wagged.

After that the blocks seemed to disappear. On some there was more flooding and on others it was less than ankle deep. Finally, we reached the Jazz Shack.

Weakly, I pounded on the door. Nothing. So I tried the knob, but it was locked. I put my ear against the thick metal door. No sounds. Shadow barked, and I yelled, "Anybody in there?" Still nothing. "Open up!" I screamed. No one came

and I didn't hear any noises from inside. I shook my head. "Stupid dream," I told Shadow. "We would have been better off at the Superdome. C'mon, Shadow." But like a statue he sat in front of the Jazz Shack door. With my last bit of strength, I tugged on his leash. "I said c'mon." Shadow yelped at the door. At that point I got way too tired and sank to the sidewalk in front of the door. Next time I see the popo, I decided, I'm asking for help.

I was drowning when I thought I heard sounds from inside the Jazz Shack. Voices. I leaped up. "You hear that?" I asked Shadow. He sniffed at the door and howled. Again, I banged and tried the knob. "Anybody in there? It's me, Saint Beach." With that the door unlocked and cracked open. Instead of a face, I was met with two double-barrel shotguns pointed right at me. Totally freaked out, I froze.

Suddenly, Shadow sped off. "Come back here!" I shrieked, but as I turned to run after him, a hand reached out from the Jazz Shack, and like a sack of potatoes I was dragged inside. "My bag!" I yelled. Another hand grabbed it, pulled it in after me, and shut the door.

It was pitch black and it wasn't just the fact that I was soaking wet that had me shaking like a leaf. But in seconds someone turned on a lantern and I smiled. Our neighbors, Perry and Squirrel Tiberon, were standing right in front of me.

"Fancy meeting you here," Squirrel said.

I counted ten other people inside. All were musicians I'd seen around the Quarter. Before I knew it, I was in dry clothes and canned food and water were being shoved my way.

"I thought you guys were still at your house," I told the Tiberons between gulps of water.

"We were," Squirrel replied, "until it became apparent that the only sapient choice was to surrender the abode."

"That means it was the smart thing to do, right?" I said.

"Precisely."

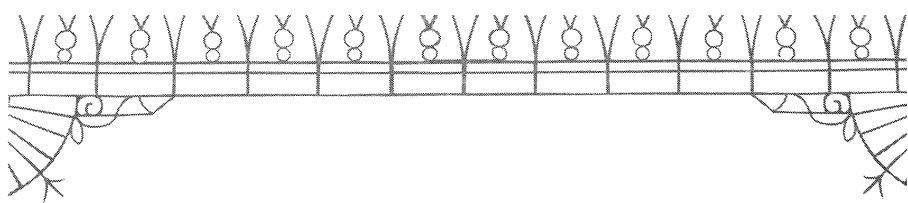
"How long do y'all plan on stayin' here?" I asked the group.

They glanced around at one another. Finally, one man replied, "In New Orleans . . . forever."

Around the room, heads nodded and someone whispered, "Amen."

It wasn't what I was asking. I meant how long were they planning to stay in the Jazz Shack, but I let it go.

For the first time in a while, my stomach was full, which made my body feel even more tired. I worried where Shadow was and frowned, but when I glanced at my life line, I thought *Ha-ha* and grinned. Then, like a scary movie zombie, I took my duffel bag, wandered over to a cot, and crashed.



HIS NAME IS SHADOW

From a corner a candle shone and the sounds people make when they're sleeping filled the room. I'm not sure how long I'd slept, but it seemed like forever. Light snuck in from little places. It must be morning, I thought.

Before long a few other people were awake and milling around. But when a dog started up outside, barking nonstop, scratching at the door, everyone woke up. I'd know that bark anywhere. It was Shadow. I leaped to my feet.

"That your dog out there?" one of the men asked. He sounded upset.

"His name is Shadow."

"Didn't ask what you named it . . . asked if that's your dog."

"Yes."

"Then see to him or swish him on away. Don't no one else need to know we're up in here."

Perry picked up his shotgun and headed with me to the door. Carefully, he inched it open, and when Shadow stuck his wet snout inside, I saw them.

I couldn't believe my eyes.

Mama and Pops. I tried to talk but no words came out.

Behind them stood this really tall cop who was kind of a friend of theirs.

Then, before Perry could stop her, Mama flung the door wide open. "Saint!" she screamed. Tears ran down her cheeks, her arms circled me, and she covered me with what felt like a hundred kisses. "My Saint," she whimpered. By then I was crying too.

Tears filled Pops' eyes and he hugged me so tight, I thought I'd bust. I was really feeling the love.

The cop's stare settled on Perry's gun, so he put the double-barrel aside and promptly ushered all of us, including Shadow, inside.

Pops flung his arm around my shoulder and Mama held my hand tightly.

The policeman studied the room. A few of the men seemed like they knew him, and one spoke up. "Hey, Mose. How you?"

"Don't ask me that question, Newt. New Orleans gone crazy and I got too much other stuff to worry 'bout, so even though y'all are under orders to evacuate, I'ma pretend I ain't seen none of this. Just here for the boy."

"So we cool?" Newt asked him.

"We cool," Mose replied. "But y'all can't stay up in here much longer. They want everybody out the city."

Total silence.

Mose scanned the room once more. "Mercedes, Val . . . time to go."

I grabbed my bag and waved. "Bye, y'all."

"Nice boy y'all got there," an old man told Mama.

"I'll see you anon," Squirrel muttered.

"That means you'll see us sometime soon, right?" I said.

"Precisely."

Pops gave Perry and Squirrel long bear hugs. "Thanks for taking care of my boy. I owe both of y'all big-time."

Through her tears that were still coming, Mama offered her appreciation to everyone in the room.

Hats were tipped; one man winked.

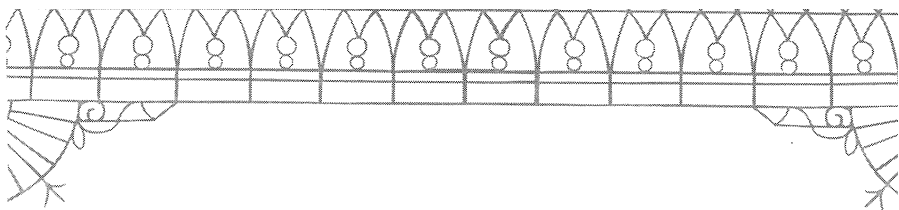
Swiftly, Perry led us to the back door, but as we stepped outside into the muck, Shadow hesitated in the doorway.

"C'mon, Shadow," Pops told him. Obediently, Shadow followed.

I gazed up at my pops. Did I hear right? He'd never called him by his name before. "Why'd you call him Shadow?"

Pops grinned and replied, "That's his name, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it is."



BATON ROUGE

“How’d Shadow know where your mama and pops were?” Kalisha quizzed.

It’d been a little more than 216 hours since New Orleans had been ordered evacuated. We were sitting in Gramma Beach’s kitchen, eating chili dogs and chips, drinking soda, playing a card game called Uno. Of course, I was winning.

“Yeah—how’d he know?” my little twin cousins blurted.

I shrugged. “I dunno. Just glad he did.”

Over and over Pops had told the story about how he and Mama were at the Convention Center, showing my picture around, questioning every rescue crew, until they finally came across the ones who’d airlifted me and Shadow from Miz Moran’s roof.

"Yeah, I lifted that kid. Dropped him at the Superdome . . . him and the dog," the rescue guy informed them.

And that's where they were headed when Shadow showed up, barking nonstop, tugging on Pops' clothes. It wasn't long before Pops and Mama got the idea. Shadow wanted them to follow him, which they did. But when they got to the Quarter, the story changed. Cops and the national guard weren't allowing access.

"But my boy's around here somewhere," Mama pleaded.

Suddenly, like an angel, their friend Mose tapped Pops on the shoulder. In seconds, they had an escort.

Tirelessly, Shadow led them through the Quarter to the Jazz Shack.

"Tell us about that dream with King Daddy Saint again," Kalinda said.

Kalisha thumped her sister's head. "No way, he already told us a bazillion times."

"Ouch! I'ma tell!" Kalinda whined.

"Like I care."

Shadow sniffed at Kalisha's smelly cat, which was curled asleep in a chair. Startled, the cat woke up, hissed, and pounced toward Shadow, but Shadow was too quick and got away.

Kalisha picked up her cat, cuddled it, then scowled at me. "That dog needs to leave my cat alone!" she screamed.

"That stinkin' cat needs to get a bath!" I replied loudly.

Gramma Beach's house wasn't very big and being cooped up was making us grumpy. I stuffed the rest of the chili dog in my mouth and headed toward the living room.

Mama, smiling, met me in the hallway. "Found Miz Moran."

"How?"

"Used my connections."

"She's okay?"

"Alive and well in a hospital in Atlanta. They've been in touch with her daughter."

When Mama was done hugging me, which lately she was doing way too much, I did something I hadn't done for a while—the Saint Louis Armstrong Beach boogie.

But when I got to the living room, the other grown-ups were stationed in front of the blaring TV. Pictures of Katrina victims and hurricane damage flashed. Quickly, I lost the happiness.

My gramma shook her head. "It's a shame how they treated those people. Worse than animals."

Uncle Hugo, Auntie Vi, and Pops agreed.

I couldn't watch any more. It was too sad. I grabbed my clarinet and headed outside to the garden. Of course, Shadow tagged along.

A bird with a yellow belly was having fun in the birdbath,

some bees were buzzing, and a dragonfly zipped by. I plopped on the grass, leaned against a tree, and petted Shadow's head.

I'd promised myself, no matter what, that I'd find some way to get in touch with MonaLisa. I wondered if I'd ever see Jupi, the Tiberons, or Smokey again. Would my feet ever walk down St. Bernard Avenue, Canal Street, along Moon Walk, or through the Quarter? Maybe I'd never hop the ferry to Algiers or shovel red beans and rice into my mouth at Willie Mae's one more time. And the way Mama and Pops were talking, we might never be able to go back to live in our house in Tremé.

But even if, like some people claim, New Orleans is over—no one can ever really take it away, because New Orleans is inside of me, Saint Louis Armstrong Beach, and always will be.

I put the Leblanc to my lips and blew some blues.



BRENDA WOODS, whose maternal great-grandparents, grandparents, mother, uncles, and aunts once called New Orleans home, is an artist and a photographer, and she has a bachelor of science degree

from California State University, Northridge. Her books for young readers include *The Unsung Hero of Birdsong, USA*; *The Blossoming Universe of Violet Diamond* (a CCBC Choice and a *Kirkus* Best Book); Coretta Scott King Honor winner *The Red Rose Box*; and VOYA Top Shelf Fiction selection *Emako Blue*. *Saint Louis Armstrong Beach* was chosen for the Chicago Public Library's 2011 Best of the Best Reading List for Kids and was an ALAN Pick and one of NPR's Top 5 Books for Backseat Readers. Her numerous awards and honors include the Judy Lopez Memorial Award, FOCAL Award, PEN Center USA Literary Award finalist, IRA Children's Choice Young Adult Fiction Award, and ALA Quick Pick. She is an avid reader, has two sons, and lives in Nevada.

For more about Brenda Woods and her books, visit **brendawoods.net**.