



Home > Poems & Poets > Browse Poems > Ground Truth by Claudia Emerson

## Ground Truth

BY CLAUDIA EMERSON

My brother's funeral over, the dark-clothed  
congregation clots the church doors, a lingering  
aftermath moving into flat light—the sky  
low and swollen, a storm siren's long  
expansive notes, evenly measured,  
so loud the pauses between ring  
with aftersound. Used to it, no one  
here appears alarmed, the church ladies  
filing into his house bearing heavy covered  
dishes, the funeral flowers. On the muted  
television tuned to the weather,  
a small area of Watch now upgrades  
to Warning; the words stream across the bottom  
of the screen calling conditions perfect,  
this town, this house disappeared beneath the map's  
isolated lesion, its red edges  
uneven, stalled. The forecasters rely  
they say on spotters to confirm  
what the radar cannot—they call it  
*ground truth*; until then no one knows anything

for certain beyond this inward watching.

The room hums, an airless, crowded hive.

Their mouths are full, plates layered—fried chicken,  
deviled eggs, casseroles, bright congealed

salads with fruit suspended inside.

All of it dust. I have come here too late,

his body gone, already ash. The storm's body  
could be forming now, tightening from cloud

to the gyre that will consume its path, all of it  
a becoming—spiraling a wall of water,

mud, dust, and sand; with dispassion taking up  
into itself the fence line, a barn—the house

beside them spared with the same dispassion. Or this,  
more likely now: siren silenced, the winds

diminishing, the light, afternoon's concession  
to another dusk—severe, more common truth.

Claudia Emerson, "Ground Truth" from *Secure the Shadow*. Copyright © 2012 by Claudia Emerson. Reprinted by permission of Louisiana State University Press.

Source: *Secure the Shadow* (Louisiana State University Press, 2012)

---

## RELATED CONTENT

Discover this poem's context and related poetry, articles, and media.

### POET

Claudia Emerson

### SUBJECTS

Living, Death, Sorrow & Grieving, Relationships, Family & Ancestors

### POET'S REGION

U.S., Southern

Report a problem with this poem.