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## Do you know what it means to stare down what you don't yet know?

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*Do you know what it means to stare down  
what you don't yet know?*

Jessica Varin

*Andrea Saunders Gereighty / Academy of American Poets Award  
2<sup>nd</sup> Honorable Mention*

: The Familiar

It's raining the kind of rain that year after year  
lifts after hurricane season and this is the kind  
of rain that reminds me how useless my shoes  
can be when water gutters onto the streets.

I left three days after Andrew, too young  
to swing a hammer hard enough to board up  
windows once again spared. I've come back,  
as one does, to New Orleans where roads tilt home.

: Things I Can Cook

I was asked if I knew how to make a roux.  
I know how to make a roux.  
I can, in theory, boil crawfish and,  
in practice, break open shelled bodies  
wrapped in old copies of The Times-Picayune.

: Refuse

I live in a neighborhood leveled by Katrina  
and marked by our city for gone. Repair  
is incremental. Pylons and rebar.

Houses raised above flood lines,  
repainted bright. My complete in-  
ability to find an unoccupied computer  
at our branch library.

: Learning the Alphabet

I never learned how to hold a pencil the right way.  
I just practiced until able to prove I  
could form letters with my savage grip.  
I have held tight the written-off. Things  
deemed worthless to save.

Paper, antiques, electrical  
components, the vulnerable.  
Processors thrown from the windows  
of a middle school to prevent further looting.  
Alphabets still attached to furious refrigerators.  
Water and water and water suspending.

: The Suggestion of Ground

I run sidewalks flawed by water,  
wear, love, continuing repair. Muscle memory  
curls my toes, insists the stutterstep, then  
leap, capable of clearing hollows and intrusions  
on makeshift trails.

How instinctively I recall the seasonal creek  
and sections of concrete known to give.

*Do you know what it means to miss New Orleans?*  
*Do you know what it means to paint Love on ordinary appliances?*