

Twelve River RIPPLES

Favourite Poem



This poem is from a book by Kwame Dawes called *Wisteria: Twilight Songs from the Swamp Country* based on the lives and memories of elderly black people living in Sumter, South Carolina, USA.

Tornado Child

for Rosalie Richardson

I am a tornado child.

I come like a swirl of black and darken up your day;
I whip it all into my womb, lift you and your things,
carry you to where you've never been, and maybe,
if I feel good, I might bring you back, all warm and scared,
heart humming wild like a bird after early sudden flight.

I am a tornado child.

I tremble at the elements. When thunder rolls my womb
trembles, remembering the tweak of contractions
that tightened to a wail when my mother pushed me out
into the black of a tornado night.

I am a tornado child,

you can tell us from far, by the crazy of our hair;
couldn't tame it if we tried. Even now I tie a bandanna
to silence the din of anarchy in these coir-thick plaits.

I am a tornado child

born in the whirl of clouds; the center crumbled,
then I came. My lovers know the blast of my chaotic giving;
they tremble at the whip of my supple thighs;
you cross me at your peril, I swallow light
when the warm of anger lashes me into a spin,
the pine trees bend to me swept in my gyrations.

I am a tornado child.

When the spirit takes my head, I hurtle into the vacuum
of white sheets billowing and paint a swirl of color,
streaked with my many songs.

I didn't find this poem in a book. No. It came to me, probably a year and a half ago and more than halfway into my life as a poet, when I watched live performances of competition-winning poems on a London poetry magazine website performed by the poets themselves. This was the last poem to be read and was written by the competition judge, Professor Kwame Dawes. And when I say "came to me" I really mean: it burst into my conscience, wrapped around me so tight as to make me nearly scream with wonder. I had not seen - and have not seen since - such an eye-watering reading. And ever since, it has been a guiding light for me – unattainable to the horizon. I don't pretend to understand all the underlying deep currents and counter currents, nor see the true purpose such as there might be; you won't hear me utter artistic, critical obfuscation or clarification. I simply love it for all its explosive, obvious beauty

Bartelby write-up: *'In Dawes' poem 'Tornado Child', wickedness is examined through freedom. There is an implication of racism based on the first few lines of the poem. By the end of the first stanza racism is the direct subject.'*

Poetry Everywhere, Kwame Dawes, 'Tornado Child' – less than two and a half minutes of mind-blowing performance poetry: [youtube.com/watch?v=r-guTTBeivg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-guTTBeivg)

Jacques Groen