

**Elizabeth Swados**

**The Siren**

It's not strange  
the sirens sound like women  
calling out in grief,  
but one just passed by  
my window on Mercer Street  
and she sounded  
not as if she was on her way  
but as she was standing  
at my front courtyard  
screaming through the gate  
about what she knows  
and about what urgently  
she thought I know. Or ought to know.  
Her hair is long and wavy  
and she has come from the sea  
right where the fishing boats  
and yachts are parked.  
"It's over for me," sings  
the hollow rail of her voice.  
"But you can still catch  
a kayak, row out towards the light  
and not get lost.  
Thirty years I've warned  
the women on my route  
about the aftermath  
of tumbled rocks or ashes made of bodies  
caught in the fire, the falling of the gray sky.  
I hold a dead infant in my arms.  
She came before me in my mother's womb.  
But I was told to stay  
so I could hear the sirens wailing to fires,  
injuries and heart attacks,  
the men who jumped  
in front of subway tracks  
and the mother who watches from her bed  
not knowing what the blackbird meant  
as it soared like a siren,  
so far away she was almost deaf  
to its empty road of wind."

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Elizabeth Swados is an award-winning author and composer and an Obie-award winning theater artist. Her first book of poems, *The One and Only Human Galaxy*, was published in 2009.