

The beginning stanzas of ADRIENNE FIDELIN RESTORED

What is your fortune, my pretty maid?"
"My face is my fortune, sir," she said.

"Then I can't marry you, my pretty maid."
"Nobody asked you, sir!" she said.

-traditional nursery rhyme

Those late nights, leaving the Bal Blomet,
I'd look up at the stars trembling
in the Parisian sky, fragmenting
their reflections in the puddles
between the cobblestones,
and think of how they were the same stars
flickering in the warm black nights
of Guadeloupe, where I was born.

They were the same stars
I saw when the skies cleared
after the hurricane that killed my mother.
I was thirteen. Two years later,
when my father died,
I was done with island life.
Not for me to marry a local boy
and raise a passel of kids.

I went to Paris to be a dancer.
At first, I lived with my brother.
My second home was the Bal Blomet,
a refuge for Antillean Blacks,
where we could dance and make music,
where we could let go and be ourselves,
or be, for a time, whoever we wanted.