**Watcher**

**By Natasha Trethewey**

— After Katrina, 2005

At first, there was nothing to do but watch.  
For days, before the trucks arrived, before the work  
of cleanup, my brother sat on the stoop and watched.

He watched the ambulances speed by, the police cars;  
watched for the looters who’d come each day  
to siphon gas from the car, take away the generator,

the air conditioner, whatever there was to be had.  
He watched his phone for a signal, watched the sky  
for signs of a storm, for rain so he could wash.

At the church, handing out diapers and water,  
he watched the people line up, watched their faces  
as they watched his. And when at last there was work,

he got a job, on the beach, as a watcher.  
Behind safety goggles, he watched the sand for bones,  
searched for debris that clogged the great machines.

Riding the prow of the cleaners, or walking ahead,  
he watched for carcasses – chickens mostly, maybe  
some cats or dogs. No one said remains. No one

had to. It was a kind of faith, that watching:  
my brother trained his eyes to bear  
the sharp erasure of sand and glass, prayed

there’d be nothing more to see.