



After the Tornado

Diane Warner

After she saw the tornado **splinter** the hackberry trees
standing at field's edge; after she saw the hymnals
and purple velvet cushions of Coal Creek Gospel Hall
rise up and twirl like hellish dancers in cobra's trance;
and after she witnessed the tornado itself
diminish and sink back into the **black** cloud ceiling,
exhaling pews and tree limbs like candy wrappers from a passing car,

only then, after all, could she return
to her body and her breath, like a bird
unborn, returning to the shell. She could take up
her storm stopped chores: straightening
the swing set's **tangled** chains,
gathering sun-dried sheets from the line,
feeding the caged rabbit a few blades of grass.

she could feel her **fear-struck** heart rolling in her chest
like grackles swarming in the yard and rising from the elm.

Because she could not gather the girls and their father
like a line of sun-warmed laundry tight in her arms,
she swept the floors clean as pearled barley, stood crayons
shoulder-to-shoulder in a bright sturdy box
like irises framed by the kitchen window.

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