



## After the T o r n a d o

Diane Warner

After she saw the tornado splinter the hack berry 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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Poem Written by Dr. Diane Warner © 2008 • Illustration and broadside designed by Gilbert Venegas

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