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This Morning's Tornado

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THIS MORNING'S TORNADO

Tonight it's in the paper, how it killed forty people
in my hometown. This picture, taken just before,
shows the sky black, but should have shown the sky
green, calm, and the town moving about
in the language of animals, waiting.

I can't find the names of the dead.
This doesn't say whether Banks had opened the filling station
by the time it happened, if he looked up
with eyes dirt yellow, and saw it coming –
whether Mr. Moss saw anything at all
or if he forgot to pull the shades in the store,
if he sat with his head bowed
after the roof came off and the ancient
black shoes lay torn from their rows
out of the dusty bags.

I try to call my mother.
She would have watched me take the back path
to school. And J.T. Henley, in his sheriff's car,
would have chuckled this morning at any who trembled.
Even now I can see him out at the Ritz on the highway
waiting for the National Guard.
He is eating slowly, eyeing Charlotte
who comes just close enough to pour coffee and ring up the bill.