

*Strange Service Warning*  
*from the Night of Oct. 17*  
Joseph Michaels

*I shrink from saying, as science writers often do, that this book is written for the layman, given that its antonym is priest; I dispense demonstrable truths, not revealed ones. Let me merely say instead that I write, although not exclusively, for those who do not make their living from science.*

—C.F. Bohren

*Wenn wir den plot natürlich jeder ständig beobachtbare parameter der Atmosphäre, wie zum Beispiel Temperatur, und gleichzeitig ignorieren das immer wiederkehrende Effekt der Rotation der Erde um die eigene Achse und die revolution um die Sonne, was wir beginnen zu sehen, ist ein graph der nichts mehr als unregelmäßige schwankungen (siehe Abbildung 69).*

—Hermann Flohn, *Klima und Witterung*

WARNING

We interrupt this program. This is a state and regional county emergency. Please be advised. What follows is an urgent message brought to you via satellite from the National Weather Service in Miami, in association with the new State Advisory Committee and/or Community Outreach Cabinet. Under the select guidance of a special team of National Weather Service and NOAA meteorologists, a severe thunderstorm warning has been issued for the following counties for the night of October Seventeen: Lake County in Florida, western Orange County in Florida, Osceola and Polk Counties in Florida, et cetera, with a severe thunderstorm and tornado watch remaining in effect until approximately 11:45 PM Eastern Daylight Time. Doppler radar indicates that currently the storm is moving southeast of Alachua County at an estimated speed of roughly twenty-three miles-per-hour, with a possible tornado vortex signature (or, colloquially, TVS) developing later on as it nears the city. Additional strong storms are or have been spotted as being in-development along the sea-breeze collision, maturing/incrementally progressing in their way throughout this afternoon and continuing on well into the evening inside (geographically-speaking) the current (which is to say: as yet) pandected warning area. Other locations inside the warning area include but are not limited to Valwood, Apopka, Mount Dora, Eustis, Wekiwa Spring State Park, Mount Plymouth, Mount Coriander, Paisley, Oak Ridge, Clement, and Green Swamp Wilderness Preserve. For the county and/or region listed that is not (repeat: not) specifically designated as an inland county, moderate southeast to south winds are to be expected throughout the day, operating in particular conjunction with an oncoming though weakening high-pressure ridge moving in over the Atlantic with a general wind shift to the south and southwest as the day goes on. Southeast winds of five to twelve knots are to be immediately expected during the earlier moments of this shift, with the seas themselves (which is to say: the shores, the waves) starting at about two to three feet with a dominant period of about eight seconds and a slight but increased chop on the more intracoastal waters. A significant, more ultimate wave height has been predicted at around twelve meters (or, colloquially, about thirty-nine feet), as

measured through-to-crest using the average highest one-third of all current waves recorded. Due to the processing of such calculations, however, and the ongoing nature of the human error, please note: individual waves encountered in your time today may in fact present themselves as more than twice (or even three times) the predicted significant wave height. As a polite but urgent message from the National Weather Service in Miami, in association with new State Advisory Committee and/or Community Outreach Cabinet, you are urged strongly not to surf, to wander, to jog along the beach or make false castles in the sand, precarious upon the water's edge. Note: you have been warned. Note: please be advised.

Given the recent reflectivity readings taken across the area, all weather centers in the state have been put on high alert and the storm is now deemed capable of producing such inclement weather conditions as strong winds, large hail, cloud-to-ground lightning, ground-to-cloud lightning, headaches, sleet, snow, seasonal discomfort, cloud-to-cloud lightning, unexpected microbursts, altocumuli with virga, feelings of drowsiness on a soporific scale from medium to intense, adiabatic vicissitudes, anemometric uncertainty, dramatic declines in ground temperature, Andes lighting, pogonip, advection fog and sea smoke, tornadoes at little or no advance warning, and very heavy rainfall. For your protection, move indoors immediately to an interior room on the lowest floor of your home or business—preferably one with a rubber lining. In the case of a tornado, seek out shelter underground, remaining with all loved-ones in a safe, well-lit, and at least conditionally palatable living position for the duration of the storm. If at any time you are unsure of the storm's progress—lacking in particular an authorized and eminently purchasable National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration weather radio or some similar digital readout device to be used underground for a remote assessment of the storm via the clear and audible reception of polite (read: urgent) Specific Area Encoded Messages like this one—and you wish to go outside and check, refrain please as much as possible from giving in to such an inclination. If necessary, when settling on foul-weather plans, be prepared to remain stationary inside your shelter space for at least two days after entering (any part of a day being a whole day for this particular purpose). If you have not brought a watch with you or yet purchased an NOAA clock/weather radio of your own and

have already lost complete track of the time inside your new and relatively storm-safe abode, however many days your rations last should be (in the end) more than sufficient of an equivalency.

If in an office block or mobile home or any other sort of building without a basement or a designated shelter area, a narrow windowless hallway on the lowest possible floor (though risky) will for the moment be acceptable—especially if it has a rubber lining. Those suffering from claustrophobia and/or other generalized anxiety disorders are advised not to panic, but (rather) to close their eyes, to inhale deeply, to think of larger spaces almost impossible in size and rich in slow composed affect. At a time like this, or so the phrase has it, despite the obvious motivation to do so, consult neither your local physician nor the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (any edition being an edition of use with respect to claustrophobia, having been diagnosed in urban-dwelling European males as early as the nineteenth century). Though seemingly helpful both of these options may appear to be, you lack the proper time and/or leisure now to give these efforts worth, should they have had any worth to begin with—you yourself possessing almost an entire lifetime alone together with your illness, and over the course of which you have (doubtless) apperceived well enough already what it is which you endure. Listen, instead, to the rain outside. Picture it. Hear it. Wet. Hands. Search for its expansiveness, clustered somewhere paradoxically inside its widening sound. Lean back. Breathe. Please. Consider the meaning of the specific word “lenticular”—a stationary cloud wrapped up inside itself and appearing to its viewer like a kind of hurricane in miniature—what it connotes, the asseverative properties of its multiple ilks, in which direction it progresses, the fear it brings to average spellers, how it might apply to you. If claustrophobia is a learned condition, consider the storm a remodeled education. Breathe. Think. Take a minor solace in the idea that you are not alone within your apprehension, though you may in fact be well alone within your narrow hallway.

For those without a hallway, follow advance plans whenever possible, avoiding in particular school auditoriums, larger social halls, and all other types of shelter constructions with a wide and ample roof lacking in interior supports. The mini-tornado, also called a landspout—the most insubstantial (admeasurements-speaking)

of the three broad categories of tornadoes—holds a comprehensive wind force of up to one-hundred miles-per-hour, capable of destroying homes and other relatively fortified structures via an internal aerodynamic ballooning effect spurred on as the edifice meets wind, and is steeped inside a highly pressurized environment, the outside wind force practically squeezing the construction direct through its middle until the roof is lifted off essentially from within. The roof is then sucked up into the funnel along with ancillary debris. Note: you have been warned. Please. We. We interrupt this program.

Note: it is precisely from this action—the grounding of the funnel and its eventual consumption of dirt, detritus, unsuspecting anthropoidal materials—that the vortex gains its darker shade. Though tornadoes themselves figure across a reasonably wide range of the color spectrum, the most commonplace of these colors—and thereby the pigments on the wind you are most likely to come into contact with in your experiences today—are as follows: black, gray, white, forest green (a verdure so dark and lonely it might as well be contiguous with black, except maybe a little deeper), brown, blue, blur, transpicuous, and red. (For a more comprehensive listing and detailed schema analysis of all possible tourbillon colors, visit our website at the links provided.)

Accompanying this image, and a relevant augury for the tornado's nearby presence, is a highly distinctive noise: a loud, oftentimes bombinative din referred to by a pocketful of survived witnesses as quote/unquote “the roar of a thousand trains.” The exact emotional trauma that is elicited from such a close and necessarily prolonged acquaintanceship with a tornado is, in the end, entirely subjective and may linger for survivors until many years after the fact; after which the victim, in uneasy sleep, may suddenly awake inside his/her home, fall down the morning stairs, greet the spouse and glowing family, only to find him-/herself (to a notion of much relief) entirely, implausibly cured. In the end, these things, too, can happen. They can, they do. Morning comes up and makes the weather fall away. The idea of it more, perhaps. The need for it, or the human fragile understanding of its malign complications. Turns it away. Shapes it. Please. Makes even the constant constants in George Winterling's heat index formula seem (in their own humid way) quite distant. But, then again, only for

some. For some they can. For some they do. Are. Be. For others, meanwhile, waking up odd hours each night, piling away the bedclothes on excess hobbled trips to the bathroom in the dark, you may do well to note that mornings (as much as they may seem to be) are never quite a definite. Something generous to notice, to feel mistaken by; acknowledging of the nothing there, like a deep-hearted flaw, or just to hobble past. We have been warned. To help manage your stress in situations such as these (which is to say: in situations after a damaging tornado strike), begin first to reestablish only the most basic of routines before moving on to the more markedly complex social and/or meteorological dynamics of living a daily life. Eat meals at regularized times in the special company of select friends; attend mass meetings with local bereavement, weather, and/or otherwise-oriented support groups, assisting daily in the incremental sharing and/or re-experiencing of your past; find a hobby in the form of a creative process; seek out new less-tasking occupations, relocating perhaps to an area of the country less notable for its inclemency; whine; whine; crusade righteous against young mothers and their sweeping away of poisonous cat litter; sleep only fitfully on an unmade bed half-emptied recently of a glowing red spouse; wake up early in the middle of the night (each night) and call up feelingly for a long-distance number previously (weirdly) unknown to you on the kitchen landline telephone—a number, you learn later, linking a smell to it and to the event like skin or warm salt pretzels sold out on the street, which has for six months now (no more, no less) been ruefully disconnected due to diplomatic border issues in the watery southeast. Take free classes at the local Y; follow an exercise program; do one thing for the rest of your life with supreme discipline. Get an embarrassing tattoo paid for at a discount by free-range insurance funds and planted direct into your flesh in a proportionally embarrassing location. Drink. Drink. Cover the mirrors in your house with silk white handkerchiefs, and when anyone asks just tell them they are drying; just tell them you are mourning; tell them for your father; say to them you are Hungarian, it being a kind of naturalized custom there; or just tell them, in a way, what is equally untrue. Write letters. Whine. Drink. Smoke. Name, in consummate sweet fondness, the body parts you have not yet lost. Look out the window (or gaze, colloquially, if you will) at each imminent sunset, watching with some minor-league

intent both the clichéd, complex, sub-existent traffic beating down below (the redundancy of which phrase never actually strikes you) and up above faint constellations, which move and duck in such a way that only the cautious and somnambulant could ever really know or understand to be as just one half of light reflecting itself upon the whole. A reflection, as they say, or as you will tell them, just recently covered. In the end, these things, too, can help. They move. They can. Wet. Close. Elbows. Be. You have been warned: we have been, all.

If your shelter is not reinforced, move immediately to a shelter space which is. Repeat: move immediately to a shelter space which is. While inside, maintain a five foot distance from all windows and apertures of any kind. Any blinds, roll-down drapes, black-out fabrics, knitted curtains, or swag curtain-tiers (with a careful decorative appliqué of maternal embroidery) must be kept shut for the entire duration of the event, even if the storm appears to have entered into a lull. Do not look out. Do not cry, do not fear. The wind sighs loudly, solids turn; a cloud in a twist or the curious mapped-out spiral in your homework not long since forgotten for a difficult math class, unwound cotton like a once-stuck zipper as the rain spills out. Breathe. Think. Please, wet. Blood. Have. In the end, weather, too, can be deceptive.

The best way to deal with severe weather is to avoid it. Lightning is inherent, so use proper judgment when preparing your shelter space and be aware at all times of your potential for flammability. If positioned out-of-doors at the time of the storm's arrival—and with no adequate shelter space having (as yet) made itself available—find your path to a relative clearing; away somewhere from taller, heavier trees (keeping generally about twice as far away from isolated trees as the trees are tall), crawling all the while with stomach and/or nose as close as possible along the ground and being sure as you do to stay at least twenty-eight-and-a-quarter feet apart from any other members in your group to avoid the probable flow of lightning between bodies. Keep your eyes on the western sky and try and recognize the early warning signs of harsh impending weather. Breathe. Think. Advised. To avoid becoming a lightning statistic, know always what the storm is doing. Should thunder and/or lightning be approaching, you should be able (with some proximate degree of accurateness) to determine the following symptoms of an

atmospheric change: acute rise in wind velocity, a sudden reversal of the wind's direction, deep rumbling sounds emanating someplace in the distance (i.e., the sound and/or collective loud discordant sounds of thunder, plural), a general aura both human and barometric of the style color gray, disturbances in nearby livestock and/or farmers' daughters, sustained ozone redolence, the darkening and building up of clouds as they enter the congestus phase with a billowing ice-laden shape not unlike large broccoli florets. Alone, cold—not quite alone, but still—recognize that these are symbols, and you will understand forever what they really mean. Stay where you are. Watch. Have. Know. You will know the rain as an extended congress with the lake, the lightning and the snow as just two ways of turning space electric. See these things, and you will call. Wind inside a vortex spirals counterclockwise; rain falls densely in Unionville, Maryland. Once situated (well and safe) inside the clearing proper, crouch and curl yourself into a seated fetal position in the nearest and/or driest gulley or ground depression, thus making yourself the smallest possible earthbound target with knees together, eyes shut tight, and crossed arms pressed firmly against the chest. Should you have any compunctions regarding this procedure, or should you notice together in the small moments of silence here as you report these rules aloud any fear whatsoever on the collected loud discordant faces of your group, pause charitably for a moment and note only with a proud and elegant baritone register that in situations such as these (statistically-speaking) fatalities are, in point of fact, exceedingly rare—one in six-hundred thousand, actually—and that in addition to the sheer physical rarity of the event there are (to be sure) but three primary non-lethal possibilities for experiencing pain from a lightning strike. First, abundant electrical output from the strike produces a force formidable enough where any non-conducting objects in the nearby vicinity (timber, rubber, most types of ceramics and/or homemade pottery, et cetera) are liable when hit to explode. Second, the flow from such an output also produces intense heat, which can frequently start fires (see below for FIRE). And third, the blastwave responsible for the production of the sonic undulation we call thunder is itself so mind-alteringly palpable and/or acoustically powerful as to rupture or at the very least partially damage the eardrums of most nearby persons, resulting most often in radical hearing loss,



drainage of fluids from the ear (sanguine or otherwise), and an increased likelihood of mastoiditis. Most lightning related fatalities, on the other hand, can be attributed more often than not directly to cardiac arrest. Should a member of your party happen to be struck, either simple CPR or the proficient use of an automatic external defibrillator will be your most effective means for the reviving of the victim. If more than one person among you has been struck, be sure to treat small children and all those who are unconscious first, but only (repeat: only) after it is safe for you to do so. In the end, it has to be this way. In the end. If the person has stopped breathing, begin rescue breathing. If the heart has stopped beating, begin emergency cardiopulmonary resuscitation. If there is no pulse and the victim is not breathing, retreat immediately to a safer place and allow yourself to mourn, remembering now well in advance of your next scheduled camp outing to pack the AED. Mark the time. Mark the place. The way light comes, picketed and lattice-worked, through the leaves of trees even when it isn't warm out. The smell. The blood. Wet, close. The give and the take. Count off the seconds until they turn to minutes and to hours and to years, gaining both a weight in time and this unleaded spark of vitriol as all things and humans do (living or dead) with age. Wet. Hands. Knees. Close. The dirt quietly risen; imbedded in the grooves of an old tree's bark, the dry skin of your joints. We interrupt this program. We interrupt. We. Please be advised. In the situation of some faint sign of life—if an AED is not available and no one else in your party has been trained ahead of time and/or authoritatively certified for the safe and legal administration of cardiopulmonary resuscitation—you may be forced, however unfortunate it may appear, to utilize to the best of your capacity alternative methods of treatment. Examples of these treatments can vary widely in their practice and result according to a multiplicity of sources, and verge often on the supernatural. In the end. Please. A field. For a more unequivocal experiment, however, transport the body with several other members in your group to a large, more readily dilatant clearing at least a mile away northwest from the first clearing in the woods; prop it up somehow (which is to say: the corpse), adorn with metal and other conductive materials, wait to see what happens. A field. Please. The average monophasic shock from an automatic external defibrillator is charged to around three-hundred-sixty joules. (A cloud. Have.) A lightning strike

several miles in-length contains and released anywhere between one-billion and ten-billion joules. (Please.) This should be more than enough. For those victims in your party who are visibly to seriously burnt and maintain already the natural (enough) appearance of being well deceased, stand back and wait calmly for the realization that nothing more on your part can be done (bodily) at this particular juncture. Mark the time. Mark the place. Note aloud and understand, conceptually-speaking, what you have already doubtless been well told: that this day or night or exceptionally tree-lighted, gorgeously unspecified autumnal morning, in point of fact, is not your fault: that there is (in time) a complete complex multitude of movements and points and stretched out moments in the depth of one's experience—moments, events, almost like mirrors gone a little bit dusty and obscure—and that they happen at all in the ways they do is merely a symptom and despite all feelings to the contrary has nothing to do with you. In a day, in the end, as the phrase has it, or just right motherfucking now—please—you are hardly even here. Looking back on the event—through an old photograph perhaps of some charred deserted campsite—you will understand that what you have experienced (which is to say: this feeling now of shame, and something close to indignation at having it rebuked) is a type of selfishness found only in emergencies, something to pass by and overtake just as the rest of it will become, no more real than the deadliness of seasons, the expected rain that never reaches pavement because it is too hot, and surrounded on all sides by a myopia through which you may consider the entire rest of your time's own experience to be both incredibly fortunate and tremendously cruel. Mark the time. Mark the thought. The place. The movement. The dirt and the rain. Breathe. Think. Say what you will. Note: please: you have been advised.

Note: fact: hailstones are larger in Potter, Nebraska.

Note: fact: the added-up seconds of all the world (in the clearing, in Florida, Cuba, Europe and out, in Kansas or Georgia or New York City, and the nowhere where it most wishes it would be, et cetera), this calculated time between an image and its sound, multiplied by point-two, will forever result in a desperate figure. A field. A cloud. Something needing on its surface and quite ultimately wet, like some blank-faced choice to stay outside, to be foolish or brave, made in an instant with a stupid halo formed; streetlight

like a portal, visible for the rain. Wind inside a vortex spirals counterclockwise. You have been warned.

Withdrawing for a moment then from the more hostile aspects of a lightning storm (as the phrase has it), it is perhaps equally beneficial that you make time now and enjoy (for yourself) the stunning visuals and immense pulchritude of nature's very own light show. Not only is it impressive, but it can be enjoyed (or at least, with a certain plaintive aspect to the eyes, looked at) again and again in the presence of all relatives and adjutants in the form of high-resolution lightning photographs. This having been said, however, it might still be noted that (speaking of hobbies) documenting of this particular variety is (almost certainly) not for everyone, and comes itself—even while it may deal so stridently with the more visible aspects of this world—terribly burdened by its own systems of nostalgic worth. A timid scarecrow altered ineffectually with a pork-pie hat stood beside a thunderhead, the steps in metal shadow leading up to a house, and the rusty-green color grass takes on driving County Route 153 only some few feet beyond the New York boundary coming from Vermont. In the end, this flatness, this scale and longing—these are the things that pictures do. Should you (thus) feel too necessarily old (or perhaps just too healthy and too necessary, in all) to find yourself so caught inside the avocations of such wistfulness, there is in addition a wide media and consumer outlet capable of providing substantial, surprisingly full funds for known and/or emerging weather photographers and their stark captured images of the rarer permutations lightning has been known to take. Specific examples of these permutations include but are not limited to bead lightning, staccato lightning, cloud-to-cloud lightning, and the scarcely photographed ball lightning, likened often by its voyeurs to nationalistic once-a-year fireworks and mistaken just as often for the verified/verifiable proof of extra-terrestrial-flown unidentified flying objects when seen on dark nights by the lonely and the hopeful and the heartbreakingly misinformed. These things, too, occasional pictures have been known to perform. To take a lightning photograph, mount your camera on a tripod—preferably plastic in its majority constitution and/or minorly equipped (at the very least) with rubber bases for its telescopic legs—pointed in the general direction of the storm with aperture set to about f4.5 and lens focused at infinity, or perhaps a trifle closer. Set and/or

adjust your shutter speed at about one-fifteenth or one-thirtieth of a second, snapping the shutter only once you see or (at the very least) sense that the electrical potential between two centers of charge (repeat: any two: ground and cloud, cloud and aerial array, et cetera) exceeds for the most part twenty-five thousand volts per every inch that separates the two points respectively, resulting by rule in a negatively charged initial stroke—also called a pilot leader—which advances groundward from the cloud base in a rapid sequence of discrete mobile return strokes that ascend from the turf or otherwise-oriented field position at roughly lightning speed (i.e., one-tenth to one-half  $c$ , provided  $c$  here represents the speed of light). When finished, retreat rapidly to a secure area free from natural danger (a task which is, though enduring, not entirely impossible, as it turns out), listening intently and with great wonder to the cannonade far off. To take a lightning photograph, one must be able to see something in nature not readily accessible to the average outdoor-going hiker; to see a kind of beauty, and yet at the same point to know that you are skeptical of just how beautiful it all actually appears. Mark the time, the place, the memory now captured on its print or the equilateral (or close enough) currently digitized/pixelated form thereof. Allow uncertain spacing between your toes and feet, and realize somewhere in faint cognizance the sheer ambiguity that is being and/or has been just recently observed—even, to an extent, manipulated—in such a process as this one. You have just caught a moment, and in doing so will not help but recognize how significantly fragile and even artificial the movement of things is; how they move at all, or so you might wonder staring at the perfect stillness of your latest work, remains (almost always) the property not to be known. That they move too fast, in truth, in fact, en pointe, is another such datum. As is the way with visible things, and as is the way with extant technology (so the phrase has it), though you will doubtless never be able to capture that precise charge or pilot leader which first triggered your artistic muscle outside in the storm, there is still a chance of photographing one of the many subsequent strokes and unbranched lines which follow usually within fractions of a second. This much, it is true, seems perfectly sound.

Having finally completed (now) your first photographic session—the first, as is said, of a quite hopeful many—develop the

pictures (should you have used raw film for the project) either at home using your own personal darkroom with chemicals and plates and sundry bought optical apparatuses, or more simply the sterile wiped-down back-services counter appearing at your local pharmacy and charging the sum total of: not much, for crispy negatives and double prints. If making use of your own darkroom, be sure not to rush. Take your time. Ready your place. Wet. Feel. Prepare your tank and stop-baths with an almost prodigal care; develop the film using only highest quality photographic fluid not previously watered down for adverse (technologically-speaking) methods of frugality; and remember always to assemble your necessary materials ahead of time so as not to flounder in the dark. Wash and dab—not daub—lightly (read: lightly) with homemade wetting agent and hang your negatives to dry. Return to the darkroom in due time, closely examining the work for wet spots and/or significant impurities within the frame, appearing now in its primitive form quite grim with subtle light and an iciness streaked through the shadows' base. This is the way a negative looks; this is the way, as it turns out, it feels. Pale. Dark. Blood, and a touch of what is evil. Hands. Eyes. Wet. When at last your first prints have been made, store the photographs at home in a sizable old book placed gravely on a top shelf somewhere and capable of being dusted on occasion. Label the book. Mark it. Please. Be. What you do with the pictures (or, for that matter, just the book) after this is entirely your decision. Sell them for a business check to prominent magazines of fulminology, disregard them completely as a wounded father might his daughter, show them to co-workers when they ask about your weekend habits, to old friends at regularly scheduled dinner parties, or the local potentially meteorological-in-nature support groups you begin (at first hesitant and well-caffeinated) to attend each Thursday night. Frame them in cheap frames. Protect them from greased hands. Wet. Dark. Spread. Live with them, as you must. As you yourself have chosen to. To drink the coffee, too hot in its cup, and say the names of those you've hurt. Look at them faintly in the bluer hours (which is to say: the photographs, the palimpsests), almost worsening your grief while you sit at home alone and staring through a face, hollow at the picture frame, apoplectic in annoyance, spreading mucus like a slime across its valent gloss as you weep incrementally softer in feigned transportation. Breathe. Hands. Eyes. Nose. Wet. In the

end, at a time like this, to do anything otherwise would be naturally foolish—optimistic, transcendental, attritional, and double-dealing—although weather, it soon comes to me, is an enterprise of fools, both in typical contingency and by short-term conversion.

Breathe. Think. Look at how the hailstones fall—please be advised.

Note: fact: a middle is coming, an ending to follow, the whole of the thick clouded mess beginning to be heard. We ask for things. We offer. We travel by entry-points, hidden in its bedrock like the city in itself, and promulgate the way. A light. The dark. A bloodied nose.

Early July, 1961—a Wednesday, and later on to be recounted in some odd historic miscommunication of an already corrupt context as the exact same day a half-bushel full of peaches falls unexpectedly from the sky onto the heads of five litigious and inebriated masons from Shreveport, Louisiana—the exact same time perhaps, or give a little for delay and the requisite re-centering of time zones, a single psychologically stranded bolt of lightning in the late evening nearly one thousand miles off from New Orleans' suburbs makes fair contact with an abandoned tobacco barn in the middle of a field somewhere in North Carolina, setting fire to the field (see below for FIRE) and killing the eight souls trapped inside; while outside, in the near-dark, a handful or a pocket (at the least) of improbable yet present witnesses stand devastated; they stand, they look, they offer in the little ways they have; they report a sulfur smell to the authorities and something (they say, they give) like the ripened pork-rind grease of an early morning fry-pan; go home; eat; stir; shit contemplatively in their respective homes; attend together two weeks later a reckless string of small mall-staged self-help seminars and fringe group tattoo parlor crawls for the next few desperate years of life, only later emerging up from something like a sleep to fall down brightly the morning's stairs and tell their loved ones gathered all around the table for what would normally appear to be (but not since the accident, the night, the storm if a single bolt could be so called) an impromptu breakfast party filled with smiles and a little bit of peeking sun, the whole town plus the sexton spilled out inside the kitchen nook, tell them all for no particular reason except that it feels right and maybe even good that what (in point of fact) they are now actually afraid of: terribly, gut-looseningly afraid—

they finally just realize even in themselves—is not lightning exactly or darkness per se, but the smell: the smell of the field and the barn after the strike, the grease and the smoke and fat, delivered to them express, belched screamingly each morning on the weekends from some late aired awful scent of bacon spitting in a pan. Crisp. Dark. Blood and oil, water and salt. The site of the fire is roped off for weeks. They come and stare. They ogle. They sniff. The dirt gets in the wood, onto their hands, in the prepped tobacco leaves they still use to smoke. Yellow and black tape stretched across the barn's burnt outer frame under the local guidance of select law enforcement teams. A rawer sky, a pretty nice day, and thus only after the storm is made officially to pass, and everything else nearby is made or (at least) halfway headed in the right direction (as the phrase has it), and everything is said for the first and the last time, is it at last told en masse to the surrounding neighborhood such as it was with charred gaps in population and sexton and all that the eight poor victims of the burn were, (in point of fact) at their time of untimely deaths, perched upright on metal bucket seats.

Black. Wet. Eyes and nothing more in the sense of mattering and memory.

Temperatures are hell, hailstones fall densely.

We breathe. We offer. Close. Close.

The weather, too, exhales.

Note: fact: thunderstorm rain may produce flash floods. Stay out of dry creek beds and other unsafe zones. If you live along a river, consider relocation. (Wet. Please be advised.) Contrary to ostensible opinion, it is not too late to do so. To run. To flee. To jump. (Away. Close.) Discuss the matter first with all affected members of the family and/or personal financial confidants, using as an incentive the absolute tremendous boon you stand now to acquire in the selling off of valuable waterfront property desirable to consumers even in the most devastating of housing market recessions. (Have. Offer. Wet.) If a tornado is approaching, in no way should you attempt to outrun the phenomenon—this will not help. In the case of flooding, you may be forced to swim; in the event of drowning, you may have to hurt. Keep alert for any changes in the surrounding areas, and try to breathe regularly. (Think.) Updates are to be expected.

Should you feel so obliged (in any way) to assist us with the information effort, report all weather changes to your nearest

law enforcement agency, which will then promptly relay that information either to the National Weather Service directly or to the new State Advisory Committee and/or Community Outreach Cabinet, in strict compliance with the recent and/or neoterically implemented NWS/SAC/COC news-weather regulations. Note: fact: this is not a drill. The organization contacted will thereafter inform the next and so on and so forth until the situation has been formally announced. Due to recent alterations in the system, however, if you are in any way unhappy with or feel misrepresented by these proceedings and you wish to file a healthy/productive/non-threatening complaint, the SAC/COC complaints offices are available now twenty-four hours a day (save for a brief respite on Sundays in between the hours of eight and ten, ante meridiem) and can be reached whenever necessary (save for those hours recently above mentioned) by dialing the extension number 0225 and clarifying via a momentary for-your-convenience conversation with the automated telephone operator as to which specific organization and/or subcommittee you would (in fact) most like to deal with in the processing of your particular aggrievances (which is to say, finally: the State Advisory Committee or the Community Outreach Cabinet). Note: fact: repeat: this is not a drill. If, on the other hand, you would like to file your complaint with the National Weather Service or the National Weather Service-affiliated National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (and not, specifically, with the State Advisory Committee and/or Community Outreach Cabinet), this is also entirely acceptable and can be achieved with relative for-your-convenience alacrity by dialing the extension numbers 0223 and 0224, respectively. These numbers, too, will give you diction for survival. In the end. In the dark. At the time of storm's arrival. Please note, however: it is the National Weather Service's distinct wish that you might abstain from doing so, at least on a landline telephone, while a severe thunderstorm watch is still in effect, thus acting on your part in responsible correspondence with the annually-published NOAA Weather Safety and Awareness News. In the end. In the dark. In the dark. To assist with this and the quelling of all random temptation of the like with a tendency to seep in, all of the organizations and/or agencies mentioned above will (during a severe thunderstorm only) temporarily disconnect their telephone lines, acting once more in legally mandated correspondence with



organizational guidelines clearly listed in later background sections of the annually-published NOAA Weather Safety and Awareness News. These things, too, are meant to help. To obtain your free citizens' rights copy of this NOAAWSAN, visit your local pharmacy (the same one, presumably, just used for the possible though not altogether necessary technician-assisted development of your now-bound nature photographs) and look for the stacks beside the checkout line, directly adjacent to the elderly vested employee with a name like Betty or Mae-Sue (or Marjorie or Ellie or whisperable in quaint times) and rheumatoid arthritis and second-stage mastoiditis and absent limbs she has not named and mortgage loans and two sons buried in a Broxton cemetery on the very special section of the lawn where neatly maintained crabgrass angles itself gently in an obtuse sort of way and turns in smoothly against the hedgerows by the ferric exit gate—who feels more than you because of not somehow her own divinity but simply she has felt so much—who laser-scans the barcodes on your selective purchases, and scans those (as well) of the persons after you. In the end, in the dark, she is still there.

Note: fact: this is not a drill.

Please. Be. You have been warned.

For a third option, if this is all too complicated and you wish to stay as far away from the information effort as is humanly feasible, simply wait (wherever you may be) in a calm and collected manner for the storm to pass. Be. Have. This will all be over soon enough. Take a deep breath in, and think. Please. Have. In the end, just look at how the seasons change. A field. A cloud. The end.

If you're just now joining us this evening—just now tuning in—at approximately 6:42 PM Eastern Daylight Time, a select team of National Weather Service and NOAA meteorologists detected a severe thunderstorm capable of producing quarter-sized hail and damaging winds in excess of sixty miles-per-hour. The storm was located near San Felasco Hammock Preserve State Park just south of Alachua County and moving at an estimated contemporaneous speed of about twenty-three miles-per-hour. Mother, father. Talk. In more recent developments, according to a new wind pattern just analyzed—taking into account (mainly) the systematic rotation of the currents and concomitant anemometric flow—it has been deemed now highly unlikely that this storm (intimidating as it

sounds) will stretch beyond state lines. Rather, for those interested in their geography, it should only hover, suggestively, somewhere amid the coasts—bounded almost by them, coloring in this state alone and changing the very relevance of anything that lies without: a message reproduced, yet in its reproduction quite limited of scope: earthy now and changed as an excuse. Talk. Cloud. In Georgia, then, there is no squall; in New York, then, no Wilhelm Dove. In Florida, however, in light of past months' drought conditions, and in direct conjunction with the quickened wind, even firestorms remain a threat, rolling as they do across the flatter lands and vaguer zones which separate our counties (if they ever needed separating to begin with). That there will also, likely, in the course of tonight's climate event, be a large amount of precipitation means nothing to the detriment of these fires. After all, how could it really? How could it, when you think?

If ever in direct contact with the flames, withhold yourself as long as possible from having distressed thoughts. Appreciate, instead, the rosewood color spectrum and complex thermogenic satisfaction which is exuded from the holocaust. Hot, bright, a feeling in a would-be dearth of same. Spilled out. Up. A lick and then it's gone. Equivalent with common sense—disregarding excess adipose and/or density/frequency of methane gas reserves—the human form will not burn swiftly, a total anatomical cremation requiring anywhere between one and two hours of broiling at tremendously high temperature, beginning at mid-section and stretching out from there: drip: hot: wet. And don't forget the smell. (For a more comprehensive listing of flammable objects found typically inside the home, visit our website at the links provided.) For continued health and safety of all loved-ones in the situation of a blaze, reduce all furtherance of indoor air pollution: discard any food that has been recently exposed to heat, smoke, or soot—placing overt anguish in the making of fruit salads and preparation of your child's formula (should you have, or wish, or have anyway, a child to begin with)—and should smoke levels rise to an unsafe extent, and should your vision cloud by residue, should one foot stumble on the area runner never quite made straight despite a generous allowance paid, should a nose break, should there in fact be blood, should a member of your family misplace his bronchodilator and should that afflicted party fall both on hands and knees to search

quite ashenly beneath armoires, and in the aggregate confusion caused with such a spectacle around this sick boy's wheezing gasp should you yourself begin to cough, to note faint flutters in your chest, and should there be at such a moment no alternative asylum, refrain please as much as possible from lighting scented candles. Using wires, flame-retardant rope, time off, and excessive mounds of dirt, create a thirty to one-hundred-seventeen-foot combustion-safe zone surrounding your house. A circle like the best and most mathematical of circles: thoroughly imperfect, ultimately unsustainable. Offered. Wished. Gained. And as you work so dutifully upon this misshaped project you've begun, take time (on occasion) to just reflect a bit, to look up briefly to the house and the family you've left immediately beyond your broken ground, standing both somehow obnoxious and terrifically affecting (almost elegant) in the center of your yard. Your yard. Your yard. Wet. Wipe the sweat and dirt away, the ash, the soot, the heat, the smoke grown rigid in your lips' cracks, and even though you fail to smile, note at least that there is such a thing (wonderful/improbable as it may seem) as a kind look in instances of intense fear. Note: fact: this is no drill. No message. Note: fact: beautiful truth: now, most certainly, is not a time to panic. There is still work to do. Other measures to be taken, facial structures to be remarked upon and seen (or at the very least noticed) for the first time. Mark the feeling. Mark your place. Right here. Ground: wet: your yard. The grass quite nearly burned, and the earth now grown richer in destruction. These things, too, disasters can manage. Warm: soft: here. A field. Meanwhile, other measures to be taken in the reduction of your family's potential exposure to flames and radiant heat include but are not limited to a highly routinized schedule for the mowing of all grass, removal of propane tanks from within the nearby area, and the regulated disposal of all stove, fireplace, and grill ashes via placement of said residue for no less than two consecutive days in a metal bucket filled with water, after which the ashes (now cold) must be transported an additional fifty feet outside your thirty to one-hundred-seventeen-foot safety zone and buried quickly in a pure colloidal soil. These things, too, one must learn to manage. When marking off your safety zone, set aside all household items capable of use as fire tools: axes, rakes, oriental silk hand fans, assorted saws, and several shovels can each be used to fight off smaller fires in the home and/or on the grounds (your

ground) before emergency responders must be called. Vacuuming, though tempting, is extremely ill-advised. As is micturition, or so it would seem, for the means of personal extinguishing. Additional storms are to be expected. Landspouts are to be expected. Fires and rain and loss and violence and heartbreak and the inevitable stoic task soon undertaken of having to rebuild are all things to be expected. Temperatures are hell in Saskatchewan, Canada. The presence of a thunderstorm is the first stage in the development of a severe tornado. Please be advised.

In 1917, a single whirlwind over the course of one seven-hour period razed two-hundred-ninety-three miles of privately owned farms bridging the borderlands between Illinois and Indiana. Habitants stand devastated, partially (almost entirely) alone. They lean sunward in the roughhoused fields, set out to the untrue wish of having to recover (even only then perhaps to describe: to wives, to children, to husbands, and insurance agents) in some vague and impossible way what is now indefatigably lost. They inhale. They wonder. Some even bleed. In a way, standing there, they know something that is more than human. A cloud. A field. At times a storm is felt. From other points it is merely viewable. A boy substituting his own breath for time spent on doodling at homework. A plain but gorgeous woman—gorgeous, in point of fact, inside her pain—who stands before a room and teaches violently. The spiraling wheels of a delivery truck lost and racing somewhere in downtown Manhattan, wheels that rush right past you on the sidewalk and substantiate a cross-breeze that makes you feel like nothing so much but to fall like trees or leaves or paper plates into unknown uncouth arms, sucked in somehow by someone else's air. A watch, a place. Wet sound. Please. The noise of movement, a feeling of some shift—drooped eyes tied up in a blindfold, all ultimately present, right here. A banquet ballroom filled with men in Stock Exchange colors—some saluting, some hands over breasts, others more simply confused—as they sing aloud without musical accompaniment the national anthem, a difficult song, in a collective loud discordant voice that sounds like wood and oil. Breaths taken, brothers lost. Just that close. Wind inside a vortex spirals counterclockwise. Habitants stand devastated. Note: fact: please be advised.

We interrupt this program. We interrupt. We interrupt.  
We.

Rain falls densely in Unionville, Maryland.

You.

For those with shelter, though evacuation is unlikely, keep a small tote-bag at the ready should the worst occur. Blankets, blank checks, flashlights, penlights, flares, fusees, ponchos, pocket-knives, inflatable air mattresses, foldable chairs, wax-tipped extra-long incendiaries (see above for FIRE), respirator masks, rest-territory maps, items of personal hygiene, items of personal identification, small games, cards, comfortable clothing, prescription medications, incomplete tax returns, important family documents, portable valuables, and small nutrient-rich snack bars are all items you are recommended to include. (For a more comprehensive listing of suggested emergency supplies, visit our website at the links provided.) Use proper judgment when preparing your shelter space and be aware at all times of your potential for fallibility. In the end, weather, too, can be deceptive. In the end. In the end. Here it comes—everybody staring. An entry-point in the thick of things, a window not yet shut. A field, a cloud, what is a vacuum tooling against advice its little electric motor at the center of a twist. Lock all doors, utilities may falter. Confer nightly with your neighbors with regards to a more extensive and holistic community safety plan, working together on a set of mutually inter-reliant and/or accommodating off-hours to create a thorough catalogue of useful skills and/or any and all other statistically important attributes available within the neighborhood—examples of which include but are not limited to any medical or technical experience, individual citations of agility, individual citations of a lack of agility, whether anyone has pets, and (in case of an emergency) which of those pets are loved. Begin stocking up on water and other hydrates, avoiding in particular caffeine or alcohol. Drunkenness will not assist you in this situation, nor will a hyperactive mind. Take the time, instead now, to calm your nervous system. At the current moment, should you have any doubts and/or compunctions pertaining to your immediate or significant or (as the phrase has it) ultimately evolving constitution, try counting to ten in a neat and level voice starting all the way from the beginning with zero and working your way up to ten. And even though technically you are counting up, attempt (rather) to conceive of the numbers as being (for whatever reason) in mid-fall—precipitated somehow, like an exercise in gravity, its

wares, its verified/verifiable containment of the materials surrounding you. A field. A cloud. Breathe, think, prodigiously perspire, and look deeply at the faces of your group. Close. Close. Offering. Some even bleed. Gravity, after all, in the strictest sense of its terms, is not a universal principle. As you consider these things, thinking and breathing and whatever all else, try at least for the moment to keep your mind off thirst. An inability to cry is one of the foremost signs of critical dehydration, followed usually by very sharp muscle cramps and palpitations of the heart. To begin the rehydration process, take brief sips of either bottled water or any number of electrolyte-heavy sports drinks available at local stores and/or pharmacies near you. Should this strategy begin to fail, you may find it necessary either to spray and/or lightly mist the outer layers of your afflicted party's skin to help facilitate the moisture's evaporation into dermal tissue using a small spray bottle filled to (at the very least) the halfway point with either lukewarm bottled water or any number of electrolyte-heavy sports drinks available at local stores and/or pharmacies near you. If you are at all uncomfortable with the performing of these operations on your own time, storm relief centers sponsored by the American Red Cross (in conjunction, in particular, with the more local and/or above mentioned Community Outreach Cabinet) will be set up across the city of Miami and its outer-lying neighborhoods, offering assistance to all those in need. In the end. Need. Have. Please be. Regular public shelters available under emergency conditions will accept anyone who is self-sufficient and/or needs professional assistance in performing the activities of a daily life (should there be any to begin with). Individuals not meeting the above criteria (dialysis, oxygen dependent, nebulizer, and hospice patients specifically included) will be transported gratis either to the Special Needs Shelter or to an appropriate health care facility. Preemptive registration, though not required, comes quite recommended by its staff to be allowed entrance into these public shelters. Please note: fact: seating is limited. (After all, how could it actually be otherwise?) If you happen to own storm shutters or any other forms of household fortification, now is the ideal time to put them up. If you have no storm shutters, and are in no way amenable to the option of go buying them, feel free to make your own using whatever materials happen to be available from a harmlessly salvageable point of view: plastics,

metals, fiberglass, pieces of wood, et cetera. Desks, chairs, longcase clocks, and infant cribs are known to yield the most. That this is potentially an act of the extreme—that you will, at some future date (no doubt), grow to regret these indiscretions enacted here this day upon your furniture—is exactly the point of this whole operation, your very extremity of force and lack of associative control within the situation (should you be willing to comply) serving you now as a kind of quiet intrepidity: shielding you and more from events just like this storm: it, too, being a force of boundless culmination. Hailstones are larger in Potter, Nebraska. Rain falls densely in Unionville, Maryland. Take a large breath—the kind that almost hurts—and know that you are here. Close. Wet. Hands. Thighs. A cloud, a field. Mother and Father, the faces both melted as the words occlude. A boy but middle-aged and sitting at home like a metaphor not yet thought full. He sips coffee. The doorbell rings. He gets up. Forty-four thousand storms occur each day. Hailstones are larger in Potter, Nebraska. A bachelor living on Long Island with his aging sickly parents one late morning in the month of September, 1938: on something like a whim, and feeling (admittedly) a slight quotient undesirable, he purchases by way of mail-order rebate a high-fashion glass barometer from the catalogue brought out at Abercrombie & Fitch. Symbols. Letters. Warm to the touch, its thin rough pages having steamed in the mailbox all day long. Upon delivery, the package itself is soon unwrapped—coffee-colored paper torn away quite fast, the needle of the device found stuck at HURRICANE, with the brand new owner feeling miffed. Letters. Symbols. Rain falls densely in Unionville, Maryland. The bachelor—free time now significantly and/or ultimately on his hands (being that he is, after all, a bachelor)—takes it upon himself to jot down an irate letter to the employed staff at A&F, filling it with vile words and the newsprint photographs sketched out by someone else's penciled hand, cut out direct from the magazine itself for an object (startling) comparison to his own box camera snaps of the broken item bought/described; the whole thing destined (in the end) for someone not totally responsible, a scintillant well-underpaid professional member of that aforementioned employed staff, and feeling slightly guilty now and so much more than just a little undesirable he does the awful thing and licks the sealing wax on his own paper envelope, the abject bitterness of which quite startles

this grown boy's tongue. In the end, weather, too, exhales. It offers. It binds. In the end. Temperatures are hell in Saskatchewan, Canada. The doorbell rings. You get up. Returning from the post-office, nodding unctuously to the half-crippled arm-in-sling paper-boy on whose oblivious/aggrieved route the bachelor with his family so happens to live, and feeling at the moment in the barely more than friendly nod (now more so than ever, really) outright harrowed on an intimate or at least personal/inimical scale with regards to his own choice to write such a horrid letter in the first place, he looks down now somewhat woefully at the hard pre-cast concrete walk so sparkling and shiny now, just months or years after installation and its first steps footed, a country in motion now after much time left standing, with an upward sloping GDP and everything, and the paper-boy in turn feeling something like this newness or excitement of the tiles beneath your feet just recently repointed nods back even to your nod back, glad to see a person, glad to be a person, glad to be outside half-crippled with his arm in a fucking sling, so sad in its sight, so outright pathetic the bachelor thinks later (which is to say: bathetic), but he remembers it all, every step, how he even (this kid) just so slightly tries to wave, the goddamned good-hearted kid that he is, stretching, groping, spilling his papers all over the new-day/new-deal street, but quite naturally cannot, a sigh, a bloody sneeze, seeing as he does it all with the wrong hand, with its useless arm attached and scarred, the doorbell ringing in the distance and our man moving away—the bachelor on his own, feeling less and less desirable by the minute here, returning home: he makes a well-memorized near-instinct left turn on the next block of his small neighborhood street and finds above all else his house is gone: torn down in total, his parents in heaps, taken away by some foreign wind, and the brand-new barometer presumably along with it. The bachelor stands devastated. The bachelor lives alone. He hears a sound. He gets up. He jumps. Away. Please. Temperatures are hell in Saskatchewan, Canada, and hailstones are larger in Potter, Nebraska, and rain falls densely in Unionville, Maryland, and three thousand electrical storms are happening right now. Inhale at your own leisure; exhale when of necessity. Fetch the mail. Fetch the shutters. Eyes. Be. The night goes inside and storms roll on. It stays. It repeats. The names of things, the people left. The distinct ridges of the clouds, their shapes, their heft, the mystery words once meant



to describe same. In the end, the weather, too, can be deceptive. In the end, please be advised.

I myself have seen mad ravers stuck outside in lengthy storms: a series of choices nearby impossible to make yet in this motion just the same: a fascination with the way they take up room. How a single storm might make itself around one single man—a kind of colored wrapping for what could be in some select circles (in all honesty and truth and even slight discomfort with the very phrase) considered that man's soul—a man who has no other choice than but to grow quite hollow in his stance, like negative space inside a condensation funnel, the storm, in turn, thus filling him. These stories, for the most part, are all false. The differences are transient; new records are being broken every year, the past is always changing. It is happening right now. Sometimes, even, it is us: magnifying our discomforts, shuffling its laminated pieces.

Please. We. Wet, hands, eyes. We.

We interrupt. We interrupt. We interrupt this program—please be advised.

For those with family close by, in the now near-ended midst (read: mist) of a storm like this, during sparse moments and the great awkwardness of a protracted fear, it is not altogether inconceivable that boredom should become your worst affliction. To quell ennui—which, should the situation worsen, could prove to be quite fatal—be sure to prepare well in advance of the necessary time together a general relaxation and/or board-game themed corner for your shelter space. Surface-wise, a series of bunched rubber mats may seem preferable. If you lack board-games or the will to play, print out the lyrics to several of your favorite songs and make wise use (finally) of the family's bookshelves. Breathe. Think. Eyes. The inward-falling materials of a room, yet something more within it, only recently set apart. A blindfold. A bloody nose. The leaves, the seasons. A cloud. Gathered in one corner, huddled in a mass, look at your family, their names in memory a set of words and symbols dutifully carved; see these things, and the room will call. Please. Despite whatever positive urge you might feel inside your situation (which is to say: in your room) towards a certain element of literary topicality, classic storm literature—such books as *Paul Clifford* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton or Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*—may, for some individuals, be found too depressing

and/or textually (read: texturally) dry, and can contribute easily to a collective lack of ill-weather morale. If you believe this might apply to your own family, consider (rather) joining your voices for a song, for something even like a dance, or the barely perceptible movement of a voice along its slide, like the much more jovial (perhaps) and well-regarded tempest-ballad “Jumping Sight”—attributed now to an anonymous Jewish American author living contemporaneously on Ocean Parkway in west central Brooklyn, though first sung in early 1963 as the eleventh and final seven-shape note-influenced track for the fourth studio album of the late (immense) jazz vocalist “Little” Jimmy Scott, titled *Falling in Love is Wonderful*—

Wet and wild,  
Some great jumpin’ sight—  
Out in the parlor, one pure second’s glance;  
Just what can I be seein’ here  
On this fine autumn’s night?  
In the great room,  
Left, then right—  
Oh brother, oh sister,  
What a fine low sight.  
I look high and I look low,  
Oh wet, and oh wild,  
Some great beautiful delight.

For three additional verses and one optional refrain, the song goes on: breathy, moist, familiar in a way a child is, endlessly moving: climaxing eventually in a somber trumpet solo to be played out in a traditional hexatonic blues scale and capable of homemade substitution with a hum or scat singing session. Please. Now: be. Breathe, exhale: up from the gut, and out over the head through a parched mouth: a system of community: of anatomy: of this sharp thing, in its way, known more than understanding. Those uncomfortable with their own voice in lyric, however, may instead choose prayer as an adequate avenue for hope. The designated appropriateness of such an activity—of, in point of fact, all activities—and thus the family’s decision to include it in your rainy day itinerary, rests jointly on the collective loud discordant dispositions of all those involved; and however inappropriate they

seem at first to be, beneath their very inappropriateness is hidden (which is to say: occluded, almost clouded) one necessary fact, as integral and somber (perhaps) as that same blues trumpet solo glanced at only above: beyond all argument and strict mark of content alone, these activities and others will keep you from the storm. A cloud, field, a method of knowing what it knows it to be. A link. An entry-point, all for the best unregistered by crowds. The end. A cloud. For those avid humanist members of the family (then), consider reciting the so-called SENSE, or the Secular Expression of a Non-Secular Expectation, anonymous and popular in its aporetic origins, and reading as follows:

Undecided, much derided,  
Feel like just a kid.  
We've confided, so it's your turn.  
Save us what we've bid.  
Each an evening, hard knees kneading,  
Feel like just a kid.  
Much confusion, good chance illusion,  
But please now just save us what we've bid.  
Non-electly, circumspectly,  
Feel like just a kid.  
Can we see it now, concrete solid,  
Can't you ever save us what it is we've bid?

In the end—in a choice of song, prayer, boredom, and calculated disorientation—there is little difference between the four, this entire question of belief fading eventually like a pair of old wet negatives into the slow and markedly easier matter of select company. The little houses glittering on the shore, the family as unit; the dream of constructs being real but with a scent or sight like fantasy. What is visible, what is hermetical, what is dematerialized, awkward, affected, incandescent, and/or blisteringly asinine from an alternative perspective—these things are, after all, the very axioms of one's belief. And, for that matter, non-belief as well. The very precepts. The very precepts. A sigh. Together, forming their group, they are its charm, its music, its starry-eyed disciples, and storied day-histories. Its notion (its fact, its sublime fatal conviction) to do more at any one point (in fact) than simply panic. One way or the

other, you may consider it lucky that you lack the proof.

As you prepare your shelter space, moving agitatedly between the rooms, stop for a moment to reconsider your belongings—your family plan—and think about anything you may have missed. Mark the time. Note the place. Right here. Ground—so close. Look at the pictures on the wall, and the ones kept hidden in their spines. Fetch the mail. The shutters. Close. Wet. Reel in the lengthy green garden hose that slides like a snake in an outdoor pool and dribbles water incrementally the more its rubber is compressed. Put up all storm shutters. All curtain-tiers. Close them. Tight. Hands. Wet. Think, breathe. And ask yourself these questions. Do you know where your children are? Did you turn off the water pump? Do you care where your spouse is? How many adult beverages have you consumed, just solely on this day? This week? This month? What kind? What, in point of fact, actually, is an adult beverage? Is it taller? Drier? Less satisfying to the tongue? Served in a glass that might just break, or something else entirely, more linked than age to the wrinkles in your eyes? Who are you? What is your name? Did you save up money ever in your life, comb through data columns and pure number systems, purchase with a prejudice at regular intervals (birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, et cetera) for your progeny a sacred cache of government war bonds? How much are they worth? How much are you? What do you see exactly when you look up at those old pale picture frames, practically blank from decades of mercurial exposure to the hallway's light? Do they help you to remember something? Anything? What about to know something, to feel it, to hear it in the registers of one's dark physical absence from a place so much different than mere remembrance? Anything? Something? Who are you? How do you breathe? How do you think? How many thoughts are had in a single moment of your time—true thoughts, pale and new and wonderful? Can you hear the words, or only see them? Do they melt? Do you? Do you ask yourself a question, fearing not the answer but the fact that you might be its target? Packed up inside the tote-bag next to your door—your sharp loud discordant belongings—just how many of these assorted items can be called truly new? Bought last week? Purchased this day? Which ones? Why? Do we live, as the phrase has it, only in the past, or is it modified but briefly by the dull future? Are we? Are you? What are the three broad categories of tornadoes, and are they all so obviously

named? What is your name, for that matter? Can you say it? Can you speak up? Can you lean in or kiss? Can you repeat that name, as they say, introduce yourself, using only the accent and/or regional dialect of its origination? If not, then why? Why bother? Why breathe? Why do you stand there, staring so much? Why do you not speak up? Is it the source of the sound somewhere in the wind, or are you actually just moving closer? What are, in fact, your most necessary expenses—not counting yourself? What's that, you say? What's that? Have you ever hoarded spring water in large tight plastic drums for seven whole years in a dark concrete basement before ever even having the chance to properly use it? Sulfur or mineral? Stagnant or drinkable? Do you have a means for transportation? And what of evacuation? What of pets? What of food? What of dinner, of dessert? How about an appetizer or a meal or (at the very least) some faint smooth ripened fruit aperitif? How, in point of fact, does one pronounce the word "aperitif"? Did you turn off the car, lock its two doors? Did you flip on the radio and see an image in a voice? Are you safely inside, or somewhere quite else? Did you turn off the water? Did you turn off your speech? Are you being green enough? How about your spouse? Who built this place: this home: swarthy workers in off-white t-shirts and no hardhats or wallets in sight—what were their names? Where were they from? Did you ask? Did they tell? Could you even understand? Is precipitation really not a detriment to the creation of a firestorm? How could it not be? For what remotely adequate reason would a right-minded, politically-correct person mist sports drink (electrolyte-heavy or otherwise) on the outer organ of another human being? Much less one who is suffering from critical dehydration? Is this real? Is it a joke? How could it not be? Do people only say these things, or do they say them, or do they say them? Are all human beings, in point of fact, persons? Are your children? Your siblings? Your parents? Are you? And what about that spouse? What of the house? What of the ceiling fan and its war against your concentration? The walls? The closet? Its dark? What of the illness known as claustrophobia, and what of the high-minded nineteenth-century European men who were afflicted? How high-minded? How afflicted? How, as the phrase has it, European? And why not the women? Why not the women caught full-bodied and right-minded in the bright raw lengthy storms and trapped to death

of fright in the angling hallways like trout with hooks fresh in their mouths? What might they be like? What wallets would they carry? What might their names be—which is to say: if it can ever be agreed that they had any to begin with? Are you a person of integrity? Of honesty? Of that weird contextualized property people refer to only as the sagacious? And how do you know (really) what it is you might suggest? How are you wanted? When are you needed? Did you feed someone today? Attend some meeting at the local church? Get a fine strange tattoo on the upper portion of a nicknamed shin or a right arm useless and immobile now as a stale loaf of bread? Have you made love today? Did you leave the lights on? Was it sober or otherwise? How about this storm, did you whisper? Awfully wet out, did you say? (But is sex all, does someone wonder? Just about, maybe replied?) Did you walk somewhere? Did you make it private? Dance? Did you buy gasoline from the nearby station and cart it home in bright red beakers with pert yellow spouts? Have you sung a song or told a joke or prayed ambiguously, holding hands as though only rubbing them together for the task of putting up storm shutters, looking as you do quite blankly at the ceiling and embarrassed that you may be seen? What is your name? How old are you? How about in weeks? In days? In hours? In time spent brushing teeth or putting on a pair of socks? Walking the dog, grumbling about walking the dog, waiting for a phone call, waiting for some friendly line or family connection to resurrect itself at last and un-disconnect? Waiting for a paycheck, for a parent to expire, for a gallon of milk bought too hastily in decadence to do the same? For the silent perfect spaces like an ambulance with quiet lights, where corners meet before they all fall off (herky-jerk) while diving into sleep? Can these spaces be called churches? Are they quiet enough? Holy enough? What, in point of fact, would be the difference? Do you see the lights from where you are, cuddled up inside the back nearby the forlorn stretcher? Do you ask the man? Does he ask you? Are they so silent as they really seem, or just wrote blank with loud intensity? Is there a meaning to life? Is there a God actually, or just a set of vocal chords? How many witnesses make up a pocketful? Twenty-six? Twenty-eight? Twenty-eight-and-a-quarter—and for the record: just why not? Why, in point of fact, not? What exactly can one mean, or understand, or live, even, walking through the empty living room beneath a vast plaster-job of

wrinkled roof and sheet rock gently stapled, blurting out the words in quick succession with a modified regional yet equally (somehow) vast computer accent, “the inconsistency of hope”? Just what exactly is “the inconsistency of hope”? For whom is hope consistent? For whom is it expected? And when, ever, is that expectation met? When, ever, is hope some comprehensive figure like a thousandth smoke-screaming train pulled out at once from an old ghost station? Whose ghosts? Where? Why? Which? Where? Where, if I may ask, are the witnesses to that? Any takers, do you say? Not likely, should someone pipe up? Pipe up? Why? Why should one think? Why must one breathe? A field? A cloud? A foreign wind? To what extent does drowning and/or suffocation really physically hurt? Who, in such a case, is hurt the most? You, the living; or they, the dead? Who is Heinrich Wilhelm Dove, and why has he fallen out of favor? Who, then, is Hermann Flohn? How many constants are there in George Winterling’s heat index formula, humid or otherwise? How many variables in total? How many people (actually, or so the phrase has it) care? Is all of weather just another form of gravity? Of sex? Of fear? What isn’t? What, in such an instance, might *c* represent now? What’s your name? What color is your hair? What timbre is your voice? How long, in fact, is your attention span? For whom do you work? For what do you achieve? What do you see? What makes you feel pain? Which nationality are you anyway? Are you human—and what kind?

Breathe. Think.

Be.

Wet.

Please.

Hello.

If, at this time, you should begin to feel a little overwhelmed, inhale slowly and note only that what you are experiencing is the natural response. Do not panic. Do not fear. Do not loiter, do not riot, do not rush or run or walk briskly on wet floors. In the end, these actions, too, can ruin nights. In the end. Take small children by the hand. Hug them: breathe: the smell of skin like nutmeg ground. Reassure them of the safety which, conceptually, you represent. The storm is not yet, the leaves have yet to change their color.

Steady yourself.

(End.)

Breathe.

(In.)

Maintain a neutral disposition.

(Hello.)

And remember—if you can hear thunder, you are close enough to be struck by lightning.

### *Acknowledgements*

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