

Tornado Skin

by
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Yesterday I found a tornado skin.

I'm kind of stupid when it comes to tornadoes. When those warning sirens go off, most folk rush inside, get to their basements -- all of the suburban hatch battening you are suppose to do. Me, now, I rush outside.

Funnel clouds thrash about in my dreams; all the more so since, until yesterday, I'd never seen one in person. I would be asleep, having a blameless fantasy, when the skies would get all green and swollen like a pond corpse viewed from below. Then there'd be five, ten, fifteen of the black wrigglers squirming across the horizon. Storms in my dreams are distantly epic, every time: grand productions, always just out of reach. Which, naturally, made me want to reach FOR them.

So, yesterday, during that amazing wind storm, I was outdoors enjoying the threat of violence. Abruptly, a funnel touched down with a strange weight not a quarter-mile from where I stood. I remember a guy to my right yelling and pointing, as if someone could have missed the seething column tearing its way through the earth like God's finger drawing the plans of Armageddon. I felt my insides stirred up just as violently. I don't mean I was terror struck, although I surely felt fear. I mean... here was my dream, come to meet me. Something that had always kept its distance, whether behind the fool's glass of television or in the Technicolor candlelight of my own head, had leaped off of the screen and into my suburban reality. My feet were nailed to the ground with spikes I had happily driven in myself.

The raging cloud spun in place, yet advanced toward me, almost like it was just growing larger instead of moving. The air was gritty with gravel and garbage. It stung my face until I cupped my hands around my eyes just to see.

I had always been taught tornadoes were destructive whirlpools of air, but, as the monster wind bore down on me like a truck tire on an ant, I witnessed something I'd hardly expected, even in my dreams: it had a surface, a skin, a continuously rolling fabric with a weave too blurred by speed to perceive. I remember feeling surprised, even a little cheated. This was supposed to be a tornado! What the hell was it, really?

Well, I lived, obviously. And everybody said it sure damn well was a tornado. I was lucky, they said, that it chose to pick its foot up and step over the next couple of houses. All that

happened to me was some scratches on my cheek, plus my right hand hurt like I bent it back, somehow.

But I wonder. Later that day, after the curdled clouds had lifted from the horizon and let the setting sun peek in, I was picking through the trash left in my back yard when I found something odd. You know those "snake pellets" roadside firework stands sell? The ones you light and watch as glossy black worms emerge from whatever hole they had been sleeping in before the fire chased them out? Imagine a bunch of them woven into a coarse cloth, crisscrossing each other like a tight chain link fence. I found a fragment of that, all curled up like birch bark, about as long as my arm and maybe twice as big around. It was this iridescent, glossy black. It felt like a hemp basket, except smoother, maybe less substantial.

I remember rubbing my sore right wrist, thinking how my fingertips tingled something fierce. I don't recall anything about how I hurt my hand. All I can imagine is... you know, maybe I did reach out after all...