

Aftermath

by Ron Watson

It touched down as an F-4.
We do not name tornadoes, as we name our hurricanes,
Their ominous monikers approaching cultural myth—
Camille, Andrew, Katrina—like infamous distant kin,
Their stormy visits uninvited, their tantrums legendary,
Unsettling foundations and uprooting family trees.
A hurricane leaves a calling card, its lingering signature
A permanent, autographed scar for the record books.
But we lack a name to append to this particular twister.
Locals will recall the Hopkins County Tornado of 2005,
Naming the year, like remembering floods or droughts.
If it lacked in personality, it compensated with intensity:
From southwest to northeast, its black mass roared—
Rotating and straight-line winds topping 200 miles an hour—
Telephone poles and trees snapping like match sticks
In a path 15 miles long and a quarter of a mile wide. Now,
As night falls, we are still without power, and a forecast
Calls for freezing lows overnight. Those left homeless
Are living in Pride Elementary, designated as a shelter.
A curfew keeps the curious at bay, as military Hummers,
Squad cars, land movers, and emergency vehicles
Navigate and manage the debris. Bits of pink insulation
Litter the tallest oaks left standing. Whole sheets
Of metal lie crumpled like wastepaper. Roofless houses
Lean, their blown-out windows gaping, Fords and Chevys
Tossed aside like broken toys. Overhead, choppers lift,
Descend, and hover like rescue missions in a combat zone.
I have checked on the ones I know and love, found them
Shaken but alive, their tongues baffled by the nameless
Fury of it all.