

The last week of June, the week after school let out, was a week of thunderstorms. In the beginning the rain came first, the lightning stretching across the sky then snaking in on itself. By the end of the week, the clouds were stopped up, the water brewing inside, their countenances so dark, I imagined they contained more than water: bits of fur and roadkill; cat paws, raccoon tails, rabbit teeth, even whole groundhogs; birds' legs and beaks; human fingernails, earlobes, wrists and kneecaps; fragments of half-digested carrion: proof of the consuming powers of the storm, or perhaps the ingredients of the malice forthcoming. The brawling clouds had powers, I believed – the yellow veins of electricity and the ear-splitting cracks evidence of some great rage waiting to be spat out at the unsuspecting and the unprepared.

The mornings descended like a wall. At first daylight, I awoke in a frustrated panic, sheets tangled, old sweat collecting around my hairline, dreams of sirens lingering: ambulance, police, fire, all mingled together.

I lined up Mason jars behind the garage. Each day I unscrewed another lid to collect that day's rain. Each day I discovered the clouds brooded longer, and each day the water level was substantially higher – even though, as the week wore on, the rain fell with more and more force, splashing out of the jars and catching on the surrounding grass.

At the first low rumble, my forearms prickled. I kept time records and loudness records in the orange pocket notepads Sam brought home from gas stations. In the early evening's hush after the storm subsided, I walked around Apple Ford, assessing the damage, looking for ugliness, for evidence of that great wrath: fragments of bone and animal ears and bits of cloth, tangible proof that the storm's fury was real. I sought out trees struck by lightning and cut the wood free with Sam's hunting knife, smuggled out of the house because of its forbidden sharpness. I laid my hands on the shining burnt crevices where the limbs had been severed. Energy, perhaps electrical, perhaps more than that, surged into my hands and maybe into my veins. At home, I stored the bits of lightning wood in a box in my bedroom closet, checking them with the lights out to see if they glowed. Underneath, I was driven, certain as I was of my own flesh that something magical was to be gained from this knowledge, this accumulation, this seeing. I stayed

quiet and paid attention. If I waited long enough, the secret of the storms' temper would be my own.