

## Storm Watching (a word picture)

Late afternoon brings faint rumbles of thunder far off in the west and a stray drop of rain hits my forehead. The sky is ash grey and air heavy with moisture. Birds flutter, busying themselves as a storm moves east across North Louisiana.

Next drops arrive thirty minutes later — in no hurry this storm. The chorus of crickets suddenly stops and a steady, straight-down rain rinses the wooded world I grew up in. Pine and dogwood, azalea and oak, ivy and nandina, Bermuda and monkey grass. Green goodness gets an April bath.

I draw up a chair at the open door and watch the storm. Mom says that's what I often did as a kid, sitting on the porch step. Water pours off the roof and splashes the nandina bushes into submission. The patter of rain fills my ears. A steady shower settles in and thunder grows closer. More fury ahead.

Now a tight downpour, the symphony of water saturates my mind. Trees appear as brown and green ghosts in the background. I scoot back a bit to keep my shoes from getting wetter.

Two small, white spots appear in the grass. Curious. Petals of spring blown off by the storm? Now white balls drop in the grass like marbles. It's hail! Frosty balls of laughter. My soul delights. A crush of ice balls smack through leaves, bounce playfully in the spongy grass and come to rest.

The swell of hail thickens. Balls hop all over the yard like popping corn and pile upon each other. My eyes dance to the furious scene as hail nearly covers the green grass. To the east thunder rolls on taking its spring surprise to the world beyond.

Rain mixes with hail, then a quick brush of wind blows it all away. Mist appears above the ice-covered grass and the sky shifts sporadically through shades of grey. A thick fog, head high, rolls up the terrace from the garden and shrouds the yard. The shadow spirit envelops all and my breath becomes fog. More rumbles to the east, but the storm seems done with this place.

Birds chirp. Leaves, limbs, and grass, all rinsed clear of their yellow, dusty coat of pine pollen, drip softly in the sudden stillness of late afternoon. A squirrel fritters in a pine, wet limbs its trail in the sky. Birds fly by. I am too still to be noticed. The melting balls leave the air surprisingly cool. I shiver.

A thrush behind me — busy making herself a nest in the garage windows permanently open to the west. The music of the storm is over, but the magic lingers.