

VISITATION AT KILL DEVIL HILLS

David Essex

I had watched with the snake's deaf
fascination for the moving flute,
as the spout's tubeworm hulaed
across the water, evolved upon landfall
into a trunk, the rest of the celestial
elephant somewhere up in the thunderhead.
Live as a wire, haphazard sliced blindly
across the island, flaying the Orville
Motor Hotel, leaving the interior untouched,
the beds neat as the maids could make them,
mirrors and watercolor seascapes staring
from theatrical flats.

In the cathedral-quiet aftermath,
sound siphoned up to the silent sky,
the phone poles and the high-tension lines
were hung with spuncandy-pink insulation.
Ambulance gumballs winked 'Interesting . . .'
as they crept lightly among
the dumbstruck lucky, who came out now,
like night crawlers on a watered lawn.

Barbecueing in the power outage,
we talked of Oz and God's macabre fondness
for mystery, for the ambiguous object lesson.
The tornado's one fatality was a local lady
who was reported, probably apocryphally,
to have turned eighty that day. She'd done,
we agreed, as any of us wisely might have,
and still the freezer fell a thousand feet
and found her huddled in the ditch.