

Vagaries

Paths tornados follow can be erratic
as heartbeats of patients going into shock.
Merciless knowledge for injured survivors

and families of the dead. Follow
green-swaddled verge to Glade Springs
and you'll discover the explosion of truth.

You bleed, you learn. You scream, you learn.

Trees fill gouged earth with branches
strewn like toothpicks, shorn trunks spearing
the sky with knife-pointed heartwood,

timber-snapped beams and shotgun blasts
of debris jolting as a movie's jump-cut, hard
to swallow as Morissette's "Jagged Little Pill."

Wait until the dust settles.

Condemned homes wear blue-tarped shrouds,
plywood nailed over windows as hard-hatted
crews spray-paint doors with orange X's.

On one side of the street, a shredded hotel
retains little more than foundation boards,
concrete, the underlying grid of pipes.

The fire trucks are coming up around the bend.

Across from the hotel, patrons dine at
the Iron Skillet, untouched except for its sign,
metal twisted into bristles like a fall pinecone.
Daylong the dump trucks roar, beds sticky with
glue of residents' lives — bloated cushions,
appliances, photo albums blurred into nonsense.

You grieve, you learn. You choke, you learn.