First Storm and Thereafter

By Scott Cairns

What I notice first within
this rough scene fixed
in memory is the rare
quality of its lightning, as if
those bolts were clipped
from a comic book, pasted
on low cloud, or fashioned
with cardboard, daubed
with gilt then hung overhead
on wire and fine hooks.

What I hear most clearly
within that thunder now
is its grief—a moan, a long
lament echoing, an ache.

And the rain? Raucous enough,
pounding, but oddly
musical, and, well,
eager to entertain, solicitous.

No storm since has been framed
with such matter-of-fact
artifice, nor to such comic
effect. No, the thousand-plus
storms since then have turned
increasingly artless,
arbitrary, bearing—every
one of them—a numbing burst.

And today, from the west a gust
and a filling pressure
pulsing in the throat—offering
little or nothing to make light of.

Source: Poetry (April 2011)