

I SURVIVED

TRUE STORIES

TORNADO TERROR

Lauren Tarshis

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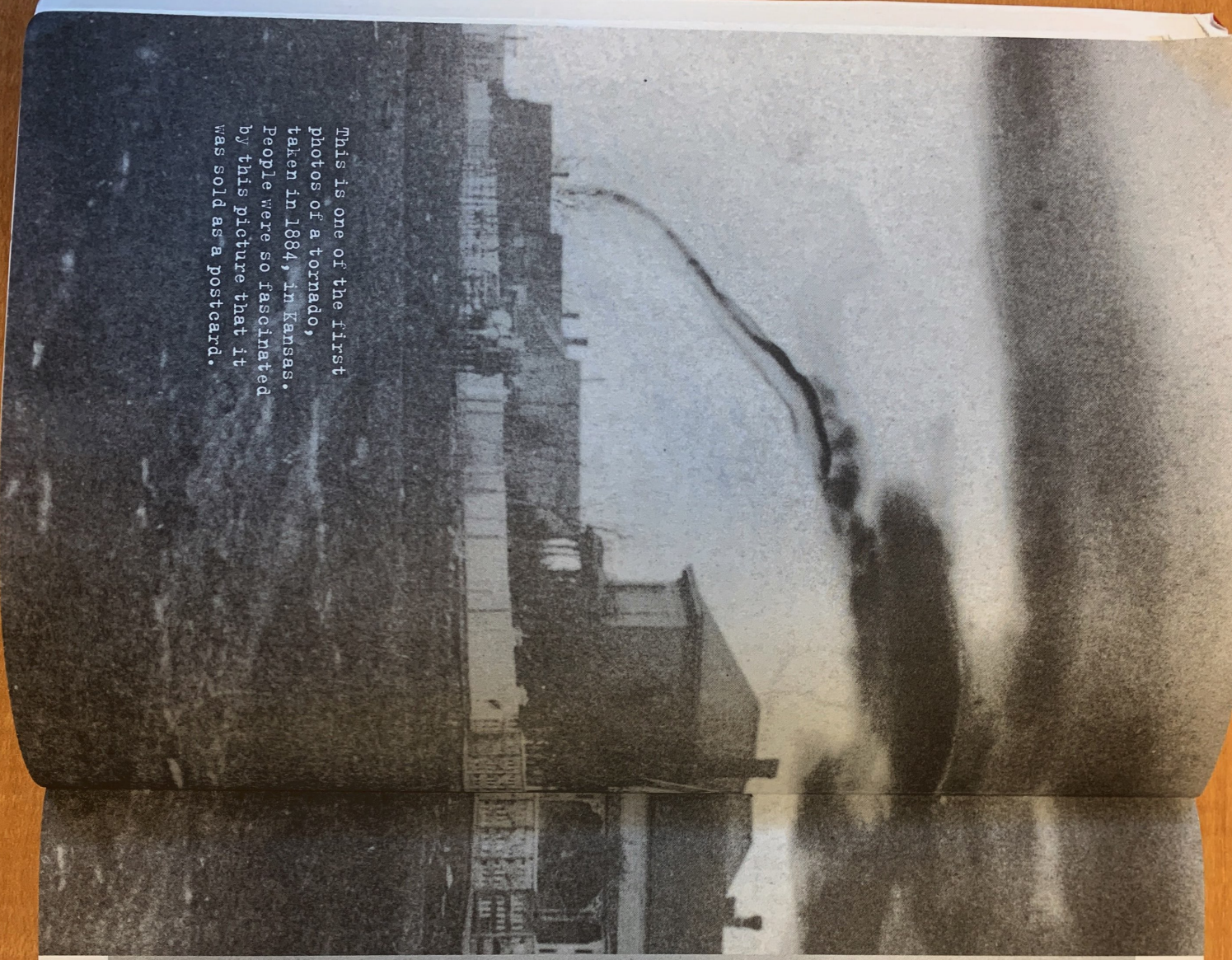
THE DEVIL'S WIND

Imagine it's two hundred years ago. You're walking alone somewhere in the middle of America. There are no towns, no roads, and not another person around for miles. Suddenly the sky turns greenish black. The wind starts to howl. And then you see it, a strange swirling cloud snaking down from the sky. It roars to life, and starts tearing across the land, shattering everything in its path.

Your heart stops. Your blood runs cold. What could this be?

Today, of course, you would know that it's a tornado.

But until about the middle of the 1800s, few people in the world had heard of these monstrous clouds. For centuries,



This is one of the first photos of a tornado, taken in 1884, in Kansas. People were so fascinated by this picture that it was sold as a postcard.

the only people who had witnessed them were people living on America's plains—members of Native American nations. Members of the Miami tribe called them the devil's wind. The Kiowa told of a beast called the Storm-Maker Red Horse, a flying horse with a snakelike tail that whipped through the sky to create tornadoes.



This is a piece of a calendar drawn by a Kiowa artist, in 1905. The image on the far right shows the Storm-Maker Red Horse, which many Kiowa believed caused tornadoes.

When early American settlers first witnessed tornadoes, they had no idea what they were. Some thought they were curses, or warnings from the heavens.

It wasn't until the 1870s that scientists started to really study them, and that they agreed on the name tornado.

Since that time, thousands of tornadoes have struck the United States, smashing cities, wiping away towns, and destroying lives. On the following pages, you will read about two famously terrible tornadoes—the Tri-State Tornado of 1925 and the Joplin Tornado of 2011. I chose to write about these two because they were especially powerful and destructive. And together, they show how our understanding of tornadoes has changed over the decades.

What hasn't changed is their shocking power. These devilish winds are every bit as terrifying and fascinating as they were centuries ago.

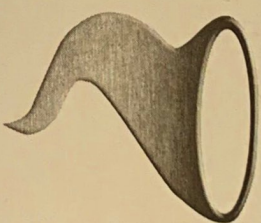
Anna Zerkow



#1

“EVERYBODY
MUST BE DEAD”

THE TRI-STATE TORNADO, 1925



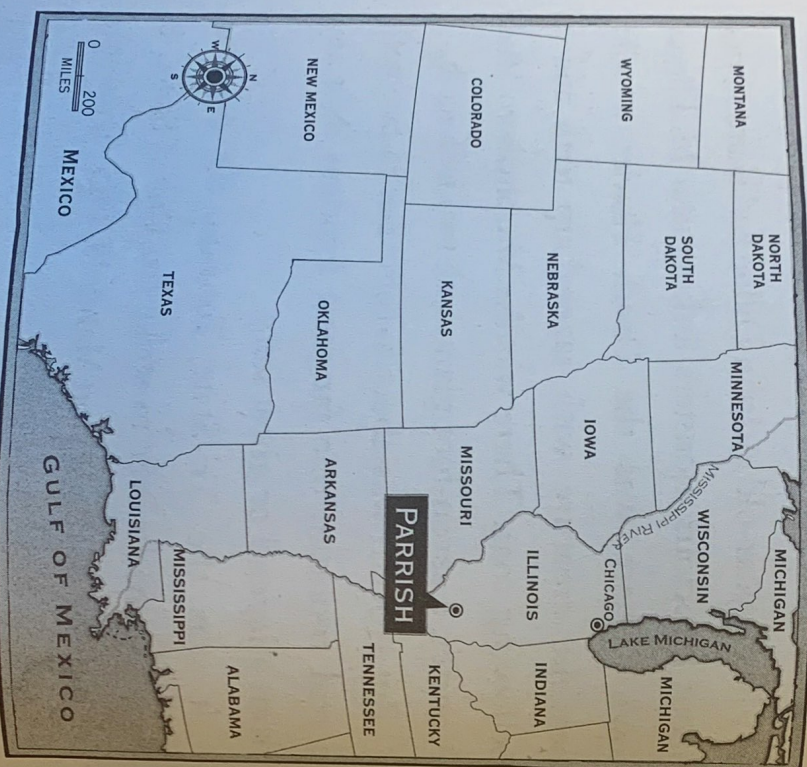
Eleven-year-old Adrian Dillon had heard stories about ferocious monsters lurking near his Illinois town. There was the Ozark Howler, a wild bearlike creature with razor-sharp teeth and a bellowing roar. There was the Murphysboro Mud Monster, a seven-foot giant with two-inch teeth.

But Adrian was about to come face-to-face with a real monster, one far more ferocious than any from a legend or ghost story.

It was the Tri-State Tornado, the deadliest single tornado ever to strike the United States. It roared out of the sky on March 18, 1925. In roughly

three hours, the massive twister ripped through Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana. It killed nearly seven hundred people. It destroyed twelve schools. Entire towns were sucked into the sky.

One of those towns was Parrish, Illinois, where Adrian lived with his family.



There are many legends about fearsome creatures lurking in the wilderness of Southern Illinois.

SMALL TOWNS VS. BIG CITIES

In 1925, many small American towns were still quiet and old-fashioned. Meanwhile, big cities like New York (right) had been transformed by new inventions like electricity, indoor toilets, and motorcars.



AN EXCITING DAY AHEAD

Adrian woke up on the morning of March 18 with a jolt of excitement. Not much ever happened in Parrish. It was just a tiny speck of a town, nestled within the grassy hills of Southern Illinois. America was changing fast in 1925, with most cities and big towns lit up by electric lights and honking with motorcars.

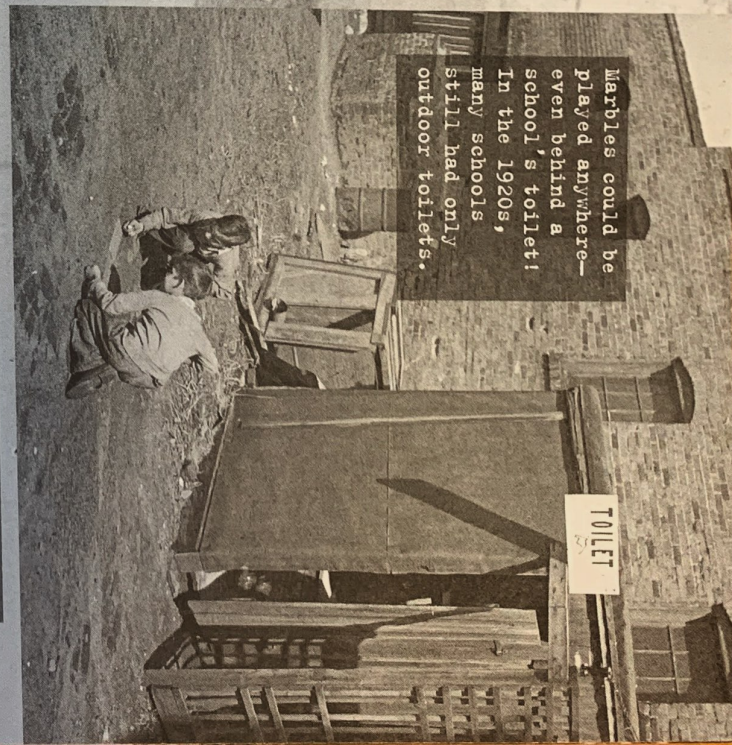


But Parrish hadn't changed much since Adrian's grandparents first settled here one hundred years before. Parrish School didn't have electricity yet. Few people had telephones or radios. Many people in Parrish, including the Dillons, still drove around in wagons pulled by horses.

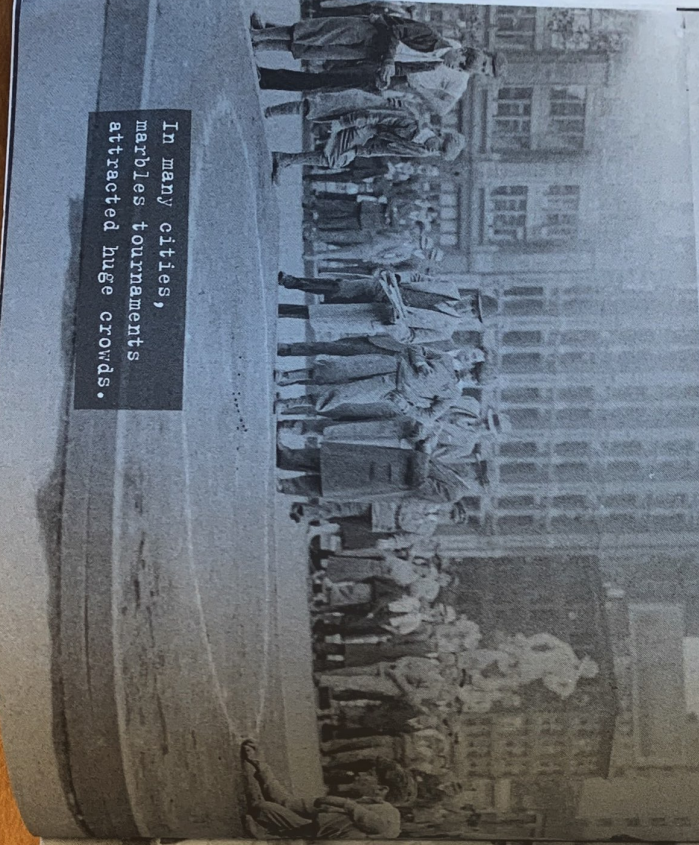
But for Adrian, Parrish was the center of the world. Especially today. Because this afternoon



In the 1920s, marbles was the most popular game for American boys.



Marbles could be played anywhere—even behind a school's toilet! In the 1920s, many schools still had only outdoor toilets.



In many cities, marbles tournaments attracted huge crowds.

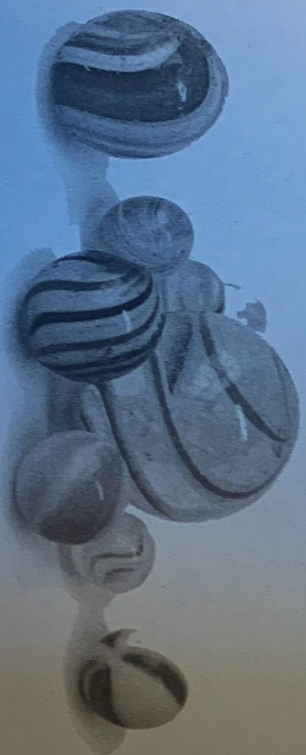


While marbles was played mainly by boys, the game of jacks was a favorite for girls.

was the town's big marbles tournament. Adrian had permission to leave school early to compete.

Marbles was one of the most popular games in America in 1925, and Adrian and his friends were fanatics. They played every day at recess. Adrian and his friends would kneel around a big circle and his friends would take turns trying to knock one another's marbles out of the dirt ring. Adrian loved everything about the game—the feel of cool glass marble in his hand, the clack of the marbles, the hoots and shouts of his buddies.

And, of course, Adrian loved to win. He would never brag, but he was one of the best shooters at Parrish School.



True, there were only about eighty kids. But still. Adrian was proud of his skill. His prized possession was a sack filled with marbles he'd won in matches. If he did well in today's tournament, he'd be the town's marbles champion. His photo would be in the newspaper. He'd be famous!

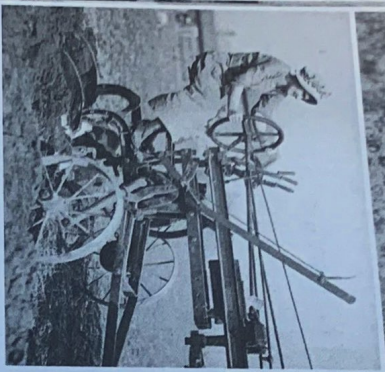
Adrian lay under his quilt, smiling to himself.

But suddenly the sound of his father's voice snapped him out of his happy spell. Even a marble champion had to do his morning chores.

A HAPPY FAMILY

Adrian hopped out of bed and quickly threw on the worn trousers and shirt he wore every day to school. The sun was barely up, but already the Dillon household was buzzing with action.

The family lived on one of the small farms that surrounded Parrish. And there was always work to be done—horses and goats and cows to care for, buckets of water to fill from the well, fences to



SCENES OF 1920S FARM LIFE

There are no surviving photographs of the Dillons' farm. But these photos capture what life was like in farming areas like Parrish.

mend, fields to weed. That morning, Adrian and his thirteen-year-old brother, Leonard, milked the cows. Ten-year-old Ruie helped prepare the oatmeal and bacon for breakfast. Even little Wendell and Faye pitched in by feeding the family's pet rabbits.

The work was endless. But Adrian knew the family was lucky to have their farm. Many of



Adrian's friends' fathers worked in the dangerous Black Star Coal Mine, one of the many mines dug under the hills of southern Missouri and Illinois. Being a miner meant working hundreds of feet underground in almost total darkness. Miners breathed in poisonous dust and faced the constant risk of explosions and cave-ins. Hundreds of miners died every year in America.

FAMILY FUN IN THE 1920s

In the evenings, many families gathered around their radios to listen to concerts and comedy shows.



Farming was a safer job than mining. And the Dillon house was a happy one.

Adrian's mom and dad—Edna and John—had a loving marriage. Edna doted on the kids and their animals. John was a warm man with many friends.

After chores, the family sat down together for breakfast. At 8:00 a.m., Adrian, Leonard, and Ruie left for school, about a mile walk. Adrian waved to his mom and brother and sister. He would never see his house again.

THE RAGING STORM

The Dillon kids walked to school under a bright blue sky. The day was much warmer and more humid than usual. The blueberry bushes were in bloom, and wildflowers were starting to peek their bright heads up through the tall grass. The warm breeze made Ruie's braids dance around her shoulders. All seemed peaceful.

And yet hundreds of miles to the west, a monstrous storm was raging. Overnight, violent thunderstorms lashed Oklahoma and Kansas. Egg-size hailstones had shattered windows and punched holes in rooftops. A small tornado had chewed apart a barn in a small Kansas town.

That storm had crossed into Missouri from Kansas, and was heading east. It was gaining strength and moving at 70 miles per hour, faster than a train.

Those summery breezes following the Dillon kids to school would make the storm even more dangerous. Warm, moist air adds power to thunderstorms, and makes tornadoes more likely.

But nobody in and around Parrish knew that a ferocious storm had set its sights on their town. The weather forecast printed in most area newspapers that morning said simply that rain was possible for later in the afternoon.