Letter Read in a Storm

Windows twitched, then stuttered in their frames, muttering up an approaching storm.

Outside, two butterflies boiled their wings over against a yellowing pane.

Clouds were coiffured crazily atop each other. Lightning toppled tiaras down.

Inside, her eyes drew themselves up to their full length. She opened the letter with the whole of her face. Suddenly, the room went black as boot polish,

and gravel in the driveway threw up fistful after fistful of knuckle-white rain.

Her face snapped. Beads from her broken necklace pattered all over the floor.

Flowers in a bowl, sweetpeas from his garden, clutched absentmindedly at her hand, and broke its fingers between them, gently, one by one, dropping them onto the carpet.

A year after he was missing in action, that official letter came. Unofficially,

two last yellow butterflies were left to limp away across the lawn.

ROGER NASH