

The rain ceased as suddenly as it had come. It was mid-December, the almost end of a long, parched year. Drought had hit in the summer like a wave of nausea, left burned-out charcoal ridges in the mountains and spineless, skeleton trees in the valley. X drew back the kitchen curtains, her hands stifled with hesitation. Light came in and left a jeweled shadow on her neck. There had been, in the two minute downpour, a shudder she'd wanted to mistake for wind and then a terrible cracking like an old body colliding with cement. The tree lay big and surrendered across the flattened fence, the squished car. Heavy tree. Witless rain. Reminded X of claustrophobia.

Summer, X wrote letters to friends in states far away. Dry here, she wrote. Dry air, dry skin. Dry people. I have forgotten the selfish and wasteful luxury of a warm, heavy shower. Yesterday, my brain woke up before my body did and I tried to move my fingers, my toes, my neck but I couldn't. I felt with such clarity that I was trapped, that my body and brain were distinctly separate. It was a strange disjointed thing like a lining had come loose from its jacket and fallen inward. She agonized over endings - love, with love, all my love, all love? Licked her envelopes to seal them shut. In writing these letters, she found a strange meditation. She had nothing of note to say, but she marveled at how she could think a word and it would come so easily out the end of her pen.

"Tree come down?"

X didn't move from the window. "Yes," she said.

The faucet ran. Luke filled a cup. X could hear as it filled, pitch rising like a scream.

"There wasn't any wind," she said. "Why'd it fall?"

The faucet was off. Luke sipped his water. Swallowed. "Drought," he said. "Roots are dry, don't go as deep. Rain comes, floods them. They fall."

"The car's ruined. Fence too."

Luke came to the window. Stood beside her. "Shame," he said.

Outside the window, a leaf dangled from what seemed to be a single spider's thread. A breeze had picked up and the leaf moved as if guided by a hand, scratching and scribbling in the air like a frenzied pen. The movements reminded X of her grandfather's signature, how it had shown up faithfully in birthday and Christmas cards as she was growing up and then toward the end of his life had disappeared, his name instead written in by her grandmother - neat, curled cursive. She worried about reaching that point in her own life when her body would seem a tether, a hindrance, a weildy and unfamiliar thing.