

When Leaves Fall

by Matt Kang

That summer Annie told me something important to her. Her face was like a mask of leopard-spotted shadows from the apple tree's boughs, as she mouthed the wind, pushing the air, and the air forming the words, coming to me. She asked me not to repeat her words, and I guess I won't.

When things got bad between me and Annie, Annie would run away from me. She'd run and run, and I'd wait a bit before I went after her. She'd always be at the same place, the oak tree beneath her like a great Oak father with gnarled, branch-arms with leaves like faded-green tattoos, holding her stonefaced, without any sort of knowledge of what made her cry but wanting nothing else in the world but to stop the tears I set off.

Worst thing was, she would whisper something I was too far away to hear. And then she'd wipe her eyes, sweep her hair between the crest of her left ear and the side of her face and press that ear to the knot. She'd pause, and nod solemnly to the upward heaven of branches above.

She would hear voices. I shouldn't have said that, but it doesn't really matter now. The birds, she said, incessantly rambled about worms and newly washed cars and the rocks gruffly wheezed and grunted and the individual blades of grass tittered incoherently about the world's virtues and its end. I notice her eyes would watch me closely as she said this to me. Like she really knew what she was saying.

They took her away to the facility last May. It's November now, and I'm here standing underneath the tree in the backyard, fingering the knot that spoke so much comfort to her. The leaves are

yellowing, and the edges are puckered and careworn; they are falling from on high.

I ask the tree what had happened between them. I hear nothing.

