

# The Sleep of Trees (Three Parables), part 3

*by* Sam Rasnake

*Riverbed*

— *after the painting by F. Scott Hess*

All I can tell you of trees is this: They grew in the riverbed — the scrub and bush and occasional tree — outside the city, though this was no real river — just a bed for runoff. But there was a flood. There must have been. And it washed me here — some little death, some fetal curl among the spindly limbs. Shoes, missing. My legs bent, my wrinkled nightgown, my eyes opened to a heavy sky, and away from the one who watches me. Or, does he sleep too? I couldn't say. But with such a quiet bending of the wrist, my left hand edges closer to him.

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He has no idea how long he's been coming here, day after day, to this spot, curling beneath the dead woman in her tree. Just to look. Some days he's sure he sees her move, other times, no. She doesn't move, hasn't moved. He can't help himself. He doesn't know why he's not wearing any shoes or socks, doesn't know where he's left them. Sometimes he almost thinks of it, but never does. Not knowing is good. It makes him happy. Too afraid to laugh out loud, he chuckles to his mouth, grinds his teeth to silence. Show respect, he thinks. One day — though not today — I'll touch her hand. Near his feet, in a puddle of water, the butterfly rests on a stone.

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