

You

And now we come to the matter of trees. A tree, I think, is the closest you can get to an Old One. If you look at a tree does it look back at you? Perhaps. But if you do not look, but see, you may be sure the tree sees you. Otherwise there would be no seeing at all.

You would not, I think, like to get in the way of such a being. You would get a bad burn. How is a tree able to open its eye to the furnace? Look at it carefully out of the side of your eye, because when you see it, by so doing it sees you. The eye opens. You are seen.

One summer I made an inventory of all the trees in my town. There were two hundred thirty different species. A cosmopolis of trees in a provincial village of only two tribes of sapiens. No one knew what I was doing that summer. I still have the reference book I used, Rutherford Platt's *Pocket Guide to the Trees* (1952) which had belonged to my mother's boss before he gave it to me in that confused winter when he died. A short, stocky man of fountain pens and document cases and colognes. My mother was promoted to head cashier when he left the job so suddenly.

Trees are likely in love with the wind, as I was.

One summer after my encounters with the village trees, when I was old enough to ride out into the countryside on my bicycle, I got caught in a cloudburst. I had had a flat tire and was walking home, probably five miles. Around four o'clock my mother showed up with the car, for which I was conventionally grateful, but an inarticulate part of me was annoyed. I had been going to see the Old Ones, I suppose, by a road onto which I had turned, in the mist and pouring rain, by accident. That is how one finds the way. I had found it, only to be picked up and bundled back into a hot bath and sweaters. It was going to be a long while before I found that

way again.

I had been to Lake Campbell, an egg-shaped puddle seven miles south of town where there was a hamlet of lake cabins and a store. There was also a roller rink there which has since burned down. Years afterward I learned that you used to skate there. I could have seen you with your three sisters, dancing. Twirls, loops, toespins, jumps, reverses — there were boys, I suppose, weren't there, to dance with? You were half the other girls' age. Did you still wear your hair in two ponytails at the sides? A pinafore, I suppose — girls didn't wear jeans then, or even shorts much in 1955, the Year of the Trees. Twisting in and out through knots of teenagers a foot taller, in your round glasses, you wouldn't have noticed me if I had been there, in the bleachers. Why wasn't I?

People used to say that the ghosts of the dead hang around the living for a time before they dissolve in the rain and the wind. Mindpeople they mean, who do get dim and hazy after a while.

There you are, among the Old Ones, dancing. I see you dimly through the veil of rain, falling now hard enough to stun thought. I reach out, but you are as far away as the wind in the treetops.