

The Absence of Trees

It was summer when we lost the trees—
overnight and all at once. Without
their deep green shade, our houses
were less lovely than we'd thought.
The wind was warm and full of dust.
We bought more blinds and curtains,
learned to keep them closed. Without
the color and crunch of leaves,
we weren't sure when the season
changed. We found that we missed raking,
missed the smell of autumn burning
block by block. That winter,
our Christmas trees were fake and snow
fell faster than we'd ever seen.
Already our children were forgetting
tree houses and tire swings,
art they'd made with leaves
and melted wax. When we tried
to teach them about trees, we realized
how little we knew—maple, oak,
Dutch elm disease, something about moss
and being lost. We tried to describe
the shape of fruit and branches,
scrape of bark against our skin.
In our houses, what looked like
wood was usually veneer. It's not
the same, we said, the trees
were real. Our children didn't know
how great our loss had been,
how much blame we all deserved.