

Still Life with Lilac and Pine (April 2015)

I didn't hear the branches snap and fall. Eleanor says she did. She says she saw through that small rectangle of window at the top of her front door, one minute she was noticing the branches and how the ice looked on the pine needles, sparkling in the streetlight, and the next she heard a loud crack and they were gone.

I had checked before I went to bed last night and everything was fine. I get up this morning and look out the window from my living room, out at my front yard and now I see two huge branches from my tree splintered and on the ground. They landed on my lilac bush and took down some wires. There are branches in Eleanor's driveway and on the back of her car. I immediately wonder how much it will cost, at least five hundred if that's what her car insurance deductible is or my homeowners or maybe the two insurance companies will argue over whose responsibility it is. Or just call it an act of God. It's only six in the morning and I see the branches on her car and know I have to get out there to clear them away in case she has someplace to go.

Eleanor's been in the house next to me for going on a year, she and her daughter Debra. She's seventy-nine but you'd never know it. She reminds me of my Aunt Abby, a tiny bundle of energy. She still works part time and laughs when she says she takes care of old people as if she's not old herself. So, Eleanor might have to go someplace. That's Eleanor—always on the go, home health aid, mother. I'm a mother. Since my son, Jamie, disappeared there were times when I tried to stop thinking of myself as one but it never worked.