

In a Forest During a Storm, Growing Older

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Today, rain pounds the earth like it's trying to tell me something. And the swollen river overflows its banks and rises up the trunks of nearby trees. *Do old trees shrink?* I wonder, because, last week, at my check-up, the nurse told me I'd lost an inch. *No. That's impossible,* I said. She smiled kindly. *As people age, the spine loses fluid.* Later, my gynecologist peeled off her gloves. *Vaginal dryness is a normal part of aging,* she said and suggested helpful products. Dried-up spine. Dried-up vagina. I thought of all the cream I slather on my skin. Which stays wrinkled and dried-up. How, at the end of each appointment, the stylist rubs oil in my dried-up hair. A few days ago, my two-year-old grandson asked if there was milk in my breasts. *Face it,* I thought, *I'm withering.* Today, a brown leaf floats in a puddle like it's trying to tell me something. I look away and the funny thing is, my tears haven't dried up. *I want to be young,* I think. Then, as if I'll have a better chance if I'm not too greedy, I add, *Or at least in my forties.* I remember when my body felt as wild as this river. Today, the water roars downstream. I stand here, in the middle of a green and dripping forest. My hair, coat, jeans, even my feet inside their boots, are soaked. And, suddenly, it feels as if some ancient, slumbering magic has woken. As if an old woman from a page in a fairy tale could wave her gnarled stick and I'd be young again. But all I see are trees and rain. When wet leaves brush against me, I can hear them whisper, *Don't you understand? You're the crone in the forest. Go find someone who's making a wish.*