

Janet Ruth Heller

Hot Flash at Work

Despite the December cold,
my body heats up
as if it were the dog days of August.
My face and ears turn red,
I feel dizzy,
and I start to sweat.

Shedding my vest and cardigan
and opening windows wide,
I try to combat this heat wave,
to calm my flustered spirit,
to focus on teaching logic
to my confused students.

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October Thunderstorm in Michigan

I leave work in Albion at 5:15—rush hour with dark grey clouds—for my fifty-mile commute. On the car radio, Todd Mundt interrupts the national news to broadcast a severe thunderstorm warning for Calhoun County. I drive west on I-94, hoping the forecast is wrong. But the wind gusts; then lightning cleaves the horizon. Around Marshall, fierce rain hits, and highway traffic slows to a crawl. Approaching Galesburg, I can barely see through leaves plastered on my windshield. Slowly, I maneuver to the rightmost lane, pull off onto the shoulder behind four other cars. We wait until the rain slackens and our windows clear.

Inching back onto I-94, I see that many trees have fallen. Also, a large truck has smashed into the median barricade, crumbling the cement, as if a giant had taken bites and dropped some bricks. Shaking, I keep driving west through deep and wide puddles.

When I reach home in Portage, the rain has nearly stopped, but water swamps the streets. My husband grabs a rake and runs out to remove leaves from our sewer grate, and our neighbor clears the grate on his side of the road. Now the Falcon Avenue flood swirls down the drains.

Four hours later, we turn on the local TV news. We're lucky: further south, century-old trees have toppled and power lines have crashed down. People in mobile homes have come close to death.