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Summer

by Jim Douglas

It has not rained for ninety-three
days
and the leaves of the trees along the gravel
and dirt section roads
are coated with a khaki dust as fine and fragile
as powdered sugar. The hot dry air crackles like cellophane
in winter and though it is August
the belly dancing
leaves of the cottonwoods
along the barren creek beds have given up on water and turned
a desiccated yellow. The thick green leaves
of the blackjack and pin oaks have faded to a leathery
brown
and even the Johnson grass, immutable bane of all farmers and
gardeners, has died of thirst
and the prickly pear
paddles have shriveled thin, their needles more brittle
and sharper than ever.
Someone
drops a cigarette
out a car window
or parks their red hot catalytic converter over dead
buffalo grass or maybe even strikes a match
just to watch the thick gray fog of smoke rise and flow,
flames dancing among the dead stems, a slow breeze keeping the
beat,
while every volunteer fire department
in Comanche County answers
the call and fights the flames, sweating rivers inside their
thick flame retardant clothes, gasping for clean air in spite of
special masks. We drive home in the dark,
bright beams
highlighting shadows of blackened grass and weed, the air
acid with the smell of charred flora.
Here and there orange glows and yellow flames are the aftermath
of war and it looks like the end, but I know
that even without rain
that within the week the blackened ground will sprout thin little
sprigs of green.



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

