

Years later when she walked out of the lake and headed for town, no one recognized her, or themselves, in the drench of fire and rain. The water-snake was a story no one told anymore. They'd entered a drought that no one recognized as drought, the convenience store a signal of temporary amnesia. 75

I had gone out to get bread, eggs and the newspaper before breakfast and hurried the cashier for my change as the crazy woman walked in, for I could not see myself as I had abandoned her some twenty years ago in a blue windbreaker at the edge of the man-made lake as everyone dove naked and drunk off the sheer cliff, as if we had nothing to live for, not then or ever. 80

It was beginning to rain in Oklahoma, the rain that would flood the world.<sup>2</sup>

1994

### When the World As We Knew It Ended—

We were dreaming on an occupied island at the farthest edge of a trembling nation when it went down.

Two towers rose up from the east island of commerce and touched the sky. Men walked on the moon. Oil was sucked dry by two brothers. Then it went down. Swallowed by a fire dragon, by oil and fear. Eaten whole. 5

It was coming.

We had been watching since the eve of the missionaries in their long and solemn clothes, to see what would happen. 10

We saw it from the kitchen window over the sink as we made coffee, cooked rice and potatoes, enough for an army.

We saw it all, as we changed diapers and fed the babies. We saw it, through the branches of the knowledgeable tree 15

2. Embedded in Muscogee tribal memory is the creature known as the tie snake, a huge monster who lives in waterways and will do what he can to take us with him. He represents the power of the underworld.

He is still present today in the lakes and rivers of Oklahoma and Alabama, a force we reckon with despite the proliferation of inventions that keep us from ourselves [Harjo's note].

through the snags of stars, through  
 the sun and storms from our knees 20  
 as we bathed and washed  
 the floors.

The conference of the birds warned us, as they flew over  
 destroyers in the harbor, parked there since the first takeover.  
 It was by their song and talk we knew when to rise 25  
 when to look out the window  
 to the commotion going on—  
 the magnetic field thrown off by grief.

We heard it.  
 The racket in every corner of the world. As 30  
 the hunger for war rose up in those who would steal to be president  
 to be king or emperor, to own the trees, stones, and everything  
 else that moved about the earth, inside the earth  
 and above it.

We knew it was coming, tasted the winds who gathered intelligence 35  
 from each leaf and flower, from every mountain, sea  
 and desert, from every prayer and song all over this tiny universe  
 floating in the skies of infinite  
 being.

And then it was over, this world we had grown to love 40  
 for its sweet grasses, for the many-colored horses  
 and fishes, for the shimmering possibilities  
 while dreaming.

But then there were the seeds to plant and the babies 45  
 who needed milk and comforting, and someone  
 picked up a guitar or ukelele from the rubble  
 and began to sing about the light flutter  
 the kick beneath the skin of the earth  
 we felt there, beneath us

a warm animal 50  
 a song being born between the legs of her,  
 a poem.