

Somewhere around chest height, a squat 95 is painted with little care across the trunk of a tree. It was there before we moved into the house it marks. The old bark makes rough shards of the yellowed-white numbers. The vertical stem and part of the bowl of the 5 have flaked off, but there is enough paint there to still make out its figure. The tree pushes at a short wooden fence at the front of the house. On the other side of the fence, at number 97, there is a similar tree. It has not been painted on. It reaches across the fence and fuses with the outstretched bough of 95. Their disfiguring clasp looks permanently loving. One winter evening, through the front bay windows, I watched the bare nerves of their branches move against each other. I thought about last summer, when their intimate canopy blurred so that you could not tell one from the other. Still looking to the winter trees, eventually, I told my wife I did not love her. I told her I had to live a life somewhere else. I lived it and came back to the house. She had moved on, years earlier. The trees were gone. I asked the neighbour in the yard opposite, he said the species are diseased, a fungus or something. I said they were living when I saw them last. He said they are ash now.