

Carpenter Road fire takes lives, news at the corner café

All the talk was about fire,
and quieter, the coming years of shortfall water;

how the deer will need to be shot, will starve
of winter with no time for the mountain to re-grow;

how to know if this ends
with anyone left untouched.

Moving amidst the coffee mugs and half-eaten
plates, a hushed crackle of gratitude—

it wasn't their house, the waitress/cook deep frying a new order
and someone's sizzling guilt when the newly burnt out

fell to the neighbors' misfortune.
Men dead. Trapped by smoke

and the blaze that downed
towers and lines as well as houses—phones dead and pets.

Begin the count of the lost.

This gathering place perches at the last corner

before the road back toward home
becomes impassible.

So many weeks into the blistering mountain,
the road glows red even in the daytime.

Here at the café and the flash of news
with the winds, the fire jumps the break,

burning bucks toward the resort at the lake.
Streams of cars start leaving, a few drive by

to work, or grocery runs, to stop at the café for espresso and fries,
picking their way through contained zones

of root fires and smoldering trees.
But then the rain started.

With scraping chairs, everyone stood up to watch
water fall for those few minutes.

It was like seeing a famous person pass by in a coffin.

sky as memento

Today the sky went missing.
Sitting in the grocery store parking lot,
late summer heat stumbling through open windows,
azure's absence became the question
of cut-out eyes in a photoshopped image.

(Are you still recorded as missing?)

In more recent years, I've noticed, even in self-defense,
death achieves a smell;
memory of it sleeps curled in unwashed blankets;
startles awake, without grace, or kindness.

About the sky, I'm saying that the blue in the sky was gone,
to that checkered abandon, not that it went grey.

In the car,
just waiting,
the heat, and waiting for the sky to heal.

I didn't feel the blade, or the slit of memory's eye
opening. The sky just tore
back; broke the old stitching
holding it over earth's musculature.

I cannot guess, in the end, who caused what
between you and I. I couldn't then. Still
unable to know,
whether summer black, sweet tarmac and high grass,
you a shirtless stranger I'd turned down,
me being 16 and living alone
in a world where sandstone hills bank left as you move straight
from one need to another.

I cannot guess how it was, you in your 20s
somewhere, in your blue car,
above the town;
whether you knew we were invisible;
you whose desire unravelled
like rancid lanolin on hill-sheep wool,
reaching for me.

I cannot be certain :: all these drowned years evaporating.
You climbing out, on the road and toward me;
and not much later lying with blood, instead of me,
one foot wedged between tire and earth.

I do remember the sudden fall of fear, and the leap I made
above the road's steep bank, my small pack,

knife still in my hand, and out,
into the grasses and gone,
green and far from your dying.

Here in this time, around the missing sky ::
the buildings stagger, trail a ragged edge;
the parking lot flutters, and the trees
the ripped sky left heaving.

moving into morning in the alley beside the voting center

“the moon's brokendown alley” Yusef Komunyakaa

rats unroll celadon, line the sagging sky,
pick at dawn with their teeth so that it begins
to, finally, unravel, day's shredded threads span, nest
to nest, litter the sky with mammalian strategies
the size and shape of dew drops. the last
stars cast shadows in glyphs, arrows into the meaning
of things, shaped this way to warn the waking

stiffly quilted air that puffs sparrow wings
also stuffs bricks back into walls, settles buildings
into readiness for work. done shaking their wings,
the sparrows are free; roam for the odd
dropped seed, shred of egg, or muffin abandoned
the day before. what they find unpacks late afternoon,
tucks it into a dark corner, diaphonous still with unmet hunger

the long-bone of a leg, a torn sneaker on one foot
nudges rose-dawn, and with that the light of morning
hardens into place like a blanket behind a dumpster.
Unfolding from the night, sleep slides into the crevices
between feral dandelions and unmoored leaves.
In the small tornado of a body moving through time,
a pamphlet tumbles saffron to the tawny tongue of the alley.
It says *Vote. Your Voice Matters*. The new moon
rides the rising light. It is invisible, hidden behind the heaving sun.

border running

2AM on a dark road, border running
with no lights. The girl ready
in the distance, an hour yet
but she waits wrapped in a blanket
caught in the wintered dark
him drunk and sleeping
hours yet before he wakes

and in this running hour nearby
a policeman dreams some troubled portent
of robbery, diamonds going out
gripped black bag by some indigent

this hour past ?
the moon sparked river water
elbowed its way through,
the road taking a glancing blow
both kept going, neither giving way

driving past
a bar let out its last drunks
to waiting cars. children
asleep under piles of wool.
homeward in this hour
they will go

running in silence. those in the dark
that remain unaware, sleep
in this comedy of starlight
aeons, the past blinking;
light from history burns, just now
making pale, the dark road arcing
towards the girl's creeping ghost,
silver in the deeper dark,
pinched pewter by needled boughs

across the line car tires spin
the river's gravel wash,
rest-stop hidden behind tree limbs bent
low under snow's crystalline weight,
caffeine, the lull of water and time passing
thinking about all the pain, the endlessness
of it, a few pebbles pocketed
from this crown land, this shared corporeal earth,
what difference can such a theft make?

spits of coffee grounds flung upon the river
its cold enduring power due this gesture of respect,
then off again

I mean, whose duty is the past and future dark?
like, one time, high past in the mountains
to the west, one that 2 years
to this hour
in the dark he was gone with me
the blue grip of his upper
arms now just a night-time
shadow in his bruised stone dreaming,
that boy, now, drifting
under quilted smell of lilacs

true, his tyrannosaur still lurks
plastic jaws agape
on the shelf behind the few books
he had with him that night
he climbed below these blankets
waiting in the car's deepest shadows,
but now he sleeps away
the blown trial of his living
and it's hours yet before he wakes.

who knows what he'll become,
and the girl running, no longer
snow bound, toward the car door's
opening dark? I don't know,
but we whose history remains invisible
under the thin prick of star's spark,
what can the future be?
some deep absurdity? or perhaps
a dangerous engagement with personal authority

For survivors: history lesson for the primary school years

After the first killing laid out
most of the women, and the 2 men
that were there, the fleetest
children huddled under
scrub in gullies.

The soldiers let their guns swing loose,
called, promised safe passage.

A few children crawled up.
Men swung rifles against shoulders.

Each cartridge box held 40 rounds.
The shells were ½ an inch thick.
Each rifle weighed 9 pounds.