

*July 2000. Mission Canyon Fire Safety Potluck*

1964. Coyote Fire. You were three when you saw it burn through this canyon.  
1977. Sycamore Canyon Fire. I was five when I watched it sweep up that hill.

This is fact - stark and bare.

It was not the meat of the conversation we started  
after the fireman's presentation on safety and prevention  
had given way to a disarray of talk among neighbors  
voicing well-versed opinions on the necessity  
of community brush clearings, traffic policing  
and the unwelcome, recently proposed, development.

We mentioned it late  
as a matter of course,  
after the chips and layered dips  
succumbed to fruit salads and cheesecake  
balanced carefully on paper plates and laps.

We were both in town from up north  
visiting the homes of our families  
set on neighboring hills;  
two strangers acquainted by proximity  
to a place we knew as children.

It was this simple fact of memory  
that might have been lost  
in the casualness of our conversation  
missed in the recounting of subsequent details:  
places lived, tasks done, philosophies formed,  
details listed as means of introduction  
interesting in the usual way, and peripheral  
to the central point.

Fire defines the nature of a face.

It was there without saying:  
the magnitude of blaze  
the escape to refuge  
the endless blanket of ash  
the bright, green shoots

the marvelous uncertainty  
written in awful, furious gold;

understood differently as a child  
grows old and looks out to see the view,





how many  
it takes w-a-t-t  
to change?  
do you know the moon is a beacon to turtles?  
do you know when water is lit they come flocking?  
pecking through eggshells they flock to the sea.  
*dar la luz* is the name they call it down south  
when the women give birth to children they say  
*dar la luz, dar la luz,*

and she brings in the light  
to the people who dance  
around the new babies  
because they are kissed  
by the moon on the forehead  
and the light goes

on, i catch with two hands  
i catch it and frame it  
in pixels on screens  
with windows inside

i conjure up words  
oh won't you read them?  
light of the moon  
reflecting the sun

does the moon have a light  
that shines from inside?  
does it look like a lightbulb  
high up in a streetlight?

i ask, though I shouldn't  
(isn't it bad?) but i do  
how does the moon look  
when the sun isn't on?

maybe the moon  
moonlighting with moonshine

moons the moonwalk  
jumps over the cow

moonstruck by madcow  
wanders like turtles

over the sand            erasing the trails