

Smokehouse Creek Fire
Poetry

There are fenced in prairies, steep orange canyons,
And acres of cows. A horse here and there, or a goat,
And the stray buzzard circling cuts through what would
Otherwise be an unworried scene.
But tucked in its corner, the empty creek suddenly seemed
To alight on itself like a steeple or a siren, and it flashed too.
So the huddled debris, the dead branches and half-dead undergrowth,
Even the more ancient; the buried bones and fallen antlers,
One by one caught fire and fanned out to the prairie,
The canyons, and the cows.
The wind, which moved candidly and without pretense,
Carried on its back a warning and a sanction,
And moving rapidly, the wind brought the fire to its grate,
Or rather made a grave of itself,
Which the cows, held by the fencing, could not escape.

Across the valley, where the empty hope of rain fumed
Up in steam and ash and the unbearable heat,
Was a girl doing cartwheels,
While her dad calculated how much gas and how much
Distance one would need to outlast a fire.
Their house had a fence and a flume.
The bolt cutter was in its drawer and the girl could smell
Burning iron and burning rooms.
She didn't know about the cattle or the creek, or why the
Horizon seemed to fall into itself, like how the
Buzzards, again and again, dive and then coil back into the
Air to alert their companions for food.
But she could sense something coming,
And she, as an animal, knew how to run.