

ashes and snow
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this fire is carnivorous, savage;
it tears through walls and windows and precious memories
in a fast-moving wave of smoke and flame.

its shadow twists and dances in the reflection of my irises,
singing the hoarse words of destruction in an eerie tone as i
watch my tomorrows singe and smolder in the smoke of uncertainty.

how can this be... how must we understand this,
how in this flame-tattered afterworld can we come to accept it?

these smoke-shrouded hours melt together
like the desiccated frames of our abandoned cars,
too-loud voices in microphones colliding in a perverted imitation of regular life—
i find myself staring, in the darkened shades of nightfall
into the flames i cannot erase from my vision.

i see their ghosts in the charred foundations,
feel their heat in the crumbled black that cakes the soles of my shoes;
watch as smoke shades the sky
and ashes fall with snow like some sickening poetry.

is this relief? i ask myself between the bones of my neighbors' homes,
i wonder again inside the smoky room in which my books have kept their pages—
i imagine feeling safe, feeling contained and feeling intact,
and i cannot picture the world as it was before.

i don't know how to separate the tears of my friends from my own,
can't decide whether to be guilty or glad.
i feel as if i am still watching the news in helplessness,
only now i watch those i love struggle
in a today that i cannot understand.

there is some relief in knowing, i decide,
that none of us are alone in this—
that whether we are consumed with grief or guilt or gratitude,
we are not alone.

as we try to reconcile the brightness of snow with the darkness of ash,
we offer our houses and our clothes and our time
to our friends and our community.
the beauty of humanity is such
that its true strength is found in the ashes,
our deepest compassion unfurling in vivid green from this alien expanse of scorched
earth.

i won't pretend to see an easy end to this pain,
a sunrise emerging to shed light on the mountains.
we are still struggling to find a reprieve in the depth of this long night,
but there is one thing i know to be true:
however many hours before the sun finally rises,
we will be the source of light for each other.
for how beautiful is a sky full of stars?