

EXTINGUISHED

VIRGINIA SOILEAU

Fire choked the sky, making the evening air too thick to breathe.
The mix of smoke and twilight gave the mountain a bruised quality.

Evening deepened and the setting sun lent its brilliance to the rising flames
as the beat of a helicopter paralleled the pulse in my veins.

Long fingers of steam reached for the intruder,
wanting to pull it down to Earth to further fuel its hunger.

The flames bellowed, demanding the earth yield its sacrifice.
Through the sky, a murder of crows denied Fury's call,

and I wondered if their voices sounded a warning siren,
or if they were screaming their defiance.

Stalking behind, Inferno followed me home.
Smoke crept into my room, stroking my hair while I slept.

Dreams, flaring like scattered kindling, jumped and skipped,
igniting in me every emotion I had let wither and dry.

Outside, darkness camouflaged the haze, hiding it from sight.
In its thirst, it consumed the stars, stealing away with their energy.

Only in their absence could I see Rage as it engulfed all life.
Even the crows lost their breaths—silenced.

I watched it in its gluttony, searing its name on the earth,
until, with nothing left to yearn for, it devoured its own essence.

SWIMMING IN A FISH BOWL

CHRISTOPHER WU

It was a Tuesday morning when I got a call from Ava asking if I would like to come over for dinner that night. It had been several months since my friend was committed to the psychiatric ward and I hadn't talked to her in that time. I wasn't around when it happened, but I heard from other friends that she had been committed to the hospital by her boyfriend for suicidal depression and mood swings. I had known her since high school and I knew that she suffered from depression, but this was something else entirely.

At five o'clock I locked up my tool box, tried my best to scrub the grease out of my fingernails, and clocked out. It was a thirty-minute drive to her place from the shop. I spent that time thinking about different scenarios, and different topics to avoid. I wondered if she would be in a fit of rage or as depressed as a French movie. As I pulled into the driveway I saw her silhouetted in the kitchen window. She turned and looked out and went quickly to the window and shut the blinds. When I knocked on the door it took her several minutes to answer. When she finally opened the door I was struck by the awkwardness of not knowing quite what to say.

"Hey Ava! Long time no see!" was what I finally said.

"Hi Josh, no kidding," she said, smiling awkwardly.

She invited me in and I took off my greasy work boots by the door before walking into the kitchen. She told me that she hadn't started cooking yet since she wasn't sure when I would get there. I looked around her small house. It had an air of being occupied by someone consumed with lethargy. On the couch there were several blankets that resembled a freshly opened cocoon. In the sink there were dirty dishes, and crumbs had seemingly been scattered on all the counters. I could see empty glasses scattered around. They reminded me of way points marking her movements through the house.

"What's new with you?" she asked.