

Winning Poems in 2022 CFCP, Inc., Annual Contest

7. California, Third Place

Paradise in Ashes

(Sunday, November 11, 2018)

Paradise falls in ashes in my front yard,
white specks of rose bushes and dreams,
kitchen curtains, picture frames,
old love letters, woolen slippers, bills
—combustible lives, overrun by fire.

Houses burn all the time. Businesses
catch fire from faulty wiring, and
fields char in wildfires. But this whole town
was reduced to crackling rubble in 24 hours.
Its residents evacuated, escaped, missing or dead.

The internet is flooded with images
of missing loved ones, pets, neighbors.
Reports of the dead climb with each hour.
The smoke first rose, driven upward
by the heat of the fire, then sank

to settle in a heavy fog down burned streets.
The relentless smoke pours
from the ridge into the canyonland
and sinks into the vast central valley,
blotting out the abscessed sun.

The ashes of Paradise filter through the smoke,
drift onto the changing leaves of my birch,
drop onto the wilting petals of the last rose.
I try not to think of the flames, the terror,
the confusion of fire, smoke, ash settling now.

Katy Brown
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*posted on Medusa's Kitchen Blogspot 11/12/2018
the Camp Fire started 11/8/2018 near Pulga Road 12 miles east of Paradise*