

Summer of Fire I

British Columbia, 2003

*The things to be feared are... the anger and hatred
of powerful men. And injustice joined with power.*

—Aristotle, *Rhetorics*

We went mad for money and power
and the only songs that move us now
are air-raid sirens in the desert.

Terrified eyes and screaming babies
fill the streets of Baghdad
and Vancouver.

The acid stench of civilization rises
like a CEO's salary
and still we can't stop.

The invisible hand at our throats
won't let go—trickle-down lie that leaves
burning holes in everything we touch.

The fish. The water. The trees.
The very air itself, if necessary—ALL of it—
ours to buy, sell or steal.

Yachts chuckle gasoline into the harbor
waiting for cash registers to light up,
the pantomime democracy toothless.

And Western forests dry as soul-dust erupt—
the Voice of God walking
in sheets of molten creation.

Saw blades howl for mills burned to the ground.
Lives curl in fists of ash—
a family's five-acre dream

black as starless sky. A lone fireman
kneels on smoking Earth and feels
a sound, a voice shuddering from below—

wind tearing sheet metal from a roof—
a grizzly torn from her cubs in a hail of bullets.
Summer of fire, autumn flood, she growls.

This is not spring, and these are not tears.
Thunder cracks a steel wool sky
and our Tonka Town empire washes away,

the daily commute a million-dollar drama
of death on collapsed highways.
And now, the angry spasm relieved,

a winter moon waxes, aurora borealis
pulses farther and farther south,
strange lights glisten on the glacier

and sleep in the valley lies so deep
you can feel it like snow
or sorrow.

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Summer of Fire II

Driving home through an alien twilight,
news of a continent on fire.

Curtain of haze the internal combustion
of desire. Ash clouds jig past my windshield
where only yesterday moths and dust motes
danced, praying for rain. Dollars devalue
in a shower of sparks and the highway fills
bumper to bumper with *homo consumeris*,
anxious to join the extinction parade. So be it.
Life goes on, they say, in a billion forms
we've never yet seen nor will see
in galaxies only now coming into view.

Ride that aurora borealis breathing fire
across an ember-strewn sky
while you can. Smoke will be your water,
ash your soil. Fire an emanation
from the belly of Unktehi the Water Serpent.*
Life goes on, they say, in a billion forms
that have nothing whatsoever
to do with our genius. So be it.
May the stars shine on in whatever eyes
are there to drink down their love.

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**From the Lakota Sioux legend*