Season of Fires

Rina Garcia Chua

University of British Columbia Okanagan

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The Finlay Creek wildfire near Peachland is still pegged at 1,500 hectares as of Monday afternoon. Fire information officer Heather Rice says crews are witnessing increased fire activity this afternoon as winds pick up in the area. She says residents can expect to see new plumes of smoke due to the increased activity.

—Kelowna Capital News, 2 September 2017

In Peachland, across the Lake, behind your head as we sit for dinner in the El Dorado, the white smoke flutters on top of you like a halo.

It forms a harmless cloud; around us, the festivities continue, with drunk men mistaking me for a waitress; lithe women in their summer dresses and mascara sticks in the toilet—giggling and growling, “Let’s find ourselves boys.”

Above us, the sky’s pink; it makes you high, I know, so I take photographs of the crevices of clouds, the Canadian geese diving into the warm waters, and you perusing the menu.

We walk the marina at night, hearing the buoy hit wooden planks beneath our feet. I cajole you to go to the edge of the dock—there’s no one here, but you say you won’t cross that line.
I’m a rebel, I declare, tiptoeing
the planks with the stealth of a
ballerina. Beneath is only dark
water. You say there’s fish there.
I can only guess which kind.

That afternoon, we parked by
the beach and you suggested
we take a walk by the shore.
You walked; I ran to the water
as fast as I could, kicking off
my shoes and feeling the sand,
waves, tides crawl on my skin.

You are from the islands;
a sharp reminder as you reject me
when I beckon you to join.

In Peachland, the wild animals
are scampering away from
the blistering heat; the fire
fighters are dousing the area
with what little water the Valley
has; people are watching the
news, waiting for the knock
on the door that will tell
them it’s time to go.

I never hear that knock
on the door. It’s never time
to go for me. Or maybe that’s
my rebellious nature always
wanting to tip my heels to
the deep corners of the lake,
or run into the forest in the middle
of the night until the burning
gasps in front of me.

It’s either the water or fire—
I want the elements to devour
me completely, a feasting
on my unburdened desires.
RINA GARCIA CHUA is currently doing her PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of British Columbia Okanagan. She is the editor of the first anthology of Philippine ecopoetry, Sustaining the Archipelago, which was released by the University of Santo Tomas Publishing House in February 2018. These days, she enjoys hiking in the woods of British Columbia as much as she relishes swimming in the warmer corridors of the Pacific Ocean. She also wants to try ice climbing next winter.