

New Journal #9/5

I gazed inside the gates of hell today. They flanked the 405 Freeway.

And not "hell" in the way people complain about driving in LA, inching along in traffic, wondering, how did my life go so wrong? It's always a parking lot after school, but today's hell was no metaphor...

Embers skitter across ten lanes. Trees in the Sepulveda Pass crack and explode in tornadoes of fire –

"Mom! Take the Getty exit so we don't get trapped." June, five years away from a driver's permit, is backseat driving as usual. "We can cut up into the Valley."

Mom swerves onto Getty Drive. Above us, the museum, crapped onto a beheaded mountain by a billion dollars, squats behind a burka of smoke. June wheezes and takes out her inhaler for a hit. I shut the fans. Futile. The car smells like a chimney.

"There's fire everywhere." Mom hesitates at the intersection, squinting.

"Turn right. If it jumps the freeway, we'll be better off on the other side," I try to sound calm. But is this how it happens – everything normal, running errands, living your stupid life, and then some horror shows up out of nowhere like a school shooter? And you die in a mudslide? Flood? Inferno? Happening every day now in the Golden State.

Mom cuts right, away from home, and floors the car. The roaring Santa Ana winds disappear everything in smoke as afternoon becomes midnight –

"Look out!" June yelps.

Two men carrying trash bags emerge like ghosts. Mom slams the brakes, and the men scurry into the brush. Did they start the fire? It happens. Homeless in encampments light cooking fires that get away from them, what with everything so dry and –

"There's fire right there." June points to an exploding tree, each leaf spectacularly aflame. I'm momentarily mesmerized, like a guy jumping off a building, thinking as he falls: This is intense. This is life! Splat.

A Mercedes slings by us, forcing an oncoming car into a gully. Mom swerves into the breakdown lane, scraping the concrete barrier.

"Mom!" I'm shouting as if I can control any of it. "Take it easy."

“You just tore off the mirror. Badass!” June sounds thrilled, suddenly the star of one of the *Fast and Furious* movies she drags me to. Mom barrels up the breakdown lane, ignoring the fire truck blaring behind us. That’s when I know she’s losing it. Mom always obeys the law.

“There! Open sky,” June declares as we crest the hill that overlooks the valley, slumbering in its usual blanket of smog, unaware that behind us it’s pure movie destruction – like Godzilla belched up from the depths of the ocean to scorch the world.

“Will we get to evacuate?” June asks, picturing a vacation from fifth grade.

“Depends on the wind.” I roll down a window, take a deep breath, and exhale in a rattle.

Turns out, we do have to evacuate. It’s a nightmare because they won’t even let us up to get Gigi, no matter how much we beg the cops at the canyon barricades. Only one way in and out, and they don’t want to risk it for a dog, the heartless bastards. So now Gigi’s stuck up there by herself with fire everywhere, left behind like the pets after Fukushima melted down from the earthquake/tsunami.

Left to starve or die of thirst. Or burn to death. Christ!

I’m trying not to bug out, downloading this horrible day in a damn Kimpton Boutique Hotel in Westwood because Dad had some points on a credit card. The hotel advertises “Wilshire Chic,” and I’m up on the roof deck with a tiny pool, watching fires rim the distant hills under a nuclear bomb of smoke. Couples drink twenty-dollar “craft cocktails,” like somebody spent a year woodworking them into existence. Like nothing is wrong. And for now, for them, I guess nothing is.

But so far, ten houses have burned just two streets away from ours. I’d pray if I thought it’d help. Pray our house is spared. Pray Gigi’s not burned alive. Is useless prayer all that’s left?

The sun goes down blood red over West LA.

The merciless wind shifts.

This is good news. Now pluto mansions in Bel Air will burn instead of Gigi. It’s terrible, but you can replace houses.

At least that media mogul’s estate gets torched. Love that his compound burns as his lie factory for the adult diaper crowd denies Climate Chaos. What do you say to an old bloodsucker spreading fake news and poison around the world? Grasping all that fear money?

Do you shout, “Go to hell!”?

No, that would be redundant.

Godzilla just broke the gates of hell and banged on our front door.

Today's Headline

“Over 5% of California Burned in Last Five Years.” And fires alone produced nine times more emissions than got reduced here last year. We’re full speed in reverse.

– *LATimes.com*