

WISH YOU WERE HERE—GLAD YOU'RE NOT

Here it tastes like a Vegas casino. Smoke
from LA smudges the skyline, mountains painted

an altered tint. Forgive me,

the landscape looks like it belongs

on a postcard, in an ad. Taking
the dogs out, it's the first day for a jacket.

The dogs greet a stranger and I

am embarrassed they want the world,

everyone, to welcome them with open arms.
Snaking our usual route, all is unusual

tweaks of temperature and dirty air. Far beyond

the fire's perimeter, California's biome dances

in the throat, picks my scalp. As we quicken
down the sidewalk, I'm thinking about toast

and marshmallows, trying not to

say no to every new everything, to stay warm in the sun
until the shadows gather too large.

UP THE MOUNTAIN, DOWN THE ROAD

I don't understand how thick
it feels or the amount

of flies, divots in the dirt road

and scores of people
with the impulse: Get to the lake.

We are trying to get out of this

heat, this house, the replay
of everyday. I understand

the sign: No Driving on Meadow.

How can I possibly understand
there are people who need this

sign, who don't know we don't

drive on meadows.

TIME IS A TRICKY BEAST

In that way children can feel their bones
grow, sometimes two people who share a lot
of time

for a long time, lose confidence
for the other
in certain spaces. The man I live with is positive

I'll carefully care for our old dog, whose body has begun
to shrink and flop. But 20 years in,
his belief in me reading any map, pointing

in the correct direction,
is covered with doubt. We have a friend (maybe
had—

time can complicate
that too) whose job is to get to the end of the road,
to map the unmapped,

find the finish and turn back. Even
satellites still miss
the unpaved, while there are these agencies

who want every wild thing,
every ending accounted. Clocked. The old dog
maneuvers around her failing

body, keeps moving
as best the workarounds enable, swings her back end
up or down

as needed. Left and right
continue to be my trouble. Direction undetermined,
he shouldn't trust me with the map—

it's navigation
with more momentum than muscle.

FOUND IN EVERY U.S. STATE EXCEPT ARIZONA

He wipes up a puddle behind
the sink, says, *This is what I hate*
about water. To be clear

he dislikes how wet
water is. The force
of Niagara, the span of sea—

43 percent of the population
lives within 93 miles of ocean—
the turtle, the frog, the otter. American mink

a species most famous for fur, solitary
carnivores not fussy
about clean den space, as long as

they're close to water. It's not complicated
for the semiaquatic creature:
no circles around faucets, drowned

carpet, bloated baseboards—
damage that can be
so swift. For this man who curses and carries

basic need the same
as any animal: of course
there is more—with, without—always

things get wet because of water.

RANCHO ABSURDO

we were ridiculous
enough
it was Sunday suddenly
amending soil

seemed like pleasure
compared to other tasks
on hand in theory
could also be

pleasure again we were
ridiculous too much
on the baked beans
the poem

a pressure pot
chicken stock, chopped
garlic, cumin ridiculous soil
thick in clay we were
over

and over trying
to plant that
same ground
each year another flat of enough

succulents to cover all
Sundays all ridiculous
if the earth could
be less get better
if we were

less ridiculous enough
to think things
would are cooked
right grown
to ridiculous perfection

NO, I DON'T. I DON'T WANT TO INSTALL UPDATES.

When did the city's development start
to power my gloom?
The neighbor doesn't want to know

the plan for the plot where the deer slept,
says he likes to see whatever it is pop up—new
grocery store, a hotel,

duplexes—version 2.0
all at once. His dog bops about the yard
marking the fence and cries,

letting us know she's here, been here, will be
back. Every so often
our dogs bolt out the front door just in time

for a playdate,
just as they always intend. Planned and such
a surprise, these reunions

of beasts who mostly want to replay the good parts
time and again. Like most of us
on instinct

crave the same things for a lifetime. The lot of us
divided: one set of people who must
also mark their spot:

BRAD + JEN = FOREVER
spray paint on the overpass, initials carved
in hearts. And then the other set, programmed to worry,

hand to internal heart, how that poor tree feels,
memory hacked.

AFTER THE GIRL THOUGHT OF EVERYTHING

she couldn't get enough
nothing. The girl grips today,
tonight, toothbrush, the rain too
tight. Toes scrunched

as if they could hold on
to themselves and the ground, Girl tries
to release, simply
stop the buzz and be

blank. The TV plays the desert
island where Korean singles attempt
to couple up. Even this
becomes too much, spills into another

layer, one could not have thought
until now, and now
the thought of never
being able to empty, always

more popping: unbearable.
Girl indeed needs less—the dubbed faces
quieted, the waves flat,
the wind, the sand

to stop its shift. Polite, gorgeous people, please
walk away, leave the island
in silence. All, each
sum, so much holding

hands. So much can happen
in stillness. Girl knows the nothing
of land, sea or screen
must be something.

NATALIE PADILLA YOUNG

Natalie Padilla Young co-founded and manages the poetry magazine *Sugar House Review*. By day, she works as an art director and graphic designer. Her book *All of This Was Once Under Water* is available from Quarter Press (2023). Natalie's poetry has appeared in *swamp pink*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Tampa Review*, *Rattle*, *South Dakota Review*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Terrain.org*, and elsewhere. She serves on the Lightscatter Press board, and lives in southern Utah with the poet Nano Taggart and their two dogs. Find more at NatalieYoungArts.com.