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Fires

John Davies

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Fires

Yesterday for the first time mist hazed the hills
 but no, Rob said, it was California burning.
 I wouldn't have known. From a thousand miles,
 hoarse forest-eaters were breathing
 blackmail on three States so hills were sour,
 shrunken not veiled as if cowering for once.
 Eyes ached at them. Thumps crumpled—
 the military base spoke up for the baffled sun.

Back home last year, singed air overloaded dropped
 from Russia. Earth spoiled; new fears grew.
 Today though a river following our road like a dolphin
 dived past poles shouldering telegraph wire
 and small towns flag us down, streets broad as open hands.
 The parks have pioneer relics, a grindstone, hoisted bell.
 On a grass square, ranked streets at Payson wear
 the flag's colors, paths slip a world in edgewise.
 Trees spurt sun. Between *For Sale* signs
 old as prayers and the highway murmuring Go,
 what survives seems so entire of itself it could
 last forever. Called to, the mind starts drawling.

Haze lasts too. From the edge of things
 keeps coming in. With the first crackle of autumn rubbing
 green edges red, bushes along the road are ghosts.

—John Davies