

EARTH ON FIRE

By Laura Reece Hogan

A haze of smoke hangs high, a red-eyed canopy of uncertain danger, strange, yet more and more familiar with each passing news cycle, as day follows brittle day. Drought has pressed

grass into crunchy brown scrub, plum trees into tinder, heartbeats of the phoebe into a clattering for water, seed, relief. Yet what comes is fire, relentless inferno, licking red tongues of destruction, flames

clasp hands with scorching sirocco winds, outstripping jackrabbits, incinerating chaparral, walnuts, oaks, all one in the blazing terror of wild, consuming hunger. The wisdom of birds grows silent.

(Yet did you not say you came to set the earth on fire?)

Now listen to what was left behind. The very soil lies coal black, hills turned to ash, to nothing; every contour bared in mourning, broken only by harsh bony fingers of ebony oak corpse, stabbing through the side of moonscape.

(Yet, did you not say you wished it were already blazing?)

Let me tell you what I see there, on the shoulders of the charred foothills. What was fire, and death, and the end, has become a new Jerusalem. She is shadowed yet beautiful. She says, "Do not stare at me because

I am dark, because living fire has burned me." What flames have turned ash, the beloved embraces. What lies barren births anew, a shared, open heart, suffering yet transformed, transforming, still in bride-clothes.

A seed lies there, one that only knows to break open at the caress of its natural mother, fire.