

## Taylor Graham – Five Poems



Feature Poet

### The Alpha Fire

*A fire to end all fires, the  
big one you'll never forget – but big fires  
come almost back-to-back now,  
descending on neighborhoods; a burning  
ember from a couple miles away....  
fueled by drought and fanned by erratic  
gale-force winds. As the planet  
heats, how can we protect against  
inferno?*  
Just listen, how a breeze  
kicks up. This tree that over-  
leans the house providing shade  
might torch us.  
Nightmare, the new normal?  
Or, wind as it's always been –  
pulsed by whims of weather?  
Questions of our future  
run like rabbits aflame through the woods  
spreading flame, the woods  
tinder-dry, dead trees standing  
unharvested,  
verily  
waiting to burn, to  
x-out the meadow we walked just  
yesterday, believing its  
zen would save us.

*Note: italicized quotes from “CalFire Says Climate Change Is Impacting Fire Behavior”  
by Steve Gregory*

## **Our Sudden Hills**

*on a line from "My Heart like a Nation" by Philip Metres*

*A man photographs the sudden  
undulating hills* he's lived with all these years,  
not thinking how, in an instant  
it could be wind hot-dry down-canyon  
flame-bounding, so the sunburned hills leap  
red-maned stampeding.  
On the news he'll see a fine black stallion  
head-high stubborn-pacing the practiced  
steps, his master pulling him  
urgently through smoke, racing fire  
to the gate. Horse unwilling to leave his  
stable, his comfort, home.  
These hills the man has loved so long.

## **Green Connections**

When the men worked our little valley  
with chainsaws and chippers, hanging on ropes  
from the higher reaches with their blades,

the greatest valley oak stood as a stump  
between chip-seal and right-of-way.  
I couldn't explain it to the woods.

What of our unseen, unknown neighbors  
on the other side? Everyone  
in this canyon, abruptly connected.

Not as every tree in the woods  
is connected with its brothers, living roots  
mourning the slaughtered trees;

not by words and forms we humans  
have invented, and think we understand,  
but deeper, like water underground; like faith.

## Journeys

In woodlands and across our highways, the deer are on the move.  
It's mating season, wild heat of love drives away cold caution  
on pavement speeding with cars and trucks headed somewhere else.

It's wildfire season, powerline crews are cutting down the trees  
that could fall and cause a spark, our woods now so sparse and spare,  
so much wide-open space that once was shadow, leafy shelter.

From our hilltop I survey what's left – trunks of oak lying slapdash –  
and sudden movement across-slope, doe in solitary flight,  
the same who birthed her fawn here, now fleeing somewhere else.

## Home, Fox

We came home unexpected in the dark.  
Up sprang Fox from today's abrupt  
opening of the trees,

Fox so brushy-tailed up our driveway.  
How explain to Fox  
the driveway new-graded by exhausting

machines? Fox already gone past  
our house, into dark of newly opened  
woods – our canyon by daylight

a growl-&-buzz of machinery.  
Fox must have a den here,  
on rocky wooded hill now lessened

by eight great oaks felled to keep  
us fire-safe. How explain pyro-weather  
to Fox, to ourselves? Fox, we're home.

**Taylor Graham** is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in the California Sierra, and served as El Dorado County's first poet laureate (2016-2018). In addition to *Muddy River Poetry Review*, her work has appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and elsewhere. She's included in the anthologies *Villanelles* (Everyman's Library) and *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Santa Clara University/Heyday Books). She has a poem forthcoming in *California Fire & Water: A Climate Crisis Anthology*. Her latest book is *Windows of Time and Place* (Cold River Press, 2019).