

FROM THIS DAY FORWARD
by Jennifer O'Donnell
Corbett, Oregon

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The young man who tossed the firework into the brittle trees at Eagle Creek on a hot September Saturday. Did he act with intention? Did he mean to cause harm?

I pass my days with friends right now, after fleeing a night of heat and smoke and ash and wind. What is truly important when one runs from home in the dark, wondering if there will be a home to return to? Now, I watch and wait and wonder, as 35,000 acres of land has burned. Like a friend who is dying, if I could hold the pain so the forest doesn't have to, I would. Where are the birds that sang when I hiked those trails last spring? Where are the deer and the swallowtail butterflies? Are they safe? Do they have friends who will take them in during the middle of the night on the other side of the river where they can breathe the air?

My community is scattered. Where is our mail? Will someone pick up the trash we put out before we realized the fire would travel thirteen miles in sixteen hours? Have the tomatoes ripened? What are the goldfinches eating since their feeders are empty? Is the rose I planted in honor of my mother still blooming?

The responders, many of them my neighbors, protect my home when they cannot return to their own. Those who have no place of work, because there are no customers coming, will their mortgage get paid next month? The children who can't go to school, what will they learn that wasn't in this week's lesson plans?

I said thank you every morning I woke up to the light over the Columbia River. The mountains, the river, the sky, each their own shade of blue comforted me. Can I return to live in a place that makes me now hurt so deeply?

I know of many who wish that young man who started it all a miserable death. Or at least a miserable life. I wish for the young man no harm. I wish for him that every decision he makes from this point on is thoughtful and responsible and kind. When he comes to the end of his days, and the effects of his decision are still upon the landscape, I wish for him to be able to say, from that point forward, I caused no harm.

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