

not lugging your stuff plus our own. If we have to get out, it will be fast!" said Daisy.

"It's all just provisional," said Henry. "If it goes mandatory, I'll take your mother to a shelter—at the high school. You and Brisa will have to go straight to the shelter from the movie—or wherever you're going. I'll text you the location. I won't be able to pick you up. I'll be coming straight back here back to keep watch on the house—unless they force me out," he added.

"*Madre de dios!* Don't try to be a hero," Daisy said. "You're not the type." She fiddled her fingers and exhaled, craving a cigarette from the old days. Maybe it was the smoke in the air. "Let the firefighters do their job."

"We're not going, anyway," Henry said. He kept working the cantaloupe.

"Mama Rosalia will keep the house safe," said Daisy.

"No," said Henry, "I mean the wind is shifting, I can feel it."

"I can feel mama's spirit," said Daisy. "Right here all around us."

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Daisy and Henry went about the rest of their morning in blissful denial. What fire threat? They had always been safe in that house, through quakes, floods, slides, and other wildfires up and down the coastal mountains. Like most people, they believed everything would be fine until it was not. They had warning when the hot offshore wind picked up at noon. Daisy smelled it first and told Henry to stop making appetizers and start grabbing up what he could.

Henry needed no convincing when he stepped out onto the patio. He pulled out the garden hose and gave the roof another soaking, quickly as he could. He loved that roof and had laid some of its deep-red Spanish tiles himself, falling off into bushes and breaking his wrist at one point, four years earlier.

Ashes swirled down like snow flurries, and the air smelled of burning wood and oil. He looked northeastward and saw a wide column of white-and-gray smoke reaching skyward, fringed by a line of orange flames cresting a ridge so close Henry thought he could touch it. He worried about the animals—the rabbits, gophers, and coyotes. He always did.

Wildfires could pounce across ridges like mountain

lions, creating white-hot firestorms that fed on themselves like nuclear chain reactions. Henry stood, aghast, and remembered the turreted house he had once owned high on one of those ridges, with its spectacular view of the ocean. It would be burned to cinders by now, as would his nemesis—or former nemesis, anyway—Leo's faux Mayan temple straddling a hilltop. Henry basked in *schadenfreude* for a long moment.

"Henry! What the hell are you doing out there?" Daisy's voice came through the open sliding glass door. She still wore the jolly Day of the Dead clown-white skull make-up and her mother's wedding dress but had taken off all the flowers except for an orange marigold in her hair—to greet the flames, perhaps—and had put on a pair of red high-top sneakers.

He heard the growl of squad car sirens pulling up front and deputies shouting through megaphones for everyone to evacuate.

"Just getting something, honey," he called back to her.

"Well, whatever it is, get it fast or leave it," she shouted.

By then Henry was in and out of the garage with a large round blue-and-white metal cookie tin he had fetched off a high shelf. It was the kind with little Dutch children and windmills on it, for holiday cookies, except it was heavy with papers.

"What's that?" Daisy asked, giving him a squint as she came onto the patio headed for the garage. "What are you doing here? Open the garage door and start the car."

"Later," he said, grabbing a backpack of clothes and personal items, a couple of blankets, and whatever else he could manage.

He had to turn on the wipers to clear the windshield of ash as they pulled out onto the driveway and rolled down their usually quiet side street toward Main.

"Bye, Mama," said Daisy. Tears streaked the ashy grime on her face.

A hot gust broadsided the car, causing it to veer seaward and yaw like a tempest-tossed cabin cruiser unaccustomed to such indignities. "Santa Anas," Henry mumbled, tugging at the steering wheel. "Opposite day . . ."

"What?" Daisy asked.

". . . It's a contrarian wind . . . blows everyone's life sideways." His mouth felt dry as burnt toast, his nose stuffed with hot cotton. He fumbled in the cup holder for a nonexistent

## ANDA DUBINSKIS

*What She Does (Upstairs Porch)*, 2007

Gouache, 22 x 15 in

