Where the Tiny Things Are: Feathered Essays

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Microfire

It started small. Not two kids with rubbing sticks. Not two members from the Navajo Nation setting pranks behind dumpsters. Not two ATV riders with very sunburnt necks sparking their batteries. Not two hippies who spaced putting sand on their fire. Not even overachieving squirrels. Not ravens with a match. No, there was no direct cause for this fire that is burning over 7,000 acres, for this fire that is the Bambi Disney version, forcing squirrels and skunks and raccoons to flee and is also not Disney-like in that humans evacuate their fire-magnetic homes and shelter at the Yavapai Community Center. Take refuge. Get away.

Evacuations are not all that rare anymore. Last year, the big fire out by Payson, and two years ago, the Wallow fire, largest fire in Arizona history, and three years ago the Schultz fire and then also the one that had our housesitter packing up her car with all the pictures she could find of our kids and the pictures that our kids had drawn and the things that looked like important pieces of paper, drawn by the kids or not, as she frantically tried to call us as we camped so ignorantly out by Sycamore Point just thirteen miles away but too far for cell service and too far to know that the fire called Little America was turning towards us and the winds were up and the humidity low and in June in Arizona you should know better and keep a pack of memorabilia packed and ready to
go because you are human and you will forget everything that you ever learned without a piece of paper on which to write it down.

You had better treasure that paper. The trees. They are burning down. The trees, some say, will not come back. The trees need certain conditions. Some humidity. Some rain. Some days where temperatures are below 32 degrees. Other plants may grow. Juniper and chaparral. Pinyon Pine. Maybe we can make paper out of juniper upon which we can invest our memories and protect them from a fire that is coming since fires like that just aren’t that rare anymore.

In Prescott, no one is blaming anyone directly. At the Yavapai Community Center, a man sits on the edge of his cot. Another man stands a couple of miles away, white lines through black ash. In the Center, a woman quiets her baby. The baby is hot and the corner seems the coolest, quietest space. Back at the fire, a woman digs her Hotshot shovel into the ground. Fire lines. They used to work. Maybe they will work today. There is another man, a fire detective, walking the line between forest and the Center. In between, he will find the cause, but never a direct one. Human-caused for sure. All the fires now. Just touch the air. Touch the ground. It hasn’t rained for months. The humans are good at so many things: starting fires and stopping rain.