Arriving Fifteen Minutes into the Fire

My cheeks turn flush and hot.
My eyes turn dry.
I stare up at the flames.
I see window glass shattering under the immense and heavy heat.

The second group of fire trucks arrives.
The streets are filled with confusion.
Everyone searches for the ones they love most.
"Are you okay?"
"Have you seen Diane?"

My phone sounds relentlessly.
I answer only to say nothing.
I am staring
Up, Up, Up at the flames.
My tongue is dry.
There are no words to describe what I see.

Clouds above us grow lower and lower.
The sun is lost.
The sirens take on their full effect.
Brilliant red and white,
competing with the fire’s glow.

Now my once dry eyes
turn to tears.
My once rosy hot cheeks,
turn pale and cold.

“How did this happen?”
“Is this real?”
“Was there a bomb?”

Carriers of the Mission
Maintaining Faith

La Llamada

OLLU
OUR LADY OF THE LAKE UNIVERSITY

2008
Newscasters and reporters plunder through the growing body of learners
probing for some indication as to why.
Why this was happening to Our Lady of the Lake University?
They are met with blank stares and dread.

I move around in the crowd,
staring nowhere but
Up. Up at the flames taking over our steeple
taking over our school, our home.

I bump into others as their gaze is up.
Their gaze is blank.
We are lost,
lost in the smoke,
lost in astonishment,
lost with the taste of terror stuck on the roof of our mouths.

Now cell phone service is blocked due to the mass rush of calls
and texts.
There is no way to contact the students who are lost to us,
to call our families who are worried for us.
Everything becomes simply lost in the smoke.

Slowly but sturdily,
all the students join hands.
With No direction—
No facilitation—
Intuitively, we are all join hands.

A prayer starts and all heads go Down.
All eyes go Down.
All worries go Down.
We say the prayer together and all tears fall to the ground.
Sweating hands grab tight and as the heat of the flames beat down
on us.
But we all hold tight.
Deep into the night,  
the crowd separates and the flames go down.  
Fire trucks start to leave,  
and dorm students scramble to find a new home.

Now these glances Up reveal that  
Our steeple was taken,  
Our floors were destroyed,  
Our offices were burned.

But Our Lady Still Stands.  
Our Lady Still Stands.

No one was hurt,  
and no one was lost.  
and Our Lady of the Lake University still stands.

— Tedi Butolph