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The smoke rolls in and turns the ocean floor orange. Everyone is drunk or high on the energy of the day. My little gang of holiday 'orphans' have been swallowing cocktails like water all day. We watch the sand change colour beneath our feet.

The peculiar cast of light reminds us all that trees and houses are burning to the North-west, only an hour away. Close enough to close off the sky with gun-metal grey, but far enough away for us to feel detached. We float.

I call my mother again, from the beach on my mobile. She and my sister are cooped up in the house, fires burning in all directions. They want to leave, just to leave everything and get out. But my father assures them, that it is best to stay at the house and to leave only when they are really under threat. I am swimming and drinking martinis. The notion of threat is thick in the air and with it the smell of change. They are coming to pieces. Each time I call, they are more unstable and less resolute as to what they should do. I tell them to leave. They wait for my father to phone again, when there is a breather between one threatened house and another. The breaths get further apart. The fire moves much faster than the trucks. They wait for him to call.

Our near neighbour Dicko has lost his house and all his semi-trailers. Home and business charred to nothing by rolling walls of flame in a few minutes. His family is okay, but they are left with nothing.

If the hell remains at a safe distance, I could just keep swimming without it really penetrating my skin. If I watch the television I will burst into tears for a while. I am cut up

but not sure for whom or for what. Everything feels like a story. On the other side of the world the destruction is unyielding, while the closest thing I feel here, is the flames.

Even still, I am floating in cool water, while my mother and sister are crying and running in small circles. The distance down the phone line seems enormous. If I had been out there when the fires approached I guess I would be inside it emotionally as well as physically. But from here, it still feels like a fiction and anyway, I am too drunk to drive.

I phone again, after dinner. In that short interval of time, Eddy's orchard had burnt. He was moving one of his tractors to try and save it as the fruit burned on the trees. I can almost smell the sweet burning jam mixed with ashes. The fire-fighters worked to save the house and the sheds. Dad found the overturned tractor—the wheels still engaged, the engine running, up against a eucalypt. Dad also found Eddy, beside the tractor, not breathing. He must have had a heart attack as he watched 70 years of his life burn around him. I hear my father crying, repeated through my sister's tears. Fiction is erased and I feel the weight of it in my body.

The fires keep burning for three days. The wind keeps changing, searing the land on all sides of my parent's house, forming a firebreak.

The smoke slowly clears from the air. And the waves keep crashing in.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by John Stanley.*