

Atmospheric River

by Evelyn Lau

After, you would join others at the beach,
greedy for a glimpse of wreckage -
barge slammed against seawall, containers
like a copper fort bricked against sky.
Scrawl of flip-flops, kelp lacing the bike path.
A fishing vessel propped against rocks, deck
at right angles to the shoreline, split open.

On TV, Merritt slept under a skim
of coffee-brown floodwater -
a city submerged, tops of trees and roofs
tickling the rippled surface. A month of rain
in two days, and farms in Abbotsford
morphed into private islands
on a vast inland lake, livestock paddling
through cranberry bogs. Zigzagged cars
strewn across the Coquihalla, a medley
of tree trunks and metal, mummified in mud.

During the storm you were on the bridge,
forcing your body against the wind like a mountaineer.
Savage sounds of banners snapping,
signs and awnings cracking, safety glass imploding.
Decades ago, you stood on this summit shredding
sheet after sheet of paper into the night ocean,
groping for courage to follow
their ghostly descent. Now you cling to life
like any stubborn old thing, clawing your way across -
headlights surging on one side,
swallowing sea on the other. The atmospheric river
breaching the banks of sky, swamping the horizon.