

My feet brought me here, though I have no recollection of the walk. And I don't know why they would do such a thing considering the fact I have tried as hard as humanly possible not to think about it. The ashes are still blowing. The debris, not yet cleared. And if I think too hard, I can still feel the heat on my face as I scream in the darkness.

Though the whole house is gone, a beam here and a beam there help me visualize how things used to be. The steps are charred black, but they still hold my weight, barely. The carpet is gone, revealing the concrete that was hidden beneath it. I look at the small chunks of wall that remain either standing or fallen. Those walls used to hold family portraits and art work. Those floors used to hold eight sleeping girls giggling over something stupid, or some crazy thing that Michael had attempted. This house used to hold a family.

Suddenly, I am in my living room the evening before it began. My father is sitting on the couch playing with Michael, who was only three. I throw my backpack to the side and smile as momma welcomes me home. I answer their questions about my day

Fast forward and I'm sitting at the table in the kitchen, putting butter on a homemade biscuit. Michael rambles on all about his day at daycare while the rest of us sit patiently listening. His eyes are bright and shining, expecting to tell of his adventures for eternity. Dad shares a knowing, loving look with momma as she passes him the potatoes. He winks at me as Michael pauses and takes a sip of his apple juice.

Next, I stand where the sink once was, washing the dishes and dancing along to music coming from the TV. I dry my hands on my jeans and go to my bedroom to do my homework. I stumble and look down half expecting to see one of Michael's toys, but instead see a large lump of melted and smeared colors. My eyes become blurry, and I don't wipe my cheeks as I cry.

I can see where my bed used to be. The metal frame is still there. To my left I see the remains of my mirror. It isn't hard to picture it whole, to picture my entire house whole and complete with a family inside, again.

I sit on the ground, not caring to sweep away the ashes that could be ruining my dress. I don't care. A shaky breath escapes my mouth, and I feel overwhelmed when I try to imagine my old room. So I don't try to.

I stare at the ground for a while, unable to look up. It only happened a week ago. And for a week, I was able to keep busy, keep moving, and keep away from the terrible sorrow that would encase me if I stopped. I tried anything to get out of the house: stay with friends, walk around town for endless hours, or just sit on a bench and not think at all. Those were the rare times when I had felt completely numb to the pain, shock, and confusion that were patiently waiting for me to take down my walls.

The wind picks up, sending ashes flying all around me. Some sticks to my hair, others to my skin. Some to the black dress I wore to the funeral. A piece of paper slides across the floor, away from me, and I reach out to grab it.

A silent, shaking cry rushes through me as I hold the picture of my dead family in my hands. Anger flares in my chest, making me want to scream. But I do not scream. I just cry. I shake and I rock back and forth and I try to forget everything I ever loved about this place.

Through tears, I fold the picture, tucking it into my coat pocket, and stand. Michael's room was smaller than mine, and closer to the fire, but it was less damaged. His batman blanket is still intact and crumpled up on the floor. I kick it away. His toy box is half melted, but on the top I can see his Spiderman action figure. I pick it up, holding it close to my chest. He was too young to die. He was too young to burn to death. Why couldn't it have been me?

I spin around, trying to regain control over my emotions. Again, I find myself in his room, but his walls aren't black, they are blue and he sits on his floor playing with his Lego's. Suddenly, the Hulk crashes through his city made of the colorful plastic blocks, scattering the pieces everywhere.

Momma comes in to tuck him into bed. He whines a little before obeying and climbing into his bed. Their conversation is still as clear as it was that night.

*"Mommy! Do the thing!" Michael cries.*

*"What thing?" momma asks playfully.*

*"You know, the thing where you say the words and tap my nose," he replies testily. He doesn't understand she is teasing.*

*Momma kneels by his bed with her index finger in the air before beginning. "You're as snug as a bug in a rug; I love you very much, and will see you in the morning."*

*Michael lets out a happy giggle and she kisses his forehead. "Goodnight, silly goose."*

I am back in the living room now, staring at the remaining pieces of leather from the couch. I touch a piece, remembering the way dad used to give my tight hugs around my neck, and the way he used to cook us pancakes on Saturday mornings. His coffee cup lies on its side on the ground. I grab it and throw it back to the ground, watching it shatter into a million little pieces.

Momma's room is on the other side of the living room. Before I can lose it again, I cross the floor and imagine where the doorway would be. I see the bent pieces of the bed, remaining fragments of wood from her wardrobe. She didn't deserve to die. None of them did. But why are they dead?

Why did that wall cave on top of them?

Why had I been the one to survive?

Why had the fire even started?

And then my mind is full of 'whys.' Why, why, why, why, why? I pick up a piece of black wood and turn the chunk over and over in my hands, making my skin a black color. But I don't mind.

I use the wood to hit the wall. But it doesn't budge, only breaks the stick. With frustrated cry, I kick the wall, creating a hole. So I kick again, and again, and again, until my foot starts to hurt. Then I punch the wall instead. The first punch hurts at first, but I do it again and again until I am aware that my knuckles are bleeding.

I grab a brick and throw it as hard as I can. It hits a window, and the glass breaks. But not enough. With a scream, I throw another brick, then a piece of wood, and then use my hands until there is no more glass. My hands bleed but there is no pain.

I let out the breath I was holding in, finally allowing all of my bottled up emotion out. I fall to my knees, sobbing, crushed by the weight of trying to pretend like I'm ok.

But I am not. I am not okay. I am like the cup. I am shattered. I am broken. I cannot be put back together again because of how finely I have been ruined. Because I feel as if three pieces of my heart have disappeared.

The sun had gone down by the time I stand up. My head spins, but I force myself to look at my house one last time before walking out the door. Once I am back on the sidewalk, I reach into my coat pocket and pull out the picture.

I may have grown up here, but this is not my home any more. There is no need to have to continuously be reminded of my loss. And while there is no way I can forget it, I don't want to see it, and I don't want to have to force myself to look away.

I go across the street to my neighbor's house. She is sitting on her porch knitting. She looks concerned with my hands, so I stick them behind my back. I ask her for a lighter. She goes inside to bring me one, and before she can sit down again, I tell her to call the fire department.

I walk away then, and make my way back into a piece of burnt property. It's time to say goodbye. I use my feet to mop up a pile of paper before adding some wood. I light the paper, and leave the house.

In the distance, I can hear the sirens coming, but that's okay. I thank my neighbor for the lighter, pull my jacket closer around my neck, and then start walking back to wherever my new home is.

I turn around before making my way around the corner, staring back at the flames that were growing, though there wasn't much to burn. The sirens are getting closer, but it is still okay. Something lands on my nose and I look up at the sky to see the first snow of the winter start to fall. Near the flames, the lighting contorts the white color to look like ashes between the pale moonlight and red, burning fire.