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After the House Fire

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The day I returned home,
 the house,
 the structure,
 was but a pile of rubble,
 an amnesiac to its own past.

When I used to ride my bike down these streets,
 the buildings longed to meet the sky,
 r e a c h i n g
 for a rendezvous that they could only achieve
 once they and their inhabitants collapsed into dust.

The memories my family and I had once shared
 were now reduced
 to the ash
 of betrayed trust
 and grief-induced madness.

I sifted through the ruins,
 the smoky, sadistically overzealous smell
 of scorched safe havens
 and the hint of incinerated inhibitions
 overwhelming my consciousness.

In the broken glass from the living room window,
 my sister's reflection stared back up at me.
 "If you keep talking to me like this, I'm done."
 My stomach clenched, whispered sorries
 lingering in the smoke, choking the life out of the air.

Every time I had to cover my ears to drown out the screams,
 she had been there to chase the monsters away.
 I had grasped her hand then,
 but that last time, I thought she was the enemy.
 I stopped listening. Her visits stopped. Her calls stopped.

Looking down at my ashen hands,
 I couldn't help but wonder:
 Did I light the match?

When I was about 5 years old, I started to notice that I was different from the other little girls in my class. There was no way for my kindergarten brain to understand if the differences were positive or negative, but I just knew that I would attract what seemed like a million more stares and crinkled eyebrows than my peers. Those crinkled eyebrows and intense 'why is that chunky girl wearing a swimsuit to the pool? Doesn't she have any respect for our eyesight?' kinds of cruel comments have followed me throughout my teenage years and leaked into my now 24-year-old daily routine. Little boys never wanting to admit they would ever have a crush on me in the third grade has morphed into grown men pretending they don't know me until it's midnight and they are alone in bed seeking easy company. And crying to my mom in a JCPenny dressing room trying on first communion dresses has transferred into crying to my mom in a Forever21 dressing room trying on 21st birthday dresses. Some things never change but the realization that the problem was never the girl counting calories in middle school, but rather the surrounding audience that cheered on her commitment to do so.

"You're not big! You're beautiful" comments have always echoed in and out of my eardrums whenever I reflect on my upbringing to anybody who wants to listen. But those comments are exactly the problem. Why do those two adjectives have to be so exclusive? Why couldn't I be big AND beautiful? Twelve-year-old me would wonder to myself shamefully while looking at the tear-stained pillow pet buried deep in my grasp. I remember audibly gasping whenever a new development sprung to mind. "Doctor Sarah said that all I needed to do was grow up a few more years and let my chub stretch out alongside my height and I will be normal! I'll finally be pretty." I can picture middle school me smiling, almost gawking at the thought. Oh, to be pretty and grown up, and totally NOT a monster to my classmates anymore. Little did I know that Doctor Sarah would give up her pediatrics license and go on to be a full-time Uber driver... or at least she might as well have with the way she was so incredibly wrong. Well, to be fair to her, she was right that my body just needed time. Time to grow, time to change, and time to develop multiple eating disorders by the time I was seventeen. And the even more heartbreaking development was that my classmates and their opinions were the least of my worries. The scary, mean bullies at school were comparable to Mother Theresa when you took into account that the real mean, scary bullies stemmed right from my family tree.

I can still remember the first time my family fully let me down. Developing faster than my classmates and appearing full-figured before I even knew what full-figured was, my family collectively decided that it was time for some changes in little Mia's life since Mia wasn't so little anymore. You might say that a reasonable reaction to a child naturally growing is to offer support and just let a kid be a kid, but my family would say that the kid in question needs to be enrolled in a Weight Watchers program immediately.