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2nd Place, Elementary Division

2020 CFUW Writing Contest

### **The Fire Within**

*“When did it all go wrong?”* I thought as I watched our red brick house burn, the fire licking the window frames and doors, flames reaching to the roof, scorching fingers foraging for food. Our neighbours watched from the streets, eyes wide and fingers pointing. Some were crying. Firefighters, police, and paramedics swarmed the house, sirens ringing. The heavy weight of guilt sat in my stomach.

Someone later told me it first “went wrong” about seven years before the house fire. When I was four years old.

I remember. We were driving home from my Aunt Nina’s when it happened. I was crying and stomping my feet in the back seat of our truck as my parents ignored me. Unbuckling the seatbelt, I stood on my booster seat and punched the back of Mom's seat. It was a full-blown tantrum. I can’t even remember why I was angry.

*“Amara Leslie Abbott, sit down right now or I’ll crawl back there and seat you myself!”* my mother yelled. Dad glared at me through the rear-view mirror.

“No!” I screamed, feeling heat course through my blood, spreading to my fingertips and suddenly out onto the black leather seats of the car. *The fire was coming out of my hands.*

Dad looked back and his eyes widened, then he pulled the car to the side. “*Out of the car!*” he screamed. They jumped out and Mom flung open my door and pulled me out. Dad pulled us away across the ditch where we watched our car burn. Mom looked at me, tears rolling down her cheeks.

As years passed, we rarely mentioned that incident. The time a gas leak or something engulfed the old Ford Escape. I believed this story, despite the signs.

Until July 11, 2010, my 11th birthday party. The house was so alive that day! Bright coloured streamers covered the walls. All my friends and family were there, chatting and laughing at the excitement of the kids running around them. A chorus of celebration. Ke\$ha played from my new CD player, a gift from my grandmother.

I was simply over the moon, loving every second of it, including the thought of the pile of presents and the delicious chocolate cake that was waiting on the dining room table ready for me to enjoy – after I blew out the candles.

When that time came, my friends watched eagerly as I sat in front of the cake and drew in a deep breath and blew the candles in one try. I remember wishing for a pony when I felt a heat within me welling up. It wasn't the same heat I felt that day in the back of the Ford Escape. It was comforting, like settling into a warm bath.

It traveled through my arms and to my fingers. I tried but couldn't stop it. Flames engulfed my hands. Everyone around me gasped and backed away from me, hands clasped over their mouths. The children were screaming, crying. The parents were rushing to find something to stop the fire.

Everyone around me ran out of the house, ignoring me completely, too scared to try and save me. I didn't notice them, too fascinated by the fire coming from my hands.

It didn't hurt. It tickled.

"It was you!" I looked up and saw Mom staring at me. "The truck. Your father was right!" she said, covering her mouth.

"I didn't mean to! Mommy, please help me, I don't know what's going on, I swear!" I screamed as the flames leaped from my hands, reaching for her.

Backing away she turned and ran.

The dining room was engulfed in flames that began reaching out into the hallway. I was alone and afraid, gasping for air as smoke filled my lungs. Then I blacked out.

I woke up in the back of a van, lying on an uncomfortable concrete cot. I had strange gloves on my hands. I saw a window, which I looked out of. I saw ambulances, the firefighters, my flaming home.

They took me to a hospital for people like me. Outside, the world thinks I'm dead in a house fire set off by candles in a room full of flammable decorations. Only a select few people know the truth, they told me. *I started the fire.*