

“Floating”

Herbs and petals boil over cast iron, sizzling against the flames enough to snap me back into place. Leaving soaked petals to seep into the rug, I rush in for the pot and catch a hot splash of brew on my skin. The smell of flowers usually doesn't leave the room for days, so I don't mind all that much. Really, anything beats the smell of burning. As usual, I just throw the rest of the stems into the pot and set whatever type of intention I have left. As I ponder it still, I don't try to remember fixate on that day, but I always remember how much I've forgotten since then. It brings me to a crowded space so full of thoughts that it seems empty.

The fragments of what I do remember of recall from that day are crystal clear and slow in pace. All I wanted was to be floating, outside of myself and unafraid. I worked with fire daily then, eager to see her spark and light. ~~B~~ but what bellowed from within those four walls that day was louder than I could recognize. I just wanted to float above the lioness of flames and show her the destruction in her wake, but she would not be brought down so easily. In the thick of the smoke, I never fully closed my eyes. I wanted to see her at her mightiest as much as I wanted to salute the history of us that would fall to her flames. I didn't give myself much time for sadness, but I also don't remember how my body moved so fluidly as I lived through envisioned alternate scenarios in my head. Through a smashed bedroom window, I managed to spot a neighbour across the treeline and signal for help. The man didn't hesitate to throw his steaming mug of coffee to the ground and run over with a coiled hose roped over his shoulder. I must have never really considered the magic of having retired firefighters a stone's skip away.

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Commented [ae1]: Consider using industry standard indenting practices moving forward; using the ruler to manually start new paragraphs is a great option.

Commented [ae2]: I suggest making this line less ambiguous by giving more insight into what the smell of burning is. This may help readers pick up on and follow along with the speaker's internal struggles and flashbacks of the house fire earlier on.

Commented [ae3]: Perhaps use a different word or phrase in place of "remember" to avoid repetition.

Commented [ae4]: Like before, adding in small details about the circumstances of the fire will allow more clarity about why the speaker is presently overwhelmed and struggling to remember this stressful situation.

Commented [ae5]: Strong personification here, you can really immerse yourself into the situation and feel the wrath of a beast-like creature in front of you.

Commented [ae6]: This passage can be revised to use more concise wording, while still conveying the same idea.

It was then when the world slowed down. My best friend tossed me outside the window against my will and turned back toward the clouded dark hallway. I held on to the image of his bright green eyes, and I imagined him safe. I imagined him floating through the flames, collecting ~~what couldn't be lost~~. Just then, our spaniel came flying out of the same window I did ~~, into the flower bushes~~. He ~~rustled out of the flower bushes and~~ didn't hesitate to wag his always ~~happy~~ tail, unbothered by the events unfolding inside. I held onto his collar as tight as I could, ~~with the while holding the~~ phone ~~held~~ to my ear. My face twisted when the dispatcher first asked me if we had any ~~"swords"~~ in the place. ~~Well, yeah, Strangely~~, we did, but I promised not to use them.

Commented [ae7]: What is being referred to here? Elaborating will help us envision the items that the speaker deems most important for them to save amidst the chaos.

"They're just decoration," I laughed, and my lungs wheezed, "but the whole place is about to collapse ~~anyways~~ so it won't matter."

Commented [ae8]: This line of dialogue gives a good look into this character and how they try to make light of difficult situations. Since the speaker has such an interesting persona, I encourage taking the time to flesh out her thoughts and feelings even more, rather than focusing solely on retelling what physically happened that day. By giving more insight into her current state of mind, readers will be able to better empathize with the character's pain and growth throughout the story.

"They're around the corner ma'am," the woman on the phone assured me.

With the confirmation I needed, I let myself fade. Then, I was floating, just like I wanted. I don't remember how they got out, but I felt that they did ~~;~~ even when I was somewhere else. Wherever I was, it was familiar. It ~~felt was~~ warm and bright. I felt trees slapping their leaves across my face as I ran through the forest with my sister, headed for adventure. Down by the lake we hid away, building fortresses of loose wood and twigs to rest ~~in~~ after exploring the dense island's entirety twice over. Marshmallows gushed in my mind with such clarity that I could almost taste the burnt, sweet edges. I also saw our homemade green dresses, the ones we ~~always~~ dreamed of, that flowed like faeries twirling through the breeze. It was peaceful. ~~When I returned to my present body~~, I realized how freeing it is to be floating ~~;~~ ~~By~~ seeing what you have been and could still be ~~;~~ ~~It~~ ~~it~~ makes you not want to give up.

Commented [ae9]: Revise to avoid repetition of the word "felt" in the same sentence.

Commented [ae10]: For tense clarity.

~~Now, w~~With my eyes still closed, I am startled by a soft hand touching my shoulder.

“Hey, you alright?”

He is fixated on me, his bright eyes somehow more beautiful than they exist in my mind.

I don’t say anything back as I pick up the rest of the petals from the ground, but he is used to that. When I stand to face him, I just smile and extend my arms. Words cannot express the relief I feel when I hug him. I am flooded with memories as I let myself remember that day, but this time I feel no fear. I remember how happy I am to walk out the front door to a shining sun every morning. I remember sweet plant markets, my favourite cartoons, s’mores with my sister, dog runs in the woods, and my family.

Turning back to the altar, I don’t feel the need to float. I am finally grounded enough to ~~–I~~ spark a match and toss it onto the twigs.

“Conjure and burn back the path” I proclaim as I watch the new flames spark and glow.

Commented [ae11]: I suggest adding further dialogue between the speaker and this secondary character here to further highlight their past relationship and show how they interact with each other.

Commented [ae12]: Consider using a different word or phrase here to convey the feeling of being reminded of the things that make the speaker “happy” - elaborate and let us into her thoughts.

Commented [ae13]: I like that we return to the present here to finish the speaker's spell. Still, including more about the spell in the first half of the piece will make it more clear why she is boiling flowers and taking these steps in the first place. It's really nice imagery to contrast the chaotic fire with, so I feel including more description about this spiritual practice can help show the protagonist's growth and peace after the catastrophic event.

Commented [ae14]: Moving forward, it will be beneficial to consider whether this piece leans toward fiction or creative non-fiction, especially with the inclusion of magic and spells. If it's important to show that the speaker has actually gone through these events and uses their belief in practical magic to heal, then including a line or two expressing their spiritual background may help the clarity of the piece, especially for people who are unaware of these certain beliefs in real-world, non-fictitious scenarios.

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