

Trapped by the Heat

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Our feet make soft thumps as they carry us down the forest path. My brother runs faster and farther ahead of me, giggling and bounding away as I chase him through the trees. Suddenly, I stop. In addition to Liam's unrelenting giggles, and the soft whispers of a slight spring breeze, a low hiss is coming from deeper in the woods. I peer through the wide redwood trunks. Far off, but just as threatening, a color too red to be natural blazes at the base of a tree. A fire has started in a grove of trees farther down our woods path.

I jump as a sharp *pop!* shakes through the woods. The volume of the hissing only increases, and although it is too far to tell, I fear the flames are creeping closer.

"Sabrina!" My brother yells through the crackling of the fire. I run toward him and grab his hand. "Where do we go?"

"Listen. Mom and Dad will be back from work soon," I pause for a breath, "We should go back to our house and wait for them there. You need to keep close to me, okay?" He nods.

Keeping my brother's hand in tow, I jog up the woods path the same way I came a few minutes before. Except now, the subtle tawny color that dotted the forest is replaced by a dangerous orange. The fire spreads mercilessly, vicious hissing growing closer and more infuriating to my ears.

Alongside my innocent, trusting brother, my feet pound the forest floor. I look down at him and smile at his black hair bouncing with seriousness. Liam's life already contains a drastically changing climate and a sister who won't shut up about it; he shouldn't have to experience this fire.

A sharp crackling burns through my ears and I whip my head around. Another tree — even closer — is overtaken by the wildfire. Furious to make it home, I pump my legs faster. My loose, dark hair whips around, and that cruel smell of smoke thrusts itself into my face. With the ferocious sounds of the fire constantly buzzing in my ears, I run away from the threat of death chasing me down my once-beautiful forest path. I drag my brother along because I am fervently hoping for some sign that our house is near, and I cannot let my future melt away in front of me.

I almost laugh because of the raw despair. I am currently running from a wildfire, blindly searching for the safety of my home. I am completely responsible for my little brother and am only *telling* myself our parents are safe. I don't even know if I'll make it to tomorrow, and if I do, there's a scientific guarantee that I will see even more drastic effects of climate change. The lives of my entire generation are at risk, and we continue to do the same things that are causing this crisis.

"No," Liam says softly, in a way that tells me what he's seen before I see it myself. The hissing's intensity grows as orange licks the side of our house. I'm witnessing my

only home being taken away by a ball of rage and ignorance and inactivity to stop this global crisis. Just as I simply watched the trees of my own forest burn to ash, I stand as my house sinks lower and lower from the stress of the flames. Smoke grows and hides the calming blue from my sight, as if to show that its end is near. Tears begin to gather at the bottoms of my eyes, and before they stream down I wipe them away with a shaking hand.

I grab Liam and pull him backward. The fire has built a wall between us and our driveway, and there's no sign of safety to be found. Through bursts of flame, I squint to see baby blue panels be devoured by a red-colored beast. The home that I've lived in my entire life is slowly falling, and there's nothing I can do. Desperate to quell more tears from emerging, I turn away.

"Look!" Liam shouts. We stop running. Just ahead, a flaming tree has fallen onto the ground, enlivening the fire and sending up a wall of flames. I hold Liam's shoulder and scan our surroundings. For most of the path, the heart of the fire had been far to our left and some distance away. The fallen tree allowed flames to spread closer to our path.

"Run, Liam!" Smoke fills my lungs, and I strain to yell through my hoarse voice. I push my little brother ahead of me and he stumbles to escape the fire's heat. The fire is louder, louder, and the threat of death makes itself known by that constant hissing of the flames.

Just like my only home, I feel my hopes and dreams slipping away from me. Tokyo, Paris, Lima, Cairo, all sinking mercilessly into the forest soil. My carefully thought-out plans can be taken away from me just like my house was.

The fire's beast climbs farther up the tree trunks, but it doesn't stop. Flames are now licking the ground, inching closer and closer. My feet clumsily step on Liam's heels, so I lay my hand on his back and forcefully push him on. He's crying, screaming my name, but I force him farther.

The hissing gets closer, closer, and I think I can almost see the road in the distance. My legs ache from the sprint, so I just push my brother further. This pushing is all I can do. Either I die now, or I die trying. So I choose to fight while I can.