

The Fire

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I live on Wishard Street in Simi Valley, California. My best friend, Diane, lives on Gibson Street which is down the street and around the corner. My mother says we're a hop, skip and a jump from downtown Los Angeles, but we don't ever go there since she can't drive. Our house backs right up to the Simi Hills and I can see the Santa Susana's from my front yard. Our side of the street doesn't have a back fence, just rocks going up a steep hill that I'm not allowed to climb. It's always sunny here and the sky is always a pale shade of blue. Sometimes the Santa Ana winds pour over the hills into my back yard. They come from the desert and they make my skin feel hot like a heater's blowing on it. The coastal winds pour over the Simi Hills on the other side. They feel cool and smell like seaweed. When the gulls are squawking overhead, and the coastal winds are blowing on my face, I can close my eyes and make my backyard into the beach.

The fire started in a place called Newhall. It made our blue sky turn the color of dirt and it smelled like a TV dinner that was left in the oven too long. My mother hasn't been out of the house in days, but she peeks through the drapes every now and then and says, "Oh my God" in a slow whispery voice. The siren sounds keep getting closer and closer. After the first day of the fires, my mother told me I couldn't play outside anymore. Now, she makes me sit next to her on the couch to watch the TV news while she sips white wine out of a tiny glass. The newscaster

says it's the worst fire this area has ever seen. The Santa Ana winds are fanning the flames and making sparks fly up that start new fires on new hills. When she falls asleep I change the channel back to *I Dream of Jeannie*.

Then Diane's mom calls to tell us that the Simi Valley Freeway is closed so she can't get home from work. My mother changes the TV back to the news and they say people are evacuating the area. My mother mumbles, "Oh my God, Oh my God, Oh my God," as she pulls out her address book and starts making phone calls. I can hear the desperation in her voice, but I still don't know whether to be worried or not. Surely the firemen will come get us if we really are *trapped* like my mother screams to the person on the other end of the phone.

"Run!" my mother yells as she grabs my hand and pulls me out the front door. When we get outside I can see the ashes falling from the sky in giant flakes, painting everything a chalky shade of gray. I wonder if this is what snow looks like. I tell her we should take a picture of it, but she pulls on my hand, charging down the street in her slippers. I blink hard like *I Dream of Jeannie* does and I take a picture with my eyes instead. I ask God to hold on to it so I can show it to my real daddy when I get to heaven. A car pulls up beside us and my mother pushes me inside.

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