

Last Summer

Choppers fly close to our roof. The walls chatter as the fans sway in the opposite direction against the harsh turbines. I can feel the thud of the blades chop at my core, a warzone is declared, yet I have nowhere to run. I'm imprisoned in my own home, chained to the confines of my living room. Though in my hands I have a list of baggage to take with me.

I go outside and look around. I then get this phone call of worry and anxiousness saying we have to leave. The plan to escape the looming inferno has finally come into play. Thoughts rush through my head and the anxiety spikes, worried of the thought that home may not be here for long.

Looking through my sunglasses in my street, I see the crescent where the top of the trees peak with a cloud above them. When I take my glasses off it's a big cloud...a big black cloud of smoke. I hold back tears, I never thought mine and my brother's life could potentially be at risk.

My brother has packed his car and is halfway down the backyard gathering the chickens into a shabby cardboard box. I run inside, bribing the dogs into the pet carrier, although they are reluctant. I put them in the car and start my engine while my brother runs towards me with the chickens, his panicked face makes me scared; I have never seen him like this and that is when I notice the aurora arising.

Coming out of our street, I drive behind a row of fire engines. I amp up my speed and start to notice every car, truck around me driving like myself, fear is present; we are scared. As we join the queue my phone rings, my Mother's number pops up on the screen. "Have you left?" she says, in a worried tone. "Yes" I reply. She sighs in relief. "Did you follow the list?" she says. "Oh fuck, the list!". I put my blinker on, the dirt hits my brother's car aggressively as I turn to the opposite side of the road. "I have to go back" I yell to him. "Are you crazy? You could die!" he says.

Winding my window up against the smoke, I drive past these familiar streets and houses fearing they may not be here tomorrow. The beautiful white cottage on the corner and the extravagant red robin hedge. The tall pine trees that set the scene for the rest of the street. I pull up at my front gate. The sky above is an overbearing orange and the fumes mixed with retardant makes me nauseas. I run inside and grab the dogs leads; they are the only thing that is worth getting on Mum's list. Glancing outside the window; the soot clouds swallow the sky. The inferno moves closer, this is the last time I will ever be standing in my faded kitchen full of food. I snap out of my trance and run back to the car; my brother waits impatiently in the driveway. "You really are stupid you know" My brother says. "Yeah, I know" I say with a half-smile on my face thankful that he followed me.

Driving out of the street, my brother drives behind me. The sky behind us lights up like a candle. The traffic jam near the fuel station goes back so far, we might not make it out. I ring Mum. "Where do we go?" I say, nervous. "Go to your aunties house, she isn't too far away" Mum says. "Okay" I sigh. I hang up. As I see a gap in the traffic, I take my chance, hitting the accelerator too hard my wheels spin out of control and go

flying to the opposite side of the road leaving tire marks and smoke behind. My brother gets the brunt of it as he follows me. I shut off the radio and focus on the road, I can't have another scene like that. I talk to my two dogs in their carrier repeating to them; "it's okay...it's okay...it's okay" trying to convince myself that it's okay too. On the freeway I look in the rear-view mirror, my brother is steadily behind me.

Getting out of the car at our aunties, I take a breath, my entire body tremors and feels like a puddle of sweat. I ignore it for now and greet my younger cousins running towards us. They help us bring the dogs inside and let the chickens roam around in the backyard. The dogs are nervous but excited to be around people although, they can tell something is not quite right.

I call Mum again, anxiously waiting for her to pick up while my aunty makes us something to eat "You need to keep your strength up" my aunt says. Mum picks up. "Where are you?" I demand as I let out a breath of relief. "We are heading over to aunties now; Dad wants to go past the house first" Mum declares. "I don't think that's a very good idea" I say, dumbfounded. "I know" unexpectedly the line gets cut. My nerves kick in wondering if they are okay. My cousins try and distract us for a while, but I cannot help having everything on the back of my mind.

Mum and Dad finally walk through the door. We all embrace and turn on the tv to watch the live news and that is when my phone goes off with text messages; *The fire is on your street, They sprayed retardant in your backyard, I can see your roof, The helicopter is over your house, Your backyards on fire.* I rock back and forth on the couch saying to myself. "My backyards on fire...my backyards on fire...my house is going to burn down". My thoughts get interrupted by Mum screaming. The huge eucalyptus tree in our front yard has burst into flames, sizzling branches fall off and start a fire in the front yard, the lawn goes up. The warzone was declared, I ran and now we have nothing left.

The rest of the night is a blur, everyone tries to avoid the topic of what tomorrow is going to look like for us. I have a shower to wash off the day, the water drip's down my forehead to mask my tears. My silent sobs make it hard to breathe. How are we going to get through this? Trying to get to sleep in my cousins spiderman themed bedroom is the hardest I toss back and forth wondering and waiting. Mums scream still rings in my ears and the unopen text messages loom for another day. I know I cannot run anymore; this is the worst night of my life.

The alarm goes off for 6am although, I am already dressed, uneasy to see what is waiting for me. We pack the dogs up into their carries. I avoid eating anything with the knowledge that I know I will get overwhelmed.

I drive alone following my Dad's car through the loops of the backstreets. The grass and trees are so dry and lifeless. We go past the fuel station; it is still standing and so are the tire marks I left on the road the day before. Driving past the familiar streets they are all still there. Hope looms deep within me, this does not seem so bad. I pull into our street and see the beautiful cottage on the corner's lawn charred like an overcooked steak, the familiar red robin hedge burnt to the ground; the pine trees needles steamed. I come

up to our red tiled driveway, my house still stands though, the front lawn singed, the elegant eucalyptus tree blistered and broken.

We get out of our cars and look at the damage that has been done. We have no words. walking down to the backyard, burnt branches hang on to the trees like baby sloths hang onto their mothers. Our photinias: gone, the orchids fruit turned into oozy black goo. Our stack of firewood still burning against the melted town fence. I look around and see my family, everything we have all worked so hard for is gone, all gone. Tears well up, I look for Mum to embrace in a hug. Slowly making our way up to the house, inside is how we left it; the Christmas tree by the window, dogs toys scattered around the place. I walk into the kitchen and once again gaze outside the window seeing the damage that has been done.