

ASHES

A TEN MINUTE MONOLOGUE

By Carolyn West

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CAST: one male or female

AT RISE: ***CHRIS stands on stage alone, tired and dejected.***

CHRIS

I went to the house today, or what used to be the house. There's no point in calling it a house. It certainly isn't that anymore. It's not a building or a structure. It barely counts as a ruin. It's a pile. That's what it is. A pile of charred building materials.

So I went to the pile today. Because the firefighter said we could. "It'll be cooled enough after three days." But it wasn't very cool. I didn't get burned or anything, but there was still heat coming from the ashes. And there was smoke. Not that you could see it, but you could smell it. I could taste it in my mouth and no matter how much I cough, I can't get it out of my lungs. It's in my hair and my clothes.

(Holds shirt collar up to nose and inhales.)

This is the smell of my house on fire.

I went because I thought something had to have survived, you know, like a sock or piece of a plate. And there were plenty of things like that. A soggy shirt, scorched silverware. I didn't want any of it. I wanted a memory of my life before my house burned down.

There was a porcelain vase, kind of small. I gave it to my mom for a Christmas present when I was 10. It was in what used to be our living room. Not a mark on it. Timbers had crashed around it and there wasn't a scratch. It wasn't even stained from the smoke. It was like someone had walked up five minutes before and placed it in the rubble, the way you place Easter eggs in the grass for kids to find.

I smashed it against the sidewalk. The bigger pieces I ground into the cement with my shoe. I was so mad at that vase. Furious! How dare it be perfect when everything else was ruined? It was like it was bragging to the world. "Look at me. I can survive anything." I had to prove it wrong.

It was stupid of me to break it, I know. But if I'd kept it, it would have been a reminder of when the house caught fire and we escaped with only our lives. I don't need that kind of memory. No one does. So I broke it. And then I went back to searching for whatever it was I was searching for.

(Attitude changes.)

I never really thought of my house as a member of my family. You don't abandon family members because your parents want to live closer to work, or taxes are too high in this area. It is sad when you move out of a house, but you can kind of comfort yourself with the idea someone else will soon move in. They'll hang their pictures on the walls and lay their rugs on the floor. They'll discover all the neat things about the house that you discovered years ago. You're sharing something special with a stranger.

I can't share my house with anyone anymore. No one else will know that if you stick to the right side of the stairs and skip every other step you can make it all the way down to the first floor without anyone hearing you. And no other person will ever discover that if you need a good hiding place, the second shelf from the bottom in the linen closet is big enough and sturdy enough to hold an 8-year-old quite comfortably. And if you put some towels in front of you, no one will ever find you. Of course, there are no stairs or linen closets left, so what's the point?

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