**Hot Flash**

Fannie H. Gray

I lie in our bed, on the left-hand side, as I have for 17 years. I hope the valerian or the half bottle of scotch will soon put me to sleep. My husband’s chest rises and falls simpatico with the snoring cat. Both are fat and happy. The mattress is uneven; my side a good inch or two above his. I am slight, barely perceptible underneath the bed coverings. My husband’s belly balloons, a blanketed summit.

Just as I am beginning to believe that I might nod off, a glimmer catches my eye. A rosy glow peeks from underneath the window shade. It is far too early yet for dawn; so, I tiptoe over to take a look. I can feel the radiant heat before I lift the shade. The backyard is afire. It is a sea of flame, undulating and ebbing ever closer. The smallest waves of crimson and orange, flicker across the lawn licking at wicker lawn furniture and potted plants before the blue flames engulf it all, an infernal tsunami rushing toward me. Entranced, I feel something akin to envy as I watch the flames take what they will. I have not felt such desire, such longing, in years. I glance briefly back at my husband and the cat, oblivious to the lusty blaze beckoning me.

Once, I was a barefoot vagabond lover. I took what I wanted but never more than I needed. That man in the bed wove his fingers through my hair, and his lies through my heartstrings. He wanted to hold me, not hold me down, he said. He wanted to put a diamond on my finger, not a ring through my nose, he promised. He wanted to put fine shoes upon my feet, not shackles around my ankles, he lied.

I watch my husband pull the blankets ever tighter; he is chilled without me in the bed. Lie next to him to keep him warm, lie underneath him to keep him happy, lie to myself to keep from going insane. I turn back to the blaze. My husband and his cat, that battleground of a bed, the very walls of the room disappear.

Ah, Desire, my old friend, I thought you had abandoned me forever but here you are, resplendent in the finery of flames! My heart threatens to break free from my chest. I hear my whispered name, hot, honeyed tongues at my earlobes. In the window, my image is haloed, my head ablaze. I look back, just once more, at the false prince, the man who promised me a kingdom and made me a servant. My shadow stands resolute as the fire illuminates the room. Enough, I will no longer keep my yearning at bay. The smallest ember deep within me, the one I fanned with freedom and frivolity, has sparked back. I put my palms to the window, press my weight upon it; my hands are seared. And then the glass shatters and I am seized. Such rapture…