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For Girls Made of Fire

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i burn.

i am a small hill of
twigs so carefully
carved into the
shape of flesh
and bone.

cut away the
unwanted parts
of me and you are
left with my
complicity and
eagerness to please.

so instead of
your knife, i
take your matches.

i would rather
light a fire
on my own skin
and turn my protest
to ashes
than be
sorted into
sweet and bitter
until i am nothing
but doll eyes
and nail polish.

i burn.
i am raging and
i scorch smirks
off of lips and

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watches off of wrists
and satin ties from
corn-starch collars.

i burn for the angry girls,
the broken girls,
the hopeless, scraped-up,
restless girls.

i burn for the tired girls,
the not-enough-or-too-much girls,
the sick-of-always-running-girls,
the i-am-smarter-than-you-girls,
the they-never-ever-listen girls.

i am a small hill
of twigs
they tried to turn to paper.
but i will not carry
their stories on my back.
i sear my own into
gravel and rock.

i burn
and my arms
are worth every sunrise
and my bloody knees
worth the stars and
i am light.

i burn
and i do not let them
decide for how far
or how long or
how tall my flames reach.

i burn
with red as my fury
and orange as my hope.
i burn
and we burn
until someone brings the water.

Author's Note

I wrote this poem two days after the election. For me, a Trump victory was a symbol of our failure as a country, not only to educate ourselves on policy, but also to educate ourselves on others' experiences. I remember the election-night headline on the CNN website, printed big in all caps, "IT'S TRUMP," and the sinking feeling that I had grown all too familiar with during the campaign season struck me once again. I do not think it was naive of me to expect better from our country; I had faith in the goodwill of the people and faith that we are selfless enough to sacrifice our own wants for others' needs. The election of Donald Trump was an anomaly, and it did not spring from the inherent kindness in every human heart. This man's campaign was fueled by misplaced anger, fear, ignorance, and intolerance, and it appealed to the people whose lives were also fueled by these. During the next four—possibly eight—years, it will be hard to keep hope at the forefront of our activism. Personally, I have struggled to have hope when fear seems so much more convenient; it's easier to yell and scream than to have a diplomatic discussion—just ask any toddler. However, hope is what separates us from the very people who frustrate us. We have hope for a better future, and we still see the world through a lens of what it could be. Our values of acceptance and compassion glow brighter than any kind of hate that could try to put them out. For me, the most important thing is to keep a Trump presidency from being normalized. This is not something that should have happened to a country whose goal is to keep moving forward. Undoubtedly, this was more than a couple steps back in history for us. It is especially disappointing because just one bigot in the White House can erase all that hard work. Still, I remain confident that we will be able to recover.

This poem was not so much inspired by Trump as it was by his supporters: the bullies who try to make others look small to make themselves look big. But I refuse to be small, I refuse to be silenced, and I refuse to let anybody else who stands for justice be silenced. Although I am hopeful, I am still angry, and my anger will not cease until it is given a reason.

Author Biography

Eleni Eftychiou is 16 years old and an 11th grader at Millikan High School in Long Beach, California. She was born and raised in Long Beach, where she also attended Cubberley K–8 School. She was editor of Cubberley's creative writing magazine, and she completed the South Basin Writing Project, a summer program at California State University, Long Beach. At Millikan, she is enrolled in the *QUEST* Pathway, an honors and college-prep program, and is Co-president of Millikan's Feminist Club. Her interests include photography, French, psychology, politics, and government. At home, she shares a room with her sister, Zoe, and occasionally a cat named Bessie.