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fire control safety

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fire control safety *Lucas Bryant*

I enjoy the smell of the burning leaves. Wood is also nice, but it's the leaves that really carry that musky smoke that tells you precisely what kind of tree they came from. Ashes all look the same, but when something is so sure of what it is even after its shape is gone, that's how you know you're having a delightful burn.

The leaves are just confident enough; they spend their last moments of existence telling you exactly what they are. Their smoke says it calmly yet with surety in silvery little voices, "I'm a hickory leaf!"

Rubber may be my least favorite. Rubber has no idea what it is, but is so unpleasantly insistent. It screams in thick black smoke, more trying to convince itself than the burner, like a drunkard that throws bottles and hollers, "I'm not an alcoholic!" Pity that rubber would be the first thing that burned for me.

That older boy in kindergarten, Jacob I think his name was, he broke my nose throwing one of those thick bouncy balls at me—probably just for attention. I tried to break his nose by throwing it back, but he caught it. And then the ball ignited itself just for me. It made a funny kind of fizzle as it melted, but the smell was awful. Jacob's smoke would be similar, I imagine, with the same obnoxious yells. "I am not an asshole!"

But then again, people are made up of a lot of things. The more complicated the thing that burns, the harder it is to tell what it will say. Leaves and rubber balls don't have much to talk about, so they're easy to understand.

When things mix and get old you'll be surprised by what they talk about when they burn. The old widow's house sat at the end of the street for years after she died before it decided to burn for me. The smoke of the wood mixed with the smoke of the carpet, the furniture, old pictures and documents, and even the mold. They all spun together. The smoke was light, but not warm, like a cold, weak hand on your cheek. The fumes were acrid, though, and stung my eyes, like they were pitifully begging, "Cry for me. My story is sad."

The play-fort in the back yard, pieced together as a child from bits of plastic and Dad's old twine, didn't choose to burn for me until I was already almost a man, but it held on to its childish attitude for all that time. It let out bitter, wispy smoke that made my face twist in that same way it does listening to a child's bratty outburst. "Go away!" it shouted. "Just leave me alone!" which I never understood. I knew what happened in that play-fort as a child, even if I didn't let myself remember until adulthood. I think it's tragic, really, that it would spend its last act of being refusing to tell me its story, even though I was a part of it.

Sometimes I wonder if fire has a way of telling the burning thing all the other smoke stories that have been told. The play-fort might have opened up if the fire had told it that Dad's smoke just made a sort of stubborn growl, or that Mom's let out a sigh of relief. Other times I wonder if the thing chooses the fire or the other way around. The thing has to choose to burn, I believe. You don't often hear of random blazes. They choose to burn because I'm the only one who can understand what they say with their smoke. It's easy to understand why they'd do it, too. The last wish of a thing tired of being is to tell its story.