

It is a few days later. The house is gone—burnt to the ground. Parts of the brick walls are still standing, but the roof and wooden-beamed ceilings are no more. Some of the burnt timbers can still be seen on the ground of the “former” living room, where they have crashed during the fire. We can see the sky. It is a cold, bleak, overcast day. Smoke still rises from the smoldering ruins. The furniture has been crushed and burnt. There is very little left worth saving.

Through the portals which once were the entrance from the dining room, and where one charred oak door hangs precariously from a hinge, come MORRIS and MADY. Their clothes are tattered and singed. They enter the room listlessly, MADY carries a Gucci shopping bag. MORRIS carries a broom and dustpan. They step over debris and twisted furniture.

MADY (*Looks around at the charred ruins*) Well, I tell you one thing—I ain’t cleanin’ up this mess.

MORRIS (*Morosely*) Well, you got to look on the bright side, Mady . . . At least we only got one floor to do now.

MADY Never seen a fire spread so fast in all my life. This house got “well done” quicker than a barbecued chicken.

MORRIS It was the wind. Came up outa nowhere blowin’ fire every which ways. (*Points off*) Looka that! First time I ever seen a swimming pool burn down.

MADY Now, how come the fire department never answered the alarm? And how come no neighbors bothered comin’ over here to help us? And how come when it started to rain, it rained everywhere but right here? I ain’t a gamblin’ woman, Morris, but somehow I got the feelin’ this family has “crapped out”!

MORRIS (*Stops; thinks*) You think it’s true, Mady?

MADY What’s that?

MORRIS That the Lord is testin’ Mr. Benjamin? That it’s God who’s burned us and froze us and starvin’ us just to see if Mr. Benjamin really loves Him the way he say he do?

MADY I hope so. Sure would be a waste if all this misery was nothin’ but misery. What time is it?

MORRIS What difference does it make around here? (*Looks at his watch*) Uh-oh. Get ready. It’s time for Mr. Benjamin to be gettin’ up now. Hold on.
(From the distance we hear a scream—a long, agonizing scream. It is so painful and mournful, it hardly sounds human. It dies slowly, MADY and MORRIS have been looking back in the direction of that horrible sound)

MADY He sounds a little better today.

MORRIS He ain’t gettin’ better. He just ain’t screamin’ as good.

ROSE (*Offstage*) Morris? Mady? Are you in the living room?

MORRIS It’s Mrs. Benjamin. (*Calls out*) Yes, ma’am, here we are. We’re outside in the house.

(ROSE and SARAH straggle in through the “portal”)

ROSE Oh, I’m so glad you’re both home. I forgot my key.

MORRIS (*Getting up to help her*) Careful, Mrs. Benjamin. Lotta that furniture is still hot.

ROSE Look at my beautiful house . . . my beautiful living room . . . And we just had the windows done.

(ROSE and SARAH climb over the rubble)

~~SARAH You’re tired. Mother. Why don’t you sit down and rest?~~

MORRIS Set yourself here, Mrs. Benjamin. I think it used to be the sofa, (*ROSE sits down*) Would you like a carrot to chew on, Mrs. Benjamin?

ROSE No thanks, Morris. I don’t want to spoil my dinner.

MADY You won’t, ‘cause that’s it.

ROSE (*Looks around sadly*) You know, Mady, when I was young I always wanted a big house with a little fireplace . . . Now I’ve got a big fireplace with a little house.

MORRIS If you need to borrow some money, Mrs. Benjamin, we’ll be glad to help you out.

ROSE You’re both so kind . . . Did I tell you that David is gone?

~~SARAH He drank a whole bottle of brandy and ran out blind drunk. Ben went out looking for him.~~

ROSE Don’t say anything to Mr. Benjamin. He’s got enough on his mind now. If only David were here. He keeps asking for David. “Where is my little David?” he says . . . over and over through his chapped lips.

MORRIS Listen. Someone’s comin’.

ROSE Oh, dear. And the place is a mess.

MORRIS It’s Mr. Ben.