

Adust

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Adust

Fiction • Faith Kressner

They call me in when she's out. I am asked to build houses from piles of sticks, trees from blackened husks, bedrooms from splintered heaps, and human lives from small mounds of ash.

He has burned many things in his life—letters, fevers, bridges, toast, leaves, and marshmallows, to name a few. He likes best the fire that transmutes the tangible (hair clippings, small insects, plucked feathers) into the beautiful anonymity of dust.

I tell the tales she scrawls in ashen waste, report the work of flames. Perhaps a splash of gasoline begins the story, or a slow leak of gas. Once, an untended steak—a shame, really. Ought to have asked for it medium rare. But I am no true author. I am merely her scribe, my mouth filled with burning words. I see the end and craft the beginning. I enter the theater at the end of Act V, inevitably discover the workings of tragedy, and proceed to construct the tales of Montagues and Capulets from sprawled bodies and happy daggers.

He has often wished that he might see a phoenix in a zoo. To burn so wholly that every constituent particle becomes flame, sacrificing the body to the living dust of creation—that is the perfect burn. He would be honored to burn such a creature.

(You are dust, and to dust you shall return.)

I see ash, fresh and restless across the charred skeleton of a once-blue house. There, a xylophone of scorched pine planks laid beneath the crooked outline

of the once-front door. I see a soot-stained baby grand inexplicably standing alert in a wasteland of collapsed tables and crumbling upholstery. Over there, a melted muffin pan, and there a single tattered green sock, spewed from the dented washing machine, its lid hanging loosely open like a once-gasping mouth. Above it all, clumps of soot fall like leaves to the fertile black earth.

In the end, he tires of playing at fire. He tires of the space between doing and being, the space between grasping fingers and flame. His feathers ache in the heat.

I see the restless field of ash beneath the once-blue house as clearly as I see her now, leaping to life in my hands. She is my author and her words burn as I swallow each and every one of them—crimson, crackle, smolder, lust, explode, hatred, stars, ignite, adoration, dust, flame, dust, flame, and dust again, eternal.

(I will perch myself on the baby grand afterward, and wait for the birds to rise from the skeleton trees, shaking burnt dreams from their wings.) •