

Fire Upon the Hills
By Alayna Chandler-Gutierrez

A long time ago is such a hard time frame to interpret these days. My current situation is less than ideal, I'd love to think a long time ago was years and years. Unfortunately, my story, my story is the product of the aftermath of crime, envy, lust, love, and finally war. I would also love to say that my understanding of how the world used to be was forged from stories from my great-grandmother, yet again that option does not exist in today's world. The story that most know is that the world used to live a semi-harmonious life. People were not separated by color, race, gender, or anything. Cities hustle and bustle, as rural areas had farmers that would supply food, politicians who would run the country, and people had jobs who were all synchronous. They had a good balance of everything until the red and blues came. The red and blues were always there and had been there for "a long time". Every day they got stronger and stronger, their dislike for each other worsened, and eventually, it exploded into a war. I am not sure exactly what the difference between the red and blues were exactly, but some say it was just how they thought. They were two different thoughts on the same subject that just could not find a common ground. Some say it was the races, and some say it had to do with science. Honestly, I do not know, but I am going to find out. The Red and Blues are what tore our world apart, they waged war, and they destroyed life as we knew it. Living in the aftermath of that is not picturesque, however it has opened minds and released a world that not everyone is made for. I am going to change that. I remember living in a small, cold tiny house on wheels, although it did not move often. It was home for a small time, my mother and father from what I can remember took care of me. I do not even remember their faces; I can remember my mother's warmth when we were sleeping and her hand on my cheek. Her soft hand caressed my cheek as I slept. She would put her hand on my head and stroke my long perfectly straight brown hair. She used to tell me stories

about my family, how we were all somehow tied together by blood, how many cousins I had, and how many aunts and uncles there were. It's hard for me to remember now, but I know there was a family at one time. It was my 10th birthday when the bombs came raining down like a storm of light. I barely remember anything prior to that. We were sitting at the table, having our meager meal of weird meat out of a can, and peas that my father had managed to scrape up in his run out today. Looking out the window, it had to be spring. The leaves were just starting to blossom on the trees, and the grass was so green and long. I am not sure of the exact location of where we were, but there was an old rock wall outside on both sides of the street that had a sign that said, Mystic Meadows. I liked to think of it as a beautiful meadow at one time, that had horses running in it, a stream flowing, and children playing on the edge while their fathers fished. There was a road that led through the rock wall sign, the road ended in a circle. I know there used to be other houses, real houses on this street. I imagine them as huge rock houses with beautiful green grass and giant trees. When the bombs came raining down, it was like a light show. I stared off into the light, getting lost in the beauty of it for a second before my mother yanked me up and threw me over her shoulder. She strapped me into the seat, then jumped into the passenger seat. By that time my father had started the beast of a house that impressively worked. The engine roared and as I sat scared. I couldn't help but keep staring at the beauty of the light raining down on us. It was washing the earth, cleansing it of everything we loved everything we believed in. As my father maneuvered around the streets, I caught a glimpse of his face. He looked determined and strong. My mother had one hand on the dash, seemingly holding herself upright and the other hand out in front of her directing my father as to where to go. They worked in sync, like they knew this would happen one day and they had been preparing this whole time. I watched the road ahead, and as things would come down in front of us, they would almost move again before we

got to them. There was so much destruction and damage, bomb after bomb surrounding us. Lights everywhere, debris everywhere, I saw other cars swerving and driving erratically. For a split second, I imagined we were all headed to the same location, a sanctuary for everyone. Of course, that was short-lived, as there was no such place anymore. Our house was moving as fast as it could, things were falling out of cabinets, knocking off the walls, and chaos was raining down. I took a deep breath and looked at my mother. I could hear her speaking cautiously to my father.

“We need to just go there, it's safe, this is the only way to protect her,” she said. My father's rebuttal was quick and to the point. “We will lose her forever, are you willing to do that?” he yelled. What were they talking about? Go where? Lose who?

“I love her more than life itself, they can help us, it's the only way to make sure we live to see another day in this God-forsaken life!” she was almost pleading with him. As time stood still for a split second, I could see my father glance at my mother and with her pleading eyes he nodded his head and that is all I remember of my 10th birthday.

I woke up in a makeshift infirmary, it was a cold cement room. My eyes fluttered open and the burning sensation from the lights above was almost unbearable. I slowly shifted my head to the right and saw a boy lying in the bed next to me. He looked to be injured, his leg was wrapped up and his head had a bandage on it. I could see his toes poking out the end of the leg wrap, they were purple. I kept thinking, he must be really cold, as was I. I shifted my gaze to the left and the remaining beds were empty. In fact, they had nothing on them, they were just broken old cots. My next thought landed on my parents, where were they? Were they injured? Surely if they were hurt, they would be here too. They must be ok; they must have just stepped out for a second. I felt a tingle jolt down my arms into the palms of my hands. It almost feels like when your hands

are so cold that when hot water finally hits them, it's like a thousand tiny electric shocks. I squeezed my hands together and the feeling subsided, just as a door creaked open at the end of the room. A tall skinny man entered, wearing an all-black suit. When he saw I was awake, he quickened his Gately walk towards me and looked at me with such curiosity.

He almost whispered, "Hello Malinda". Hearing my name brought on a lot of emotion I was unaware I had bottled up. My eyes started tearing up, and those icy prickles were surfacing on my palms again. My breathing must have noticeably increased because he quickly said, "It's ok, you're alright, your parents are ok, everything is going to be ok". The sense of relief was overwhelming, and the tears flooded down my face. He sat on the edge of the bed and wiped my tears. He was incapable of providing me with any answers to the questions I asked him. Where am I? I said, He dodged the question and asked me if I was feeling okay. After persistently stating my concern for my family, he told me it was his duty to take care of me now. This frightened me and only made me miss my family more. I had no recollection of how I had gotten to this strange place. Or where I was located, I feared my parents would never be able to find me. After what felt like hours of speaking to this nameless stranger. He insisted I'd call him Henry. Mr. Henry was a tall man however seemed to be very thin in his baggy clothes. He had to be no more than a buck twenty. He stood very proper and had a funny accent. There was something about Mr. Henry that made me feel a sense of warmth and relief. A little while after finally gathering myself a small but subtle buzzing sound came from Mr. Henry's watch. He seemed frantic. He stood up and explained how it was time for him to go now. I plead for him to stay. However, he took my hand and told me not to worry and he'd return soon.

The panic began to resurface, I felt my heart begin to race once more. The boy next to me opened his eyes and spoke in a language I was unable to distinguish. He was obviously

extremely distraught and unaware of his surroundings as I was before Mr. Henry came in. However, this time two individuals dressed in big suits with face coverings entered and wheeled him away. This was a frightening experience, why were they so kind to me but so impatient with the boy who was injured? The rest of that first night was a blur. I remember being hungry but the stress building within me kept me from eating. I believe I slept a total of forty-five minutes that night. In the morning all I could think about was when I'd get to see Mr. Henry again. I feared he'd never return, and I'd lose my only sense of hope in this place. But after constant worry about him not returning he did! I was so happy to see Mr. Henry in hopes of gathering more information than what was provided the previous day. This time Mr. Henry came with a notebook. It was a little, blue-covered book with a white ribbon used as a bookmark. This caught my attention. He sat at the end of my bed as he did once before. He asked if I had gotten any rest. I assured him I was incapable of this while being locked up in an unfamiliar place. Mr. Henry told me he understood and placed the empty notebook next to him on the bed. He slowly nudged it my way and told me he'd brought it for me. He explained how every time I felt uneasy writing down what I was feeling would be calming.

As a ten-year-old this was new to me. I was so young and incapable of expressing the feelings of emotion that fulfilled my body. I had never received a proper education. My father worked a lot and my mother feared school was unsafe and how she was capable of teaching me what I needed to know to survive. However, this notebook was a new way for me to feel connected with my past life. I took the skills my mother had taught me and went to work on practicing my writing. Weeks passed by and each day Mr. Henry returned, he came with new information and taught a lesson of something new each and every day. I wondered if this was what school for normal children was like. He taught me math, English, French, and science.

Science was my favorite. I found myself intrigued by living organisms. Flowers, trees, etc. I dreamed I'd see the beauty of the outside world again. The last thing I could remember was the bombs that fell from the sky on that terrible day. As I grew older and wiser Mr. Henry thought I was "ready". I feared what I was so-called "ready for"

One day upon Mr. Henry's arrival a note was delivered to gather my things and bring my blue notebook. On one hand, I was fearful of where I might have been going, however, on the other I had built this form of trust with Mr. Henry and was excited to see where he'd be taking me. I was brought to this strange room I had never seen before. It had a funny smell, It smelled muggy and left my skin feeling damp. They handed me a jacket and long pants with funny-looking boots. Was I going outside? I hadn't been outside in what seemed like forever. I began to be so excited. Mr. Henry soon arrived shortly after I got dressed. He asked if I was ready with a smile. This gave me closure and eased my nervousness. The door swung open, and the smell of fresh air filled my lungs. The feeling of fear and worry left my body. The grass was green, and the trees were full. It was a cold and gloomy day. I ran as far as my legs could take me. My nose was cold, and my lungs burned from the cool breeze. When I finally calmed down, I sat down under a tree. I took my notebook out and jotted down everything I saw. I wanted to remember this moment in case I didn't get to experience it again. After a good amount of time. Mr. Henry came over. He said, "How do you like it?" I stood with excitement, "I love it Mr. Henry, I missed the fresh air on my skin".

His tone shifted and I directed me to follow him. I gathered my things and as we made our way the rain had stopped. He led me to the top of a hill that looked over the wall surrounding the building we had come from. As I peered off into the distance, I couldn't believe my eyes. It was burnt to shreds. There were no signs of life and flames filled the sky. I was left in outer

shock. I cried out to Mr. Henry and asked why this had happened. He reminded me of the Red and Blues War and how they strived to gain power over one another. He explained that by them doing so he destroyed much of the human race and the night of my arrival was the day my parents decided to offer me a better chance of life and put me in this program that would keep me safe and protected. I finally received the answers I was looking for. I am now seventeen years old and am still in the program I was enrolled in on my tenth birthday. I still haven't seen my parents and am an advocate for the new members who were dropped off like I was.