

Chapter 1

Ren



Houses don't burn down. That's wrong.

"I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down," says the wolf in the story for little kids.

The truth is, houses burn *up*.

We saw the flames when we were sitting inside our car at the end of our road ... leaping orange tongues of fire bigger than a firework display and crowds of people and fire engines.

We thought it was exciting.

But then, as we drove nearer, we all whispered, "*That's our house!*"

When we climbed out of the car, there was a

big cheer from our neighbours because they had thought we were trapped inside. Everyone rushed over and hugged us. We didn't die or anything. I wouldn't be telling this if we'd died.

No one knows for certain how the fire began that Sunday evening. Mum and Dad said it might be faulty electrics, but we might never know for sure. We had spent the evening at Mum's friend Lisa's house: me, Mum, Dad and my brother Petie. There we were, tucked up on the sofa eating pizza and watching films, and all that time my bedroom at home must have been flickering with orange light. That's how I picture it: flickering as the fire took hold.

By the time we drove back home and found the crowds and fire engines, our house must have been burning for at least two hours, one of the firemen said. The downstairs study had exploded with a bang everyone had heard down the street. That's when the people next door called the fire brigade. The Eltons stood in their coats, holding each other. Water was being sprayed on their bungalow too but it was just our house that was blazing because there was a garage in between our two houses.

Mum and Dad were pushed back. We all were.

We stood there gaping.

A fireman called, "Sorry, no one can go past the tape. Stay back until the area has been made safe!"

More firemen held on to hoses and huge jets of water spurted out into the building. Blue lights flashed, making it almost like day.

"We're so lucky," Mum said, holding me close. "Thank God we weren't inside."

"So lucky!" Dad echoed, holding Petie. "We're all OK. That's all that matters."

There was a feeling of rushing and shouts but somehow I was closed off, frozen, watching. My eyes had fixed themselves on our burning home. Those blooms of sudden light as things inside caught fire and blazed. Those burning bits that flew and fizzled. *Swishing ... whishing ...* Black smoke billowing out from downstairs. *Hiss, spit, crack*, making me gasp.

Worst of all, our house was already broken. I was looking up into my own bedroom but chopped in half as if someone had sliced it with a giant knife. I could see my bed and chest of drawers, my stool and fallen-over lamp. There were my kite curtains blowing, my otter picture tipping all wonky on the wall.

I turned and pushed my face into Dad's chest to not see. But I had seen.

We watched the fire devour our house like a monster.

Houses don't burn down. They burn up and up into the sky with huge flames that eat everything until there's nothing left.