

Verses Upon the Burning of Our House

Anne Bradstreet was a Puritan wife and mother of eight who wrote poetry in her rare free time. Without her knowledge, her brother-in-law took some of her poems to a printer in England and published a collection of her work called, *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America...By a Gentlewoman in Those Parts*. The book was a critical and commercial success and motivated Bradstreet to continue writing for the rest of her life.

Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

In silent night when rest I took,
For sorrow near I did not look,
I wakened was with thund'ring noise
And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice.

5 That fearful sound of "Fire!" and "FIRE!"

Let no man know is my desire.
I, starting up, the light did spy,
And to my God my heart did cry
To straighten me in my distress
10 And not to leave me succorless.¹

Then, coming out, behold a space
The flame consume my dwelling place.
And when I could no longer look,
I blest His name that gave and took,
15 That laid my goods now in the dust.

Yea, so it was, and so 'twas just.
It was His own, it was not mine,
Far be it that I should repine,²
He might of all justly bereft
20 But yet sufficient for us left.

When by the ruins oft I past
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast
And here and there the places spy

1. **succorless** - without help or aid
2. **repine** - fret or complain
3. **adieu** - "goodbye" in French
4. **pelf** - property (often used to describe materialistic items gained through theft or piracy)

Where oft I sat and long did lie.

25 Here stood that trunk, and there that chest,
There lay that store I counted best.

My pleasant things in ashes lie
And them behold no more shall I.

Under thy roof no guest shall sit,
30 Nor at thy table eat a bit.

No pleasant talk shall 'ere be told
Nor things recounted done of old.

No candle e'er shall shine in thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice e'er heard shall be.

35 In silence ever shalt thou lie,
Adieu,³ adieu, all's vanity.

Then straight I 'gin my heart to chide,
And did thy wealth on earth abide?
Didst fix thy hope on mold'ring dust?
40 The arm of flesh diast make thy trust?

Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
That dunghill mists away may fly.
Thou hast a house on high erect
Framed by that mighty Architect,
45 With glory richly furnished,

Stands permanent though this be fled.
It's purchased and paid for too
By Him who hath enough to do.

A price so vast as is unknown,
Yet by His gift is made thine own;

There's wealth enough, I need no more,
Farewell, my pelf,⁴ farewell, my store.
The world no longer let me love,
My hope and treasure lies above.

- Anne Bradstreet, July 10, 1666

1. Interestingly, Anne Bradstreet's faith is reaffirmed by the destruction of her home, reminding us that unexpectedly good things can come out of bad situations. Give a hypothetical example from our modern world of something good that could come out of something bad, such as losing a job or breaking a limb.

2. Although it's natural to feel sorrow at the loss of all of your possessions, Bradstreet checks herself twice, stating in proper Puritan fashion that all of this is part of God's mysterious plan for her life. Look back over the poem and write the two line numbers that mark the beginning of the sections where she stops feeling sorry for herself and reminds herself about her faith in God.

3. Does everyone in the Bradstreet family escape the fire? How do you know this?

4. Who is the "Architect" mentioned in line 44? How do you know this?

5. What is this poem's rhyme scheme? How many syllables are in each line?

6. There are two lines where the -ed ending of a word must be pronounced as a distinct syllable in order to preserve the poem's meter. Name one of the two lines where this happens.

7. An inversion is a poetic device where the writer switches the usual order of words in a sentence or phrase to increase the dramatic impact of the line or to adhere to a rhyme scheme. Bradstreet uses this technique several times in her poem. For example, in the first line, she writes, "In silent night when rest I took," an inversion of "In silent night when I took rest." Find and write another line that includes an inversion.

8. If your home caught fire and you had less than a minute to save your personal items, what three things would you grab? (Assume all of your family members already safely made it outside.)

