Here Follow Some Verses upon the Burning of Our House, July 10, 1666

By Anne Bradstreet

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.
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 strengthen me in my distress
And not to leave me succorless.

IN OTHER WORDS
It was a quiet night. I slept peacefully, never expecting anything bad to happen. Then, suddenly I woke to the sound of loud noises and screams of “Fire!” It was a sound I hope no one has to hear. I sat up and saw the light of the fire. My heart cried out to God, asking him to give me strength and not to leave me without help or comfort.

Then, coming out, beheld a space
The flame consume my dwelling place.
And when I could no longer look,
I blest His name that gave and took.

Vocabulary
At first I was not sure what beheld meant. I think the speaker is watching her house burn down though, so beheld probably means “looked at” or “saw.”

1. Succorless (SUHK uhr LIHS) means “without aid or assistance; helpless.”
2. that gave and took is a reference to the Bible verse Job 1:21: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”
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;
He might of all justly bereft
But yet sufficient for us left.

Outside, I watched my house burn down. When I could not stand the sight any longer, I blessed God, who both gives and takes away, and who left all I owned in ashes. It was fair because it all belonged to God, not me. I should not whine: After all, God had the right to take everything away, but he left us enough.

When by the ruins oft I past
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast,
And here and there the places spy
Where oft I sat and long did lie:

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,

Nor at thy table eat a bit.
No pleasant tale shall e’er 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.

In silence ever shall thou lie,
Adieu, Adieu, all’s vanity.

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3. goods: belongings.
4. Repine (RJH PYN) means “complain.”
5. Bereft means “taken away; deprived.”
6. Spy means “see.”
7. Store means “things put away for the future.”
8. e’er means “ever.”
9. Recounted (RJH KOWNT THD) means “told about.”
10. Adieu (UH DYOO) is French for “goodbye.”
11. all’s vanity is a reference to the Bible verse Ecclesiastes 12:8: “Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.” This verse ends a famous description of the approach of death (Ecclesiastes 12:1–7).
IN OTHER WORDS

I often walked by my ruined house and looked at the familiar spots—where I sat, where a trunk or a chest stood, where my favorite possessions lay. All these fine things are burned to ashes, and I will never see them again. My house! No guest will sit under your roof or eat at your table again. No one will tell stories in you or talk about old times. No candle will shine in your windows, and no bridegroom’s voice will be heard. You will lie in silence forever. Goodbye, house—possessions have no real worth.

Then straight I ’gin my heart to chide,
And did thy wealth on earth abide?
Didst fix thy hope on mold’ring dust?
The arm of flesh didst make thy trust?
Raise up thy thoughts above the sky
That dunghill mists away may fly.
Thou hast an house on high erect,
A Framed by that mighty Architect,
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, farewell my store.
The world no longer let me love,
My hope and treasure lies above.

12. ’gin means “begin.”
13. Chide (CHYD) means “scold; find fault with.”
14. Abide (UH BYD) means “wait; stay.”
15. mold’ring is short for “moldering” (MOHL DUHR IHNG) which means “breaking up and wasting away.”
16. A dunghill is a pile of dung or manure.
17. Framed means “put together; constructed; formed.”
18. Pelf (PEHLF) means “wealth or worldly goods; sometimes used as a term of contempt because the goods are considered to be ill-gotten or even stolen.”
IN OTHER WORDS Then right away I began to scold my heart: Was your treasure here on earth? Did you fix your hopes on things that turn to dust? Did you trust in the human body, which is mortal? Raise your thoughts higher so the mists that cloud your thinking will fly away. You have a house that stands high above, built by a great architect and filled with glory. That house lasts forever, though the one on earth is gone. That house was bought by Jesus with his life, a price higher than anyone can know, and yet he gives it to you as a gift. That’s all the wealth I need; goodbye to my earthly belongings. I will no longer love things of this world; my hope and treasure are in heaven.