

Do I hear Ten Thousand?

by Gita M. Smith

"Don't throw your shitty first drafts on a bonfire, for chrissakes," my sister crackles into my ear via sat phone, ten states away. She lives at some godawful altitude where cell phones don't work. Suddenly, she has decided that my manuscripts might actually be worth something, someday, and she is calling me all in a lather.

This is the sister who last read a composition of mine when I was in fifth grade and nothing since, the sister who once told me that poetry and fiction were for people who couldn't cut it in the real world -- unh-hunh, that sister -- and now she wants me to box up all the early drafts of my work for posterity.

"We could auction them off at Christie's for a good price, something to leave your family since" *and here she can't resist getting in a dig* "you never saw fit to grow up and buy any life insurance or investments."

I cannot begin to list all the ways this conversation can go downhill from here, so I hang up the phone quietly and turn my eyes toward the yard where the fire pit is waiting. I'm old school when it comes to editing. I like to read a draft on paper and cover it in red marks, like stab wounds. These pages eventually end up in my Bonfire of Catharsis, (which is not to be confused with my Shrine of Self Pity.)

With my sister's words still buzzing around in my head like angry deer flies, I carefully build a teepee shape out of tinder.

"*Do I hear a hundred, a hundred, a hundred?*" my inner auctioneer starts chanting. I move on to stack dry wood the thickness of my wrist as I chant, "*Do I hear two, two, two, do I hear three?*" and erect a larger teepee of split logs above that, chanting, "*a thousand, a thousand for this fine manuscript come a thousand. Two thousand thank you very much to the lady in the back with three thousand for a full short story, am I bid four-four-four.*"

Available online at «<http://fictionaut.com/stories/gita-m-smith/do-i-hear-ten-thousand>»

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I set a match to the kindling and feed in balled up pages, hearing the crackle and pop. Bad first drafts vaporize and drift upward as steam or smoke. Words that were leaden on the page -- all my bad prose and dull plots -- go airborne. It is a kinder fate than the shredder and *far* less embarrassing than having someone bid on them at some future date and read them aloud at a dinner party.

