

# Burn It All Down & Rise: The Magic Of An Awakening Woman

*By Shannon Crossman*

I am aflame. No one set the fire. This is self-immolation.

I don't think I knew what I was signing on for when this all started. But there's no stopping the fires of transformation, once they've begun lapping at your skin. I climbed up here on this pyre. Said I wanted to be awake. Declared the intention to set free all the structures that tie me down. Hold me back. Stop me from becoming. I think I had very romantic notions of what that would look like. Imagined I could rise without the burning. Envisioned grace descending in a peaceful, quiet hush.

I forgot how this whole phoenix business works.

Now I am here. Screaming in the heat. Clawing at my own skin. Desperate to get out. You cannot un-know these kinds of things. There is no reverse apple. Once Truth-with-a-capital-T is tasted, it stains your lips, tongue, teeth for life. Still, I resist. Wriggle and strain against it. Refuse to surrender. Run from myself. Go numb. Howl in agony. Plead with God, with my spouse, with myself. Try to reason my way out of this. None of it does a damn bit of good.

No one tells you the truth about being a phoenix. How this kind of burning – the kind that strips you of everything you are so you can be made new – hurts like hell. You feel it. All. Every tiny, bright tendril consuming all you have ever been. Resistance is as useless to you as a pair of shoes you wore when you were six. Once ignited no amount of water will put out this cleansing. Anything short of complete surrender only prolongs the burn.

Inside the flames, I am learning the hard way how to let go. It is the most fucking painful thing. Goes against all my internal programming. Every line of code ever input into my system hinges on endurance, holding on, dissociating at times, but never letting go.

Sounds so simple.

Unclasp fingers from object. Drop it. Disentangle mind from obsessive worries. Free it. Easy to say, but execution is a bitch. So I suffer. Tell myself I am losing my mind. Going mad. Breaking myself. May never recover. Grapple with the impossibility of the situation. Make everything so much harder than it has to be...

I tell you, the greatest game of 'come here, go away' I've ever played is with my Self.

I long for the next iteration, and cannot seem to release the current one. Something inside screams, "I am not disposable!" I don't know what to do with her. She is an ever tightening noose round my neck. I cannot breathe inside her framework for being. Know she must die off. Be freed so I can renew. Yet up to now, she formed a core piece of my identity. Together. In control. Strong, no matter what. Reliable. Competent beyond reason. Productive. Problem is, all those structures eventually become cages. Trap a person in ways so subtle, it's hard to notice. I think that's what drove me up here on top of this pyre. It got so bad, I started to notice.

Now I am attached to this aspect of my personality *and* I want it to be gone. That fact alone is crazy-making. So I lie here on the pyre playing tug-of-war with my consciousness.

If I could get my head in the game, this might go more quickly. But my mind doesn't seem capable of getting it. Cannot connect the burning to the rising. No matter how hard I try to convince myself, the little lizard curled up at the base of my skull refuses to budge. Screams, "We are dying!"

Sounds all the alarms. So my brain dumps cortisol and adrenaline into my system like candy flying out of a freshly busted piñata. Forcing my body to respond as if I am in grave danger.

Flight. Fight. Freeze. I grow weary of this infernal suffering. Know there has to be another way.

On an existential level, I know what I am doing. Understand the need for smouldering to ash. An essential piece of my operating system is being overwritten. I will not emerge the same. That was the intention. I have to trust that I meant it when I lit the first match. Stop second guessing myself. Start surrendering. Otherwise, I could get stuck here. Perpetually on fire. Never make it to the rising. I think it's why some of us go slowly mad. There aren't instructions on how to manage this process – it's too personal. We're all just winging it. And it's so easy to get lost in the fear. To forget that things are not worse now, they're just visible. Unveiled. Brought to the surface so they can be transformed.

Grace finally comes. Not in a peaceful, quiet hush. But in the arms of panic attacks and the inability to pretend to have it together for one more fucking second. Who knew grace would show up like that? It's a wise move with someone like me. Overpower me to the point that I can no longer employ my enduring strategies. Until I *must* admit defeat. Recognise the futility of fighting. Let go of my end of the rope in this tug-of-war.

Lean into the flames. Pray. Sometimes change is just brutal.

I pass the last bits of time imagining what it will be like on the other side of the flames. How I will disintegrate into a pile of ash and dust until no remnant of selfhood remains. Break down all the cages. Free at last from the myriad ways I've bound myself up in this life. Certain, because I am human, I will create new ties. Fashion a whole different set

of cages. I'd be kidding myself if I thought otherwise. But for now, it is enough to pray for the wisdom to spring the traps sooner next time. To not let it come to the fires and the burning again – at least not for some time.

When it is done and I am burned to the ground, there is peace. Inside that peace, deep down in the ashes new life stirs. What she becomes is not for me to know or project. Only to witness. An awe-struck observer watching how this magic of being human works.

How we can be reborn again and again in the same lifetime. How in spite of – or maybe even because of – the fear, the death throes, and the pain of it all, we rise. Indomitably. Eternally. We rise.

*For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [Women Who Run with the Wolves](#).*



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