But fire wasn’t like it was in movies or books, or at least not the books that she had read, or the movies that she had seen. Fire wasn’t a candlelight, warming the mood of a dining room, holding a family together. Fire wasn’t a torch on wood and oil, bundled up in haste in a musty cave, or standing erect above the tip of a single wooden match. Perhaps her perspective is simply coincidental, because fire is not exactly a subject with which we as a species are unfamiliar. In fact, had she looked closer at a couple books, or seen a few movies contrary to the former, it is quite possible that she would have known the nature of the element all along. We *have* been trained for it after all. Dragons belch out flames of gold and burgundy ash to ravish and plunder country-sides, all for the sake of the folly of man. It takes a single knight to stand against the beast itself, a man against the element. But when fantasy meets reality, the roles are switched. When the roles are switched we have fine books by fine men and women. From this we have Firemen, destroying in irony the very literature which breathed life into them in the first place. Bradbury’s soldiers spew flames just like those dragons, and just like her.

The cold does not phase some people as much as it does others, it’s natural. Neither, for some, does the idea of walking home alone at night. For Cassandra, both were the same. And, just like anybody else would surely be, when a man with a good eight inches ahead of their height pulls a knife on them in a cerulean alleyway, she was scared. She was scared for her life, and she was scared to live: no one under the blade knows what could come before death any more than the rest of us do in our everyday lives; the difference is that when you’re under the blade, you don’t have time to think.

That’s why she didn’t think. Cassandra let her body take the wheel just like our men in blue, our soldiers (men in green?), and our favorite athletes on our least-favorite fields. But these instincts are bred, taught, honed over time. The instinct of survival is a bit more premeditated than this. And when you’re 24 years old, having never fought a day in your life, somehow a push on his clavicles is all you can muster (again, mind you, with a knife at your throat). But life and the body have a way of delivering in ways we would not expect.

For even if you had seen or read every scrap of science fiction (sine, I suppose, the lovely Stephen King), it should be hard for you to imagine a small girl capable of such a feat. But life does not play the gendered favorites of Hollywood, and neither does magic. This was the way of our moment in time and many others, as warmth from the veins of Cassandra’s wrists wrought havoc on the chest of this massive man. Heat singed his clothes to gray, and ribbons of fire wrapped around his face. The knife fell into a puddle. So did the man. As the heat cooled from her fingertips and her skin remained unscathed, slowly retreating to her forearms, she thought of all the movies she had seen—all the books she had read.

“Beautiful. Not like a candle, and not like a match…”

What she meant, at the time, she couldn’t express—at least not clearly. What she meant was that the fire was beautiful like her. Fire was like a girl: both would live.