

## All That Remains

Her shadow self is a container of secrecy, a plain  
black, cracked pottery urn, a repository for  
the toxic waste of smoldering dreams,  
glowing mistakes, burnt bridges.

Every so often she pours out a handful of  
cooled embers, sour ashes, bits of melted debris.  
Tears spill into the mix.

Here is the first marriage, a piece that looks like  
red, pitted coral. It feels firm, but it's full of holes.  
It was so fragile when she first broke off a bit.  
These smudges on her fingertips, hard to wipe clean,  
are what followed. She doesn't look at the remains  
for too long. The raging fires then  
have caused too much damage.

Near the bottom of the urn are three charred bits of  
something that look like bone, rubbed smooth from stroking.  
She knows them immediately, fossilized for all time.

This one is the oldest child, who was fifteen when  
the sparks ignited. He puts on a brave front,  
but he's scorched from the inside out.

Here is the heart-shaped pale pink bone for the middle child,  
the only daughter, whose cries were barely heard as she  
succumbed to the smoke. Sometimes she screams,  
Why didn't you stop it? Why didn't you help me?

And this last charred bit of bone is the third child.  
She marvels at its soft brilliance, its funny little  
dips and swirls, its rounded edges. How did it survive  
the flames that formed it? He is the one best able  
to hide his scars, yet he shrinks from touch.

She knows it's time to put away the contents of  
the pottery vessel, before a stray breeze scatters the  
precious bits. She sets the shadow urn on its shelf,  
way back beyond nowhere, in the hollows of her heart.

**Word count with title: 295/33 lines**