
1. What does the author notice one Sunday afternoon? What is his mother's reaction? What does she do?

Answer: One Sunday afternoon, the author noticed a strange smell. Then he saw smoke pouring in through the seams of the ceiling and filling the room very quickly. They could barely see anything. By the time they ran out into the front yard, the roof was already engulfed in flames and was spreading very quickly.

His mother ran back into the house. She had brought out a small metal box full of important documents. She wanted to bring out important things from the house one by one. She was in a 'crazed state'.

2. Why does he break down in tears after the fire?

Answer: After the fire, he broke down into tears because it suddenly struck him that he was suffering a big loss. He realized that his cat could not be seen anywhere. Then, everything hit him at once – the new school, the fire, and his cat. That was when he broke down and cried.

3. Why is the author deeply embarrassed the next day in school? Which words show his fear and insecurity?

Answer: The author is deeply embarrassed the next day in school because when the fire broke out, he was still wearing the dress he had worn to church that morning but he had no shoes as he had lost them in the fire. So he had to borrow some tennis shoes from his aunt. He was totally embarrassed by everything. The clothes he was wearing looked weird, he had no books or homework, and his backpack was gone.

Words used in the lesson that show his fear and insecurity are "...outcast and geek..." , "...like a zombie.", "...wanted to curl up and die." , "Everything felt surreal", "All the security...had all been ripped away".

4. The cat and the author are very fond of each other. How has this been shown in the story? Where was the cat after the fire? Who brings it back and how?

Answer: The author had great affection towards his cat. He cried inconsolably when he couldn't find his cat after the fire. He would regularly go to the site of his house in the hope of finding the cat. He remembered how the cat would crawl into his pocket and fall asleep and missed her terribly.

The cat was so freaked by the fire and ran a mile away from the house. One woman found her and took her in. She located the author's number on the cat's collar. However, she couldn't reach them as the phone had been disconnected because of the fire. The woman then made personal efforts to find the author and returned back the cat.

5. What actions of the schoolmates change the author's understanding of life and people, and comfort him emotionally? How does his loneliness vanish and how does he start participating in life?

Answer: The schoolmates showed genuine concern for the author in spite of not knowing him well. They helped him by collecting supplies, books and clothes for him. People whom he had never spoken to before started coming to him and befriending him. They also called him to their houses. The author made new friends. He was overwhelmed by their love and cooperation. He realized that his new school and new people around him were good. He stopped focusing on his feeling of fear and insecurity and became confident that everything will be alright.

6. What is the meaning of "My cat was back and so was I"? Had the author gone anywhere? Why does he say that he is also back?

Answer: After the fire the author loses interest in life. He feels that he has lost everything. After he gets books and other items from his schoolmates he feels a sense of newfound security. The recovery of his cat is like the icing on the cake. He gets back his best mate. Now both he and his cat are back to normalcy. His statement is indicating that he has begun picking up fragments of life.