Patchwork Phoenix

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By Emily Woline

All the books were gone, lost in ashes on the wind.
Even Ray Bradbury’s book could not escape the FlaMeS and the Fire Chief’s dream came true.
The fires, burning history, dreams, ardent love affairs, and tragedies collapsed inward and SPrAYeD the ashes into the glowing night sky.
The scraps of paper littering the edges of the bonfires were fused by the melted glue of the bindings; red-and-black faced firemen shoveled the remnants into pits for burial. People shrugged off the ashes like fallen leaves and swept themselves into efficiency and business, conducting themselves with the utmost authority on nothing at all.
The stories were lost—all the connections, the values, the belief in tragedy and its phoenix, hope.
But the stories were in some people’s minds and they furtively mouthed the words to each other on crowded subways and at urinals, while nursing their babies.

Books began quietly appearing, coded and innocuous, upon the beds of hard-working, upstanding citizens. People traded scraps, traded stories and symbols to recreate family memoirs, biographies of their heroes:

Eleanor Roosevelt to Fredrick Nietzsche and then stitched on to recreate Paradise Lost, Ecclisisastes, and Shakespeare.
Pulitzers were conjured out of the rag bags of dutiful wives.

Inside the minds of former librarians and random bibliophiles great libraries raged, the tumult released in quilts of great utility (pragmatism is a value highly praised when books are like idle hands).

Each story-scrap became a feather in the great wings of the stirring phoenix.
Each breath of a clandestine storyteller breathed life into its awakening, into the rebirth of books.