

## Women Behind the Walls

by Claire Braz-Valentine

1 Valdetta — early twenties Female

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3 *(Valdetta, a fiercely independent African-American single*  
4 *mother in her early twenties, is now serving time in a*  
5 *California state prison. She has been imprisoned for gross*  
6 *neglect of her child, a young son who was injured in an*  
7 *apartment fire while the mother was on an errand at a local*  
8 *store. Now the grieving Valdetta shares the tragic story of her*  
9 *son's death with Rosa, another inmate.)*

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11 It was late, around 10 PM. We had a long day and he  
12 was tired. He was sound asleep. I had to go to the store  
13 to get some things for breakfast. I didn't want to wake  
14 him. It was just a block away and it was freezing out. I  
15 threw on my coat and ran down the three flights of  
16 stairs and down the street. When I got to the store I  
17 grabbed some milk and cereal and fruit. And there was  
18 a lady there in front of me, arguing with the clerk. I got  
19 nervous. I almost put the groceries down and ran home.  
20 *(Sobs.)* Oh God how I wish I had. But I waited another  
21 few minutes, and paid the clerk and raced out. I was  
22 halfway up the block when I remembered the candle.  
23 Our building is old and some of the lights don't work. I  
24 remember covering him. I remember seeing his face, his  
25 beautiful face, sleeping, seeing his face in the  
26 candlelight. *(Terror at memory.)* The candle. I had left the  
27 candle. It suddenly was as if I was in a dream. I was  
28 running but couldn't move fast enough. I reached the  
29 apartment and started climbing the stairs and then I

1 smelled the smoke. The awful smell. *(Frantic.)* I  
2 remember screaming his name. David. David. Over and  
3 over. Knowing I shouldn't have left him alone, and the  
4 stairs going on forever, then the key, the key getting  
5 stuck in the rusty old lock and the smoke coming out. I  
6 remember the flames on the wall, the drapes and I ran  
7 to him, screaming, 'O God please save my son, my  
8 baby.' *(She picks up a bar and sits on the stage sobbing*  
9 *uncontrollably, the bar across her lap. Rosa goes over, strokes*  
10 *her hair. Comforts her.)*

11 But I saved him. I saved my baby. And everything  
12 was going to be fine. Everything was going to be alright.  
13 But the Fire Department called Children's Services and  
14 they took him. They took my baby. And they put me in  
15 here.

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