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### The Early Hour

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They probably have frostbite now. No jackets, no place to go to work, and a pile of worthless papers. I wondered if somebody forgot their daughter and their jacket. I continued up.

The 38<sup>th</sup> floor was it. I collapsed as soon as I reached the top of the stairs. The smoke was so thick, I could barely see my hand in front of my face. She was probably dead. This poor little girl. Someone's daughter. I smashed another window. The blast from the wind knocked me down. I sucked air and wiped my eyes. I wondered if the fire had choked itself out. Now it was only smoldering like hell.

The 42<sup>nd</sup> was my first look at the fire. Some of the office furniture was flickering in the corner. I was panting very hard. My chest hurt. Most of the oxygen was gone up here. I couldn't vent. If I did, the place would go up. I saw her lying in the corner. A small stuffed animal was clutched in her right arm. Her left was outstretched and hanging on to something white. I got down on my knees and rolled her over. Someone's

daughter. She was black with soot. She opened her eyes and glared at me. She rolled them to the object she was hanging onto. Behind this knocked over file cabinet was the someone whose daughter this was. I checked for a pulse and looked into each one's eyes. They were gone. I picked up the girl. She fixed her eyes onto mine. She knew, but she did not cry.

I ran down the stairs. My lungs burnt, but my legs wouldn't stop. I slid down the ice, bruising my ass and elbows. Laying on my back, one of the guys lifted the girl from my arms. Two others pulled me to my feet. I limped to an ambulance. Flash bulbs popped from reporters who were waiting for something to write about. I sucked on oxygen while listening to their questions. One asked about the stuffed animal in my boot. I reached down and pulled this small dog from my unbuckled boot. She must have dropped it.

"Is this the girl's?" asked the frenzied group. "It belongs to someone's daughter."

## The Early Hour

*Susan A. Davin*

Watching endless hours.  
People surviving the deadly movement.  
As the earth swifts.

Hearing the screams and scems,  
Echo through the rubble mementos.  
Either crushed or burned.

Hoping those who are close,  
Do not come out dead.

But, to survive with courage,  
and hope to rebuild the inevitable.