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CBC Writing Competition
CBC Entry
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Burn the Guilty

I

I can still see the look on her face.

“What? Why?” she asked, frantically through tears.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t want it to be this way.”

Our hands reached out for each other, and my lips found her lips for one last time. Letting go, I turned and walked away with a guilty conscience quickly creeping behind me.

That was nearly a week ago.

Today. The black X’s on my calendar tell me it’s a Monday. Hurling the covers off, I drag myself out of the warmth of my bed. The light of the morning passes through the window, onto my naked back, as I sit on the edge of the bed thinking, “Did I do the right thing?” Flashes of images play like a reel of film in my head... standing with her on the pavement, seeing her cry... because of me. Not enough time right now to watch every scene. I have to go to school.

And see her.

II

Opening the bright wooden door, I walk into class, pull up a chair, and sit down in my usual place. To my right is her seat, but it's empty. Class comes and goes, and she never shows up. Leaving the room I find her out in the hallway, sitting on the floor with her back against the wall. I walk over to her.

In a soft voice she says, "Hi."

"Hey. Why weren't you in class?"

"Oh I woke up late. I got here like ten minutes ago." She stands up and throws her bag over her shoulder.

"You goin' to Psych?"

"Yeah."

"I'll walk with ya."

"Okay." She gives a sad smile, at me, her new friend.

On the walk to her class, she paces behind me. Not much is said.

Standing by the door, outside of her class, we see a kid running and awkwardly maneuvering around people to get inside the psychology room.

I say, "*Dork.*" And she laughs. And then looks at me. Stares at me with longing. Her dark eyes reach out to mine, waiting, hoping, for the words, "I made a horrible mistake!"

I could say that, and I could lie. To her. For her. But instead I walk away and just say goodbye.

III

“Why does she have to look at me like that?” I ask my reflection in the bathroom mirror, hands gripping the sink edges.

The reel of film starts back up again... standing with her on the pavement, the cars passing by, her telling me that I'm her life... and I ended it.

I ask my reflection, “How can I get her to forget about me? How can I make it so she'll never look at me like that again?” I stare at the mirror and my reflection stares back. My right hand reaches up and touches the reflection, and then caresses my right cheek.

I rush out of the bathroom to grab my little red Swiss Army Knife. I find it on the top of the dresser, next to her picture that I've forgotten to take down. Looking at it, I think, “She didn't deserve it.”

Leaving the picture, I walk out of my bedroom, through the hallway, and return to the bathroom with the knife in my hand. Slowly I pull open the blade with my fingernail. It snaps open and the metal sheens in the fluorescent light. I raise the blade up, next to my cheek.

The reel of film starts back up again... standing with her on the pavement, saying we'll always both love each other, saying we still want to be friends... saying things I don't really mean.

With pressure, I slide the blade down my cheek. Skin rips open. Blood appears and slides down my jaw to my neck, and drops of red scatter into the white porcelain sink. I do the same to the other cheek and some blood spurts onto the reflection in the mirror. Then the knife moves up to my forehead and starts slashing, making scattered patterns of straight lines and zigzags, into the skin. More blood gushes out and drips towards the floor to my chin. I carve deep lines across my nose and then hack into the lips that I used to give her her first kiss. Gazing into the mirror, I realize that it's not enough. Under all the cuts, the face she longs for remains. I drop the knife into the sink, showered in blood, and it hits the porcelain with a clank. Fleeing from the bathroom I run downstairs, face covered in blood, to the shed outside.

Standing in the shed I have a pack of matches and a can of unleaded gasoline. That's all I need. Holding up the gas can, I shower and envelop myself with the liquid. I grab the matches and strike one against the flint, watching the glow of the fire. With the tiny flame burning, I tilt my head back and let the match fall.

IV

They say I should have died. They say I was lucky my neighbor was hosing down his SUV when I came barreling out of the shed, in shock, and engulfed in flames. They say I'll probably have these burns scarred on me for the rest of my life.

My eyes open and I see nurses, white sheets, and burns. The smell of gasoline still lingers. I move to sit up and am stricken with agonizing pain that keeps me on my back.

Daylight shines through the windows making the room bright. Reaching with my hands, I gently graze what used to be my face with my fingertips.

Then she appears in the doorway.

Eyes wide, horrified, she quickly steps towards me.

“Oh my God! How did this happen?”

“Is it bad?” I ask.

“What?”

“My face. Does it look bad?”

“... No... you look just as handsome as ever...” She doesn’t look at me when she says it.

I notice how her eyes don’t seem to reach for me, like they did before. Like they used to.

That look on her face is gone. She says, “Well I should probably let you rest.” And she leaves.

The reel of film starts back up again... standing with her on the pavement, walking away, turning around and waving goodbye...

V

Months and months go by in the hospital. My face has turned into an enduring mask and my skin a crusted shell. She doesn’t call, she doesn’t visit, she doesn’t exist. Today’s the day that they’re releasing me from the hospital. I wonder about her, as I’m getting ready

to leave. Has she found someone else? Someone who won't do what I did to her?

Hopefully.

The nurse comes into the room and asks me if there's someone else, besides my father, that can be called to pick me up from the hospital. She says that she can't seem to get a hold of him. He's been dead for five years and I still have him as my emergency contact. I tell the nurse that I'll be fine on my own.

My entire body feels stiff as I walk down the halls and stairs of the hospital. I know I've remained in the Burn Ward too long when I notice the grimaces of the strangers I pass. I never thought about how this would affect me. I only thought of her.

Stepping out into the light, the sun burns.

The reel of film starts back up again... a new release, watching the tiny flame fall, feeling my flesh melt, thinking that this is the right thing to do... was it?

I get dizzy at the feeling and the memory. The walk home is only a couple of miles, but the distance seems to stretch further and further, like a rubber band. The sun plagues me, hanging high in the sky, staring at me like everyone else.

Home. I fall onto the couch like the match fell onto my face. Hours go by and I don't move. I just watch the grooves in the ceiling and listen to the white noise of the ceiling fan. Then the doorbell rings with an unfamiliar level of volume and I cover my ears and cringe, while the reel of film in my head quickly flashes back to the burning in the shed. After the ringing fades, I get up from the couch, walk to the door, and open it.

It's her.

She's covered in scars almost like mine.

All she says is, "I will always love you."