

Kindling

I remember the day of the fire — of the people I never knew. It didn't take long until it had engulfed the most-part of my village. A quaint, out of the way — secluded, if not isolated — Amish settlement in the middle of nowhere. Now, it was a charred, broken mess — with no resemblance of the old times or the old ways.

Even the people who used to dwell there no longer looked as though they belonged to a once, tight-knit community. All of their faces were dirty, smeared with ashes and their expressions identical to one another.

Loss, written between every single line on every single face. My village had become the living epitome of anguish.

The day of the fire was snowy, cold, and bristling. It was freezing cold when I woke. Looking around, I saw my indignant woman pulling her pantyhose up her thighs, her eyes flashing towards me every now and then with disapproving glares.

“Why are you going so early?” I asked, yawning — rubbing the sleep from my eyes as I pulled myself upright, trying to get a better view of her behind.

Alice turned to me bitterly.

“You're a moron,” she barked as she put her leather jacket on. Stepping into her stilettos she approached the bed and sat down, keeping her face from me. “This place is going to hell... you have to leave.”

“Don't be stupid,” I muttered, thinking nothing of it. It wasn't uncommon for Alice to ramble on about the military, constantly saying how the small village I lived in was a prime target for purging.

“This town doesn't have any secrets; we aren't hiding any of their stupid Psicoms.”

Alice turned to me; her pale face scorned with a look of deep distrust.

“If you wind up dead, I’ll see you in hell.” she said getting to her feet. She stormed out of the room, slamming the door shut behind her.

“I love you too, Al.” I sighed, throwing myself back onto the pillow. I stared at the ceiling mindlessly, dozing back off to sleep.

I awoke from a nightmare, hours later. Coming to my senses, I composed myself. I was overwhelmed by an eerie nausea.

Listening closely, I could hear crackling. The cold, snowy morning had evaporated, and my body was being ravaged by heat.

Something was wrong. Getting to my feet and dressing myself as fast as I could, I bolted out into the front yard.

Screaming and weeping sounds filled the air.

Alice had not been wrong.

All around me, fire had engulfed the village. Civilians were scurrying about in panic like mad men, all screaming at the top of their lungs.

Some were on fire, their bodies blistering from the flames.

“James,” I felt something pull at the back of my shirt. Heat emanated from the something, and I wrenched away quickly with hostility. Looking up at me was Sandra, the woman who owned the liquor store. Her face was burnt, and she smelt strongly of molasses. I pushed her away in fear, the force of my blow damaged her brittle body, and she fell to the ground. Dead.

All around me it seemed, villagers — people I knew were dying, or fighting futile battles against the napalm fires.

The air was thick, and I soon found it difficult to breathe. My eyes darted to the gates that enclosed my small village.

I had to escape. I had no connections to this small, dead-end town — I was unlike the others, all of

whom were busy trying to salvage pieces of their former lives.

No, I would not be one of those fools.

I ran, as fast as I could towards the gate. The tar beneath my feet grew sticky and hot, eating through the soles of my shoes. Throwing myself up with all my strength, I grabbed onto the top of the gates. It was forbidden to leave this town, and yet here I was — doing everything I could to get out.

I heard shots ring out. Bullets bit through the gates, missing me by inches as I desperately pulled myself over.

My jeans tore from the barbed wire, and my feet ached when I landed on the gravel.

Behind me, I watched the villagers scream — running towards me, despite flames that had wrapped themselves around their bodies — all reaching for me, begging me to return.

But I don't turn back. I run. I run for my goddamned life.

© Lyana Lim Palmer