

How It Burned

Stories

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The Salvage Yard

I stood on the front porch looking out to the dirt road. The screen door behind me emitted a belated thwap. It was the end of summer, the last day for open fires without a permit. Smoke curled in the sky from three separate directions signaling me to make my own. I couldn't think of anything I wanted to burn.

Claude pulled into the driveway in his mother's old station wagon and stopped in a galvanized lurch a few feet from the shrubs. The brakes were bad and part of the wood paneling on the driver side flapped against the door when he slammed it shut. Claude didn't have a driver's license. The heat was electric, charged and heavy. All I could do was sweat.

We walked around the house, through the backyard into the woods. Claude smoked a cigarette that he bummed off my brother. The trees thinned and we followed the asphalt access road past the rock quarry. I felt the blacktop's heat through my Dip-flops. Two lines of barbed wire running along the ground and a chain link fence

bordered the salvage yard. We **stepped** over **each** wire. Claude climbed the fence and from the other side pulled a loose portion back like a **curtain** so I could duck through. Cars were stacked three high and old **appliances** **sunk** into the ground. Plastic bags tumbled through the **paths**. Ripped garbage bags cooked their insides in the **scalding** sunlight. During the day, in the blazing heat, everything sizzled like **water** dripped in a hot **W e t**.

A rusted dryer emerged from a cluster of weeds. Its mouth gaped as if it had been misunderstood. Claude threw a rock and missed the dryer. He hated his name and wanted to change it to Richard like his uncle or **Bruno** if he started a punk band. He talked about it all the time as if by **changing** his name, he could change himself. We came here a lot, after school and during the summer. Some days, there were guys with their upper bodies buried under the hoods of old cars, scouring for spare parts but most of the time it was just us. I sifted through piles of aluminum and scrap tin with an old cane that Claude found. He searched for license plates to hang on his wall.

There **was** a dismantled amusement park ride in the center of the salvage lot. The motor lay on its side with a **painted** display of two arched dolphins encapsulating Neptune. The rotating **arms** and **seats** were **scattered** around. Claude said it came from Coney Island but I **knew** the *state* fair **dumped** it here when they closed in the fall a few years ago. I unscrewed the last remaining Light bulb from the *King of the Sea* sign and tossed it at one of the dolphins. It broke in a little **poof** of dust.

Claude **wanted** to be on "Ripley's Believe it or Not," and he concocted and perfected his own **skills** of oddity. He had a longhaired Jack **Russell** terrier named Fred and he could fit the dog's entire head in his mouth. It wasn't the **finale** that he hoped for