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**BRANDON
BUCKNER**

A HOUSE IN FLAMES

Fiction

I ducked to avoid my father's glass. It smashed behind me, staining our living room wall with the fourth screwdriver I had mixed for him that night.

"That was weak," he stated, and then leaned back in his recliner. "Make me another."

"We're out of vodka," I said.

"Then light a fire." He threw a matchbox at me. "I'm not warm yet."

I caught it before it flew over my head. "We don't have a fireplace."

"Then burn something else."

"Fine." I lit a match and then flicked it into his mouth. His head snapped back and flames erupted between his lips. The wife beater and boxers he wore disintegrated as the fire coursed down his body.

"You tried to kill me!" my father howled. His once colorless eyes flared with a blue-light.

"I wanted you to burn," I said and stepped back to avoid his combustible body.

Smiling, my father stood up from his burning recliner. He screamed flames into the air that burst into smoke. It billowed around me and caused the smoke detector to beep twice before he tore it off the ceiling.

The smoke watered my eyes and clogged my throat. I fanned my face before it stole my voice, but then my father snatched my arm.

"Let go of me," I said. Flames engulfed my free hand as I tried pushing him off me.

"Did you just give me an order?" He twisted my arm, sending me to my knees.

"Stop," I begged.

"Say 'please.'" His hot fingers seared my skin.

"Please."

"Much better." He shoved me to the floor.

I crawled to the other side of the room, keeping my head low in order to breathe through the endless waves of smoke above me.

"Are you sorry now for setting me on fire?" he asked and swiped the walls with his burning hand, leaving scorch marks as he stalked me. Each step he took singed a footprint into the carpet.

"I'm not afraid of you," I repeated in my head as the numbness coated my burnt arm. I went to the closet door, opened it, and grabbed the fire extinguisher.

"Come here and face me like a man," he yelled and stretched out his flaming arms. I aimed the nozzle at him and squeezed the handle. He backed away with his hands shielding his blue-light eyes. The pressurized water forced him to trip over his burning recliner, causing him to knock his head on the wall. He slumped to the floor unconscious.

“One...two...three...” I whispered and continued spraying him, waiting for the flames to stop flicking the charcoaled ceiling.

“...six...seven...eight...” Never releasing the handle, I watched the fire waver in front of me, dying of thirst.

“...ten...eleven...twelve.” The flames dimmed into pathetic embers shivering in the cold air. In case of future emergencies, I stopped spraying and put the extinguisher back in the closet. Then I took off my shirt and padded the embers into nothing.

Naked and dry, my father pushed himself up and rested on the blackened wall next to me.

“Thanks for starting a fire,” he said, staring at the burning wreckage.

“No problem,” I said and rubbed my burnt arm, enjoying each rush of pain that broke out of the numbness.

“Are you sure we don’t have any more liquor?”

“I’ll check.” I stood up and walked out of the room, blaming the fallen ash for my tears.