

Love Burns

by Marco Baier

"People have it wrong, you know... Love doesn't hurt. It burns. That's what daddy had whispered into my ear as he pressed my head down onto the stove..."

"Daddy loves you darlin'..." he had said. "Daddy loves you so much it burns."

The scar tissue on the left side of my ruined face stretches painfully as I smile at the memory. It had all happened two years ago, on my 13th birthday. I know now that daddy had been right. Love burns—it eats away at you, devouring you bit by bit.

It changes you.

I smile awkwardly, my head cast down, wringing my hands behind my back, seeing but not noticing the nervous shuffle of my feet.

"Do you... Do you still think me pretty? Have I changed too much?"

I look up as her shine grows brighter—harsh, but warm at the same time. She is scolding me, but teasing me as well.

She still thinks me pretty!

Relieved, I look up to drink in her appearance—a living flame given shape. She looks so much like I did before I changed: tall and lithe, with long hair cascading down her slender shoulders. I know she confined herself to this form because she loves me... Her true form is ever changing, boundless, and wild—fire in its most beautiful, most primal state. "Now she is... limited, confined like a torrent of flame licking the inside of a glass bottle. I knew it could not last, so I drank her in. Her flesh, golden and orange, ever changing, never still. Her hair, so red and vibrant. And her eyes, like low burning gas flames. She was so beautiful.

Mesmerized, I see the golden flicker of her tongue licking from her throat to dance between her lips. Her hissing is like a hoarse purr, the most urgent of invitations.

"You... you would?" I ask.

She nods, and like the proverbial moth to the flame, I am drawn to her. My eyes widen. A kiss? Did she know that I loved her this way; that I always had, ever since her first touch those two long years ago?

Had she always known?

Her arms embrace me, drawing me closer to the inferno of her body, her touch burning my nightgown in an instant. My flesh recoils, and then dissipates like melting wax. There is pain—incredible agony, so much that there is none—only pleasure. I moan and bite my lip coyly in anticipation of her face nearing

mine... My body, my very soul is afire. I am like air, and she is devouring me. I tilt my head as her mouth draws ever closer, the gold of her tongue licking over her fiery-red lips, teasing me.

How will it feel, I wonder? This, my first kiss?

There is the briefest of hesitations, the slightest tremble—then our lips meet. Not with the ginger uncertainty that I expected, but with a horrible hunger, a hurry born from necessity. My eyes close, and I wallow in sweet agony. The golden flame of her tongue is running over mine, then deeper, down my throat and into my chest, consuming me from within.

And with that gentle embrace, that most hungering of kisses, we are as one...

...and I am no more.