

Fire

by Daniel Harris

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—You don't appreciate me. I'm a beautiful woman, talented and cultured. All you can do is denigrate me.

—You know that's not true. I just don't think your mother ever said those things to you.

—What would you know? You were the pimply-faced guitar hero. The big frog in a small pond. You were going to make it big in New York. What did you do? Stopped playing rock and roll and started playing jazz. Whoever heard of a jazz guitar? You're a loser. If I weren't a Rockette, we would be starving. I could be fucking a stage door Johnny and living the big life. Instead I come home to an empty apartment, while my husband is playing with Negro junkies up in Harlem.

She poured another glass of Jim Beam.

—None genuine, he said referring to the slogan on the whiskey bottle.

—Well, you're a genuine ugly fuck-up.

She went into the bathroom and slammed the door. He listened to her running a bath. He knew she would shave her legs and underarms. Maybe she would cool down. He's actually made \$250 dollars at a recording session that day. He thought they should go out to dinner. Now it was too late. It was always too late. She was always clever and beautiful; he was always ugly and unappreciative.

She left the bathroom and slammed the bedroom door. He heard the lock close.

He had a small glassine bag of smack.

—If you snort it, you will get a high, but you won't get addicted, said the tenor saxophonist who sold him the bag.

He laid it out like a line of coke; he rolled up a new Jackson and snorted half in one nostril and half in the other nostril. It wasn't a rush, but he could feel the tension and wearies flushing out of his body.

Some time later, he stopped nodding and went into the hallway closet. There was a tank of butane he used to do minor plumbing repairs. He went in the bathroom, locked the door and turned on the water in the sink.

Slowly and carefully, he burned off the pimples. It hurt, but not as badly as it would have without the smack. He didn't care.

She called the police. The cops forced the bathroom door. The ambulance took him away. After six months he was released from the burn unit and admitted to the psychiatric ward.

—The doctors can repair your face, said the shrink.

—No, I don't want that.

—That's a problem, said the shrink.

He was released on his own recognizance three months later. He went to their old apartment, but she didn't live there anymore.

On Christmas day he went to Radio City. It was a cold day with a sharp wind. He wrapped his face in a scarf.

He saw her leaving the stage door with a guy in expensive clothes. He walked up to them.

—You want ugly, here's your ugly, he yelled pulling off the scarf.

She ran screaming down the street. The swain froze. Stage door Johnny didn't know whether to punch him or follow her. Guitarman bent over snorting and laughing like a hyena.

