

# Talking Down the Flames

*by* Sean Ferrell

She'd always been an odd girl, nearly raising herself. As she got breasts and hips the boys complained that she was easy to get in the backseat, but afterward the car wouldn't run, not ever, like the engine died the moment they used her willingness up. So, they stopped asking her around.

When it was realized that she could talk fires out, the town began to send a car at the first ring of the fire-house bell. Initially, the fire-chief called, politely. She always said, "Yes, all right." Eventually they gave her a radio and she would hear the scratchy voice burble the code for a fire, at which she gathered her bag and shoes and flowered dress she wore to town.

She waited in the kitchen, looking out a window facing the road, her aged mother and father asleep or drunk or both. The fire-deputy pulled his Buick onto the yard. The deputy, too worried she might kill the car on the way, respectfully treated her rude and said nothing. She reciprocated.

None but the fire-chief stayed close when she did it, and even he wouldn't pay attention lest he hear something he ought not. But that one time he couldn't help but understand a few words, and he learned that Mother's love was just shy of brutal, and Father's brutality was a notch above profound. The words were slow and soft. And then the squad reached the scarred room, finding the burnt wood cool enough to touch.

