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Run Like Water, Burn Like the Sun //

Ashley Wilda

“Why are you so angry?”

I stare back at the eyes peeking over the back of the grey wooden pew. “Stow it, Marie.”

The shock of red hair disappears again, and I continue painting. Back and forth, back and forth. The rhythm of the brush is soothing, a kind of haven.

“Why did you pick such a boring color?”

I sigh. “It’s blue, Marie. Do you have some kind of problem with the color blue?”

“No--it’s just... boring.”

“Hmph. I think it’s a good sensible color.”

“Sensible is often just another word for boring.”

My brush pauses for a second. “Are you painting over there?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Well then do more painting and less talking.”

Blessed silence.

Then, “I think blue’s a sad color.”

“I don’t.”

“You don’t have to be so snappy, you know. I think you picked blue because you’re sad.”

“Marie...”

“What? It’s true. The whole town knows it.” A brush waves an arc above the bench, paint splattering on my face. That stupid girl can never keep her hands still when she talks.

I don’t answer, and neither of us say anything for a good while. Then, “I think... I think anger, is just--maybe--a way of being sad.” The words come low and quiet, but it feels like an arrow. I suck in a breath.

“Stop babbling, child.”

“I’m not a child. You’re only four years older than I am, and I’m sixteen.”

“What does it matter. All this fuss about a color. You’re stuck with the same color that I am, so there.”

Silence from the other side of the bench.

“There.” I rock back on my heels, surveying my work. “I’m

done. You?”

“Just almost...” A brush flicks up into the air, as if ending a sweeping arc. But that brush... it’s small. Too delicate for the broad painting of an ordinary church pew.

“Marie...”

“I’m done, I’m done! Chill out, already.” There is a soft snap, like the closing of a clasp. The willowy girl rises to her feet, brushing a runaway red-gold strand of hair behind her ear. Her green eyes seem fresh, as if they had just been born, supercharged with living honey. “I guess I’ll see you at church, huh Elise?” She walks backwards, a lopsided smirk on her face. “Hey, and remember to smile!” She turns around and strides out the wide stone arch, a small black case swinging loosely from her fingers.

“Hmph.” The room feels empty without her, but I don’t want to admit it, even to myself. I scrub my hands down my face. Ew, I forgot about the paint. My fingers come away smudged with orange. Orange?

A speck of color catches my eye. A fleck of green paint lies streaked against the dark stone floor.

Marie.

I shove myself up from my knees and hurry around to the other side of the bench. The blast of color snatches my breath from me.

A bright flame of color fairly bursts from the formerly dull, cracking wood. The entire spectrum of color is somehow incorporated into the painting, featuring a burning sun fading into pale blues, indigos, and forest greens, a depiction of the downfall of night so alive it is almost breathing. How I know it is a sunrise, I have no idea. But I just know.

Even more unexplainable are the tears I cannot stop. They trickle down my cheeks and splash against the stone. And I kneel for a second time, not to grudgingly paint a pew, but to let my poorly disguised sadness run from me like water and burn like the sun in the painting. The sadness is much more beautiful in death, the banishing of the night--into joy.