

Burnt Rubber

By Ben Tarling

"I need you to talk to me, Henry." The shrink sits across the room on her couch. Black leather, old and worn. "That's the only way we'll make any headway here."

A kaleidoscope of broken glass on bare asphalt, light dancing over the skeletal husk of a burnt-out car, the sky overhead cruel as cold iron-

Silence, almost foreboding, though I don't feel fear anymore. No emotion, really, unless "hollow" counts as an emotion. The shrink's mouth moves wordlessly, or maybe I just don't want to hear.

Speckled blood. Streaks of rubber line the pavement, a macabre dot-to-dot that creates an unspeakable picture. A boy on the ground (Jesus why are his arms like that) wearing his "Have a Diabolical Halloween!" shirt with the laughing skull on it that's the only thing holding in his intestines-

The shrink sighs through teeth that spit false comforts for a living. "I'll see you next week, Henry. Think about what I said. We're done here for today." We're done here, I'm done here, done as dinner, that's what she used to say-

The baby, oh God, like a meat crayon on a concrete colouring book, the woman, still inside that car, skin eaten by flames, a wretched shriek still trying to escape those pasty lips, and the man (where is his leg where is his leg) lying in the ditch, maybe he's just asleep-

I have a picture of them all at home, sitting in some dusty corner. Mom, Dad, the names I try to forget. I keep a full bottle of Valium in the medicine cabinet, the Forbidden Fruit, and I am Eve and the serpent, and a coward, too, so I'll rot the rest of my goddamn life away in this one-room flat until whoever lives above takes pity on the broken waste of life that I am and drops a piano on my head like in the-

They never told me how long I stood there. The GPS was still squawking in my beater Oldsmobile that I was so damn proud of when I bought it, and the tinny little lady tells me to make the next turn, the turn that we were both trying to make, me from work and them from the concert, me through the stop sign and them into the tree, and-

When I was little, my uncle would tell me scary stories. I used to love them and hate them, delight in the goosebumps I got as he whispered the tale of Fingerless Freddy to me through the electrifying darkness of a power outage, but my uncle did not know fear. I know fear. Fear is the driver of a beater Oldsmobile seeing it coming. Fear is him watching his mother at the wheel turning to look. Fear is watching her eyes go wide in

realization, realization that she is about to die and the thing that she created is pulling the trigger. That is fear.

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