

**Content Warning: This piece contains references to self-harm and death.**

## I. Lincoln

Lincoln learned about the beauty in pain from his parents.

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Lincoln heard their voices peak louder than sirens. His Mother and Father were at it again.

The closet was paradise. There, (an island) the sky was clear, the sun shone bright, birds Whistled, families played in the sand joyous in each other's company.

His Mother put him there.

His real home, more like London. Cloudy grey skies and rain day after day after day after day.

*I want to leave*

He thought. His brother Philip says it's his fault. *They never fought before you*, he says.

Paradise was sinking; he needed to escape.

He grabbed his most precious items. First was Steve the monkey. He'd been with him since the cord on his belly was cut. He looked like it. His fur, now dark brown, stuck together in clumps, Cotton spilled out of his back; his buttons for eyes one hung on its last thread, the other lost forever in the sand. Next, his favorite jacket.

The ocean is cold at night.

It was a long, hooded raincoat in amber, his favorite color.

He doesn't like being wet.

Last was his favorite pair of shoes. They were red Converse with Marshall the fire dog smiling wide painted on the side.

His grandfather fought fires.

His uncle fought fires.

His brother would soon graduate from the academy.

His dad fought fires. He had a way with water.

It was now time to set sail.

Slowly, he crept out, holding tight to Steve. With every row, their voices grew louder.

*Why can't you just fucking listen for once in your life?* His mother shouted.

He was scared but had to continue on.

Paradise was sinking.

As he made his way to the kitchen, he finally saw them.

Dale, his father, stood by the stove over a pot of boiling water, still wearing his station wear.

His eyes were bloodshot, and he mumbled words Lincoln could not understand.

*Dad speaks a different language,* he thought.

His mother, Kelly, was just beyond his boat, arms crossed, wearing purple satin pajamas, still berating Dale. This spectacle froze him.

He watched his father grab the pot off the stove.

He watched him stumble in his and his mother's direction.

Weeks later, they all went to church in their Sunday best. His mother and father were the picture perfect couple. Everyone loved them.

Kelly, with a beautiful smile and infectious laughter, stayed hand in hand with Dale as they greeted other members.

Dale held her hand tight.

In the light shining through the stained glass windows, her fingers looked almost amber to Lincoln, his favorite color.

Lincoln walked uncomfortably behind with bandages covering both of his legs up to his knees and his right arm all the way to the shoulder.

No one seemed to care about what happened.

No one asked.

## **II. Moth**

Lincoln was drawn to fire.

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He held a flame underneath his hand.

It wasn't the first time.

At summer camp, as a boy, is where it all started. He went there every summer. Every night after dinner, they would have a huge bonfire. Kids would tell ghost stories, sing songs, and make s'mores.

But Lincoln never much cared to make friends. He'd always sit alone as close to the fire as possible, ignoring the warnings of the Counselors.

He saw something in the bursting amber flames

And though he could not yet make out what it was, it brought him peace.

He is in paradise

But this time was different;

The flame, just far enough away, gently heating his fingers, was no longer enough.

His mother passed away a few months prior from breast cancer. Since her death, Dale gave Lincoln an ultimatum. Sign up for the fire academy when he turned 18 or be kicked out of the house.

Today was the day; his 18th birthday. He had no one to celebrate with. He and Philip were never close, and he resented his father. His mother was the only one who truly showed him love and respect.

He pushed the flame closer than ever before. He winced in pain as his skin began to burn. He held it there for as long as he could bear.

The pain of burning flesh felt familiar; felt like home. It felt like paradise.

### **III. Inferno**

Fire is Lincoln's muse

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Homes are his canvas.

And on them, he paints beautiful illustrations of pain.

He was on his own now, freshly 18, working as a waiter in a local diner.

Despite the legacy before him,

He could never fight his first love.

He had no home. He would bounce around different park benches and alleyways every day. His reality was hell, so every night he would bring forth fire from its pits and destroy families' homes.

He made sure they were empty.

He was not a killer yet.

Months later, on a night like any other, Lincoln crept through neighborhoods looking for empty homes to create his next masterpiece.

After a few hours searching, he found the perfect place.

It was a large, modern-style home with a huge front lawn. In the drive was a basketball hoop and a few small mongoose bikes. He walked around the front and back, peaking through the windows. The lights were off, and no one seemed to be home.

Upon this realization, he picked the backdoor lock and crept in.

Inside, he looked for anything that would burn easily.

It did not take long to find his easel.

Swiftly, he brought it to the middle of the home. He then took off his backpack and reached inside to grab his brush and paint.

He wildly splattered the paint all over his canvas. He then trailed the paint on the floor all the way to the door he entered.

The tension in his shoulders relaxed and his heart beat slowed to one at rest.

He lit the trail and ran as fast as he could across the street behind some neighbor's bushes.

He did not want to miss the show.

He could see smoke beginning to rise from the home and the fire burning inside through the front window.

Not long after, the house was engulfed in flames.

Lincoln smiled in awe of his creation. It may have been his best one yet.

Normally, he would not stay long to avoid being caught, but this time the fire department responded extremely fast.

Sirens wailed as they pulled up to the burning home. Just before he made a run for it, he saw someone he recognized.

It was his brother Philip. His heart skipped a beat. He hadn't seen him since the funeral.

He watched from the bush nervously as his brother gave orders.

He was a captain now.

The only time Lincoln ever saw his father show any form of compassion was when Philip was promoted.

As they readied their tools to fight the fire, the owners of the home rushed down the street to the scene.

This was something Lincoln never stayed long enough to witness.

The ugliness of the pain he caused.

A middle-aged man and woman frantically exited their vehicle.

The woman's scream would come to haunt him.

*Please, you have to get in there, my son is inside!* She shouted to Philip.

His heart sank. He was certain no one was home.

His brother quickly jumped into action. Without hesitation, he climbed the ladder to the height of the room where the son was trapped.

Lincoln watched, paralyzed with fear, as his brother broke the window and disappeared into the flames.

Others warned him to wait, but he did not listen.

Every second he was inside felt like days to Lincoln.

And then day after day after day passed until eternity was assured.