

BURNED

Written by

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INT. UNKNOWN LOCATION - NIGHT

Ablaze. Fire ROARS through the night. The walls are painted red with flames. CRACKLES of the wood almost drown out the sound of COUGHS coming from behind the blinding layer of smoke billowing inside.

A boy emerges through the smoke, ALDER (17), a wannabe loner, as he searches for something.

He continues to push through the smoke, dodging the flames. Between coughs, he calls out:

ALDER
CJ! Are you in here? CJ!

BOOM!

An explosion goes off right next to Alder, sending him FLYING into a wall.

BLACK OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. COURTYARD - ALL BOYS SCHOOL - DAY

Its the first day back after Christmas break. The snow has mostly melted, and the sun finds its way through the clouds.

THREE DAYS EARLIER

Boys are spread out all along the courtyard, showing off their new stuff.

A few boys are ogling over another boy, leaning against his brand new BMW.

Another group is comparing shoe brands and clothes like it's fashion week.

Four boys are huddled together playing the newest Mario Kart on the Switch, while others surround them, cheering.

Sitting at one of the picnic tables, we find ALDER, alone, reading *The Giver* against his backpack. He clearly has no interest in the others around him.

At the other side of the table, a group of three boys are messing around, throwing old snow at one another. Eventually... SPLAT. A bit of snow hits Alder right in the cheek.

Still. The boys are frozen, like subjects in a painting, mid movement. They watch Alder, closely.

Slowly, Alder reaches up, wiping the wetness from his face.

DING...DONG...DING...

The school bell rings. Everyone in the courtyard starts to head inside, except the three boys. They remain frozen.

Alder, dog earring his book, slides it into his backpack and stands. He towers over the others. Their eyes widen.

Not even bothering to look at them, Alder walks past the boys and towards the school. Once he's behind them, the boys let out a collective sigh like they had been holding their breath the whole time. One boy hits the other in the back of the head -- *idiot*.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Alder stands at his locker, grabbing a notebook. The hallway teems with boys preparing for the first class of the day. Freshmen wander with confusion plastered across their faces.

Morning announcements echo from the speaker:

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

... If you have not yet received your updated schedule, please come to the main office. Reminder: the assembly on Thursday to kick off the new semester is mandatory for all faculty and students...

Hearing WHOOPING and LAUGHS, Alder looks down the hallway.

At the end of the corridor, DEREK (18), alpha-male, walks into the hallway. EVAN (17), who always has a lighter in hand and a pack of cigarettes in his pocket (but never seems to be smoking) and JAMES (17), a textbook bully, are close in tow behind Derek.

The three of them approach a BOY (16), innocent, flamboyant, fresh meat, who stands at his locker a few sections down from Alder. James pulls the backpack off the boys shoulders and takes the notebook out of the boys hand, starting to rifle through it.

Evan leans on one hand against the lockers, playing with his lighter in the other hand.

OPEN. CLICK. SHUT.

Derek stands in front of the boy, arms crossed, stance wide, menacing smile. Alder watches this from afar.

DEREK

Well what do we have here?

EVAN

I think we've got ourselves a queer.

OPEN. CLICK. SHUT.

Derek takes a step towards the boy, who shrinks, not making eye contact.

DEREK

Is that what you are? A queer?

The boy doesn't respond. He watches the lighter.

OPEN. CLICK. SHUT.

Derek SLAMS his hand on the locker next to the boys head.

DEREK (CONT'D)

Answer me!

The hallway goes silent.

Alder looks around at the other boys in the hallway. Some watch the encounter, snickering. Others watch with pity. But most shoot subtle glances over their shoulder out of fear that they could be next.

The BOY trembles.

DING...DING...

The five minute warning bell sounds. The hallway comes to life again with murmurs and lockers SLAMMING SHUT and everyone heads to class.

Alder does the same, grabbing his bag and shutting his locker. As he walks past the four of them, Derek turns his head, locking eyes with Alder. Derek smirks.

Alder shifts his gaze to the boy. The boy looks back at him, eyes watery but he's clearly trying not to cry. Alder continues walking, without a word.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

Alder walks through the buzzing cafeteria with his food tray.

Finding an empty table somewhere on the edge of the room, he sits down, pulling out his book.

After a moment, a shadow falls over the pages. Alder looks up to see the BOY from earlier, standing with a tray in his hands.

BOY
Could I sit here?

Alder notices the bruise that has begun to form under the Boy's left eye.

ALDER
You should get some ice for that.

BOY
Oh. Right. Thank you.

Alder turns back to his book. The BOY goes and takes a seat across the table from him.

BOY (CONT'D)
I'm CJ, by the way.

ALDER
(doesn't look up)
I didn't ask.

CJ
(nods)
Right.

Silence. CJ pushes his food around the plate, glancing over at Alder.

CJ (CONT'D)
Can I ask you something?

Alder looks up at him.

ALDER
Seriously?

CJ stops. Alder goes to start reading again but then:

CJ
I just--

Alder sighs.

CJ (CONT'D)
The guy in the hallway...

ALDER

Derek.

CJ

(pause)

Why did he pick me?

Alder takes a moment, then puts his book away, standing to leave. CJ looks down, disappointed as Alder starts to walk away. But Alder stalls, looking back at CJ.

ALDER

Keep your head down. Eventually
he'll move on.

CJ

What would that say about me?

ALDER

(beat)

It won't matter if it's what keeps
you alive.

Alder leaves. CJ watches him, confused and a bit scared.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

The room is quiet. Everyone is working on an assignment. The teacher stands with a group of students answering their questions.

Alder sits in the back corner of the class with earbuds in. He reads his book, the completed in-class assignment sitting in front of him.

The classroom starts to stir. Noticing the movement in his peripheral, Alder looks up and sees that almost all the boys in class are getting out of their desks and heading to the window.

Alder takes out his earbuds. He hears the boys call out in cheers or shock. Alder goes to the window. When he sees what the commotion is about, he sighs.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

In the center of a circle of boys is CJ, curled into a ball on the ground, getting stomped on by Derek. Evan and James stand guard keeping anyone from entering the circle. Evan still plays with his lighter.

OPEN. CLICK. SHUT.

DEREK
Had enough?

STOMP!

DEREK (CONT'D)
Admit it and I'll stop.

KICK! STOMP!

As Alder reaches the crowd, people move out of the way for him. He heads toward Derek and CJ. When Evan and James notice Alder, they step in his way. Alder looks at them.

ALDER
Move.

Evan and James scoff, looking at each other then back at him.

OPEN. CLICK. SHUT.

Derek notices the three of them and stops beating on CJ, standing up straight.

DEREK
You got a problem, Aldy?

ALDER
What're you doing, Derek?

Stepping over CJ, Derek saunters toward Alder.

DEREK
(sarcastic)
Just... stretching my legs.

Alder looks down at the bloodied, unmoving CJ.

ALDER
Looks to me like you've done enough
stretching for today.

Derek nods his head at Evan and James for them to move so that he and Alder are face to face. He crosses his arms.

DEREK
You protect queers now?

ALDER
(pause)
You don't want to do this.

Derek takes a step closer to Alder.

DEREK

You think you're better than me,
now that you're Mr. High and
Mighty?

ALDER

I'm trying to save you from
yourself.

Just then a teacher comes out to break up the crowd.

TEACHER

Everyone! Back to class! Derek,
with me. Alder, help the boy.

The crowd departs. Derek watches Alder over his shoulder for
a moment.

As everyone leaves, Alder helps CJ up and over to a table to
sit down. He grabs a t-shirt out of his backpack, handing it
to CJ to use to dab his bleeding nose.

ALDER

I told you to--

CJ

I know what you told me.

ALDER

Then why didn't you do it?

They sit in silence for a moment. Then CJ starts to laugh,
tears forming in his eyes. Alder watches him, confused.

ALDER (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

CJ

You're blaming me?

CJ continues laughing out of frustration and anger.

CJ (CONT'D)

I get my face beaten in by a toxic
alpha-male...and it's my fault?

ALDER

You have to admit, you could be
less...

CJ

What? Gay?!

Alder doesn't say anything.

CJ (CONT'D)
 What is it to you? A disease?
 (beat)
 What is it to him?

ALDER
 So you are.

CJ looks into Alder's eyes.

CJ
 I won't apologize for it. Ever.
 (beat)
 So don't pretend like you're
 protecting me when you tell me to
 'keep my head down' and hide who I
 am.

ALDER
 I didn't say--

CJ
 I know what you said. And I know
 what you wanted to say.

CJ stands and grabs his backpack off the ground and makes his way back to the school.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Alder is heading back to class. The halls are empty. But he hears an echo of voices coming from around the corner. As he moves closer the voices become recognizable: Derek, Evan, and James. Alder stops, craning to listen.

JAMES
 --you're just gonna let him get
 away with that?

DEREK
 No.

JAMES
 He needs to be punished.

DEREK
 That traitor will get whats coming
 to him.

EVAN
 What about the kid?

DEREK

(pause)

Take him to the barn.

Alder perks up - he knows what this means.

INT. MAIN OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Alder rushes into the office and heads to the secretaries desk. The SECRETARY looks up when Alder approaches and turns to him, giving him a welcoming smile.

SECRETARY

Alder! Are you looking for another book recommendation? I found one I think you'll really enjoy.

ALDER

I'm not here for that, Mrs. Perkins. I actually wanted to know what class the new kid CJ is in.

SECRETARY

That's the boy that was in that ruckus earlier?

Secretary looks around to make sure no one else is listening.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)

You weren't involved in that were you?

ALDER

Please, can you just tell me where he is?

SECRETARY

He went home for the day. Rightfully so if you ask me.

ALDER

Do you happen to have his address?

SECRETARY

That is privileged information Alder. I can't just--

ALDER

Please, Mrs. Perkins. It's urgent.

The Secretary sighs.

PRELAP: Knock on the door.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

The door opens and we see CJ's mother, AVA (52), loving, who greets Alder.

AVA
Hello. Can I help you?

ALDER
Are you CJ's mother?

AVA
Yes.

ALDER
Is he home?

AVA
No, he's out. What is this about?

ALDER
Do you know where he went?

AVA
Some friends from school stopped
by. They wanted to try cheering him
up after what happened.

Alder turns and starts running down the street.

AVA (CONT'D)
Wait, what's going on? Is
everything alright?!

INT. BARN - NIGHT

James shoves CJ to the ground. The bruises on CJ's face have fully formed, his lip split open. Derek stands with his arms crossed. Evan sits on a bail of hay, playing with his lighter.

OPEN. CLICK. SHUT.

CJ inches backward on his hands, looking around trying to find something to defend himself with. But James stays close, watching him.

JAMES
You don't belong here. Our school
is nothing but temptation for you.

James leans down to CJ, condescendingly, with his hands on his knees.

OPEN. CLICK. SHUT.

CJ holds back tears.

JAMES (CONT'D)
We're just trying to help you.

ANGLE ON: CJ balls his hands into fists.

OPEN. CLICK.

CJ
Go fuck yourself.

CJ throws a handful of hay and dirt from the ground and throws it at James. James cries out, holding his face with his hands. CJ bolts to the door.

Before he can reach it, CJ is TACKLED to the ground by Evan.

DEREK
Tie him up!

Evan lifts CJ from the ground and pushes him to the middle of the barn and up against a support beam. Together James, with his eyes red, and Evan, get a rope and tie CJ's hands together behind him.

CLOSE ON: The lighter open and lit on the ground near the bail of hay. One piece of hay starts to burn.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Alder reaches the crest of the hill. Out of breath, Alder looks around the landscape. He spots the barn.

INTERCUT TO:

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Derek punches CJ in the stomach.

THUMP THUMP!

CJ groans and coughs.

DEREK
I'm gonna make you wish you never stepped foot in my school.

CJ
What is this, some 80's commentary?

A punch to the face - THUMP!

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Alder's feet THUD against the ground as he runs.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

James and Evan push CJ back into a standing position against the pole. He breathes heavily. Derek rolls up his sleeves.

As Derek approaches CJ again, CJ takes all the energy he has left and kicks Derek in the chest, sending him FLYING INTO THE BAIL OF HAY.

CLOSE ON: The hay hits the fire and lights rapidly.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

As Alder nears the barn, the doors swing open with smoke and flames billowing out and James and Evan on the run, coughing.

END INTERCUT.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

Alder comes into the barn, pushing through the smoke and dodging flames. In between coughs, he calls out:

ALDER
CJ? Are you in here? CJ?

BOOM!

An explosion goes off right next to Alder, sending him FLYING into a wall.

Alder groans in pain. Coughing from the impact and the smoke.

CJ
(coughs)
Alder?

Looking up, Alder sees CJ faintly through the smoke and flames between them.

CJ (CONT'D)
Alder, I can't get the knot.

Alder pushes himself to his feet and heads toward CJ.

The wood's creaking and crackling grows louder.

Alder reaches CJ and unties him. CJ falls to the ground, weak and injured.

Grabbing CJ's arm, Alder places it around his neck for support as he lifts him off the ground. As they start to make their way to the door, Alder spots something on the ground. He stops.

It's Derek, unconscious.

Alder looks to the door, then CJ, then Derek.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

People are starting to run from over the hill and down toward the barn - the smoke and fire fill the night sky.

Alder and CJ limp through the smoke and out of the barn coughing relentlessly. At a safe distance, Alder places CJ on the ground.

ALDER

Are you okay?

CJ, still coughing, nods as best as he can. Satisfied with the response, Alder turns and starts to head back in.

CJ

(coughing)

What are you doing?!

ALDER

I won't leave him.

CJ tries to go after him but he doesn't have the strength and falls right back onto the ground.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

The smoke is thicker and flames are larger when Alder gets back into the barn. He can hardly see anything. He gets down and starts to crawl.

He finds Derek again. Getting over to him, Alder shakes Derek, hitting his face a little to try to wake up.

ALDER

Derek? Derek, I need your help to get you out of here okay?

Derek stirs a little bit.

ALDER (CONT'D)

Good. Alright. Come on.

Alder grabs one of Derek's arms and puts it around his neck. As he starts to stand up with Derek, a piece of wood from the ceiling falls, SCORCHING Alder in the leg.

ALDER (CONT'D)

AHHH!

Alder and Derek fall back down to the ground. Alder looks at the gash in his leg, hearing it SIZZLE.

Looking around, Alder can see some of the barn walls are starting to burn up. They won't last much longer.

Crying out, Alder stands up. He grabs Derek by the arm, and with all of his energy, pulls him to his feet, putting Derek's arm around his neck again.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

A crowd had formed. SIRENS approach in the distance.

CJ watches as the flames engulf the barn.

After a moment, CJ sees two silhouettes comes through the smoke. Derek half-conscious, and Alder, bloody and limping. They get a few steps away from CJ before sinking to the ground. CJ goes over to Alder.

Then, with one final CREAK, the barn collapses in on itself. Everyone watches it in horror.

Everything goes still.

EXT. BARN - LATER

CJ and Alder sit on the edge of an ambulance, covered in ash, and emergency blanket wrapped around their shoulders. After a moment, Derek comes up to them, hands in his pockets. He looks to CJ.

DEREK

I'm sorry.

Not responding, CJ looks to Alder, whose eyes are on the ground. Derek turns his attention to Alder too.

DEREK (CONT'D)

Aldy...

Alder looks up at Derek.

DEREK (CONT'D)

Thank you.

In a very pointed manner, Alder responds to him:

ALDER

(pause)

No one deserves to die.

Alder looks back down at his hands. Derek nods. After a moment, he walks away.

CJ turns to Alder.

CJ

Do you think he meant it?

ALDER

I think he tried to.

Fidgeting with the blanket, CJ takes a moment.

CJ

Why did you come?

(beat)

Earlier today. Why did you help me?

Alder looks up but not to CJ.

ALDER

(pause)

Because it was never about you.

CJ follows Alder's eye line and sees that he is watching Derek. CJ looks back to Alder but doesn't say anything. They stay in silence together.

END.