

House on Fire
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We sprinted through the ever-green forest, slipping and tripping on the slush, dirtying it brown with mud whenever we kicked it and stumbled. I was laughing and panting, trying to catch my breath, chasing after Stone.

“Wait... wait up,” I said, bending over, hands-on-knees, panting.

He slowed and turned around. When our eyes met, we smiled and instantly started laughing again. Whatever breath I had gained was gone again. This time we didn't stop laughing. I clutched my stomach in agony, praying it might stop long enough for me just to draw a decent breath.

“C'mon, let's keep moving,” he finally managed to wheeze. So we did.

Slowly the ground began to even out, and the running leveled. The trees started thinning, and Stone finally slowed to a walk. All of a sudden, we were free from the trees, and standing at the edge of a bluff, overlooking the Pacific Ocean. I was at a loss for words.

The sun was just resting on the horizon, the sky an explosion of flames and color. Red and orange radiated from the ball of fire melding into purple, which fused with the last remnants of blue high above us. All the colors mixed and swirled together, reflecting as an iridescent sheen off the wispy clouds floating here and there.

Something warm brushed against my hand, and looking down, I saw it was Stone's. I grabbed his in return. “I see now why you wanted to show me this,” I said in awe, all traces of my laughing seizure gone.

Stone tugged me so we faced each other. Without a word, he leaned forward and kissed me, right on the mouth.

It surprised me. It was soft and moist, gentle and tender, nothing like I was prepared for. Not... of course, that I was nearly as proficient at kissing other boys as I would have liked. The heat of the sun seemed to flare in that moment, the rays of sunlight making their last feeble attempt to scorch our cheeks, or glare in our eyes.

We finally broke apart. Stone smiled, shyly, for the first time that I can remember. We sat down and stared out across the ocean. The sun slowly sank behind its watery bed, the colors draining from the sky like the water from a tub. Orange turned to purple, sky blue turned to cerulean to black. Slowly the stars peeked out, one by one.

I looked up and saw the first star of the night. "Make a wish," I said. I lay my head on his shoulder and caught a whiff of the pine that still lingered in his hair from our afternoon of messing around in the pine forest. I thought about that forbidden kiss, and what would happen if our families ever found out.

No more days running around pine trees, no more days lounging around the beach, no more days going to my room to "hang out" (certainly not with the door closed). The image of my sister's disgusted face, the disappointment in my father's eyes... though I've never been the man he wanted me to be.

I thought about my friends at school. Some might say, "cool man, it's whatever, you do you" (though honestly I'd rather do Stone). Who knows what the rest would think.

A gust of wind went down my collar, making me shiver. Stone noticed and wrapped an arm around me. We huddled even closer. The sky was now a rich, navy blue, and numerous stars were shimmering.

Down below, the waves crashed rhythmically on the shore, creating a soothing soundtrack.

I thought about the past: lazy afternoons, winter nights bent over books and Finals notes, Spring mornings spent walking to school like a flock of geese, underneath a canopy of bird songs and chirps, autumn evenings splashing in piles of red leaves and going home together to eat caramel apples and pumpkin seeds.

I thought about the future: no families to watch the fireworks with, just me and Stone opening Christmas presents in front of the fireplace, silent Spring mornings spent in silent, empty houses and autumns spent raking those same leaves, and then bandaging our blistered hands.

But then I thought about the present. Stone and I sitting together on the bluff, overlooking the wide, calm Pacific Ocean. The sun was all but gone, a blue impression where it had once been, shrinking rapidly among an expanding black sky studded with stars. We each had an arm around the other, and we just sat blissfully unaware of the world outside our little bubble; our little bubble of ocean waves and stars and the lingering scent of pine.