

## That Which Consumes

J.R. Phillips

As soon as the bottle left his hand he knew he had made a mistake. He wasn't trying to hit her, it wasn't even thrown in her direction, but he might as well have for all the damage it did. The emotional damage is always worse than the physical. It hit the wall hard enough to send a tremor through the paint. A picture she had framed for him, an apartment warming gift, shook off its nail and let gravity drag it to the floor. Shards of glass mingled on the whiskey soaked laminate.

She was shaking in fear. Mascara had crawled down her puffy cheeks and mingled with tears and saliva. They had fought before, but never like this. He'd crossed a line. He had dragged her across the line with him, and he knew that they could never go back to the way it was. He loved her. She loved him.

The first time they met he knew she was something special; the kind of thing that only comes along once in a lifetime. It was at a mutual friend's cottage party in Parry Sound. There were a lot of people he didn't know at the party, but everyone seemed to mix together well. It was a great party. And then he saw her, and everything changed.

Nothing happened in fluid motion anymore. He started seeing in snapshots, but they were all underexposed. Nothing had shape or colour or contrast.

Except her; she was the only thing he could see in any definition. She was radiant. A glow formed around her, and it was as if she was the only light in a dark forest. He kept watch until he saw her walking to the kitchen for another drink.

He made his move. As she reached for the open bottle of wine he abruptly threw his arm in front of her trying to grab a warm beer from the counter.

Sorry, she said stepping back.

Oh, no, it's my fault. Please, he said gesturing for her to take the bottle.

She smiled, and his heart warmed.

So, how do you know the host? He asked.

Oh. I don't really. I'm here with a friend, and she works with him. She poured herself a glass of red wine.

Beautiful area isn't it? He asked trying to keep her near.

She takes a drink. The drive up was beautiful. I'd love to go down to the water, though. My friend told me it is beautiful down there.

Is it possible to have such a being and not be burned?

He knew, though, that even if it wasn't he had to try. He grabbed the warm beer from the counter, he had never minded the taste, and he guided her through the crowded hallway to the front door.

They left the house and the spectres contained within. The path down to the water was steep, so they took each step gingerly. She stumbled slightly, and he took her elbow in his hand. Her skin was soft and warm. He didn't want to let go, but she pulled from him after she stabilized herself.

On the dock there were a few chairs. He took two, and moved them down to the end. They sat, and in the calm of the lake they both took a drink. He didn't know what to say and he didn't want to say anything. Her glow filled his heart with warmth.

They talked eventually, and then more still. He had never felt so comfortable with someone before. He felt safe with her. There was a first date after that, and then a second, and then a third. Eventually, as it always happens, the numbers meant less and less. He ached when he was away from her for more than a day or two. He loved to shove his hands into her hair, and the feeling of her hands in his.

They talked of marriage, of a family. She eventually moved in and hung the framed picture of the two of them. They rarely had a problem, and life seemed to be perfect.

It was an accident, but one that filled their worlds with more joy than they thought possible. They decided to postpone marriage for a while, at least until after she gave birth. Their apartment suddenly seemed tiny. Gifts filled every room, and eventually overflowed into the hallway. He spent his weeknights baby proofing their home, and his weekends turning their office into the baby's room.