

A romantic close-up photograph of a man and a woman about to kiss. The man is on the left, leaning towards the woman on the right. They are both looking at each other. The lighting is soft and intimate. The man is wearing a light-colored shirt, and the woman is wearing a dark top. The overall mood is tender and intimate.

SUZANNE
JEFFERIES

Scarred

Prologue

Storm

Have you ever wanted to jump from a moving car? Or run in front of a train? Do your muscles twitch with sick longing as you rest your hand on the door handle, line your feet up on the platform edge, weigh up the *what ifs*? Does your heart pump faster as you balance on the slither between life and death?

That twitch, that pump, that *urge* drives me, moves me, commands me. It starts somewhere in my nerve endings and buzzes and slaps through me until I take action. The second I light that match, my world calms, the push recedes. But that *need* always returns.

I know she feels it too.

It's what connects us. She on her side of the line, me on mine. That push, that urge, the yearn for oblivion.

The siren wails. Will it be too late, or will we escape in time?

She'll be here soon.

My cock hardens.

Flames slither and lick across the linoleum floor. It stinks. It chokes. It is delicious. I back up through the doorway, out through the fiery labyrinth that I've created.

It's a magical pathway of heat and flame that she can trace to me.

She always finds me.

I can already hear her husky voice as she calls to her colleagues. They don't know her like I know her. They don't know how the fire calls to us.

No-one knows me like she does.

The smoke thickens as my artwork spreads.

I find the stairwell that's marked with a fire escape. Those words pollute the purity of destruction—why would you escape fire? Fire is life. From the ashes, life thrives.

I descend into the thick smoke. The fourth-floor escape door opens. It's her.

Her brown eyes lock with mine and widen. An exclamation traps behind her breathing apparatus that distorts the beauty of her face.

A yearning stretches out for her that can never quite reach.

I remember the curves of her body hidden by that ugly outfit, and my heat levels rise further. She's found me.

The building shakes as something explodes.

Jasmine

Fuck. Holy fuck. One look at his face and I know he's responsible. A twist in my gut. He waits for the shudders to subside, his hand light on the rail. An explosion means we can only head one way—up.

I push him forward, ready to kick him with my steel-tipped boots. A million different emotions jostle for attention, but I have to focus on my job. No people in the offices in the lower floors. No-one in the building but a security guard who's already being treated for smoke inhalation. No-one in the building but him.

Already my body pulses with heat for him, the thrill, the adrenaline thump-a-pumping through me. For the things we do as the flames reach closer. His body on mine, in mine, the bond we have twisted and tight formed in the fire.

I can't keep doing this. It's...wrong. But, he's here, and I'm already wet with longing for him. He wears jeans and a tight-cut t-shirt that does little to contain the muscles he's honed over the years. The motion of his back should have its own x-

rating. His dark hair rests on his shirt collar. The ink on his skin is a fire-breathing dragon—what else?—and it reminds me of the power he has to destroy. *Ya think, Jasmine? Look around you —town hall's burning to the ground.*

Fear seeps into the cracks between the lust. We are so close to death here.

The job, focus on your job.

The air's less smoky as we climb the fire escape. He's in no hurry, his work here's done. And the second we get back on the ground, I'm hauling him in. His admittedly fine ass is heading for the slammer.

This time, I won't let him go. This time, he'll have to face up to his behavior, face the consequences.

And the consequences of *our* behavior? Mine?

He turns back toward me, a slow smile that lights up the angles of his face. His lips curve upward, a cocky grin that oozes confidence. Heat licks at my core as the sweat slides on my skin under my bulky uniform. "You're looking all worked up, Jazzy."

"No-one calls me that anymore."

"I'm not no-one."

His words are slow and deliberate. Just like Storm. How long has he planned this? Weeks? Months?

The steps reach the building's roof. He leans heavily on the handle that bars the exit and I have to turn my gaze away. Why him? *You know why.*

As we emerge into the shock of night, I remove my breathing mask, finally free to let rip with the questions. "What the fuck, Storm? Did you do this? And don't lie to me."

He opens his arms, and gazes up at the sky. “You know what selenophilia is? It’s for people who find the moon soothing. You like the moon, don’t you, Jazz?” He pauses. “How else can I get you up here to watch the moon with me?”

The sweat scratches under my jacket prickling my skin much like his words that pull and push at my moral code. And people think, *It’s complicated* is just a Facebook status.

I want to take my jacket off. But if I take it off...I roll my shoulders under the thick material. His presence has my mind slide into desire so thick I’m caught in its quicksand. I clear my throat. “The town hall’s on fire, Storm. And I find you here.”

“How fortuitous.” His deep voice resonates through me. I stare past him, out at Liberty’s night city scape. If I link my gaze with his, we’ll go down together. My clit so buried under hot and heavy throbs to be heard. Fuck that.

“It’s wrong, Storm. You can’t keep doing this. You can’t change what happened. Two wrongs don’t make a right.”

“Don’t they? Look what they did to us—”

“Doesn’t make it right.”

He clenches his jaw. “Aren’t you even a bit happy to see me?” His voice unravels me from the inside. All of me burns hotter than that fire that’s gaining on us. If he touches me, I’ll combust. *When* he touches me. I drop my head in shame. I can stop this, stop *him*. *Do your job, Jasmine*.

The moon shines a spotlight on the roof that reeks of hot tar. Beneath us the town hall burns burns burns. How long do we have before the building crumbles? It’s old and those gas pipelines are shooting out, one by one. Minutes? I take off my gloves and reach for my safety device.

He closes the gap between us, and I hesitate. My fingers waiver on the button to call for help, my heart torn between what’s right and what’s just.

Storm

I wait as she toys with my future. Her hand moves away from her jacket.

She takes off her helmet and a few strands of her hair wisp over her face.

“You’ve got five minutes, Storm, better make it good.”

I sweep my gaze over her. What I could do in five minutes...

Her voice interrupts my reverie. “Enjoy your moon, breathe the air. Then I’m calling for help and they’ll get us off this roof.” She tears open the Velcro of her jacket. “And we need to get off this roof, it’s not stable.”

Her lips part as her fingers move. Her white t-shirt molds to her breasts, and the moonlight reflects off her dark hair. She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Heat rises up from the building as my work unleashes itself. Her brothers and sisters to the cause will be busy a while yet. She leans up against the escape door, her shoulders flush with the brickwork. Her breasts tilt upward and I imagine her dark nipples. She never wears a bra.

An acrid aroma creeps through the darkness. This is perfect. She is perfect.

“Stop staring, Storm. You know I hate it when people look at me.”

“I can’t help it.”

“Try.” She sighs and I move closer to her. Her chest lifts with each breath and I ache to slide my hand under that thin white material. She looks up at me under the curve of her eyelashes, and I am drowning in her. I reach out to embrace her as I used to, as she used to, when we were younger. She hesitates then reaches her arms round my neck. Close to, she’s sweet and sour and I want to lick her, taste that salty skin. Her softness pushes against me and the heat rises fast and furious in me. My hands slip round her waist drawing her nearer. She draws back, her cheek brushing against mine.

My lips find hers and we kiss.

Every kiss with her is like our first—burning hot. The don't-touch hot of a stove, the red-hot heat of an open fire, the dry throbbing heat of a desert. My hands work their way over her back and up into that thick dark hair that's twisted on her head. Wet tendrils curl at the nape of her neck where the sweat's trapped. Under my feet, the tar glows with heat that's pushing for release. I slide my tongue into her mouth, and the building rumbles beneath us as another of my presents are unwrapped.

The more the fire rages, the stiller those voices that urge me to jump, to push, to commune with the void become.

She clings tighter to me, and I dip my hands under her ass and lift her up. Her legs wrap round me in their bulky fire-protectant material. No material will protect her from this fire. My brave fire fighter. Fire brought us together. Fire keeps us together.

When will she realize that she can't fight the fire forever? It will always be there.

She breaks from me, her groin arched against mine, so tempting, so deliciously open. "We're mad to do this, Storm."

"Shall I stop?"

She doesn't answer, then shakes her head.

I grind my erection against her, and she utters a cry that has me catch her lower lip and bite. She groans this time, and I wedge her body against the wall, freeing my hands to feast on her. Her nipples are already hard and ready, but I want her heat. I want to be one with her heat. Feel that flame between us as it grows and grows, licking, spitting, climbing, higher, further.

Another explosion rocks the building. This time, the ground shakes and roars. Her body shudders. “Fuck, Storm, we need to get off the roof. We’re getting too close.”

I catch her nipple between my thumb and forefinger and squeeze. She swallows as I work my fingers over her hard nipple exactly how she likes it. Her eyes glaze and her breath hitches.

I dip my head close to. “I would never let anything happen to you.”

Her hand reaches up to stroke my cheek. Instantly, I pull away, and she recoils. “It wasn’t your fault, Storm.”

An oil-slick of shame engulfs me, swallowing me whole, leaving me gasping for air. That she is even here with me, in her fire fighters’ uniform, open to me, *trusting* me. I did this to her. She wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for me. My fault

This time when she runs her hand over my skin, I don’t flinch.

“I know you, Storm. You’re not a bad person.” And I hate myself more.

Jasmine

He thinks I blame him for what happened. I don’t. I know the truth. And there’s nothing we can do to go back and fix it. He chose his way, and I chose mine. I pull him to me and kiss him softly, sweetly, a reminder that I’m engulfed with all the things I shouldn’t feel for him, but I do.

We were stupid kids then. *We’re being pretty stupid adults now...*

I don’t know what he sees when he looks at me but his stare leaves me vulnerable, open to him. There’s a tenderness there and it rocks me to my core. Most men turn their heads from me. Not my colleagues—they’ve got used to it.

Smoke dances round us and reality slaps me about the head.

We have to get the fuck off this roof. Isn't that what I swore to do? Trained for? To protect? To serve? And yet, when I'm with him, I melt under the heat of his presence. I burn for him.

Beneath my back, the bricks soak up the flames as if it were a summer's day. But the sirens below, the acid tang of that thick smoke remind me it's not.

Five minutes, that's all I've given him. Am I crazy? Five minutes is enough for this...whatever *this* is. Five minutes is enough time between safety and danger. Is it?

His fingers resume their work on my breasts, brushing over my nipples until I gasp.

"Not...here."

He lifts me, and walks over the roof away from air vents and doors. His skin smells like watermelons, and the soapy aroma of paraffin. I know he started the fire, but I don't want to know it. That smell knocks my excuses stone cold.

I waver. My heart's already re-weaving a spell of illusion round my head. I have to have him. And I don't care that the ground we're on shakes and rumbles with destruction.

He dips into the shadows of the building alongside, against a steel wire fence that separates us and eight floors down.

His hands resume their exploration of my body, lighting me up. He pulls open the Velcro of my pants, and his fingers brush over my damp panties, tracing over the swollen part of me that's greedy for him.

He taps my clit and I squeeze my legs round him.

His voice purrs against my neck. "Can I lick you, Jazz?"

I unwrap from him, and he travels down my body until his face lines up with my pussy. He kisses my thighs, stroking my soft damp flesh, and I shiver with want.

My feet struggle to keep me upright as he peels down my panties, and his tongue plunges into me.

Glass shatters one floor below as the flames punch up closer to the roof...to us. But, shit, his tongue on me, his fingers inside me, obliterate thoughts of imminent danger. He pushes me to the brink, each tongue flick, each suck of my clit reaching me closer to release. Somewhere under the roar of my own blood, I can hear the sicker-flicker of flames. I can hold on no longer and I give in to him, to the pleasure that he unleashes in me.

I cry out.

He crushes my mouth with his, and my hands are already on his zipper, feeling the hot hardness there. He groans as I stroke him. "Open your legs, Jazz. Let me inside you. Please."

His body is tight wound, all of the tension in the tip of his cock that's swollen in my hand. I want to lick him, taste him, swallow him whole, but my pussy is greedy for him.

I sigh. "It's in your back pocket, right?"

He nods. Fucker. He knew I'd be here. Knew I'd find him. Knew I'd surrender to him and this compulsive fantasy. He fucking knew. I bite down on his shoulder. He shudders, but his cock's harder than before. I find the condom, tear it open and smooth it onto him. I am no better than him.

Behind him, the fire creeps its orange fingers round the escape door. It's almost here, almost with us, like it was in the beginning.

His hands squeeze my hips as he lifts me and lowers me onto him. As he fills me, I cry out with pleasure.

The wire behind me bends and snarls as he fucks me good, fucks me hard, his fingers digging into my ass as he drives in and out of me. He kisses over the skin

that's melted away on my face, a constant reminder of what happened. "Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful."

Each stroke pushes me closer to the edge, pleasure building from deep inside me. Is it the drop, the fire, or him that has me peaking hard and tight? A pleasure that uncoils the moral stories I've built for myself.

We were made in the fire. And we worship each other in its altar.

"This is all for you, Jazzy. All of it." His breath warms my skin as he moves faster, deeper. Another explosion shakes through me as he comes. A roar from the building as its foundations slump to its knees. I cling to him, his cock throbbing inside me, as the roof buckles. My own orgasm shudders me to my core, as the fire unrolls in front of me. We can't be here.

He eases himself out of me and carefully pulls me back from the fence.

I waste no time. "Quick."

I refix my pants, and pull down my shirt. The pleasure of release melds with adrenaline. We can't be up here. Where we had minutes, we've now got seconds, and they're tick-ticking away. My jacket already smolders under the flames where I left it, my gloves glow orange. Part of the roof simply no longer exists. *We walked there...just now.* I hit my safety device. "They'll know where to find us." It's a statement, but the flash in his eyes looks like a warning. "We've got nowhere else to go, Storm. Do you want to die up here? You know what it's like to...burn."

He turns from me, his bad side a series of craters and pits. Like mine. Like the moon. He's right. I do find the moon soothing. Because it can only be seen in the darkness. Because it reminds me that I can survive.

Flames dance and leap toward us, the salsa of death as it eats everything in its path. The smoke dissipates into the air, but it's thumbprint squashes onto my lungs, coughing up the fumes. I peer down over the building's ledge.

Some of my team have lined up the ladder, and it inches its way upward.

When I glance back for him, he's gone. My heart constricts in my throat. Is he okay? Did he fall? I choke back tears. He's the only one who understands me, who knows what it's like to chase our demons, night after night.

The ladder looms close. "Hey, Jasmine, let's get you down." Mike takes in my lack of jacket, helmet, gloves as he his hands grip the ladder.

I hold up a hand. "Don't ask."

But he will. *We are forged by the fire.* That's what Storm once told me. And it's what will destroy us.

Half an hour later, I sip coffee from a non-environmentally friendly cup. *What was I doing up there? Why had I taken off my jacket?* Too much smoke, too many mistakes had been my answer. I know that won't cut it.

I hang my head.

"Hey Storm, you missed the action." Mike's voice quickens my heartbeat.

Storm strolls over, same t-shirt, same jeans, same confident swagger. "Looks bad. What happened?" He doesn't catch my eye. Relief mixes with guilt as he and Mike catch up like the colleagues they are.

Mike crushes his cigarette underfoot. "Probably the same guy who did the licencing department. Or maybe it's a faulty gas pipe. Not sure."

Storm's face betrays no trace of his secret. "You know these old buildings."

A ghost of a wink in my direction. My body still hums with the aftermath of pleasure. *Do what's right, Jasmine, haul his ass to the police.*

But I don't. Not tonight. But, one day.