

BURN THE CHILD

Written by

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EXT. WILSON HOUSE - EVENING

A modest house with a large yard set back from a rural two-lane highway.

A sheriff's cruiser pulls into the driveway, parking in front of the porch. The driver's side door opens and ALLEN WILSON, 56, wearing his deputy's uniform, steps out.

He looks up at the house and smiles. He shuts the car door and goes into the house.

INT. WILSON HOUSE - EVENING

Allen steps into the house and takes off his gun belt, hanging it up in the hall closet. He slots his police radio into a charger on the floor of the closet.

KITCHEN

In the kitchen, LISA WILSON, 53, stands at the stove, stirring a pot of stew.

Allen walks in, crosses to Lisa and puts an arm around her waist, kissing her shoulder.

LISA

Good day?

ALLEN

Boring. So yeah, I guess.

LISA

Could be worse. We could still be in the city. I feel better knowing your days are boring.

He nods and kisses her shoulder again.

Lisa takes a spoon and dips it into the stew. She twists in Allen's arms until they're face to face. She blows on the spoon and holds it up to him.

LISA (CONT'D)

Does this need anything?

Allen eats everything on the spoon and yelps, jumping away from Lisa. He puts a hand over his burnt mouth.

ALLEN

Ish haht!

Lisa laughs.

LISA  
I hope so. Does it taste good?

Allen nods.

LISA (CONT'D)  
Why do you always do that? You know  
it's going to be hot.

Allen shrugs, then wraps his arms around Lisa and kisses her.

INT. WILSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lisa and Allen eat dinner on the couch in front of the TV. Allen is in his work pants, but has taken off his uniform shirt and sits in his white undershirt.

Lisa snuggles in close to Allen, pressing into his side.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Lisa and Allen are both asleep on the couch. Allen has his arm around Lisa, holding her close. Their empty bowls on the coffee table.

From outside, there is a SCREAM.

Lisa jolts awake. She blinks, looking around.

LISA  
Allen?

She shakes him awake.

LISA (CONT'D)  
Allen!

ALLEN  
What? What's up?

LISA  
I heard a scream.

Allen stands and goes to the window, nudging the curtains open and looking out.

Through the window, Allen sees a large crowd of people with flashlights charging down the street.

Behind the crowd is a GIRL, 9. She's manacled and being pulled along by a chain attached to a dog collar fastened around her neck. The Girl weeps and struggles.

Allen jumps back from the window.

ALLEN  
Jesus Christ!

Lisa sits up on the couch.

LISA  
What is it?

ALLEN  
I need to go. You get the shotgun,  
and lock up the house.

LISA  
What's going on?

Allen goes towards the front hall.

ALLEN  
I don't know. Stay here, don't go  
out. Lock the house up behind me.

FRONT HALL

Allen goes to the closet and pulls his bulletproof vest off the hangar and slips it over his head, pulling the Velcro tight across his chest.

Lisa comes into the hall, a shot gun and box of shells in her hands. She is frightened but calm, a police officer's wife to the core.

Allen pulls his gun belt off the hook and slips it on.

ALLEN  
I'm going to call it in, so there  
should be guys coming soon, okay?

Lisa nods.

ALLEN (CONT'D)  
Until then, just lock up the house.

Lisa nods again, and sets the box of shells on the side table. She loads the shot gun.

Allen pulls a loop of zip tie restraints out of a gear bag and clips them to his gun belt. He pulls his radio out of the charger and faces his wife.

Lisa stands with the loaded shotgun.

LISA  
You be safe.

ALLEN  
Yes, ma'am.

LISA  
I love you.

ALLEN  
Love you, too, ma'am.

Allen leans over the gun in her arms and kisses her.

He opens the front door and steps into the night.

Lisa stands for a moment, then steps forward and locks the dead bolt on the door.

EXT. WILSON HOUSE - NIGHT

Allen walks across the lawn, looking down the road in the direction the mob was walking.

The sound of running footsteps makes Allen turn.

DOUG, 26, a skinny meth head in dirty work clothes, sprints down the street.

Allen steps out and snags Doug by the collar of his shirt as he sprints past, nearly knocking him down.

DOUG  
Get the fuck off me!

ALLEN  
What's going on?

DOUG  
It's nothing you need to worry about. Let me go!

Allen keeps his tight grip on Doug's collar and pulls a zip tie restraint off his belt and puts it around Doug's wrists.

DOUG (CONT'D)  
Am I under arrest?

ALLEN

Yes.

DOUG

For what? What did I do?

ALLEN

I don't know yet, but I have a bigger problem right now so you'll have to wait.

He drags Doug to the side of the road and uses another restraint to zip tie Doug to a fence post.

Doug pulls at the restraints and they tighten around his wrists. He glares up at Allen.

DOUG

The only problem you have is that you're too stupid to know what's going on.

Allen leans in close to Doug's face, his voice low and threatening.

ALLEN

What are they doing with that little girl?

DOUG

What little girl?

Allen punches Doug, dazing him. Doug slumps against the fence post. Allen stands over him.

ALLEN

Don't pull on those restraints. Don't want you to hurt yourself.

Allen turns and starts off down the road.

Doug calls after him.

DOUG

Just let it happen! You don't know what you're doing!

Allen ignores him.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Allen walks swiftly down the road. He pulls his radio off his belt, and hits the transmit button.

ALLEN

This is Deputy Wilson, currently northbound on foot along County Road 87 past Cheney Road. I have a large disturbance, requesting all available officers.

He drops the radio to his side and steps up to a jog down the road. There is no sign of the large crowd, so he starts scanning the woods along either side of the road.

He slows to a stop and keys up the radio again.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

Hey, can anyone hear me? This is Deputy Wilson, requesting immediate back up.

There's no answer. Allen smacks the radio and tries again.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

This is Deputy Wilson, can anyone hear me?

The crackly voice of the DISPATCHER comes through the radio.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Come again, can you repeat? You aren't coming through real clear.

ALLEN

It's Wilson! I need all available officers to get out to C.R. 87. Something big is happening.

The radio is silent.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

Hello? Can you hear me?

DISPATCHER (V.O.)

I can hear you. You can stand down.

Allen stares down at the radio.

ALLEN

There is a mob dragging someone out in the woods, I need everyone here now.

DISPATCHER (

No need. Officers are already on the scene. It's being taken care of. You aren't needed.

ALLEN

What are you talking about? I'm here! There's no one here. You need to get people here now.

No answer. He drops the radio to his side. He looks around.

There is a flash of light and movement in the woods. Allen crouches down and quietly steps into the brush.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Allen creeps through the brush, trying to be as quiet as possible. Ahead of him, the woods open up in a large clearing. He hides behind a tree, looking around it.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

The mob is here. A platform made of pallets is set in the center of the clearing, next to a gnarled, twisted oak tree.

It's strangely quiet. The people of the mob pile up wood around the pallets. They do it quickly. The whole situation is charged with a nervous energy.

A large figure drags the Girl up onto the pallets.

The flashlights of the mob turn up and illuminate PASTOR RICHARDSON, 47, in a black suit and clerical collar stands with the chains holding the Girl in his hands.

RICHARDSON

We all know why we're here! I'm glad so many of you God fearing Christians are in attendance.

The Girl struggles, trying to get away. Richardson yanks on the chains and she stops, cowering on top of the pallets.

RICHARDSON (CONT'D)

What we're doing here is God's work. No one here should feel shame. Or regret.

A murmur of agreement rises from the crowd.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

From behind the tree, Allen watches in horror.

He pulls the radio from his belt again, putting it close to his face so that he can talk quietly.

ALLEN

This is Deputy Wilson. I need back up, now! Is anyone there?

Radio silence.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

Where is everyone! Answer me!

Nothing. Allen stares at the radio.

He throws it to the ground in disgust.

He puts his hand on his gun. He breaths deeply, gathering his courage, then steps around the tree and into the clearing.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Allen walks into the clearing behind the mob.

Richardson, up on the pallets, is the first to see him. He looks confused. Seeing Richardson change, the mob turns to Allen. A murmur goes up in the crowd.

Allen calls up to Richardson.

ALLEN

Let her go!

Richardson shakes his head.

Allen draws his gun and points it up at Richardson.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

I said let her go.

RICHARDSON

You don't know what you're doing.

ALLEN

You can explain it to me later. Let the girl go now.

A small, frail man, MAYOR DENNIS KING, 62, begins to push his way through the crowd towards Allen.

Allen lowers his gun, but keeps it pointed in the general direction of the crowd.

King bursts out of the crowd. He stands in front of Allen.

KING

You have no reason to be here,  
Wilson! You've got no right to  
interfere with this!

ALLEN

I'm not going to let you hurt a  
little girl.

KING

There's a reason we don't invite  
outsiders to these thing. You don't  
know the full story. You don't know  
anything. The thing has to die.

ALLEN

There's no kind of justification  
for murdering an innocent kid.

Another man steps out of the crowd, wearing a familiar  
looking uniform. SHERIFF FRANK HORNE, 61, puts a tan hand on  
King's shoulder, nudging him aside.

Allen lets his gun drop again, this time from shock.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

Frank, what are you doing here?

Horne opens his hands wide, a gesture of goodwill and  
welcome. He smiles, and talks softly.

HORNE

I know how this looks. Believe me.  
I was in your shoes once, too.

ALLEN

You knew about this? You've done  
this before?

HORNE

It happens here, every once in a  
while. Bad things happen, and bad  
things need to be taken care of.  
This is just cleaning up.

On the pyre, while the sheriff distracts Allen, Pastor  
Richardson threads the chain through the wood of the pallet  
and locks it with a heavy padlock.

The Girl shakes with fear, but she doesn't try to struggle  
anymore. Her large eyes are locked on Allen.

Allen stands in front of Horne, his grip tight on his gun.

ALLEN

What you're saying is insane.

HORNE

It's how it has to be.

KING

It's the way it's always been.  
Things have always crawled out of  
the swamp and haunted us. Sometimes  
the monsters look like children.  
But that doesn't mean they are.

Richardson steps out of the crowd to stand next to Horne and King. He holds up a box of matches.

RICHARDSON

You'll see what it is when we burn  
it. It'll show its true colors.

Allen shakes his head.

HORNE

If you care about the safety of  
this place, if you care about the  
real children who live here, you'll  
let us do it.

ALLEN

I can't just stand by and become a  
part of this insanity.

Richardson pulls a match out of the box, strikes it and holds it up towards Allen.

RICHARDSON

You'll understand.

Richardson turns and goes toward the pyre.

Allen raises his gun to aim for Richardson, but Horne lunges for the weapon and twists it out of Allen's hands.

King makes a clumsy dive for Allen's knees, but only manages to get tangled up in his ankles.

All three men go down.

Richardson stands in front of the pile of wood, the lit match in his hand.

Allen is the first one up, stepping on Horne and King as he scrambles to his feet.

The mob doesn't have time to react as Allen sprints toward Richardson.

Richardson extends his hand to drop the match on the wood, but Allen takes him down in a tackle, knocking the pastor into the dirt.

Allen sits up, looking around for the match.

Deep inside the stack of wood, an orange glow appears and smoke begins to curl up into the night sky.

Richardson's doubles over with an explosive sigh of relief.

Allen can't stop to think. He scrambles up the pile of wood, and yanks the Girl to her feet.

He pulls at the chain, but the tangle around the pallet and the padlock keep it tight.

The smoke gets thicker.

Allen fumbles with the dog collar at the Girl's throat. He tries to blink, but the smoke and tears are blinding him.

Flames begin to flicker at Allen's feet. The Girl tries to climb up Allen's leg.

The collar falls away.

Allen scoops the Girl up and jumps off the back of the pyre, away from the mob, and runs for the woods.

INT. WOODS - NIGHT

The Girl clings to Allen as they duck through the brush, branches slapping at them as they pass.

Behind them, a yell goes up as the mob follows them.

Allen chances a look back. By the light of the pyre, he can see figures coming after them in the woods.

He turns and runs faster into the dark.

He makes it about a hundred feet before he slips and slides down into a dip in the brush.

He lays on his back, pressing his hand against the Girl's mouth. She struggles against his grip.

He tries to quiet her, whispering.

ALLEN

No, no, no! Stop! They're going to hear you!

The Girl struggles harder, trying to pull herself away from Allen. She twists and turns.

ALLEN (CONT'D)

Stop!

The Girl rears her head back, gets her face free for a moment, then opens her mouth unnaturally wide.

Allen only has a brief glimpse of the rows of shark-like teeth before they sink into his wrist.

Allen stares at her in shock.

The Girl look at him with wide eyes, looks him straight in the eyes as she bites down harder, her teeth digging in.

The Girl grabs his arm, wrapping her long fingers around him, and tears out a chunk of Allen wrist. Tendon and muscle tar away from the bone.

Allen screams in horror, but he is terrified into silence when the Girl licks her blood stained lips.

Her long, thin tongue curls around her lips, swirling and probing in a way that no human tongue could. It reaches down, feeling along the Girl's face.

It lengthens, stretching, growing and feeling it's way along the Girl's skin.

Allen is petrified. Tears begin to fall down his cheeks.

The tongue reaches out, a black tentacle shimmering with sickly green bioluminescence, closer to Allen's face.

The Girl leans forward, and the tentacle caresses Allen's cheek. It slides along his skin, until is reaches his neck.

The Girl leans forward again, as if ready to give Allen a nightmare kiss, and the tentacle wraps itself around his neck, tightening cruelly.

Tendon's pop and bone cracks as the tentacle tightens around Allen's neck, and his eyes bulge.

He cannot close his bulging eyes, he can only look at the Girl as her eyes begin to glow a disgusting green. Her skin bubbles and shifts, taking on a loose, reptilian appearance.

Allen tries to push the girl away, a last attempt at saving his life.

The Girl jerks her head, and Allen's neck snaps.

The tentacle disappears back into the girl's mouth. She looks down at the now lifeless Allen.

A cry comes from deeper in the woods.

The mob advances, torches and lights shining in the dark.

The Girl backs away from the body and disappears into the woods.