

*by Susan McCreery*

he told his dad he was taking sally for a walk, it's a bit late isn't it? mumbled his dad, but he said nah, not really the streetlights are on anyway and his dad grunted into his beer and flicked the remote, so he didn't take sally but sprinted up the road not looking back until he came to the bush, the air was tinder hot and crackled his blood, above him the trees whispered in the barely breeze and in the distance a truck braked, the sticks under his feet split and cracked, he brushed past ferns, he knew the way, been up here often enough it was *his* place, only once had he seen anyone, an old lady bending over a flower with a magnifying glass, she'd jumped but then smiled and said hello, nice smile she had, gentle like his nan's, this was a good spot nice and cracker dry, within seconds his ball of paper was alight and then the twigs he'd set over it and then licks of, snakes of, lovely flame, and pops and cracks and explosions, soon he had to stand back from the heat and knew it was time to go but he couldn't stop watching and now fire tearing up a trunk and he really had to run so he scrambled, scrabbled down the trail and onto the road dodging lamplight, heart crowding his chest and back home his dad said sally been whining and whining didn't you take her? where you been? I smell smoke



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