

"Get me another thermometer!"

A nurse handed one to him. 107°F. The same reading. As the nurses ran about behind him and sweat dripped down his back, he looked again at the patient lying on the bed. The hands were bright red and still blistered, but compared to the charred lumps present only an hour earlier, the man might as well have stood up and walked off. A black flaky halo of ash and burned skin surrounded Mr. Warren on the table. It seemed to have flaked off of him while he had been lying there. Directing the nurses to clean up the ash, Kreshnov felt a little lightheaded and realized he hadn't eaten since breakfast. He went down to the hospital cafeteria for a quick lunch. When he returned, the man was still running a fever, but new, pink skin was visible in many places, showing through the flaking charred flesh above it.

In disbelief, Kreshnov reached out to touch the man's forehead, but jerked his hand back, cursing. A thin blister was forming on his finger. Eyes wide, he took another look at Mr. Warren. As he watched, smoke began rising from the bed beneath the man. Alarmed, Dr. Kreshnov ran from the room, sprinting down the hospital corridors looking for Dr. Braun, and nearly collided with her. She was carrying some blood samples to the lab, but Kreshnov managed to stammer out the situation, and leaving the blood samples in the hall, the two raced back to the operating room.

Mr. Warren was nowhere to be seen, and the room was somewhat smoky, and smelled of burnt plastic. The bed was burnt through to the metal where the patient had been reclining, and in the tile floor, charred footprints led out into the hall. The two doctors gaped, then ran, trying to follow the footprints. Outside, they led over the parking lot, into the city, but on the concrete sidewalks, they disappeared. Kreshnov mopped his brow again, suddenly exhausted from the brief running. He sat down in a heap, feeling nauseous. Damn, but it's a hot day, he thought. Suddenly, he realized Dr. Braun was staring transfixed at him, looking quite frightened.

"Is something wrong, Ruth?" asked Dr. Kreshnov worriedly, as smoke curled from under his collar.

- *John Sinke WYNNS (The King of Chaos)*



- *Robert Highsmith*

The Church

I am amazed:
 An empty church.
 No priests or ministers;
 No suits or ties;
 No hymns or songs;
 No Latin or wine;
 No Catholics or Protestants.
 Sure, there is an echo—
 But it's my own.
 Sound: the droning air vents.
 I am amazed,
 But do not know
 If it's because
 I do not know
 If this place is empty or full.

- *A. P. Mendenhall*