

Burning Flame

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Burning Flame

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Summary

Your name is Ash. Ash like what remains, like what was left after the fire. Fire, like the one that killed your parents, like the one that burns so deep and angry in you. Fire like danger. Fire like selfhood.

Notes

I hope you enjoy! This is relatively short but it wanted to end where it did.

Your name is Ash. Ash like what remains, like what was left after the fire. Fire, like the one that killed your parents, like the one that burns so deep and angry in you. Fire like danger. Fire like selfhood.

Your sister follows in your footsteps. You burn for her. A fire to light the way. A fire to keep her warm. This is, in your mind, the sum of your worth. Here is what you are good for. You keep the cold away from her, and you keep yourself alive.

When you are young you cannot imagine losing her.

You have sheltered her since birth. Her sibling and her care-giver.

This is who you are. Fire-wielder, warmth-giver, light-bearer. Older sibling. All that you are is tied to the beating heart of your little sister. Even as you hold her life tender in your hands, she could ruin you. This you know, and this you accept. For your sister, you would do anything. You would fight the gods themselves if it would keep her safe. Whether you are bleeding or whole, you love her all the same. You don't know how to be anything but her protector.

When you are twelve, the unthinkable happens.

You are separated from her.

You think, then, that this will be the worst experience of your life. You are wrong, but you have no way yet of knowing that.

Without your sister, and in an environment which hates you, you are different.

Sharper.

In another world, one might say colder, but you run fire-hot always. Distant, maybe, but the heat of flames burns hotter than ever within you.

You are angry, and alone, and you teach yourself exactly how to be effective. To strike here for a quick death and here for a slow one. Here to immobilise, here to damage.

For your sister, once, you were a hearth-fire, gentle, sheltering, but a fire nonetheless. Any hearth-fire can grow, and so you have. Now, you are nothing so much as a wildfire, dangerous to any in your way.

There is no-one you can trust, so you stoke your fires and protect yourself. You're good at what you do, and that satisfies you. Your preferences don't come into it.

But, oh, how you burn. You still reach for the freedom you haven't had in years. Something in you will never be quieted, will never give in to this erasure of your selfhood. Even as you nod, and obey, quiet and still, you burn. The longer you endure, the angrier you become. Someday, you know, all that restrains your rage will break, and perhaps then they will see

that you cannot be controlled so easily. You, who can barely imagine peace. You, to whom to safety is as alien an concept as not defending those you love.

You grow, from the furious twelve-year-old you were. You become calm, eerily so, obedient and steady. The fury you hold has not in truth been destroyed, but nobody can know that. You must live. You cannot conceive of anything else you could do. You live, because what else could you possibly do? You live, because if you die, who will protect your sister? You live, because you have to. The teenager you become has little youthfulness to aer. You do not allow yourself to regret that.

When you are seventeen, something even worse happens. This is, truly, the worst thing you will ever experience. True, like how death is true. Undeniable. True, like secrets whispered with a knife to the throat. You will never be the same. You will never altogether heal. A part of your soul has been ripped away from you in an instant, with all the ease of wind picking up paper.

Your sister dies.

Your sister dies, and you aren't there.

Your sister dies, and you have failed.

You have failed. You should have protected her. That is, still, the person you are; her protector, first and foremost. Everything you do is for her. But now, she is dead. You have fought for naught.

It breaks you. You cannot let it show. You have to protect yourself. You are still far from prepared to die. But now you have little left to fight for. Day to day, you go through the motions, detached from all that you do.

In all your shattering, though, the anger rises higher. Rage pokes its way up through the chinks in your skin, and you realise, in a red-hot flash, that you'd leave in a heartbeat if the opportunity presented itself. There's nothing can be held against you now except your own survival, and that's far from guaranteed anyway.

You pull the broken pieces of yourself into something resembling a whole, a façade only you know the truth of, hiding the cracks beneath your lies, and continue, unflinching and unhesitating. Unyielding, burning strong, fuelling your fire with all that would destroy you.

At seventeen, you do not see a future for yourself, but you fight anyway, cornered and desperate.

You have no way of knowing how close you are to a better future. To the opportunity presenting itself for you to leave. You have no way of knowing, but in not so long your fragmented self, survivor of everything thrown at you, will stand no longer alone.

You will know brighter days.

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