Wordcount: 823

Firebrand

Kelly’s left hand was completely engulfed by the flames of her woodstove, but she didn’t feel a drop of pain. If anything, it actually felt somewhat good. The room around her was freezing; the sharp contrast the recently lit woodstove provided was welcomed. Her amber eyes remained fixated upon the dancing flames, watching them lick up and around her splayed-out fingers with a childlike wonder. If she’d lit the fire a bit earlier, she would not have wound up so cold, but compared to the sauna she was practically forced to keep her apartment at to keep it comfortable, the biting chill of the cabin was a nice – though, thankfully, temporary – change. The isolation here, too, was welcome for its fleeting presence in her life, a welcome thing here or there, but not something she always wanted to welcome.

“Be careful,” her father’s warning echoed in her mind, “of the people you call friends, Kelly. Not everyone’s going to treat you the same or understand, and that’s okay. I just don’t want to see you hurt.”

Taking her hand out of the fire, Kelly dropped out of the squat she was in to sit on the floor instead, propping herself up with both of her arms as she leaned back, still fixated upon the fire. She could feel the rest of the room starting to warm up now, even if she was still shivering wildly. She could easily fix that with the flannel jacket she had tied around her waist, but doing so meant covering up her tattoos, and she enjoyed admiring those too much to even consider that option. A trail of orange flames licked up her left arm in orange ink, ink that seemed to be pulsating and shimmering with both every breath she took and with every crackle of the woodstove in front of her, while the black flowers (roses, specifically, with their vines trailing between every bulb) across her right shoulder seemed to remain as dull as the black ink ever was.

The heavy sigh she let out was still easily visible in the cold air. With a small shake of her head, Kelly’s eyes fell closed, the silence of the room, excluding the fire cracks, was pleasant to hear, but it only let her mind be further stuck in the nostalgic pit she’d knowingly signed herself up for the second she took the keys to this cabin from the executor.

She was responsible for that fire.

It hadn’t been entirely her fault, but it was most definitely her fault that it got out of control. Her family had never had much of an understanding of her attunement to fire, and it had never been something any of them were keen on testing. None of them were ever keen on trusting neither scientists nor the government. With a deep breath in, Kelly opened her eyes and held up her left hand, focusing on it. A second later, another flame erupted from the palm of her hands; every breath she made as finely controlled as she could let it be. The pulsating of her tattoo remained in perfect sync with her, growing as she breathed in and shrinking as she breathed out. With a long sigh, the fire faded from her palm, and the vibrancy to her orange tattoo had lessened to a degree that any of the shifts in its coloration could easily be assumed to just be eyes playing tricks on their owners. Once more, her eyes fell closed as her mind wandered.

The fire she’d created gave her a temporary relieve from her shivering; with it gone, her stomach emptied, the shivering picked back up once more. Deep down, she knew it wasn’t going to get any better with just the woodstove roaring, no matter how much fuel she fed it, but she was too stubborn to admit it. She’d always been too stubborn to admit when she was wrong. Gently, Kelly’s knees curled up to her chest and she held them tight to herself, her eyes reopening once more. Always too stubborn. That’s what her mother always accused her of being, and her mother was always right. Kelly never admitted it. Her father always taking her own side didn’t encourage her to ever change her mind, either, because she had always liked him more. Gently, she reached forward with her right hand towards the fire, taking in a little bit more of its warmth, as she remembered how it’d been like that night.

She’d been the only one to actually make it out of the house with only some singed hair and clothes to show for it. The reports said there were no signs of arson or deliberate fire, which had been true. Kelly hadn’t done anything on purpose.

A tear slowly trailed down her cheek. Never on purpose, but never in control of her emotions, either. She felt the fire grow a little bit colder.