



Demons in the words

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And tongues of red flames leapt into the night sky, licking at the stars and charring them black, such was the brilliance of the fire.

The words fell from my lips like a curtain, concealing me, though they did little to drown out the voices echoing up from the floor below. Now they inhabit this page.

Arguments in this house happen too often for me to keep count. Voices stretch the air taut, and every movement I make threatens to break the thin veil of calm. Keep calm, a clear head, don't mention anything, keep your mouth shut, the voice repeats, but there's only so much I can take of the voice in my head and those outside. They clash, and the conflict is jarring. It hurts my head, and leaks down into my body. It stops there. It doesn't leave. I've stoppered all outlets because where else can it go?

The light illuminated the blackened remains of a life, the angry red glow bloodying the stones and bleeding over the ground, thirsting for more fuel to consume, but nothing would sate it.' I spoke to the wall, hoping the flat surface would reflect the words back to me, to double their power.

'I told you, don't talk to me, you do nothing to help this house.'

'I've been doing everything, I'm the one looking after our children, I'm the one washing and cooking.'

'I said don't talk to me!'

It's funny how my memory sharpens in situations like these. I remember my father's exact words, and my mother's stricken expression as he accused her of all the problems he faces. It's unfair how much I can remember, though I suppose, as I'm writing this down, a memory like mine is somewhat useful. In a few years, when I'm reading over this, I'll know that it's not as bad as it was then.

'We're not a family anymore, we don't talk, we keep secrets, this house is cursed.'

'I don't know what you want me to do ...'

'Shut up!'

Shut up, he says. Don't talk to me, he says. When she's not around, he tells me she won't talk to him so they can fix this. And he won't see the hypocrisy inside himself, only in others. He claims he's sick — which he is, a physical illness — but he doesn't realise the toxicity that he has caused in part has infected everyone.

She plays the victim, asking, always asking, her questions and pleas for aid a poison in their own right. I can't do everything she asks.

Nothing. The inferno roared and screamed its displeasure as its questing fingers fell upon the stones ringing the pyre.

Words have a certain power, a power I like to think I have some control over. It's ironic, for someone who gets tongue-twisted as often as me, to be praised for their manipulation. I recited to myself, before, something I had written and partially memorised, something that may be an outlet for the conflict inside me. Look at me now, hunched over my desk, pen gripped in a hand that's becoming increasingly cramped as I try to squeeze each word onto a page groaning with the weight of what I've said and will say. Future self, think me a fool, but at least you won't be a fool like me.

'We're in debt.'

'And I'm the only one with a paying job.'

'And what else do you do?! Nothing! You do nothing to help me.'

When I listen to what they say, I realise that they truly are fools, and I'm more a fool for not doing anything about this. This ability to manipulate words on a page, and those who read them, it's of no use to me.

Shining eyes watched the spectacle, dark orbs in which the void lingered from some past visit. The mind behind those empty windows was filled with nothing but the voice of the fire, as it snarled and slowly faded into the blackness of night.

I spoke to the wall with my own words to try and drown out theirs, but their voices worm their way up through the floor and under the door, coiling around my brain until there's a pressure in my skull that won't dissipate. I still feel it, the hand of a monster whose façade I can see through but have no means to confront.

They went their separate ways after, with closed-off faces and bodies rigid, as though their spines were made of steel. Whatever they're made of, they're starting to rust, and so am I.

The child watched it die. The child didn't want it to, this creature that killed the stars. The child wanted it to live, to warm those who needed it, to illuminate paths for others to see. If it didn't show the right path, at least it might show them the wrong paths, so they know which not to take.

Future self, you remember what this meant. The child, not wanting to see the fire die, tries to fuel it, but there's no wood around. The child's body becomes the fuel, the fire a soul, but there's only so much a body can take before it is consumed. That's what I feel like now, that a fire is eating me up, but it offers no warmth, no comfort.

Words are meant to be my source of solace, something to escape to, though sometimes they amplify my thoughts until it seems that they are shouting, as though the argument in the rooms below never ceased. Sometimes I wonder if I should be writing this at all. But I don't want to forget the petty hardships that made me, and that life isn't perfect now, but I'll know of the good things that compare to the bad and be able to say: 'Hey, I got through this okay.'