

With Tears of Smoke  
by Brooklyn Gorley

There was nothing... until there was something.

A soft rumbling in the distance. Followed by an army of light tappings. It was all around, yet so far away. Was it... a rainstorm?

Soon, the tappings pounded harder. Another low rumble hummed even louder than before. Then a variety of noises were composed. Mutterings hummed in the distance. *But who?* Footsteps collided with floor, producing a hushed clapping effect. The gentle creak of a door was added to the orchestra of noise, changing it all.

After the creak, the mutterings grew silent and the footsteps stopped. Then there was the click of a closing door.

Although the rainstorm continued, everything else was still and quiet. Suddenly, the peaceful silence was broken. The noise was new. But this time, intelligible.

“We have the results.” Voice. The noise was a voice.

Another voice. “Well?” This voice was different. While the first one was low and gruff. This one was softer and higher.

“It’s not great,” replied the first voice.

“And...?” The second voice was using a tone. Impatience.

“Looks like amnesia. Sadly, it seems major. It’s most likely a dissociative fugue. You said she just wandered in here?” the first voice asked slowly.

“Oh. Y-yes she did. I don’t know where she came from,” the second voice spoke hesitantly.

“That’s not great news. But luckily she’ll hopefully remember herself soon. It won’t take more than a few months for her to regain her memory. Maybe just stay with

her until then. This condition is usually caused by severe trauma. She might've been dealing with a rough history."

After a beat of empty silence, the sound of clapping footsteps came back for a moment. Then the door creaked again and the first voice was gone.

Then another bang faded into rumbles. The gentle drum of tappings followed, lulling me to sleep.

*From a distance, I could smell something. Every time my nose breathed in, the familiar aroma filled me with regret. I couldn't remember where the regret came from, all I knew was that it smelled sweet. But not in a good way. It came with smoke and smelled like—*

*Fire.*

*The heat wrapped around me, scalding my arms and legs.*

*My vision was blurred by gray smoke and orange and yellow fire. Someone familiar screamed in the distance. There was nothing I could do. The fire rendered me helpless. It ate at my flesh until there was nothing to do but scream.*

I gasped and shot up to a sitting position. It couldn't have been a dream, could it? It felt so real, so intimate.

But how could it be familiar? I wondered if it was just a memory, something that had already happened. Then I realized I couldn't recall anything happening before waking up here. *Where is here?*

I looked around, surveying my surroundings. I was sitting on a worn out sofa in a cluttered living room. But there was no one else around.

"Hello?" I called, wondering if I was still dreaming. I had to remember *something*.

Then I hopped off the sofa. Which was a bad idea. I stood up so fast that blood rushed to my head, making me dizzy. After taking a moment to reorient myself, I walked across the room, searching for something that would help me remember anything.

Nothing seemed recognizable. So I turned to what I assumed was the front door of the small home, and went outside. The sun was out, but there were puddles of water. Like it had rained not too long ago, which proved I had been conscious before.

The small home I exited was in the middle of nowhere. Which was the most annoying part of waking up there. *If I have to not know where I came from, can I at least be somewhere with people?*

The only thing for miles was fields of tall dry grass. Even though it had rained, most of the area seemed dry already. I subconsciously wondered how long I had been asleep.

Then I saw something. Near the side of the house, there was an empty patch of dirt. A small campfire was lit, flickering with the wind. I automatically wandered toward the fire. The fire seemed to seduce me with its warmth and grace.

Standing next to the fire, I bowed my head, breathing in the heat. Curly red hair fell in my face, and I closed my eyes. The fire reminded me of something. It felt calming at first, but started to make me uneasy.

*“Kea, NO,” my mother yelled as I tried to weave around the fire to get to her. “It’s too late for me. Run!”*

*Tears streaked my face, but I didn’t move.*

*“Don’t worry,” she spoke softly, coughing in between words. “You can’t control... where the fire spreads... but you can control whether you chase it.” She burst into another coughing fit.*

“NO,” I cried as I was knocked back into reality. I stepped forward, wanting to chase the memory, but I kicked the fire instead.

Embers and sparks hurled out and spread all around. I gulped as the mostly dry grass caught fire.

Before I could do anything, the fire spread. And fast. Heat surged through my body, and the fire danced in the breeze. It *taunted* me.

My mothers words echoed around my head. I knew there was nothing left that I could do. The fire surrounded me. It crackled and burned, but still somehow felt comforting. The smell of smoke filled my lungs.

*Kea.* Even though I didn’t remember much from my past, I learned my name. That was all I really needed. There were so many questions still unanswered floating around my head. It was okay though.

It was my turn to chase the fire. I didn’t know where it would lead, but it was all I had left. It was all I could do.

And with that, Kea walked into the fire.