

Trial by Fire

It was time for a change.

It was time for her to move on. For too long she had let her monsters haunt her, let them follow her every step with the tenacity of a dog following its master.

He was gone, happy with his new, younger, more attractive wife for sure, and it was time for her to finally accept it.

The fire crackled merrily in front of her, spitting glowing embers that floated into the night sky like fireflies. The sparks whirled about, spinning and floating freely without a care in the world. They mocked her inability to take flight while she was bound by earthly flesh and tiny chains, cruelly picking at wounds that refused to heal.

Her demons shackled her to the ground, digging their claws into her ankles like little thorns, piercing further and further with every breath. The monsters gouged a deep score across her heart, lying in camouflage deep within every reminder of *him*.

So it was time to let go.

Beside her sat a large cardboard box slightly wet with the dew, filled with every last memory of him. His clothes, his gifts, his pictures, his trinkets and toys – all of them sat in this box, settled so innocently in the grass.

Slowly, with purpose, she lifted the first item out of the box. His old rugby jacket. He gave it to her the night of their first date after she shivered from the cold. She never gave it back.

Into the fire it went, greedy flames consuming the rough material and devouring the memories it contained.

She inhaled sharply, her eyes wide with excitement as the great black beast that coiled in her stomach loosened its hold on her soul ever so slightly.

Free. She finally felt free.

With an elated whoop, she tossed more and more into the fire, watching with childish glee as the blaze grew hotter and brighter, surging forward to turn hopes and dreams and memories and *demons* into ash.

The impossibly tight grip around her relaxed even more, letting her breathe freely for the first time in years.

Giddy, she reached into the box and pulled out her final memento of him, the last tie between them. The last tie between her and her monsters.

Then she faltered, staring at the simple gold band that lay in her palm, glinting in the light of her fire. The heat that radiated from it seared her cheek, but she ignored it in favour of the bewitching loop that was the source of so much of her misery.

It was her wedding ring.

She stared at the band, fingers running over the smooth metal gently. Could she really let this go? Could she really let go of all of his care and devotion, poured into a golden ring and a promise of devotion?

She swallowed thickly, gaze refusing to move even an inch as she stared fixedly at the ring in her palm.

Could she throw away his smile, his laugh, his warm hugs and warmer eyes that made her heart flutter? Could she throw away the future they planned together? Throw away all of the blood, sweat, and tears they poured into their dreams?

Her chest ached, throbbing ardently as the demons stirred, awakening as the memories came flooding back.

No! She was finally free! She refused to be shackled once more!

Her gaze hardened, eyes narrowing until they were razor-like slits. She was stone, cold and unmoving. Unforgiving.

Could she really let go of him?

Yes, she could.

With a flick of her wrist, the ring was in the fire, abandoned to its fate. The flames licked and clawed at it, beating at the ring with its fiery tongues, but the metal remained strong and proud, undaunted. The ring was unwavering, holding true against the weight of her desperation and the heat of the flames.

She dropped her head into her hands at the sight, defeated, sinking to her knees as her eyes glistened with tears. Just like the ring she had cast into the fire, it would take much more than mere flames to destroy her love.

It was time for a change, but she could never bring herself to truly let go.

And so she feebly clung to him once more, relishing her last moments of freedom before the beasts came to swallow her whole once again.