

The Artillery of Words

by Keppiehed

Sometimes language itself is the savior.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Warnings: triggers for sexual abuse of a minor

Prompt: "dewdrop, amulet"

A/N: Winner for week #3 at Brigit's Flame. The title is from a line in a 1692 poem by Jonathan Swift called *Ode to Dr. William Sancroft*. Big hugs to my friend and most reliable firstreader, Grander_fanfics. I know I hear the truth from you, which means the world to me. Also, thanks to betas Fawatson and Openedlocket for the great feedback.

I'll tell you a secret. I'm seven now. It's better than six; six was bad. Six was short. I don't have to think about eight yet for a long time—I know already I won't like it. But seven ... you can tell it's good if you listen to the word. Just say it. Seven. See?

No names. Names can tell. Numbers are better.

I like the sounds of words, don't you? Sometimes I say one over and over until I can't remember what it means. Giraffe giraffe giraffe giraffe ... it becomes a muddle, like I never knew it in the first place. That scares me a little, so I stop. I want to know what things mean.

I like the words that sound like what they are. I couldn't imagine something other than sky for that. It's perfect. Blue and open and big, just what it is. Forever.

"Stop that," Mother says.

I know she means the way I stare at things, that I am always thinking. I just turn things over in my hands and head and look at them. But that's my way now. I cannot speak anymore. I can't remember if I used to be different, but whoever I was is gone.

"Go play with the other kids!" she says.

But I am not like the other kids. Nor they like me.

Some words are special, and I only take them out when I am alone. I don't want to destroy them, so I wait for just the right time. *Octopus. Royalty. Chandelier.* I heard that once, and it's my favorite. That one makes me think of fairy tales, of dancing and music and parties. Nothing bad can happen when you have a word like chandelier. It sounds fragile, though. I worry that it could break, so I save it.

In the darkness, when he comes, I am afraid. I try to squeeze my eyes shut and hold my breath, I pretend I am flat under the covers. *Envelope. Invisible.*

It never works. I don't have magic.

I am frightened, even though I shouldn't be, by now. I wish I wouldn't shake. He hates it when I cry. The words are scary, too. Dungeon, blood, scream ... there are a lot of bad words. More than good ones. They sneak in if you let them. You have to be careful.

I found a game that works. I start with alligator, even though I don't like that. I always start with that. It's hard to think of nine letter words, and it is an A, which is how things should start.

The smell of alcohol on his breath makes me cringe.

Seashell. I try and picture the girl from the tongue-twister, how she is selling things. She is barefoot, in the water. I don't think I could ever be so carefree. Have I ever been to the seashore?

The sound of my nightgown ripping pulls me back. The next one has to be good. It has to be a word to save me, because I can feel rough hands, and I know what comes next. I cast about and am lost for a seven letter word. My pulse starts to rise as I panic. I can't be here, can't be caught in this body! Then it comes to me, and I am free: dewdrop. That's a lovely word. One of my favorites. I think of fairies in the morning. When I was very young, I used to think that little pixies painted the grass while I slept. I wish I didn't have to grow up and know better.

A tongue in my mouth, gagging me. The next word springs from nowhere. It's like a champion. *Amulet.* I could think on that for a long time. The sound of it is so rich, and I'm grateful because I haven't thought of amulet in a long time. It gets me through some tough times. It's my knight in shining armor.

The pain would be too much if I didn't have *misty*. It isn't really a thing, so it feels like cheating, but I like it better than *cloud*. I thought of cloud last time and it didn't work. I like misty better. So soft and beautiful. It hides what you don't want to see.

The hand around my neck, choking me, brings me back. He wants to see my eyes at least once. He knows I do something, that I go somewhere. He saves his favorite moment for now, and I save mine. I look him right in his red eyes, strained and bulging, and it almost gets me, but I've saved *rose* for this, and I am safe again. Rose is so kind, and I can always count on that to get me through.

Bee is nearly an afterthought. It is lighthearted and cute. Buzzing about. This bee has no stinger, just a fluffy flier. There has been enough pain. It doesn't need to be strong. *He* is almost done.

The next one is easy, because I can only think of *go*. I just wish go. Him or me, it doesn't matter.

And the last word I save for the click of the door, when I am alone again. *I*. I am still me. Somewhere in here. For now.