

## Conflagration

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/44081554) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/44081554>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings</a>
Category:	<a href="#">Gen</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Empires SMP</a> , <a href="#">Hermitcraft SMP</a>
Character:	<a href="#">fWhip</a> , <a href="#">Geminitay</a> , <a href="#">FalseSymmetry</a> , <a href="#">Grian</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Empires SMP Season 1</a> , <a href="#">roseblings</a> , <a href="#">Alternate Universe - The Magnus Archives Fusion</a> , <a href="#">Transcript Format</a> , <a href="#">Fire</a> , <a href="#">house fire</a> , <a href="#">Grimlands Forge</a> , <a href="#">Temporary Character Death</a> , <a href="#">? its ambiguous</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 43 of <a href="#">From the Archives</a>
Stats:	Published: 2023-01-05 Words: 2,604 Chapters: 1/1

## Conflagration

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

### Summary

#### [GRIAN]

Right. Statement of Fail Whip, regarding his sister, Gemini Tay, and a series of events presumed connected to [Statement 0220517](#). Statement recorded live from subject today, September 17th, 2022. Statement begins.

### Notes

This is a direct sequel to [The Not Deer](#), and I would recommend reading that fic before this one! Not necessary but also recommended are the other stories in False's narrative: [Skittering Things](#), [Golden Eagle](#), and [The Red King's Tragedy](#).

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

[Click]

#### [FWHIP]

So you did talk to her roommate? False?

#### [GRIAN]

She was in here awhile ago, I guess a few months after the disappearance. In May?

#### [FWHIP]

Would've been, yeah.

**[GRIAN]**

I can have one of my assistants print up a copy of her statement, if that's something you'd like to have. It's... a little gruesome.

**[FWHIP]**

That... would be great. Thanks. She was always really dodgy with me when I tried to get answers out of her.

**[GRIAN]**

Of course. I'm recording now, if you're ready to start?

**[FWHIP]**

Fire away.

**[GRIAN]**

Right. Statement of Fail Whip, regarding his sister, Gemini Tay, and a series of events presumed connected to [Statement 0220517](#). Statement recorded live from subject today, September 17th, 2022. Statement begins.

**[FWHIP]**

Well... Gem and I were always close.

Our parents got divorced when we were pretty little, and it was kind of messy- there was a whole disaster involving custody and citizenship and stuff- so we spent our childhoods moving around a lot, and we stuck together. A lot of my childhood memories involve the two of us sneaking off together away from whoever was supposed to be watching us.

One of the places we lived when we were younger, with our mom, had this sort of run-down old shed in the backyard, back in the corner pressed up against the fence. I guess it was a coal shed, once, from before the house got central heating. We loved it. It was like our hiding place. I especially spent a lot of time there- I was always really into tools and tinkering, and I used it as a workshop. Gem always knew if she couldn't find me anywhere else, she could probably find me there.

It wasn't insulated or anything, obviously; we weren't even really supposed to be out there, since the wood was rotting and it was sort of unsafe, but you know how kids are. We figured nothing could ever hurt us. So I took the space heater from the bathroom and ran two extension cords out from the house, so we could be out there when it got cold. Stupid, of course, but I just didn't think it through.

It caused a fire.

It was a small one, but it was enough. I remember really clearly looking out my bedroom window and seeing the smoke, all thick and black, and the absolute *fear* that set into my heart when I realized I wasn't sure where Gem was. I sprinted outside just as the shed collapsed completely, as all that old rotten wood finally gave in, and for a moment I was *sure* Gem had been inside, and I'd just- *lost* her.

Then she came out of the house behind me, and she was fine, and it was fine, and I rushed to call the fire service, but- I never really forgot that feeling.

We grew up, more or less. She used to like to say I never grew up at all. Eventually she ended up

staying with our dad in England while she went off to university, before he passed away, and she settled down in London after graduating. I wound up back in America, and went to trade school for auto repair. We didn't see each other that often, but we called all the time, and kept up with each others' lives.

She always had this fascination with nature. I wasn't as interested in the outdoors as she was- like I said, I was always more into mechanics- but even back when we were kids, I liked watching her face light up whenever she turned over a rock and found some interesting bugs underneath. After she moved away, she would always send me pictures from her hikes and camping trips, and call me to tell me everything that had happened after she got home.

If you've talked to False I'm sure you already know about the circumstances of her disappearance. I remember calling her just before she left for her trip. She sounded so *excited*. It was only supposed to be a few days. She was supposed to be back on Monday, and she'd call me when she had service again.

And she just didn't.

When it was a few hours after the time she was supposed to be home, I called her. And called her. And called her. There was never any answer. The first few times I left messages, but I never got so much as a text back. And I didn't have contact information for any of her friends over there, or her roommate, so I couldn't even call any of them to ask them to check in.

I knew something *had* to be wrong. She *wouldn't* just *not* call. She always *hated* to worry me! I knew even if something had gone really wrong, she would've- borrowed someone else's phone, sent an email, *something*. But there was nothing but silence.

In those days, waiting to hear any news, I threw myself into work. I had a workshop in my basement where I'd work on little inventions- I had an old car down there I was piecing back together, and a few other projects, and a big forge setup for metalworking. I had it wired up to my furnace, so I could, uh... let's say *reduce* some heating costs. I spent more and more time down there, just doing whatever I could to keep my hands busy.

I'd had a project I was working on that was going to be a present for Gem. I'd always been making things and giving them to her, ever since we were kids. This one was supposed to be a sprinkler for her garden.

And then one day, I came downstairs, and she was there.

I only saw her for a moment. She was looking at my workbench, crouched down to inspect every little piece and tool just like she had when we were kids. It was her. I *know* it was her. She looked just like she always had. She was wearing a shirt I'd given her. Flower print. She looked up at me and smiled.

I thought- for a moment, I thought that it was really, physically her. That something had happened, and she'd had to leave England and come home to see me, and she was fine after all, just like when we were kids and she'd come out of the house behind me as I stared at the burning shed.

And then I took another step down the stairs and she was gone.

Like she'd never been there. Like she'd been a ghost.

It was the day after that that Gem's roommate finally called me. She'd gotten my number off Gem's phone.

She was... terse, I guess, over the phone. She didn't tell me much. She only said Gem had... gone missing, on her trip, but... I could tell she thought she was dead. It was obvious from the way she said it. She said she'd had... reason to believe Gem was fine until recently but then- finally realized, I guess, that she wasn't, and filed a missing persons report. I tried pressing her for detail, but she just got quieter and quieter, and her answers got shorter and shorter until I gave up.

I knew there was something she wasn't telling me. And I knew-

I *knew* I'd seen Gem.

The police investigation came back saying she'd died in the wildfire, but they never found her body. She wasn't the only hiker to get caught in the fire, and with the size of the area that burned, they'll be searching for... a long time.

She didn't have a will, so all her stuff went to me automatically- our dad passed about a year ago, and we didn't have any other immediate family left.

It was just me and her, and then it was just me.

And her.

I kept seeing her.

After they released the finding I had to fly to the UK to get her things and talk to the police. I took a redeye back, and at one point when I got up from my seat I glanced down one of the empty rows and saw her, sitting next to the window, staring out into the night. There were flowers in her hair.

I froze. My heart jumped into my throat and stayed there. I was waiting for her to disappear, like she had when I'd seen her in my workshop, but she just... didn't, and after a moment she glanced up at me and smiled and beckoned for me to sit down. I sat down in the empty seat next to her, slowly, like if I moved too fast she'd startle and be gone, and I reached over to grab her hand. It was warm, almost too hot.

I asked her what she was doing there. I asked her where she'd been. I told her I'd been looking for her.

She said she was waiting for me. She said she wanted me to come with her. I asked her where, but she just smiled and put her head on my shoulder and didn't say anything else. It felt like there was something *sharp* just under her hair, poking into my neck. And she still felt too warm, like she had a fever. But she was solid, and real, and *there*.

And then the wheels touched the runway with a jolt, and... I guess I must have woken up, because she was gone.

I called the airline once we landed. According to them, that seat was always empty. No passenger assigned. They had no sales records for a Gem Tay. She *wasn't* on that plane. But *I saw her there*.

I called False, too. I didn't tell her everything, but I told her some of it. She sounded... worried, over the phone. She told me to ignore it if I saw her again, that it wasn't really her, and she started asking me if I had any other family I could stay with for awhile, but I hung up on her instead of responding.

I guess I feel sort of bad about that. She was just trying to help. But I still knew she hadn't been completely honest with me, and I was just... I don't know. Not angry. I just didn't really want to hear her advice.

By the time I got home with the two suitcases of her stuff that was all I had left of her, it was early morning. Even though I must have fallen asleep on the plane to have that dream, I felt exhausted, but at the same time I felt like I couldn't possibly sleep. I felt like there were needles under my skin, like the whole left side of my body where she'd leaned on my shoulder was still too warm for comfort.

And if I went to sleep, when I woke up, I'd need to start thinking about funeral plans.

So instead, I went down to my basement, and worked on my little present for her until I could barely feel my hands. I don't know why I was still so focused on it. She was dead. It wasn't rational. It's just that, my whole life, whenever I didn't know what to do, I've always resorted to working with my hands to ground me.

I don't even remember passing out at my workbench.

But I remember waking up to the explosion.

It- well.

You can see the burns. They're not nearly as bad as they could've been, with how close I was to the furnace when it went.

At the time I don't think I even realized it hurt. My ears were ringing so much I could barely hear the fire alarms. By the time I managed to pry myself up off the ground everything was already catching, and the basement was starting to fill with smoke. I pulled my shirt up over my face, scrambled for the stairs and tried to breathe as little as possible.

I think everyone always thinks through what they would go to save from their house first in the event of a fire- what's most important- but when it's actually happening you really can't think about anything. At least I couldn't, when it was happening to me. I could only think about getting out.

I was at the back door when I remembered about the photos.

All the pictures of Gem and I as kids, growing up- they were all upstairs, in my room. I actually started to go for them. I knew even if I got up the stairs and found them in time, there was almost no chance I'd be able to get down again safely, but the thought of just letting them *burn*-

I couldn't.

The whole house was already burning, by then. I almost went back in anyways. I probably would've, but one of my neighbors who'd run over to see where the smoke was coming from found me and pulled me away from the doorway, and I lost my chance. My ears were still ringing from the explosion.

I don't remember much from after that. But I remember sitting on the curb outside my house as it burned while they waited for the ambulance for me, and looking across the street, and-

I saw her. Gem. Again.

She didn't look like I remembered her, not exactly. There was blood matting her hair down at the sides, and... branches? Antlers? Something long and sharp coming out of either side of her head, like a crown. But at the same time, she looked exactly like how she'd looked on the plane, and exactly how she'd looked when she was alive.

She smiled at me, and her smile was just the same as always, and she gestured for me to come join her.

I tried to stand up, but I couldn't- I was too dizzy, and as soon as I tried someone sat me down again, said something about how I'd hurt myself worse. I barely heard them. I just stared at her until another fire truck screaming down the road broke my line of sight, and when it had passed she was gone.

And then they took me to the hospital.

I was there for a week, but I don't remember much of it. I know I didn't see Gem there. Right before I was discharged, one of the nurses told me I'd been delirious most of the time, but that I'd kept telling the orderlies they had to let my sister in, if she came to see me. I told them she'd be worried.

The fire was... there was something strange about it. Even once the firefighters were there, it took more than a day to contain. Half the block went up. They're still assessing the damages.

The reason I'm here now, instead of dealing with that, is... well, maybe you've already guessed.

I want to find her.

She's out there somewhere. She told me she was waiting. I have this feeling like if I *don't* go find her, fires will just keep starting around me. And I want to see her again.

And I don't have anything else left, anyways.

[Click]

[Click]

**[GRIAN]**

False hasn't answered any of my calls since Martyn was in here, but I left her a message anyways.

I've been trying to call Fwhip with a couple questions about his timeline of events for the last three days since he gave his statement. He's not answering his phone.

*(Sighs)*

I suppose I can't judge.

[Click]

## End Notes

man FINALLY. would you believe ive been planning this statement since writing the not deer and it just kept getting pushed back. im very pleased to finally be posting the other half of this story. fwhip, along with stress, is one of the characters who i had like just SO much trouble with pretending his name was a normal person name

this one goes out to the guy on tumblr who was really interested in a fwhip statement. we got there eventually!! i hope it was worth the wait. <3

we're also approaching another quite big event in the story (on the level of moonstruck), one i've been planning since the very start. i hope yall are excited, because i certainly am

as always i can be found on twitter at @sixteenthdays for as long as it survives, and on tumblr at @sixteenth-days. and if you leave a comment i love you

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!