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Illa es Meus Lacrima
(These are My Tears)

I am the unobtrusive sentinel in the Marshall's residence. From the day the charming couple moved into my house, I have watched over them. Over the years, I have seen them bring home three beautiful children and make this humble house a loving home. The youngsters have grown like weeds, and the two older boys are now attending high school, while their younger sister still goes to junior high. I beam with pride at my humans' accomplishments, ring with laughter at their jokes, and, most importantly, cry for their troubles and suffering. More than once, my tears have washed away their dilemmas and brought them calm. No, I am not a supernatural being. I am a residential automatic fire sprinkler.

Although my kind has inhabited schools, office buildings, and factories for over a century, my residential branch of the family has only just become popular in the past decade (Residential). I think this is a travesty of human life, for where do the teachers, students, secretaries, CEO's, and factory workers come from? The home, of course! Our first objective should be protecting people in the places they believe they are the safest. People who think fires are more likely to happen in restaurants or factories than in homes are mistaken. In 2005, for instance, the National Fire Protection Association reported 396,000 residential fires costing \$6.9 billion in property damage (Residential). The corporeal loss was much greater than the monetary loss, however. The Association documented 3,055 civilian deaths and 13,825 civilian injuries in 2005 (Residential). These figures seem to pervade the years, for the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) logs over 3,000 deaths every year due to residential fires (National). By implementing fire

sprinklers, homeowners can expect financial losses 90% lower than those who live in homes without sprinklers (Facts). Studies by the USFA also show that installing home fire sprinkler systems could save thousands of lives and prevent even more injuries (Residential). Simply by adding one of my family members to their homes, people can dramatically reduce the risk of fire damage.

I remember one instance when I protected the Marshall's from what could have been a lethal fire. When they were young and didn't know any better, Sarah and her brother, James, found the matches their parents used for lighting their birthday candles. The children decided to play with them in the living room while their mother was asleep upstairs. They were thrilled when the match flared up, but when it grew too hot to hold, James dropped it. The carpet began to go up in flames, and the children started screaming. Smoke began to billow, causing the fire alarm to blare. Just as the couch began to singe, Mr. Marshall arrived home from work and ran through the front door, panicked at the sound of his children's shrieks. The thought of my humans being in danger made me scared, and I began to cry, letting my tears rush from my iron eyes and pour over the room. As Mr. Marshall grabbed his children, his wife rushed blearily down the stairs, clutching her eldest child's hand. The family quickly escaped the house while I doused the living room in my protective tears. The fire department arrived soon after to quell what was left of the flames. In the aftermath, I overheard the captain telling my humans it was because of me that their house was still intact and they were unhurt. I swelled with pride, because I know that my brethren and I save many homes and lives.

Residential sprinklers are very valuable in the peace of mind we provide, but we also have many other advantages. We are quick to respond to fires, and we use much less

water to contain fires than fire hoses use. Firefighters extinguish a blaze using over eight times the water we fire sprinklers use (Facts). A sprinkler-protected home suffers much less water damage than those without sprinklers, which saves the family vast amounts of money. We are smaller and more aesthetically pleasing than our larger, bulkier, industrial cousins. Also, we are not expensive to install. Home sprinkler systems currently cost from \$1.00 to \$1.50 per square foot in new construction, and as we become more popular, the cost is expected to decrease (Residential). In fact, that national average of installing a home sprinkler system increases the total building cost by only about 1% (Facts). In addition to providing a safer environment and protection of irreplaceable family possessions, we can also reduce homeowners' insurance rates 5 to 15 percent, giving families a much needed break in bills. We are not expensive to implement, but we fire sprinklers are a vital addition to any home, both economically and practically.

When the room temperature hits 160 degrees Fahrenheit, my fusible link (now widely used in modern sprinklers) melts and allows my tears to spray evenly around the room, efficiently putting out any fire that threatens my humans (New Millennium). Don't believe the rumors that we malfunction and go off when there's no fire- I only cry when the temperature's hot enough. The myths about us being ugly and inclined to play monkey-see, monkey-do are wrong too! We have our own designers to give us hip new looks to go with any décor, and we don't like to copy our siblings in the next room by going off when they do, we only respond to the temperature in our own rooms (Residential).

My humans are very important to me. I want to watch each child go off to college and become successful, and I can't wait to see little grandchildren wandering around the

house on wobbly young legs. Those things can't happen if a fire destroys their home or, worse, takes their lives. To that end, I have pledged myself to protect my humans from any fire that could ruin their hopes and dreams. As a residential automatic fire sprinkler, I take my job very seriously, and I never play with fire.

Works Cited

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