



## **The Boy**

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### **Rating:**

[Teen And Up Audiences](#)

### **Archive Warning:**

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### **Fandom:**

[A Court of Thorns and Roses Series - Sarah J. Maas](#)

### **Character:**

[Azriel](#)

### **Additional Tags:**

[Angst](#), [Childhood](#), [Depression](#)

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### **Series:**

Part 1 of [Shadowsinger: An Azriel/Moriel Fic](#)

### **Stats:**

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# The Boy

by [illyriantremors](#)

## Summary

This is the first part of a larger fic that will chronicle the life of Azriel from the time he was young up until he and Morrigan confront their relationship in a would-be ACOTAR3. This chapter is really more like a prologue as it's rather short and written in third person unlike the rest of the fic, but it details Azriel's life as a kid with his father and step-family and how horribly miserable living in his cell was.

## Notes

Azriel has come to mean a lot to me as a character, which is why I've decided to write this sort of "in the life of" fic about him. I really wanted to work through his psyche and get to know him better. I will warn you this fic is eventually going to later on show some very intense and graphic moments of violence and heartbreak, so please read on with caution.

All the boy knew was darkness. Darkness, and silence.

Just one hour a day. That's all he got. The air was so chilling each time they dragged him outside, he almost wished he was back in that all consuming darkness rather than suffer the freezing heartache of the Illyrian mountains. Almost wished, but then the wind would creep up to kiss his cheek and his muscles would tighten in a sort of cruel call and response he couldn't complete.

Pain ripples across his back as he falls forward at the force of his brothers knocking him down. Hands grab his shoulders roughly and drag him across dirt and gravel towards a pole in the middle of the yard where his hands are bound and his wings are strapped down.

His wings.

Each kiss of the wind against the membranes sends his blood running. There's a stretch of grass that slopes downwards not more than fifty feet off, just enough for a running start.

Leftover mist from the early morning dew tingles against his skin as his body adjusts to the sensation of freezing. The wind fits easily between his shirt made of holes. He has no idea what this weather means for flying, but he could do it. Break the ropes and run for all his fragile bones are worth until he's airborne, his wings a savior keeping him from his family's call to death.

But he'd never make it and that's what makes him stay. They know it too. His half-brothers and step-mother. Even his father knows it and worst of all, he doesn't care. None of them do. The boy isn't sure even he cares anymore. One step towards freedom and he would die, lost forever in treacherous Illyrian woods unable to fly above. Maybe it would be worth it if it meant escaping the hell-hole he lives in.

For an hour each day, the boy's heart fights with what his body demands he do and what his mind begs he doesn't. It's an effort not to cry, but he won't give his family another arrow to notch in the bow that's eternally pointed at

his head. Again, he wonders, if it would be a relief to let the arrow snap and feel his life break a final time.

Just when he thinks he can't take sitting in the bitter winter air for another moment, that he might go mad from staring at the future he craves knowing he can't have any of it, the ropes are cut free and he's being dragged back to his cell. Overwhelming instincts to fight and kick surge up in the boy's blood dominating every twitch of his nerves until he's lost all control. He'll do anything to avoid going back to that cell. Anything to stay outdoors where his body belongs and daydream his life away thinking about the wind flowing beneath his wings.

His brothers grunt, surprised at the days the boy actually puts thought into motion and tries. But they are stronger than him. Much stronger. One set of hands holds him down while another connects with his nose, his gut. Blood sprays the hard dirt on which he's been thrown. His brothers laugh cruelly.

Even worse are the days where he's taken outside and met with the kind, worried face of the woman who bore him. She's allowed only a hour with him not more than once a month - or at least, he thinks it's a month. He can never be sure he's kept track of time properly while he wastes away in his cell. No one ever bothers to tell him the time.

His mother sits with him at that pole, the only time he's allowed out unbound, but she knows the truth. For an hour, she soothes him, offers him brief moments of sanity that he would almost rather do without because time slips just as quickly, if not faster, in good company and pretty soon, she's ripped away from him along with those sunsets he longs for.

But it's hope. Not much. Just a small slice to take with him. But it's enough to keep him breathing, keep from going to meet his death in those woods. A reminder that good things are out there if he's ever brave enough one day to go and find them.

And then the darkness slams down on him and he's questioning if any of it was real. The promise of a future feels broken, the good things burned up in the light of the sun he's barred from.

For several heartbeats, his body is a blaze of panic and thrashing. He refuses to open his eyes because if he keeps them shut, he can imagine there's sunlight all around him just waiting for him to wake up. He's never felt the sun before. Not really. The cold always make the orb so high in the sky seem far, far away.

He gropes in the darkness, his hands searching for something to hold on to and finding nothing, so he grips them in tight fists at his sides instead, enough so that the nails dig in at the skin of his smooth palms until they slice open and little rivulets of blood trickle down onto the cement floor.

When his mind has honed in on that pain in his hands enough to slow down, his heart finally begins to slow its pace. Deep breathes force air in and out of his lungs until he remembers how to breathe without forcing it. He opens his eyes.

It is so dark, he can't tell the difference from when his eyes were closed. And it's cold, mercilessly so, but no one ever thinks to bring him a blanket. The eternal game of which is warmer - in here or out there - wages on.

The boy crawls along the unrelenting cement floor until he finds his cot. He pulls himself atop it with what little strength his atrophied muscles will give him and folds in on himself. The tears are allowed to flow at last.

He fears the darkness. He dies in it. Over and over again, day after day for eight years, he has lived with it. Learned to call his worst enemy friend because it is the only one he knows who doesn't talk back to him like his half-family does when he murmurs his deepest hopes and desires into the silence of that room.

When the shivering ceases and the tears dry up, the boy hugs himself more tightly and allows sleep to take him over, hoping he won't ever wake up.

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## **The Burns**

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[Teen And Up Audiences](#)

### **Archive Warning:**

[Graphic Depictions Of Violence](#)

### **Fandom:**

[A Court of Thorns and Roses Series - Sarah J. Maas](#)

### **Character:**

[Azriel](#)

### **Additional Tags:**

[Fire](#), [Violence](#), [Pain](#), [Burns](#), [Depression](#)

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English

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Part 2 of [Shadowsinger: An Azriel/Moriel Fic](#)

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# **The Burns**

by [illyriantremors](#)

## Summary

Azriel is dragged outside unexpectedly on his 8th birthday by his two step-brothers who proceed to set his hands on fire. Pain, suffering, and shadows ensue.

*“Let it bleed, and take the red for what it’s worth. Watch the fire fill your lungs with smoke for the last time. If you feel like dying you might want to SING.”*

*- The Used*

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I needed to go to the bathroom.

That was when the cell was the worst. They wouldn’t ever let me out to pee. When I was smaller, I would cry for a really long time until the pain in my stomach hurt so much, I had to let it out.

No one ever came.

I didn’t mind it so much except for the smell. On a clean day, I wouldn’t smell it after a few minutes, but after a week of it sitting on the cement floor, it would take hours before my nose would clear again.

My half-brothers liked to rub my face in it sometimes. They thought it was funny. But their mother - not mine - she couldn’t stand it. In the pale light of the torches lining the hallway outside my cell, I could see her nose pinch up whenever she opened the door to let me out for an hour. When she would bring me back, the cell was spotless again.

That’s why bleach became my favorite smell. It meant clean. It meant safe.

The smell wasn’t so bad today. But the sharp feeling in my gut was tightening.

It had been a really, really long time since I had last gone outside. Or I thought it had been. I figured I could hold on for another couple of hours. I’d gotten really good at that. Maybe if I tried harder today, I’d make it outside before I had to go.

I took a deep breath and rolled over on my cot. Shifting positions sometimes helped. The metal whined as my body moved.

I didn't want to sleep. I sometimes did nothing but sleep. And closing my eyes seemed pointless when the pictures I'd seen were the same as when they were open: dark, dark black. A darkness so dense, I couldn't see my own hand even when it was touching my face.

A dull thud carried down the hall. I could hear it even through the door, which was heavy and solid oak. I learned to ignore most sounds while I stayed in the cell. If I concentrated on them too much, I'd get too hopeful. But this sound was followed by another shortly after: snickering.

The lock on my door turned and my eyes squinted even with the torch light burning so low. My half-brothers stood in the doorway, their giant wings casting huge shadows on the wall behind them. It was the only feature we had in common. You would have never known we shared a father otherwise.

Wicked grins stretched out on their faces as they spotted me and I wanted to groan. I think their mother hated me more than they did, but she was easier taking me out than they were. I tried not to let them see my anxiety. They were meaner when they saw it.

"Happy birthday little batty boy," one of them said, a cruel delight in how he said it.

Birthday.

Today was my birthday and I didn't even know. Maybe my mother would be here today when they took me out. She tried to always be there on the only special day I got. It was only special to me, though, because I got to see her.

"What do you think, brother? Shall we give him a birthday gift this year?"

"Of course!" the other said, rubbing his hands together before stepping inside my cell. "I'm rather looking forward to it, actually."

My heart lurched for a moment, hope betraying me that maybe I would get lucky and my mother would be there, but then my half-brothers grabbed me roughly enough to throw me hard against the cement and I knew it was a lie. I was stupid to have thought anything but.

My body slammed against the floor. I felt my face rub into a tacky goo that smelled like pee and I almost vomited. But they picked me up before I could heave and half dragged, half carried me out of the cell.

I tried to kick, but fighting never worked. It certainly didn't today. My step-brother caught my foot and laughed. "Look! Little baby batty wants to play!"

He cocked his fist back and slammed it into me. I heard a horrible *snap!* in my nose before the same hand sunk into my ribs. A new punch made by the other one's foot collided on my back.

They cackled together at my already defeated body between them. In a matter of minutes, we were outside, the harsh cold of winter beating down on my skin. I tasted iron in my mouth from all the blood coming out my nose.

Suddenly, I was on the ground, their hands off of me.

"Let's see what happens you mix Illyrian magic with a little heat," my step-brother said.

My hands were plunged into two buckets until they were covered in water up to my forearms. The water was thick and had a strange smell to it. I pressed my fingers together swirling it around a bit and realized what it was.

Not water, but oil.

My body shot up on what little strength it had left from small meals and the beating I'd already received, but it was too late. Just as I cried, "*NO!*" the buckets went up in flames.

Pain tore through me unlike anything I had ever felt before. Sitting underneath the trees for an hour every day at that pole so I could freeze in the wind was

nothing compared to this. I could feel my skin flake and peel as the fire crippled my hands and I fell on the ground shaking.

And I screamed.

I screamed for myself. I screamed for the sun and my wings beneath it. I screamed for my mother.

But no one came.

Tears dried up the second they fell as the heat of the flames climbed higher on my arms, gobbling them up in the steam. The smoke rose higher and higher on me, wrapping me up like a snake about to choke on its meal. It was so thick and so black, my entire body must have been burning, but it traveled in a way the darkness of my cell did not. There was a dance to the way it moved - and it *was* moving, as if on its own accord. As if it were *alive* .

I was near to passing out from the pain at my hands as my screaming continued. I called for my father, but even he did not come. My head felt light and I was going to drop, but that darkness reached for me. A shadow passed in front of my face before it poured itself into my nose and mouth. A sharp crack whipped through my brain and I saw the shadow cover my eyes, like a filter I could see through. And then, a voice spoke as if from inside my own ear.

“*Azzzzzzzzriel* ,” it said.

It terrified me, that noise. It was soft and menacing all at the same time and I never wanted to hear it again. And then as fast as it had come, it was gone.

A shout far outside myself rang out across the yard. Flames licked my elbows and everything went dark.

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## **The Fall**

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### **Fandom:**

[A Court of Thorns and Roses Series - Sarah J. Maas](#)

### **Characters:**

[Azriel](#), [Rhysand](#), [Cassian](#), [lord devlon](#), [rhysand's mother](#)

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# **The Fall**

by [illyriantremors](#)

## Summary

Azriel's father takes him to the Illyrian war camp run by Lord Devlon for the first time where he meets Cassian and Rhysand for the first time and is challenged in the fighting rings.



*Hey, don't write yourself off yet. It's only in your head you feel left out or looked down on. Just try your best. Try everything you can. And don't you worry what they tell themselves when you're away.*

- Jimmy Eat World

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I'd never flown before, but one shot into the air and I was pretty sure it was the most amazing feeling despite the nausea I could feel rolling through my father's grip on me. He held me by the neck of my shirt by only one tightly clenched hand as if to say he would take me with him, but he wouldn't try very hard about it.

Even with my body whipping around on the wind, I loved the sensation. My body came alive at the taste of freedom it had never been allowed and I could feel my wings tensing behind my back to try it for themselves. They stretched outward trying to push and pull on the air as we flew, to see what it would feel like.

My father hadn't told me where we were going. Only that I wasn't coming back. I knew, though, as we followed the steep peaks of the mountains ever higher that we were still in Illyrian territory.

Or I assumed so. My geography was lacking from 11 years spent wasting in a cell. A cell I wasn't ever going back to, if I could take my father at his word.

I didn't realize until the morning he'd taken me out for the last time - the first time *he'd* ever personally fetched me - that leaving with no return meant I'd never see my mother again. That thought alone was enough to send sorrow crashing through me and I had to fight back the tears so my father wouldn't see. I worried that if he caught me crying, he'd see it as a sign of weakness and not take me wherever it was we were flying.

So I concentrated instead on the family I left behind. *His* family. I'd never see my mother again, but I wouldn't see my step-mother or brothers anymore

either. I wasn't even sure I'd see my father. I knew he of course would go home eventually, but if I wasn't going with him, where did that leave me?

*Daaaaaaaaaanger .*

The voice slid through one ear and out the other, slippery and sneaking.

When the other men in the village had heard my screams and finally found me in time to put the flames out before I died, I was engulfed in more shadow than I was fire. They told me afterward that they had doused me in several more buckets worth of water than was necessary before they realized the fire was out and that the shadows were something else entirely.

In his panic, my father threw me back in my cell the second I left the healers. I didn't hear from anyone for a week.

Those nights were a torment I knew I'd never forget. I could live a thousand years never seeing my father or his two legitimate sons again, but the agony of feeling my hands scar over in sharp, stabbing pains while the voices spoke was a permanent scar.

I didn't know what they were. I wasn't even always sure what they said. I fought hearing them almost as much as I clung to them for life. My only friends in the darkness were also my greatest fear.

*Down* , a voice hissed in my ear as we passed over a clearing and suddenly dropped into a sharp descent into a valley overlooking a steep and narrow cliff. My father released his hold on me before we were even fifteen feet off the ground. The last time he would ever touch me.

Instantly we were met by an Illyrian of impressive size, a hulking mass of muscle and jaw line and a look about his face that said he smelled something vicious.

"He's yours," my father said and the Illyrian nodded before looking at me. I flushed immediately at the look in his eye, a look that tore me apart limb for limb, thought for thought. The shadows stretched tighter over me in response

as if to shield me and I received another not so gentle warning that I was not in friendly company.

I got up only to be met with the toe of the Illyrian male's boot slamming my chest back down.

"Shadowsinger," he said and grunted. I didn't know if that was a good thing or not. "Get in the ring." He pointed over his shoulder to where a half-dozen other males were hitting, biting, kicking, and all manner of ungodliness so near to the edge of that perilous cliff, it was a wonder they didn't fall off as they fell. Even at a distance, I could tell they were a mess of blood and gore.

Bile rose up in my throat. He wanted me to go *in there*?

He allowed me to stand, but I whirled around to face my father, my shadows clearing enough for a pleading look to show through. He stared at me with nothing more than disinterest on his face before turning and shooting into the sky.

Another parent I would never say goodbye to.

"Let's go," the Illyrian male, who I guessed was the war lord of the camp, yelled in my ear as he shoved me roughly. "Let's see what you can do with your pretty little shadows."

"Who are you?" I asked, walking toward the fighting rings as my stomach wound tighter and tighter in knots.

"Your father didn't tell you?" I shook my head and he shouted. "Answer me!" A slap met my face and I stumbled a few steps in shock, half running as I went to get to the rings and further away from him faster.

"He didn't tell me anything," I said. "Just that I wasn't going back."

He said nothing until we met the rings. Action stopped within them at once and I suddenly was struck by the number of male heads turning in my direction. All at once, the shadows swam passing in front of my eyes in a dark filter as they whispered all sorts of information about the camp: ages,

heights, hair color, eye color, sweat, build, bruises, cuts. Their entire lives were laid out before me in an instant. I mentally swatted them away in my blind panic.

“I’m Lord Devlon,” the Illyrian said, sounding semi-awed, like he’d only just noticed my companions while they retreated. But then, “Your father is a disgusting piece of shit from another camp who fucks whores and has bastard sons like you on the side.”

Snickers rang around the clearing.

“I don’t want you here,” he continued, revulsion overtaking whatever inspiration he’d had momentarily before. “But for a Shadowsinger, I’ll grant your father the favor of relieving him of the burden of you.” He snapped his fingers and pointed at the empty ring next to us, a clear message to move inside or be prepared to face my death.

I might have faced it regardless. I had no way of knowing. Even the shadows sat silently by to let me make up my own mind and it was odd not to hear them, I’d grown so used to their ceaseless chatter. Countless faces stared me down and I was terrified of what some of them might do to me.

But when I looked at Lord Devlon, his wings flared out wide behind him in silent demand of why I would hesitate and a sudden image flashed through my mind of those same huge wings flaring behind my step-brothers the morning they’d opened my cell to light me on fire.

My fists clenched. I might die today, but I would have died had I stayed behind. I had nothing to lose but my life and that already felt forfeit.

So I moved forward, lowered a rope lining the ring, and stepped into the pitch ready to meet my maker.

Lord Devlon snapped his fingers again and shouted. “Cassian!”

A smirking, smug Illyrian bastard from across the ring stepped up eagerly and let himself in. He wasted no time at all before he glided easily to me like

fire on wind and laid into me. I had no idea of the force coming at me. A sickening crunch sent waves of pain across my cheek.

“Alright, Shadowsinger?” Cassian said, grinning ear to ear. The gang of boys lining the ring struck up a fresh chorus of snickers. Cassian sent another punch soaking into my face without hesitation or remorse. There wasn’t a tremendous amount of force behind it, but my bones were so malnourished it didn’t matter. I felt like my whole head might explode at the softest touch.

Shadows leapt over me in a fight for my listening ear, but I shoved them away, tried desperately to ignore them. I couldn’t deal with their voices if I needed to concentrate so I could make it out alive.

That was when I knew I wanted to live after all. The moment his fist collided with my skin and the adrenaline of the fight pumped into my veins, I knew I wanted every breathe I could get. The boy inside of me with fire gnawing through skin down to the bone wanted it too.

Just a chance to *live* . I could have that here, maybe. If I could figure out how to survive first.

Another blow came, this time to my gut and I fell backward onto the hard ground. Cassian whooped as he walked a lap around the ring, riling the boys up. As I sat, my eyes landed on a taller, leaner boy, the only one not jeering. He stood casually appraising me from the side, a cold hard look on his face, hands in his pockets, and tremendous wings behind him that even at rest I thought might already be larger than Lord Devlon’s.

“What’s wrong, Shadowsinger?” Cassian spat, adjusting a cloth wrapping on his hands. Whispers rang through my ears, my mind and I tried to shake them out, but they wouldn’t budge. Like a buzzing, they intensified and I had to put my hands over my ears to make any sense of it.

Cassian laughed. I undoubtedly looked moronic, but I didn’t care. I closed my eyes and allowed the voices to fill me up and when at last they realized I would listen, I heard what they were saying.

*His knee. His knee, his knee, his KNEE!*

I looked up and sure enough, Cassian's right knee was bleeding through his fighting leathers. Cassian held his hands out as if to ask what I would do next. So taking a deep breathe I didn't have, I stood and faced him.

He smirked, cocking an eyebrow in interest, and strode purposefully for me. His hand reared back, aiming high, but just before he could land it once more on my face, I kicked out and slammed into that bleeding knee. He howled and fell into a kneel at a twisted position, but was up in no to time at all and before I knew it, I was on my stomach writhing in pain and blood from where he'd broken me.

Hands grabbed me from behind and I was airborne. My head spun and when I finally looked up, Lord Devlon was glaring over me at the very edge of the cliff. I could see Cassian and the taller boy talking quietly together while the other boys re-entered their rings, though none resumed their matches.

"Not very impressive for a *Shadowsinger* ," Lord Devlon said. "Let's see if you can fly better than you fight." He took a step back and snapped his fingers, pointing beyond me to where the cliff dropped off just inches from my shoulder.

*Down. Far. Trap, trap, trap!*

"N-no," I stuttered, my mouth going dry. I had never flown before, never been taught. My wings ached for the feel of freedom in the skies, but if he made me jump, I'd fall without any training until I crashed below and died. "I can't. I never..."

In the distance, I saw Cassian's face freeze as if even he thought this might be a bad idea. The tall boy kept his cold mask, but shifted a little closer to the cliff's edge some thirty feet away, the movement almost imperceptible had I not focused my attention on it.

*Pooooower* , the voices whispered looking at the boy. But Lord Devlon dragged me back.

The war lord shrugged. "Pity," he said and kicked me over the edge.

I plummeted. Wind rushed over me so hard and fast, even the voices were drowned out in the noise of it. My heart rose up into my throat and I felt my pants become suddenly wet. I'd pissed myself in fear.

*Rocks. Blood. DEATH.*

The voices spelled everything miles below me out, screaming to be heard over that roar of the wind. My wings flapped frantically behind me trying to make some sense of what the muscles were meant to do, but in the tangle of falling, they were useless to me. So I closed my eyes and stopped fighting, ready to let the worst happen.

Out of nowhere, I felt a body grab me and then we were lost on a cloud of smoke and air compressing us into a tiny space before we reappeared back on the top of the cliffside. The body holding me let go and I fell with a dull thud.

“Rhysand, you fuck!”

Lord Devlon charged the tall boy who'd gotten me, pulling out a whip as he went, and sent a wicked lash against his - Rhysand's - face. “Off, *now*,” he said and Rhysand seemed to know what he meant because he instantly began removing his shirt. “You know the rules. Just because you're-”

“I know, dearest Devlon,” Rhysand said. I couldn't believe he had the nerve to talk to the war lord down like that, but he did it with ease. “And you know the High Lord will have you slaughtered for denying him a Shadowsinger.”

Lord Devlon snarled and it was a wonder the boy didn't cower. “Be that as it may, no magic. Not ever. Not from you. It's a dirty cheat coming from you, and besides... you know the danger. Leave the winnowing at home and fly fast enough to get him next time or I don't care who's son you are - you're dead.”

My eyes snapped to Rhysand and caught him staring at me as the shadows tightened in realization. Was he the heir to the *High Lord of the Night Court*? Cauldron boil me and -

A wicked snap hit the air. A fresh line of blood flowed freely down Rhysand's back after the whip made contact. Twice more it cracked and then Devlon left. Rhys picked up his shirt and as he bent over, I saw countless scars lining his skin between the folds of his wings. I gasped.

He heard my utterance and gave me a derisive snort before walking away. Cassian went with him. "You're such a stupid prick," Cassian said before shoving him.

I tried to push myself up, but my lungs still ached from the free fall and Cassian's earlier punches. I could smell the blood all over my face and was glad I had no mirror to see it. The sun was setting. It would be dark soon and cold. Two things I knew well. So I laid my head back down and let myself fade away, content to just go numb for the night.

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A voice spoke in my ear. Two voices. One told me to *listen* and the other -

"Come, Shadowsinger," it said and it was soft and feminine. I opened my eyes blinking wearily and though it was dark, I could make out a woman's face in the moonlight. "You're with us now," she said.

She turned and started to walk away, stopping after a few feet when I didn't follow. "Well come on! Or do you want to roll over in your sleep and tumble off that cliff again?"

With a groan, I pulled myself up and followed. When I tried to ask questions, she shooshed me harshly. She led me to a small keep within the camp. The door swung open and I was met with a million details at once from both the shadows and my own observances.

A fire roared in the hearth, warm and wonderful, though I never thought I could truly escape the cold I'd grown up with. Plush couches and pillows invited me to sit atop them and sink in. Candles flickered from all corners of the room providing a pleasant, welcome atmosphere. And sitting amongst it all were Cassian and Rhysand.



The woman smiled at me, running her fingers through my hair before she turned to the boys and gave them a stern look, warning flashing through her eyes. Her features seemed gentle, but her eyes spun a wild tale of mischief that the mighty wings at her back reinforced. She left and I gulped, but the shadows didn't panic for once, so neither did I.

No sooner had I taken one step did Cassian speak. "What do the shadows say? Do they tell you to kill people?"

Rhysand rolled his eyes, closing the book on his lap with a light snap. "What?" I asked.

"And do you ever speak above the level of a church mouse?" he continued. His voice was deep and rich. "Even after I'd knocked you out flat in the ring, you still spoke to Devlon like he was going to take you shopping, not kick you off a mile-high cliff to your death."

"Nice, Cass," Rhysand said exasperated and pointed to his cohort. "This is Cassian, the Illyrian who kicked your ass today, but you already knew that." He pointed to himself. "And I'm Rhysand, the Illyrian who saved your ass. And you are?"

"Azriel," I said simply.

"Well Azriel, you don't look so well."

"You look like cow shit," Cassian said. The nod Rhys gave affirmed this was an accurate statement and I tried to ignore the wary glances they gave the scars on my hands, but Rhysand's eyes were a little heavier when he asked his next question, as if the answer he knew I would give was a painful truth for any Illyrian to stomach.

"Can you fly?"

Silence filled the room. Cassian stared at me without judgement. "No," I said.

“Fuck,” Cassian said. “I can’t imagine not knowing how to fly. That’s like not knowing how to masterbate.”

“Yeah,” I said, staring a little open-mouthed at him. “You must have a lot of experience in that department to know.”

Rhys smirked setting me a tad more at ease. “I’m only going to do this once,” he said all amusement gone. He clicked his fingers at me the way Devlon had and at once, the scent of blood vanished. I ran my hands over my face and they came away clean. The rest of me was tidy as well upon further inspection. And the various groans and pains throughout my body were almost entirely gone. *Almost* .

“If I took it all away, they’d know,” Rhys explained. “And while it’s good to get extra attention in a place like this, two strikes in less than 24 hours would be a damn-near death sentence for me.”

“How did you do that?” I asked, looking myself over. I could tell the shadows were pleased as they glided effortlessly over me, as if the blood had somehow been in the way. “Are you really the son of the High Lord of the Night Court?”

Little wisps of darkness curled off every square inch of Rhysand’s person. His head rolled back as though this were a luxury he seldom enjoyed and his teeth were a full and brilliant display equal parts power and arrogance as he smiled. “The one and only,” he proudly stated.

“Show off,” muttered Cassian.

“Thank you,” I said. “For helping me.”

“Rule number one,” Cassian said getting up stand next to Rhys. “Never say thank you. And never say sorry, while you’re at it. The camp is ruthless and you’ll be back off the side of that cliff in no time at all if you think niceties are going to get you anywhere.”

“Rule number two,” Rhys cut in. “Do everything they tell you. And I mean *everything* . I don’t care if every bone in your body is broken and your dick’s

in two places at once. They tell you to move? You move. They tell you fly? You fly. You might still die in the end, but at least you'll have a shot at surviving if you obey. You're lucky Devlon didn't strike you down on the spot for hesitating today."

I nodded, considering everything they were saying. It was the first time anyone had offered me genuine help, but my skin still cried out with the pain from Cassian's attack and the smug way he'd gloated afterward. As if in reply to my skepticism, a dark filter passed over my eyes giving me a new possibility.

*Trust. Ally. FRIEND.*

The filter passed and I blinked.

"What do they say?" Cassian asked again.

"I don't always know."

"Fuck, you really are a mess, aren't you?" he chuckled. "Do you ever talk back?"

"No."

"Why not?"

I opened my mouth only to find I had nothing to say. Why hadn't I talked back before? I'd never considered the possibility in three years worth of fear and anxiety since the shadows first found me.

"I don't know," I shrugged and I realized I would have to figure the shadows out if I wanted to make a life for myself. They were just as much a part of me now as being Illyrian was.

Rhysand gripped my shoulders and spun me around roughly. "Third door on the right," he said. "Get some sleep and be grateful for it. It's likely the only good night you're going to have for a long time coming." If only he knew how wrong he was. Any night here was already a thousand times better than the ones I'd spent in my father's keep. "I know you're completely incompetent,

but remember what we said tomorrow. You're going to have to *try* . Cassian and I can only get you so far in training.”

“And even then, I won't hesitate to grind your sorry ass into a bloody pulp,” Cassian said behind us. I looked at Rhys to see if he would give another eye roll that said Cassian was dramatic, but I only found a hard grimace staring down at me.

“Go sleep,” he said, kicking me forward.

I went into the room and fell onto the bed waiting for me, not caring that I hadn't showered in weeks and my pants smelled like stale piss. I didn't know what to make of Rhysand's cold exterior, or Cassian and his endless theatrics, but what I did know was that the covers being pulled up over me were warm and there was a window on the wall letting in the moonlight.

If I fought hard enough, I could win a life here. I could make myself stronger and prove my father wrong, make my real mother proud. I could find a reason to live because for the first time ever, there was *hope* . Hope of something better out there. I just didn't know what exactly that was yet.

I fell asleep fast and hard almost the moment my head hit the pillow, but not before the shadows had a chance to send one last thought curling into my ears:

*Home* .

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

## **The Blood Rite**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/8032810) at  
<http://archiveofourown.org/works/8032810>.

### **Rating:**

[Teen And Up Audiences](#)

### **Archive Warning:**

[Graphic Depictions Of Violence](#)

### **Fandom:**

[A Court of Thorns and Roses Series - Sarah J. Maas](#)

### **Characters:**

[Azriel](#), [Cassian](#), [Rhysand](#), [lord devlon](#)

### **Additional Tags:**

[acomaf](#), [The Blood Rite](#), [Violence](#), [Death](#)

### **Language:**

English

### **Series:**

Part 4 of [Shadowsinger: An Azriel/Moriel Fic](#)

### **Stats:**

Published: 2016-09-14 Words: 3,189 Chapters: 1/1

# The Blood Rite

by [illyriantremors](#)

## Summary

Azriel is dropped in the middle of the Illyrian Mountains to take the Blood Rite, but Cassian and Rhysand are nowhere in sight. With the help of his shadows, he has to fight to find his brothers and defeat some unexpected opponents to survive the Rite.

## Notes

Universe Alternate: I'm not sure if Sarah has ever specified what age fae are when they come of age, but for the purposes of this fic, I've made Az and crew all 21 when they take the Blood Rite. It's older than I imagine they would have been, but I liked the idea of Az having spent 10 full years with the boys before he becomes a certified adult and meets Mor. And I get the 10 years based off the fact that he was 11 when he first arrives at camp.

*I'm gonna fight 'em off. A seven nation army couldn't hold me back... And if I catch it comin' back my way I'm gonna serve it to you. And that ain't what you want to hear, but that's what I'll do. And the feeling coming from my bones says, "Find a home."*

- The White Stripes

---

Night was a bitter mistress. Having felt robbed of my attention in the daylight, she avenged herself on my appearance before her now with knives of frozen wind and solid, compact snow and ice too uncomfortable to sleep on.

My leathers were soaked through within minutes despite how unyielding the snow beneath me was. I'd never known anything to be so equally flexible and resolute as the ice was now. I shuddered, sending my hands rubbing over my rib cage for warmth as I huddled in an outcropping of rock carved from the side of Illyria's steepest mountains. Behind me, my wings ached with the tension of fighting and the ropes binding them down cruelly to my back.

When they had dropped me down, I had risen quickly to find three other Illyrian novices rousing, prepared to bear down on me. A fourth, the shadows told me, was already making in the opposite direction from us at an alarmingly fast pace.

Smart lad.

As I pushed myself up, the shadows immediately went out of me with quick return. Once I'd finally mustered up the courage to start speaking directly to them as Cassian had once suggested I do, everything locked into place.

The training rings ceased to be a struggle with the shadows calling every attack a split second before the hands and feet of my opponents reached out. And a fog in my head lifted as if the veins connecting the muscles of my mind



had been clogged from my hesitations, no more complicated than a blocked drain.

I used the shadows, honing and training them as much as they shaped me and before long, I'd quickly caught up in the camps. Even Cassian was less of a threat, though he still wiped the floor with me by the end. It just took him several hours to do it.

And then there were the siphons. My hands ached without the feel of their energy against the skin channeling my strength and magic. I subconsciously rubbed at my palms, missing the feel of them.

No siphons. No blade. No wings. Only me and three hulking Illyrians that Cassian, Rhys, and I could now eat amicably for breakfast between the three of us.

And my shadows.

*Up!*

One snapped at me as another barked in my ear, *behind!* My elbow darted back and crunched against the first attacker's nose. A second came at my front directly and within a few painful seconds, I had him out cold on the ground. The first came back trying to catch me off guard while I was distracted, but I rounded on him before he could get his hands on me, sticking my thumbs in on precisely the right point on his neck so that he was out too.

The third one, however, was different. A greedy, hungry look gnawed on the edges of his face as he circled me, not rushing into the attack.

I never understood the death of the Blood Rite. Year after year as we trained in the camps and the ceremony was held, I would watch hundreds of Illyrians take to the mountains and barely even half return. It seemed pointless to me. Conditions were difficult enough to survive in the frigid cold mountains that the deaths were... wasteful.

War was coming. Why drain a single drop more than necessary?

*Beausssssse it's fun* , a voice snaked in my mind in the quiet spots where I would think about this issue.

And truth be told, it was. The bloodlust of fighting was intoxicating, like a drug that fixed every down point you'd ever known. There were days I didn't leave the ring until the early hours of the morning told me to stop, I was so drunk on the high of bruised knuckles and broken bones.

But fighting to the *death* ? That desire still eluded me. It was one thing to kill an enemy and entirely another to do it for sport. And during the Blood Rite, I was the enemy of every other Illyrian.

When he couldn't stand my stillness any longer, the Illyrian pounced. He was strong, but I was stronger. Allying myself with the toughest Illyrian novice - maybe ever - and the most powerful High Lord's son ever born had made me that way. We grappled for some time, the snow biting at us as we went, until I had him pinned beneath me in such a way that he wouldn't get the upper hand again.

"Do it," he spat, looking me dead in the eye. I sighed. I didn't want to, but I also saw the fire still raging behind his thirsty, thirsty eyes and the second I let him up, he'd come after me again. And if I left him unconscious, he'd follow my scent through the mountains, tracking me until one of us went down and stayed that way.

In one fluid motion so fast he almost missed it was happening, I pulled him out from under me to sit and laced my hands around his neck and *twisted* .

There was a faint snap before the dull thud of his body hitting the snow.

That had been two days ago.

I didn't see the fourth Illyrian who had run off as I began my trek after that first fight. When I crested the peak of the slope where we'd landed, I surveyed the mountains and valleys around me and sent the shadows off in our game of call and return.

*East ...*

*West...*

I ground my teeth in frustration, but willed myself to remain calm. Calm was how I weathered the storms. Calm and silence.

Rhysand was in one direction and Cassian was in the other. I was somewhere in between, but I could sense that Rhys was closest. So I peeled East and made for the slender Lord's son who had taught me how to listen to the darkness.

I traveled quickly that third day savoring the ceasefire of Night's relentless cruelties. Even being up so high in the mountains where I almost felt I could kiss the sky without having to fly through it, the sun felt far off. I was never quite able to capture it. My skin was permanently cold, my blood ice.

Rhys liked to joke it was what made my shadows so temperamental, always binding around me like a thick winter coat.

I met few along my way and killed even less among them, stopping little and eating what meager food I could find. My shadows flowed constantly in and out of me alerting me to my brothers. Rhys was close, so close I could almost scent him on the air. The kind of power he had built up inside of him, it was damn near impossible not to feel it no matter how far away you got.

But he was still a day's hike away and Cassian two more beyond that, though I could tell from the reports my shadows brought me that we were all heading with increasingly speed in the same direction - towards each other.

---

I awoke, as I so often did, not to miscellaneous sound, but a voice, whispering in my ear.

*Daaaaaaaaanger*, it said. And then, *twoooooooooo* .

The syllables were always drawn out when the worst was happening, kind of like they enjoyed the misery, but I'd long gotten used to it.

My eyes snapped open and I jumped up as quietly as I could manage. I almost reached for a sword at my back, forgetting I didn't have one. Not out here.

I hadn't found a cave or alcove to rest in for the night, so I'd made a nest in a small dip on the the mountainside where the snow was not quite so thick. The slopes prevented me from seeing over the mountain's edge, but any passing threats would not get by my silent friends ever circling around me. The small fire I had indulged in to keep warm after the day's rain was nearly out.

A chill ran through me. The trees weren't quite silent as they should have been and I could smell the husky scent of Illyrian blood nearby, blood that was spitting and churning, ready to kill.

They came over the edge I couldn't see past - two of them, exactly as the shadows had warned. When they were close enough for me to properly scent them, I couldn't place their smell, though it felt familiar. It was Illyrian, but not from Lord Devlon's camp. Not unusual, given that the Blood Rite passed at the same time for all Illyrian novices looking to pass.

But they also smelled older, too old to be out in these woods for the Blood Rite. Just as I stood and stealed myself to face them head on, no hiding or surprises, they crested the ridge and in the pale light of my campfire, I saw their faces.

They were older, but the changes would have been imperceptible to anyone who saw them day-to-day as I'm sure my father did. For someone like me who hadn't seen them in ten years, the changes were striking.

But their wings marked me most of all. They were still flexed wide as strong and capable as ever, but somehow, seeing them outside of my eight-year-old eyes as a now fully matured male made them less impressive. They didn't look nearly as large or scary to me anymore as they once had.

"Shadowsinger," my eldest step-brother said taking a step towards me. That he would even go so far as to call me by that name surprised me.

Even in the dim light of night, I could see the piercing look in his eyes. I heard his tongue gloss over his lips and teeth, begging for a taste of me. "Still

silent as ever, I see,” he said. My other step-brother - no, *his* brother - tisked behind him on the ledge. “Let’s see if we can change that.”

And I knew. I knew it as soon as he lunged for me and his brother stood by chuckling why they’d come. The Blood Rite was known throughout all of Illyria regardless of whether or not you were taking it yourself. Camps warred with one another, both for sport and from blood feuds. My father was sure to have known I’d be taking the Rite this year and so surely too his sons had found out.

Did they know how strong I’d become? Had word reached them that I was more powerful than any of them now with my new friends, Illyrian and shadow alike, by my side? Did my step-brothers come for me of their own accord or did - Cauldron damn them all - my father *send* them?

For once, I got the first hit in on him, my fist colliding with his teeth. He rebounded without pause and sent his knuckles back against my nose. Some things never change.

Blood dripped across my lips as the shadows whispered to dance at his feet and I kicked out quickly, striking his shins in a spin. He toppled, but not before springing up at me and we tangled in a heap on the ground, fists and shoulders and blood and pure determination written across both our faces.

*Coming, coming, COMING!*

The shadows went into a frenzy as the other brother approached. Had it been any other two Illyrians save Rhys and Cassian, I could have laid them both out bare, no problem. But somehow, seeing their faces and knowing why they’d come injected me with too many doubts and before I knew it, I was pinned.

My legs wrapped around the Illyrian’s waist and tugged, but he managed to remain in place, laughing as my face twisted in frustration.

“Now there’s a little emotion,” he said, whispering a low snarl. His brother knelt beside me and pulled out a long, curved knife from his belt.

“Pity we couldn’t have seen this face last time your mother came for a visit,” he said low and taunting in my ear. “She would have enjoyed something pleasant to look at before she died.”

A dry sob rose up in my throat, but I refused to let it pass. I hated them. I hated them so much I was going to go blind from the rage of it.

The knife caressed my ear, trailed a line down my neck and shoulder until it met with the portion of my back where skin met membrane. The tip pressed in ever so slightly and I howled. “Let’s see,” the Illyrian started to say, his words a mockery of the last time he’d toyed with my body, but a blast of energy knocked him and his brother off their feet and into the distance.

Darkness exploded around us. A darkness filled with stars and galaxies. It was so all consuming even in the pit of night that I thought the gap between Night and Day had been bridged for me to see through to the other side.

I knew darkness. I knew shadows. They swarmed to me like bees to the honeycomb and guided my every movement. My step-brothers gasped and groped in their blindness as my real brother strutted toward me, flicking stars out of his path as if they were nothing more than lint on his shirt. Rhysand looked like a king.

“What happened to no magic?” I asked him when he reached me. He shrugged.

“It’s not like they’re going to live to tell the tale,” he said. “Plus, they deserve it. If we got caught for *this*, it’d be worth it.”

“And the wings?” His wings were gone, disappeared to only he knew where.

“It’s just as uncomfortable having them tucked away beneath the skin as it is with ropes bound around my chest,” he explained. “But at least this way, I don’t get rope burn.” A boasting smirk slid across his face.

“You’re a terrible cheat,” I said, shaking my head even though I saw the logic through my jealousy. What I wouldn’t give to pull the ropes and free my

wings just then. He laughed and then his eyes found my brothers crawling around in the snow, trying to follow our voices to us.

“You good?” Rhys asked.

“Oh yes,” I said. “Better than I’ve been in a long time.”

A glossy, vengeful look swam over Rhysand’s eyes, one full of a dangerous power neither Cassian nor I would ever fully understand. “Then let’s go to work.”

He took one and I took the other. I grabbed the fallen dagger and carved a hole out of the Illyrian’s throat until his blood had covered my face in a rich, luxurious fabric of victory and gore. The body dropped and I watched Rhysand employ other much more dastardly, but far cleaner methods to dispose of the second.

A feline smile of amusement flexed on Rhys’ face as he played with the Illyrian’s mind. He enjoyed this, I realized. Not when it was innocent blood being spilt, but when he knew they deserved it, Rhysand loved to watch and feel their minds deteriorate in his hands.

When at last the screaming was so high and shrill penetrating the night air, Rhys dropped him and with barely even a passing wave of his hands, he misted the bodies. Even as blood floated through the air like a fine mist, I couldn’t help but be pleased knowing my father and his bride would never find a body to bury. They would have to live with simply knowing what happened.

Rhys turned to me. “How far is Cassian?” he asked.

“Half a day,” I replied as the shadows whispered to me. He’d caught up to us too.

He nodded and together we turned to leave. I didn’t spare my former step-brothers a second thought after that night.

---

The three of us made it out of the mountains and back to our camp before any of the others had returned. We fought and murdered along the way and between the three of us, it was *easy*. No one could lay more than a finger on us before they found themselves out cold, sometimes for good.

Cassian barked thick, loud cries of laughter at Rhys when he discovered how horribly he'd been cheating the elements. Rhys let him kick his ass several times over in the snow and dirt to make up for it, but no one complained when he threw blankets of darkness and warmth over us in the dead of night to stop our shivering.

Lord Devlon was annoyed when he saw us trudging back into camp, but he wasn't surprised to see us. Rhys had returned his wings to his back with rope again and we left the week's worth of blood on our skin and clothes for extra measure. Let them see what we'd done. For all of Rhys' scheming, lives had been taken at our expense - *because* of us. There would be no denying us our status as men now - bastard, half-breed, High Lord's son or not.

We were each given back our siphons, Cassian and I earning an additional two, and the ropes at our backs were cut. A tense moment passed before Devlon sighed and granted us our victory.

A blade of Illyrian steel was placed in each of our hands. We were told to name them and protect them at all costs. An Illyrian weapon was not to be taken lightly or pass into enemy hands.

I shared knowing looks of relief, longing, and outright joy with my brothers as we held our blades between us. Nearly ten years of training, fucking, and fighting together and we'd become the one thing I'd craved since I was an infant: family.

So naturally, we slung our blades at each other almost at once, testing the feel of them out and proving ourselves further. I felt light as air despite the heaviness of that week in the mountains the Blood Rite had brought. And when I fell asleep that night after a hot shower and a full meal, I felt at peace for the first time even if not entirely whole.



Two weeks later, I still hadn't named my sword. Cassian and I tossed ideas back and forth as we sparred in the rings, sunlight reflecting off the blades. But the name suddenly wasn't quite so important as Cassian spun me with the force of his blow and stopped, an addled expression that was goofy and lustful overcoming his face all at once.

Two weeks of victory. Ten years of freedom. A lifetime of battle. And none of it mattered anymore. Not a single damned piece of it.

Because when I turned around just then and saw her and for the first time, I felt the sunlight on my skin.

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

## **The Sun**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/8040277) at  
<http://archiveofourown.org/works/8040277>.

### **Rating:**

[Teen And Up Audiences](#)

### **Archive Warning:**

[No Archive Warnings Apply](#)

### **Category:**

[F/M](#)

### **Fandom:**

[A Court of Thorns and Roses Series - Sarah J. Maas](#)

### **Relationships:**

[Morrigan/Azriel](#), [Moriel - Relationship](#), [Morrigan/Cassian](#)

### **Characters:**

[Azriel](#), [Morrigan](#), [Cassian](#), [Rhysand](#)

### **Additional Tags:**

[acomaf](#)

### **Language:**

English

### **Series:**

Part 5 of [Shadowsinger: An Azriel/Moriel Fic](#)

### **Stats:**

Published: 2016-09-15 Words: 3,937 Chapters: 1/1

# The Sun

by [illyriantremors](#)

## Summary

Rhysand brings his cousin Morrigan to Lord Devlon's camp where Azriel and Cassian are introduced to her for the first time and both instantly smitten. Azriel is beyond scared to spend time with Morrigan, but finds a special way to connect with her apart from the other boys.

## Notes

Extreme fluff. So much fluff, it's a tad overkill. I'm least confident about this chapter out of the entire fic because I think it's the most out of character for Az, who is just an uber hopeless romantic here. But whatever. It's unrealistic probably, but that's why it's called fanfiction. Hope ya like!

*And yet you understand, yeah like no one can. We both know what they say about us, but they don't stand a chance because when I'm with you - when I'm with you, I'm standing with an army.*

- Ellie Goulding

---

I couldn't actually see her. I was only vaguely aware of a bright light pulsing around the area where Rhysand and his mother stood talking. She was so luminous, I thought my skin might burn the longer I stood there gaping until I was nothing more than a breathe of air on the wind taking in her scent.

Honey.

She smelled like honey. And something else so rich and sweet, I would have to move closer to make it out.

But my legs were locked in place. My eyes began to make sense of the glow surrounding her and it dimmed. What I saw explained the light, explained *everything* .

She wore the palest shade of plum, the pants running for miles over her legs until they hit the dirt around her shoes. The fabric climbed high on her waist connecting with every curve of her hips, her breasts, her squared shoulders before it disappeared to reveal the smooth length of her arms.

And her hair. Cauldron, damn me, *her hair* . The gold flowed in waves off her back reflecting the sunlight to such a degree, I thought she was the sun itself. Even standing at a distance, my fingers curled wondering what it would feel like to run themselves through the threads of her.

And then I saw Rhys lean over and whisper something in her ear, his hand pointing lazily in the direction of myself and Cassian, and then the woman turned her head, her eyes catching mine, and she smiled.

It shattered me, that smile. It was joy and sunlight and warmth made manifest, as if the Heavens had taken the power of the sun and declared it too much for

the universe, so they contained it within one individual to protect it forever and she was it. She was radiant beyond anything and my skin went slick with sweat in the realization that she was a new sensation, one I had never tasted nor even seen, and one that I craved to know *badly* .

Rhys said something else and she gave him a beseeching look before skipping off with him, a bounce in her every step.

“Wow,” Cassian said next to me and if it hadn’t been for years of training drilled into me, I would have jumped. I’d forgotten he was even next to me. I looked at him and saw the lust written onto his face as he too stared after her. A stab of disappointment clanged into me.

It was worse meeting her in person. Made even more difficult by the fact that she was Rhysand’s cousin and staying with us for the next few weeks. As soon as we stepped through the door of our cabin and I saw her standing there with that easy smile that lit up her entire face, I knew I would never survive.

“Morrigan,” Rhys said gesturing to us. “This is Cassian and Azriel. Boys, meet my troublesome cousin, Morrigan.”

*Morrigan* .

The name swam circles in my head, answering a million questions I’d been asking for the greater part of a decade and leaving countless more in their wake. I could feel the darkness inside of me licking at every letter.

“You’ll have to excuse, Az, here,” Cassian said, slinging his arm around my shoulder as he took a handful of grapes off the table and popped one into his mouth. “The shadowsinging is just a shameless party trick.”

Embarrassment heated my face and it was an effort not to shrug him off of me. I hadn’t even realized the shadows were circling and I was suddenly so ashamed that she might see them, I willed them away.

“Oh no!” she said as if she saw what I was doing. “Please don’t! I rather like them. Gives you character.” She winked with a wicked gleam in her eye and I

couldn't say anything, too stunned she wasn't shying away from me.

"You think everything adds character, Mor," Rhys said flicking lint casually off his sleeve.

"Says the boy who called me merely 'troublesome'," Mor replied. "Just because *you* have enough character to fill the Hewn City ten times over doesn't mean other people can't be interesting."

Rhys pounded a fist against his chest, feigning hurt. "Enough to fill the Hewn City? That's not saying much."

"Does she really need to?" Cassian offered and Morrigan laughed. And when she did, it filled up every pore in the air until the loveliest harmony was left ringing in my too stupid ears. And I was suddenly extraordinarily jealous that Cassian had made that sound come out of her and not me. Even more so angry that I wasn't yet capable of trying.

"Are you from the Hewn City?" I asked tentatively. Morrigan's smile fell and with it went my confidence.

"Yes," she said, her eyes, that I could now see up close were a deep, earthy brown, looked downward. "My father runs the Court of Nightmares for my dear cousin's father. So difficult being High Lord," she teased, catching Rhysand's jaw and tugging it playfully and he cringed away, not unlovingly. "I'm afraid we're a family of truth tellers trapped underneath that pesky mountain, only let out of our ugly, ugly cage to wander and fly once in a blue moon."

She tried to smile again, but something about the way her lips tightened as she spoke and her eyes wandered the room told me there was pain behind that golden facade. And I wondered given what she'd said of the mountain, if she hadn't been as trapped and lonely as I had always been.

"Well that's depressing," Cassian snapped, popping more grapes into his mouth.

"I'm sorry," I said hastily. I could feel the shadows squirming all over me.

“It’s fine,” she said and grabbed my arm. The touch shocked me and I almost didn’t follow when she pulled me to the couch, pouring us each a huge glass of wine and shoving one into my hand. “Tell me more about the camps,” and it was a question for all of us. “I want to know *everything* about what lurks outside the mountain.”

And so we told her. I was so relieved she didn’t instantly hate me for bringing up what she so clearly despised that I was content to let Rhys and Cassian do most of the talking. We told her how we’d all met, skipping over the murkier details, and told her how the camps worked.

The entire time, I kept catching her watching me in careful study. All I wanted to do was look at her, but knowing she would see it made me too reluctant to do it outright the way Cassian did. So I looked away most of the night from that smile that burned and ate away the shadows, and found myself cast into an entirely new kind of hell with the absence of her in my eyes.

And the longer the absence stretched, the more I felt the weight press in on my chest. The more Cassian flirted and she laughed back, the more defeated I felt. She avoided talking about her own life, but said enough about it - the status her birth held, perhaps an engagement with a powerful heir in another court - that I knew I could never have her.

It was ridiculous. I’d only just met her. I had no right to her even if I’d spent an eternity at her side. She was a divine being and I was dirt beneath her fingertips, forged from lies and lust in secret shame.

I excused myself for the night far earlier than either of my brothers, took a cold, cold shower, and went to bed.

---

I woke up three days later in the early hours of the morning while darkness still reigned over the beasts of the Illyrian mountains. I hadn’t spoken to Morrigan since meeting her, stopping only to make polite niceties when I saw her at breakfast before I’d hurry out and spend the day training every ounce of self-control I possessed until it ruled over me.



The rest of the house was still asleep. I could hear the deep breathes the bodies took in the other rooms behind Cassian's heavy snores as I laced up my shoes, threw a light pair of pants and a shirt on and headed outside.

The air bit at my face, bitter and chilling, but this was the one time I enjoyed the cold. When I ran, I felt like I was chasing the warmth I had always craved and when my body had worked up enough sweat from making it work against the ground and the elements, some of that heat almost felt within reach.

I liked the sensation of it, the possibility of obtaining what I wanted on my own, my body grinding until it was spent. Flying would always be my first love and a freedom I craved, but running cleared my head in a way that my wings couldn't, chaining me back to the earth lest I forget where I came from or how hard I had to fight just to live.

I made for the trees hiking a trail I was so familiar with I could have run it blind easily. The scent of pine tickled my nose and I breathed a deep sigh that sent the shadows running out into the wood. I found I enjoyed watching them scatter so and coming blazing back for me on the mist.

The morning runs had become a staple for me over the years when I was too upset to talk and fighting in the rings didn't work. My lungs cried out each time as they stretched with the morning air. My muscles merrily agreed.

Ahead of me a few miles from camp, the trees thinned out and opened onto a narrow cliffside overlooking a vast lake. It was my favorite place to be alone and think. I never mentioned it to Cassian and Rhysand because it felt like my personal secret to guard, but sometimes I thought they knew anyway and simply let me be.

I was so caught up thinking about it that I almost didn't hear the shadows warn me I wouldn't be alone until they were practically screaming in my ear. I slowed my pace and stopped dead in my tracks as I realized Morrigan was sitting on the very farthest edge of the cliff staring into the distance.

Her fingers gripped the edge tightly almost like she wanted to push herself farther - not to fall off, but only to move closer to the oncoming sun starting to peak in the distance, but knew she couldn't reach. I stood for far too long at

the lining of the trees just watching her watch the world. With each new swirl of color on the horizon, her face illuminated until she was shining with a vibrancy to match it. You'd have thought she'd never left that mountain the way her gaze latched on to every fresh stroke of paint. The awe on her face, it opened something in me that was still and peaceful, foreign to my being.

I was half a heartbeat away from turning around and running back to camp, but staring wasn't enough and I couldn't stay away. Seeing her sitting like that made the three days I had denied myself feel like a wasted misery and I had to know more even if I could never feel worthy just to be in her company.

So I moved forward hoping I might steal some of that vivacious joy so effortless to her. There was so much brightness in her, I half-hoped it would blot out the stain of my existence.

I shuffled forward, clearing my throat and making enough noise that I wouldn't startle her. Her head turned at the noise and when she caught my eye, her mouth formed a surprised *O*, but then she smiled and her eyes twinkled with the morning light.

"Azriel," she said reverently and it was the first time someone new took me by my name alone. Not the little boy who couldn't be bothered with. Not Shadowsinger. Just *Azriel*.

"Morrigan," I said, acknowledging her in return as I sat beside her. She smirked.

"I thought you hated me," she said. "And yet, here you are following me in the middle of the night."

"It's not technically night anymore," I replied, keeping my eyes firmly on the sunrise lest I perish in her fire. "And for the record, I didn't follow you, and I never *hated* you."

"Oh so there's a little fight in you after all. Who knew?" She scooted back so she was more safely sat on the ledge and tucked her knees against her chest. "If you didn't follow me, then what are you doing here?"

“I didn’t know anyone else knew about this place. I come here because it’s quiet.”

“How often?”

“Every day.”

She nodded, considering my words. Then she asked hesitantly, “Is it because of... *them* ?”

A hiss snaked through my ear, disapproving and I realized she meant the shadows. Fear coiled within me that Morrigan would back away at them, but she didn’t so much as flinch when she stared them down directly. “No,” I said all too quickly. “Sometimes, but mostly it just helps me clear the air. The camps can be a handful.”

She snorted. “I’m sure my cousin doesn’t help much with that. Cassian either, by the sound of him.”

“No,” I said, almost chuckling. “They don’t, but they make it bearable at the same time, so I’ll tolerate it.” She hummed in understanding, a peaceful look on her face as she leaned her head back, eyes closed to soak it all in. “So why are you here? What brings the truth-teller to the harsh Illyrian Mountains?”

“The truth?”

“I hear you’re good for it.”

A chuckle. “Well if it’s the truth you want then I’m afraid you’re going to be disappointed because it’s not very pretty.” She paused and when I didn’t say anything, she opened one eye and appraised me. “Oh all right,” she said, sitting back up and resuming her watch of the skies. “The truth is my family is monstrous and my father even worse, and now that I’m... eligible, he has me betrothed to the absolute scum of the earth in the Autumn Court and I can’t stand it.” She was quiet for a long time before she admitted, “We’re supposed to marry in a few months and I’ll trade one horror in for another. Sometimes I think I might die just thinking about it.”

A weight sank low in the pit of my stomach. “Does Rhys know?”

“Rhys is the one who suggested bringing me here as a favor to me. He had to beg his father to agree to it and even then, it took some convincing on the part of his mother. What I wouldn’t give to stay, but...”

“But you can’t,” I said, simple fact.

She turned her head to look at me and in her eyes there grew a softness. A softness that melted the edges harboring my soul and said *I know you. And I know you know me too. You know my fear.*

Perhaps I was right. Perhaps we weren’t so different. Two separate entities seeking solace from the light and dark in all the wrong places only to wind up sitting on a cliff next to each other, our dreams in one direction towards the skies and our destiny in the other on the ground.

“I’m petrified,” she said, barely above a whisper. “I’m not afraid of what they’ll do to me - to my... body. But when I think that I might lose all of this,” and she gestured towards the nature surrounding us, “I can feel my soul cleave in two. I want to live. I want to chase something more than my family’s blood money. Rhys is going to build a Court of Dreams some day and I... I want to be part of it.”

As she spoke, some little insignificant piece of myself that I never knew existed swam up to the surface of me only to splinter cruelly in a mockery of how Morrigan had come into my life: suddenly, all at once, and then soon not at all. It was a fate worse than death in her eyes to be taken away and sold like property. I knew that feeling of irreparable uselessness and captivity all too well. The idea that someone with such idealism brewing in her, such wildness roaming beneath the chains trying to get free, being bound forever broke my heart.

“If I could find a way to stop you from marrying him and get you out of the mountain, I would,” I said and I meant it. Despite not knowing Morrigan, despite knowing next to *nothing* about her, I was ready to follow her to the cliffs of the world and dive off if it was what she needed to stay bright and burning. “No one should have their dreams taken away, Morrigan. No one

should be locked up and made to suffer however they're told. I've sung that song one too many times and it's not worth it. But freedom is."

For a moment, she looked as though she might say something, but changed her mind at the last second. Sadness took its place in her eyes, so thoughtful and still. Brown - they were so damned beautiful, her eyes - this perfect collision of browns and golds like a smattering of stars smeared across the night sky.

"Hmm," she hummed low in her throat, a melancholy melody. "I like you, Azriel. I'm glad I was wrong. I'm glad you don't hate me." The corners of her lips twitched in a small smile before she turned back to the skies and cried out with a loud, "*Oh!*" Her hand slapped against my own sending a sizzle of electricity over my skin.

"There it is!" she said, the words breathing in and out of her as she watched the sun complete its ascent into the sky, now fully formed and whole. Her entire being came alive at the sight. Her hair glittered as she bounced up and down in her giddiness, her free hand waving ecstatically. She grabbed my arm and leaned in to me and when her head rested on my shoulder, I realized what the other scent I'd missed that first day was: honey and *chocolate* .

The scent drove me mad. I shifted my head a fraction of an inch closer that I might drink in the sweetness that much more. My eyes closed slowly and I stilled my chest as much as I could to keep her from noticing the deep inhale my lungs pushed against my chest to make as I scented her.

No matter what they did to her, no matter what her family imposed or her betrothed ruled, Morrigan was a queen who would level the world some day.

"I think it's the most glorious thing I've ever seen," she said even while I thought the same about her. "When they flew me here, I was so happy to be out from that blasted mountain, I thought I could have stayed up in those skies forever. I was so sad when Rhys put me down."

An idea struck me and I was so certain she'd say yes that even while I was terrified to ask, I did it anyway. "Would you... do you want to..." I gestured vaguely with the arm she wasn't clinging to and pointed at the skies. "I could take you, if you wanted."

Her head snapped up to look at me, eyes grown wide with adventure and delight. “What, take me flying with you?” I nodded. “You would do that? For me?” She seemed genuinely surprised, but every bit delighted.

And it was a foolish question, really, that she asked me. I scooped her into my arms, my body tightening in fear that she would recoil from the touch of my marred and disfigured hands. I almost stepped back to apologize for even thinking I could touch her like this, but she grabbed my hand instantly, sending warm wonderful tendrils of acceptance radiating over my skin.

And that’s when I knew that I would do anything for this woman. One look at her and the piece of me that had been cold and lonely, always searching for the warmth no one had shown me, had finally found the match. And her smile lit that match sparking my soul until it was a mile high with flame and life.

“Ready?” I asked and when she bit her lower lip before nodding, my knees went weak and trembled. Three days was all it took and I was entirely undone.

I took off, shooting straight up into the sky until we were climbing higher, higher, higher. She grabbed furiously for me, digging her head into my shoulder with a wild cry, but it wasn’t fearful. It was wicked and enchanted and ready for the world. I laughed rich and full, unsure I’d ever made such a sound before now. “Look up,” I whispered into her ear and glided us into a smooth even flight.

I watched her eyes the entire time. The way they danced looking at the trees and lakes below. The way they crinkled when she smiled. The way they caught the sunlight at just the right angle and became two glimmering beacons of strength to my heart. The way they poured into me beaming in gratitude every time she spared a thought for me and looked my way.

We flew for hours that morning and though she continued to flirt with Cassian in the afternoons and make a mockery of Rhysand wherever he went - even challenging him in the fighting rings - she continued to meet me, morning after morning whether for an endless flight through the skies or just to sit and talk.

And each time we met, my soul dripped out of me in a constant stream until she knew me just as well as Rhys and Cassian did. It was easy to tell her everything. And for once, pity wasn't the reaction I received in exchange for my story. Morrigan took in every word I told her and returned only the grimmest understanding and acceptance offering whatever comfort she could. I returned as much of it back as I could as she told me about the horrors awaiting her in the Autumn Court.

By the time her last few days with us came and I was agreed to go with Rhysand and his mother to visit the Hewn City where she would be returning soon, I didn't care that I only had precious hours left with her or that Cassian would be honored with her company while we were away. I didn't even care that she was betrothed to someone else she hated, though I wished desperately I could take that future away from her even if I couldn't ever fill its place. Just so long as we had those mornings and time in the sky, I knew I would love her always.

If she was the sun, then I would be a moon content to orbit her until the universe stood still.

xx

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## **The Choice**

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# The Choice

by [illyriantremors](#)

## Summary

Azriel comes home from the Hewn City with Rhysand and discovers that Mor and Cassian slept together, leaving Azriel heartbroken and angry. Fighting and angst among the Squad ensues.

## Notes

I think it's sort of implied in the books that Rhysand finds out about Mor and Cassian first before Azriel gets back or finds out or whatever, but in this fic they find out together so that everyone can have one big miserable angst fest. Enjoy!

*Sometimes I wish I was smart. I wish I made cures for how people are. I wish I had power. I wish I could give. I wish I could change the world for you and me. Cause' I feel so mad. I feel so angry. Feel so callused, so lost confused again. Feel so cheap, so used unfaithful. Let's start over. Let's start over.*

- Boxcar Racer

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I understood right away all of Morrigan's misgivings about growing up in the Hewn City. The mountain was menacing in its own right, but stepping inside felt like walking into your own crypt before you even knew you were dead. If it hadn't been for my own cell that had locked me up for eleven long years, I would never have been able to imagine what it must have been like for Morrigan to have spent her childhood feeling this way and what was worse, thinking she'd never make it out.

The city was carved out of the rock and stone, dark and depressing. The shadows bound tightly to me as if to say even they did not enjoy this kind of darkness. Though they stuck close, they brought whispers in and out of my ears of the smattering around us: petty thefts between crooks; torrid affairs in dark corners; secrets and lies all around.

Rhysand managed to look right at home, tight control over a mask he had already begun to master. It unnerved me to see him this way. But his hands were in his pockets where I knew he liked them best when he was nervous or otherwise generally uncomfortable. It made me sick to think he might have to rule over this court regularly some day.

And then *he* approached.

*Lies. Cheat. Selfish. Coward. Greedy...* A million details spun a web inside my mind for me to follow, but the insect ensnared in the framework most boldly for me to see cut a dagger to my heart - *DEATH*.

The word pounded into me as the shadows murmured it over and over, a warning.

“Azriel, meet Keir,” Rhys said. “Keeper of this blasted hell-hole.”

The eyes of Morrigan’s father slid to me beholding the shadows and widening with something like lust. “A shadowsinger,” he said sluggishly. I could taste the power hungry urges dripping off his tongue. The shadows shuddered and warned me to step back. “How interesting.”

And just like that, the anger boiled up inside of me. I was grateful Rhysand’s mother took over the conversation, keeping me from Keir the rest of the trip. Thank the Mother we were only staying one night.

Each moment spent in his presence felt like a waste. All I could think about was how his life dwindled down to this wretched city of abuse and torment when such a wondrous gift as Morrigan had been lain at his feet freely and he ignored her for something far more valuable.

I thought of little else than Morrigan under the mountain and wondered if perhaps that was part of the city’s power, to tear a person down to their basest form and expose the ugliest parts of them. Keir was within near-constant reach. It would have been so easy to pull the blade from my back, press it ever so slightly against his neck until suddenly it wasn’t soft anymore, and to make him understand what a monstrosity he was for making his beautiful golden daughter hide her light.

How easy it would have been to let the blade simply...

*...ssssslip.*

In my inability to let my body slacken and reveal how furious I’d become, my insides fell apart instead, my heart wrenching with guilt and disgust over how low my impulses were. These were the moments in which I still shuddered at the shadows, when they whispered such furious things in the dark that took me back to my cell, made me think the worst of myself with their subtle suggestions of what I might do. To think that I was even capable -  
*no .*

I was no better than Keir to be thinking about harming him in such a foul way. And yet each time I decided I was worthless, Morrigan’s smile would appear

in my mind, that insatiable appetite for life and love glowing in her eyes, and I would tell myself that though I could never be worthy, I'd have to at least try or else what was the point of wishing her free?

The night passed agonizingly slow and I was overjoyed to be leaving the next day. Rhys was glad of it too. Though I said little to him during our stay, we exchanged looks of relief the moment we stepped out of the doors to the city and inhaled that glorious crisp air of the skies.

We chose to fly back to the Illyrian camps preferring the wind at our backs over the quick buzz of winnowing. In two days, Morrigan would be leaving. I didn't want to think about it, her going back to that mountain and possibly something even worse shortly after, so I chose to focus instead on savoring the last few hours I had with her.

It was just after the earliest hours of the morning when we reached the camps having wanted to break away from the Hewn City as early as possible. Rhysand's mother let us into the cabin we shared and at once we were greeted with Cassian sitting at the table sleepily pushing some burnt toast around on his plate.

"You're up early, sunshine," Rhys chirped, gliding towards the kitchen to steal some food for himself. Tendrils of darkness floated off his being in the relaxation of being home.

*Thief...*

A small probing voice tickled my ear, making me look up, but all I saw was Cassian.

He'd stopped eating to stare at us, for once a pained expression on his face. There was no trace of ease nor snarky comment ready to roll off his tongue. Even his body language sulked with his shoulders hunched slightly forward as if he were... nervous.

His gaze found me before darting to Rhys and I could hear him swallow the bile in his mouth, but I didn't understand what it meant.

“Cassian,” Rhysand’s mother said, stepping up to him and rubbing a hand over his cheek. Immediately, he pushed her away, something I’d never seen him do in ten years, and shot up out of his chair.

“I can’t,” he said moving to the door and suddenly stopping. I had to jump out of the way. He turned and found the High Lord’s son with a glass container of orange juice midway to his lips. Cassian took a deep breathe before stuttering, “I - Rhys.”

*Thief ....*

My brows furrowed, my concern deeping. This wasn’t like Cassian to be so unhinged and the voices were agitated as they spoke, anxious that I should hear what he had to say. But how it would make him a thief? I had no idea.

The way he looked at Rhysand as if his world might fall apart was terrifying. Cassian was bold. Cassian was fearless. He didn’t get scared, not with *us* . This was blood and family, unbreakable. But his fingers twitched in agitation at his sides, the crease on his forehead bunching together in consternation. Then there was the line of sweat tracing the edge of his hairline sending the first little bead dripping down the side of his face. His chest went up and down with each breathe visibly wooing the room into silence as we waited. I took in a dozen details of him at once - the dilated pupils poised for a fight, the shaking, the way he couldn’t quite look Rhysand square in the eye...

All of it told me that our bond was very much about to break.

Just when the greatest Illyrian fighter to ever walk the earth looked as though he might pass out from fright and *lose* something for once in his life, Morrigan tip-toed down the hall and spoke in a light voice that turned his face beat red. “Cassian?” she asked, her voice small and pale. *Nervous* , like he was, I thought.

That’s when I smelt it. All over her. His scent clinging to her pores and burrowing deep beneath the surface of her skin, deep, deep, deep inside of-

I chanced a glance at her over Cassian’s shoulder and my heart didn’t want to believe what my mind saw and the shadows confirmed. Her golden locks

were a disarray of tangles over a lopsided shirt - *Cassian's* shirt - and her legs were bare save for a skinny piece of fabric over her hips that wrapped between her thighs and crotch with pale pink lace.

### *THIEF*

My mouth fell open. It was the only move my body would allow me to make. I stared at her and it felt like my insides were going to explode from the pain. My mind scattered not knowing where to start or who I could run to anymore. All I knew was that she had chosen him and no matter what I thought of our mornings together, she had chosen him, and no matter who I was or could never be, she had chosen him, and now her life would be at risk because of it and she had chosen him, and she was leaving and could only take one of us with her in her heart to suffer with her in the Autumn Court and she had chosen *him* .

I had never hated Cassian. It was a stretch to say that I even hated my own miserable family who failed to raise me. Hate was a strong word a young, naive boy trapped inside of me reserved only for the irredeemable who were few and far between.

But just then, right in that moment, I hated Cassian with every selfish fiber of my being and I knew from the way Morrigan was looking at me with her lips trembling and her brows furrowed apologetically - sorry that I wasn't good enough for her - that it didn't matter, wasn't enough. *I* wasn't enough.

And now Morrigan would have to go back to the Hewn City with the only value her family saw in her ripped to shreds. Her body - I... didn't want to think what they might take from her. How far would they go? How high would the price be? Morrigan had told me awful things about her father. It made me sick to consider what he might do - lock her up, torture her all because of Cassian.

My brother. My friend. He did this to her, put her at such enormous risk.

"Azriel," Morrigan started to say, but the shadows swooped in and shut her out.

A deep hollow madness filled my soul. It wanted to scream with the agony of what Cassian had done to Morrigan as much as for the dreams I'd built up in Morrigan crumbling apart. I was an idiot for thinking anything with her was possible. We'd only known each other for *two weeks*...

But the shadows circled in tight screaming at me even as I wanted to rage. I thought they were trying to protect me from my own self, but then one gripped my mind and passed over my eyes filtering my vision with blackness and my focus honed.

### *BEHIND*

A crack so vicious it broke time sounded, pulling me out of my stupor. All eyes turned to Rhysand standing amid a pile of shattered glass and orange juice at his feet. The tendrils of darkness that had been floating off him in a smooth cascade only minutes ago were now abundantly flowing in dark violet waves.

And his eyes. Cauldron, his eyes were dark and vicious, the whites of them nearly non-existent as they drowned in a sea of rage. There was so much power built up inside of him. We had all known it, but for the first time I feared what it might do if left unchecked.

"Rhysand," his mother said softly, but not without warning edging her tone.

"You," Rhysand said ignoring his mother, all of that High Lord's power focused right in on Cassian. His voice was the blackest night, sharp as the glass shards at his feet. "You. Slept. With. Her."

Cassian swallowed and held up his hands. "Brother," he said, eliciting a vicious snarl from Rhysand. "We didn't do anything wrong."

"Didn't. Do. Anything. Wrong?" he asked with deadly calm.

Morrigan suddenly bolted out of the hallway to step in front of Cassian and the air caught her scent as she passed me to get to him. She reeked of sex. "It was my choice!" she said, already near tears, knowing precisely why Rhysand was upset, as if she'd known this was coming even before she'd



taken Cassian to bed. “I wanted to *choose* . I couldn’t go back there knowing - knowing my freedom would be gone forever.”

“*Do you know what they will do to you now, Morrigan?!*” Rhys bellowed. He darted forward stepping on several shards of glass until his feet bled and he didn’t so much as flinch. “What kind of choices do you think you’ll have *now*? Now that you’ve given yourself away to another.” The tears that had been threatening spilled over onto Morrigan’s flushed cheeks. Her eyes sank considering her cousin, realizing the awful truth now settling over her.

“You would have to go back no matter what,” Rhysand continued and he sounded pained to admit it as his body took on a certain wildness I’d never seen in him before. “Did you think we could keep you here forever? Did you think you wouldn’t have to hold up your engagement if you slept with some Illyrian half-breed!”

“Rhysand,” his mother said sharply, but he cut her off again.

“That’s all he - we - any of us are to them! Your father will slaughter us for this and he’ll do even worse to you. Morrigan...” A sob burst in his throat like he might cry. “What he’ll do to you - No, what *they’ll* do to you. Oh Morrigan, did you not think there would be consequences?”

“Damn the consequences!” Morrigan spat, nearly hysterical. Her body shook and despite it all, I wanted nothing more than to hold her and quiet the storm any way that I could. “I can survive them whatever they are.”

And then in a move that surprised us all, Morrigan strode up to the High Lord’s son like a lioness chasing down her next meal, as if Rhysand hadn’t just been shouting at her with blood pooling at his feet from where he stepped on the glass. Their faces were less than an inch apart and when she spoke, she found her confident, eternally optimistic self again through every tear. “I am *stronger* than they are,” she declared.

“Morrigan,” Rhysand whispered. There was so much pity in his voice. “They’re going to *kill* you...” And all at once in the stillness that followed, every pair of eyes in the room save for Morrigan’s turned and found Cassian. Because somehow, it was his fault.

All his fault.

A crack split open inside of me, one I thought I had managed to seal up a long, long time ago after many years of healing and struggle. And when it split, it didn't just fray at the seams. It tore with a vengeance until the fabric had burst open and a wide, bottomless chasm in my heart was exposed.

Morrigan could *die* for this. I had feared what her family might do, but never death. They wouldn't - *couldn't* .

The bitter storm of emotions raging beneath my skin, churning my blood was quickly becoming too much for me to remain still, but I had to keep it all in, couldn't let it out: jealousy, anger, heartache, and murderous, murderous power swelled and it was too much. Morrigan could be with whomever she wanted even if her choice might have broken my heart. It was her decision to make, as it rightfully should be, and I would respect it always no matter what it was.

Because two weeks. Two weeks was all we'd had and it didn't matter that it would be but the blink of an eye in the span of what our lifetimes would become because two weeks had been enough for every single cell pumping away in my chest to belong entirely to her. And because Cassian had *touched* her, her life might be forfeit for it.

I thought of everything we had faced in the last ten years from the cruel brutality of the Illyrian camps, Lord Devlon's constant doubting of our capabilities as bastards and half-breeds, to the cold unforgiving Blood Rite, only to have it all betrayed in a single night by sex.

My soul emptied out. Morrigan. Cassian. My brotherhood, gone in a flash. And the worst part of it all was that even as Cassian had put someone as pure and noble as Morrigan in such terrible danger, I could tell from the moment he darted out of his chair away from Rhysand's mother that he regretted everything. He knew exactly what he'd done and the remorse was already beginning to eat him alive. I wanted to flay him for taking Morrigan to his bed, but he was my friend and it damned me to hell to see him fuck up like this when I knew the lionheart beating away inside his chest.

Cassian's betrayal of our brotherhood was an unsung song of sorrow in this battle that bloomed pitifully in my chest to quell the sea of anger consuming my blood. The wrath remained, but even stronger was the despair it left in its wake.

Everything happened next very quickly and all at once, but I saw it in my head as if in slow motion.

First, Morrigan broke. Her body crumpled over on itself and the sob that heaved from her chest detonated the trigger of wrath within her cousin.

The shadows flared to life. *MOVE* they said and I lunged for Morrigan to grab her as she fell and Rhysand threw himself at Cassian, his wings fully erect and - *fuck me* if those weren't *talons* ripping from his hands and feet. That was new.

His motion sent Cassian barreling out the front door and into the dust of camp. I could hear them wrestle and was silently grateful my hands would not have to be the ones to give Cassian the pummeling he'd more than earned. But my attention focused solely on Morrigan who fell to the floor weeping in my arms. I held her and I held her and I held her not caring it wasn't my body she wanted against her or that I was of no good use anymore.

All that mattered was that I do something, anything to help her.

*Stay ...*

"I'm sorry," she sobbed. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I just-"

"Shh," I said not quite sure who she was apologizing too. I stroked her hair and rocked her back and forth until the tears slowed and she was coherent enough to talk.

She pulled her head back from my chest where a wet stain had erupted against the fabric of my shirt. "Azriel," she said and her eyes were red and glossy over the deep browns and golds I had come to love so much. But it was the sound of her name broke on her lips that undid me. "I couldn't find

another way. I only wanted to *c-choose* .” It was a choke on her lips, a dying prayer in her heart.

And I knew I could never hate her for wanting perhaps the most basic human right. Her eyes drained me of all that grief threatening to burn me alive. If anything, her determination to own her life - consequences be damned - only made me love her more.

“I know, Morrigan,” I said, nodding at her. Whether her apologies were for me or not, I accepted them all so she could feel like at least someone had listened. If she needed to send messages out into the world when no one was listening, I would be her vessel to receive them always. Whatever she needed me to be even if I couldn’t be what she wanted.

Mistake or no, Morrigan had risked everything of herself to exist as she saw fit. Her determination, her will, her strength and sense of self-worth even having grown up in a world that damned her, guaranteed I could never merit her mind, body, and soul. I was base. A bastard. A sword. A shadow. She was the sun. The sky. A light. Life itself.

I pulled her back against my chest wondering if this was the last time I’d ever see her, touch her. How I would miss those mornings flying with her cradled against me, her voice ringing with joy in my ear. “I know.” I said it over and over again and when I looked up, Rhysand’s mother was looking at us with a look on her face I couldn’t quite place. Like she saw us, knew how our hearts were bleeding.

I hung on to her until Rhysand came back bruised and bloody, but not have as bad as Cassian. The fighter didn’t even pick himself up out of the mud by the time Rhysand was through with him. I’m not sure he even used magic to beat him down.

Rhysand took Morrigan back to the Hewn City two days later as promised and stayed with her. He didn’t come back until almost a week later when he ran frantically into the cabin and found me waiting for him, my blade already strapped to my back. The darkness peeled off of him ripe with fear.

“Will you go?” he asked me without preamble.

“To the ends of the earth,” I said.

That was the first bad day.

xx

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

## **The Autumn Court**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/8061277) at  
<http://archiveofourown.org/works/8061277>.

### **Rating:**

[Teen And Up Audiences](#)

### **Archive Warning:**

[Graphic Depictions Of Violence](#)

### **Category:**

[F/M](#)

### **Fandom:**

[A Court of Thorns and Roses Series - Sarah J. Maas](#)

### **Relationships:**

[Morrigan/Azriel](#), [Moriel - Relationship](#)

### **Characters:**

[Azriel](#), [Morrigan](#), [Rhysand](#), [Cassian](#), [Keir](#), [Eris](#)

### **Additional Tags:**

[Angst](#), [Blood](#), [dying](#), [Naga](#), [Comfort](#)

### **Language:**

English

### **Series:**

Part 7 of [Shadowsinger: An Azriel/Moriel Fic](#)

### **Stats:**

Published: 2016-09-18 Words: 3,383 Chapters: 1/1

# The Autumn Court

by [illyriantremors](#)

## Summary

Azriel rescues Morrigan from the seat of death in the Autumn Court where Eris has left her for dead. He then helps her begin her recovery process offering what little he can to help her cope with the pain, both physical and mental.



*If I told you this was only gonna hurt. If I warned you that the fire's gonna burn. Would you walk in? Would you let me do it first? Do it all in the name of love. Would you let me lead you even when you're blind? In the darkness, in the middle of the night, in the silence, when there's no one by your side, would you call in the name of love?*

*If I told you we could bathe in all the lights, would you rise up, come and meet me in the sky? Would you trust me when you're jumping from the heights? Would you fall in the name of love? When there's madness, when there's poison in your head, when the sadness leaves you broken in your bed. I will hold you in the depths of your despair and it's all in the name of love.*

- Martin Garrix & Bebe Rexha

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The forests of the Autumn Court smelled nothing like the pine and tar of the Illyrian Mountains. Spices, like cinnamon and nutmeg, and tart apple overpowered the scent of the trees. Had I not noticed the leaves with their razored edges ready to cut at me as I flew and ran through the patchwork, stained with the deep red-wine color of fall, I might have enjoyed the warm, cozy climate of the court.

My blood sang to me that day the same way my shadows did. I could feel it pulsing against the veins in my arms and legs as I shot in and out of the skies, keeping low to avoid the notice of any onlookers from afar.

The second *my* High Lord had winnowed me in only before leaving himself to escape penalty, I sent the shadows off chasing into the thick cluster of trees and took off. Any direction would do for now. My shadows and I didn't always get along. At times I felt they had ulterior motives for me hidden behind their directions, but today they rotated in and out of me with ease bending to my every command.

*East* , then *South* , *higher*, *left*, *left*, *left*, and on and on they went urging me with directions and warnings. An unsettling feeling came over me when the shadows did not bring premonitions of beast nor foe lurking in wait. They

should have, but the forest was eerily still with darkness as if the Cauldron itself had been landed and froze time here forever.

But while my shadows gave me directions, my blood told the story clawing desperately - *terrified* - at my heart: *Find her. Find her. Find her. Don't be dead. Don't be dead. Please, Mother don't be dead...*

The second Rhysand flooded through that door, an inky wave of darkness and terror, I knew he'd come to deliver the killing blow. A week spent in the Hewn City after returning her home and he hadn't seen her that entire time, not after the moment she passed through the court doors and her father had scented her. What little he did know, and it wasn't much at that, was too shocking to think about.

So her father had dumped her here in the Autumn Court. She was to be Eris' problem now even if he had sent word to her father that he wanted nothing to do with her and broken their agreement. Rhysand had warned me it would be difficult find her and the he himself couldn't take her now that she was technically considered Eris' own property. Stealing from another court's heir was enough to start a war even if they were glad to see the treasure gone.

"Azriel," he said when I'd agreed to go, as if I would have said anything otherwise. "It's not good." And though that was putting it mildly, the heaviness in his voice and the worry weighing down his eyes warned me what was coming.

I flew for more than a day covering what felt like nearly every square inch of that forest and even then, it wasn't all of it. It bothered me that even starting on the opposite edges of the forest at the border of the Autumn Court, so far from where Eris would be, that it would take me so long to reach her. Why would she have been placed so deeply within the trees? Why take the trouble? Why go out of your way to hide a body you cared so little about? Why stick the knife in that much deeper?

Unless you enjoyed that sort of thing. A twisted image rotted in my mind of Eris and his brothers laughing, maybe even getting off on the idea of her body decaying in a forest surrounded by bloodthirsty beasts. Forget her name and her honor or even pissing off her bastard father for trying to stick to the

agreement after they'd refused. They delighted in the simple pleasure of making a dreamer suffer by throwing her into the worst possible nightmare.

For that alone, I vowed I would slaughter them all.

It was near dawn the following morning when the shadows wrapped in close, one nasty in particular curling around my ear with an urgent whisper: *DOWN* .

I dove and when I landed, I stood still listening instead of immediately taking off as I had been doing all along. Standing still made my body grow weary, but my blood was alive enough for us both. Though I found it impossible after my experiences already spent in the forest, this particular patch was quieter, more deadly still than any other I'd encountered. And there were shadows black as night and thick as death creeping in the distance - where *she* was.

I didn't wait for the whisper that told me to move *FORWARD* before taking off at an all out sprint. My sword was in my hand and cutting at the beasts as my siphons gleamed with power, drawing their attention away from the victim they had just been about to enclose on. There were three of them, three of them screaming and wailing in such pain with looks of utter surprise on their serpentine faces as my blade sliced through the scales of their skin that had only manifested out of the shadows when I was close enough to cut. The talons on their limbs were gruesome and reminded me so much of Rhysand that day he'd attacked Cassian and I couldn't stand the comparison, so I chopped those off too while the beasts fell.

The blade sliced clean with their blood spilling their lives across the mossy ground. They were the first real enemy kills my Illyrian blade made outside of the Night Court's mountains, taking the truth of the beasts and revealing it with every swipe just as she had always been the teller of my truth.

*Truth-Teller* .

The new name pounded in my ears with every strike christening the sword as one by one the bodies fell.

Any other day and slaughtering the naga would have been a challenge. Any other day and it would have felt gratifying to defeat such an ancient, powerful enemy. Any other day and I would have returned home to quietly celebrate the victory, but when the bodies had all fallen and my sword went with them, all I could see was her - *Morrigan* - dying in the middle.

I thought I was dead. I should be the one lying there. Thick tears fell far past my cheeks intercepted by the blood covering her body as I fell over on my knees to feel her. The pain in my chest was unbearable and where I had denied myself her existence the past week, now her name flooded out of me in droves.

*"Morrigan,"* I cried. *"Morrigan, Morrigan, Morrigan."* A thousand years and never would I praying saying her name.

Her clothes were utterly destroyed to the point that she was nearly naked. The beautiful locks of gold that had once fallen in long tendrils down her back had been cut wickedly short and I gasped remembering how they would tickle my face when I flew her in the early mornings. And the blood - *fuck the blood was everywhere*. And when I took in a deep inhale, I could smell the stench of sex reeking on her. Not Cassian's work, but *theirs*. They'd fucked her anyway, not just Eris, but the whole lot of them, let their refusals that they'd rather fuck a cow be damned.

But the worst they had saved for her stomach where a single leaf of paper now tarnished with blood and dirt sat nailed to her stomach. The nail was long. The nail was thick. The nail was already rusted. I could tell just from looking at the head of it that stuck out barely a centimeter from below her navel. I saw the note. I saw Keir's cold release of his own daughter to a fellow monster as he named her too foul and loathsome for his own court.

The wrath that birthed within me sent a wail so anguished I was sure not a single creature in Prythian did not hear it. The forest around me shook and my shadows fled in despair as my body folded over and my hands gripped Morrigan's frail body. I did not stop until I realized the black I saw in my vision was not a shadow passing over me, just my own stupid mind so warped with pain it had ceased to function.

I reached a hand out and Truth-Teller found its way into my hold. I sheathed it without bothering to clean the blade and then carefully, my fingers touched the nailhead. Morrigan jerked with a loud moan instantly as I tried to remove it, but she did not open her eyes and her face was a storm of pain as I pulled. I was so shocked by her sudden signs of life that I almost stopped, but I knew the nail had to come out. I couldn't fly her knowing it still burrowed within her trying to take her life away.

With my free hand, I gripped her own hand and squeezed, murmuring her name over and over again to keep myself sane. "Morrigan," I said and slowly the nail slid out. "Morrigan, Morrigan, *Morrigan* ."

Her face slackened into its deadened state once the nail was freed and I checked her pulse frantically thinking she meant to well and truly leave me then, but she was still alive. I scooped her up and then we were in the skies flying faster than magic itself to meet Rhysand at the border where I knew he'd find us. Dawn had just crested the sun over the horizon as we met the first faint pink rays of light.

Hope.

"Look, Morrigan," I said reaching down to whisper in her ear. "The sun's up. It's your favorite time of day." My voice broke and still she did not open her eyes. "P-please wake up," I said, squeezing her body against me a little harder as my tears renewed themselves with vigor. "The sun's come up, j-just for *you* ."

Feebly, her eyes opened, mere slits. But they didn't see the sun. "Ah-zriel," was all she managed to choke out, barely any voice at all, but my simple name on her lips was enough to keep me hoping. Her hand twitched like she would move it somewhere, but couldn't complete turning the thought into action. "Az..." she whispered and then she was out again.

And with more pain than I knew was possible to feel for someone, I flew my Morrigan home.

---

I woke up sitting upright in a wingback chair. My eyes were too groggy to open and that's when it hit me how tired my body was. I mentally ticked off the mileage I'd accrued and the hours I'd spent awake working my body against reason to the death to find her.

Morrigan.

My eyes shot open in a panic as I recalled everything that had happened. I got up having to find her, to see her and know if she was okay, that she hadn't *died* ... but when I stood, she was already there before me sleeping peacefully on a large canopy bed with white silk sheets. I imagined the fabric must have felt cool against her skin.

"She'll be okay," a voice said tragically and my head swiveled to find Rhysand sitting adjacent to me in a wingback chair that was a twin to my own. He was staring at his cousin, his elbows resting on either knee as he leaned forward, his chin sat on top of his fisted hands. It was a far cry from how I'd last seen him as the memory of returning to the Night Court came back to me.

Rhysand had winnowed us in - to a small townhouse overlooking a city I'd never seen before - and I had exploded. As soon as the healer had taken Morrigan out of my arms, I was begging Rhysand to winnow me back to the Autumn Court and the Court of Nightmares so I could slaughter them all. He'd had to use magic to subdue me I realized as I fought both physically and mentally against him to win, but in the end he was stronger. I didn't give up until my body shut down on me and I passed out from the toll of exhaustion my anger had taken.

Never again would I let him see me crumble like that. Never would any of them see it, I swore on my life and hers not to fall apart again lest it be the last thing I do. For her, I would be strong and silent as the grave.

"The healers said she'll make a full recovery," Rhysand continued. "But there was poison on the nail, so the magic will take longer to work. When she wakes up, she'll be in immense pain."

His voice was monotone, dead as if the healers had told him she would die anyway. His head turned to me after a sorrowful pause had passed. "Thank you for finding her," he said in an exhausted voice and a great sigh of relief went out of him.

"I would have gone to the ends of the world and back to find her," I replied.

His lips crinkled with a flicker of... something. "I know you would have." It made me wonder if he knew why. He stood and this time, he was no longer the High Lord's son directing me on a great rescue mission for his court, but simply Rhysand - my friend, my brother. "I have to go talk to Cassian. He's not taking this well given his... involvement. I'll leave you to her."

And then I was alone while Morrigan slept. I half regretted Rhysand leaving. The idea of being alone with Morrigan now that we were both free to be whomever and whatever we wanted without consequence felt terrifying. I'd failed her entirely. Keir had been not more than ten feet from me for most of an evening when I'd visited with Rhysand. I could have killed him then and there and saved Morrigan from such an awful fate.

I had told her once I would get her out if I could and when the moment came, I failed. It didn't matter what ideas the shadows had planted in my mind. It didn't matter that the blade was strapped to my back. It didn't matter that I had enough power with my body alone to make Keir suffer death a thousand times over because the opportunity had come, I knew I should take it, but my guilt stopped me and I failed her.

And now the new guilt that found me was going to kill me. I stumbled to Morrigan's side. Her cheeks were so pale as her body struggled to regenerate the blood it had lost. That blood was on my hands. This wasn't Cassian's fault or her's or Keir's or Eris' or anyone else's. It was mine. Entirely, all my fault because I could have spared her, but I didn't.

My chest bent forward, my head cradled in my hands as I shook. I did not stop until a weak whine met my ears.

"Azriel," Morrigan whispered and my head snapped up. Her face was scrunched together. Rhysand had said she would be in pain when she woke,

but I still hated to see it. A whimper escaped her lips, her eyes closing again as bitter agony took over. “It hurts...” She sighed and her body began to curl up on itself, which only made the wounds in her stomach cry out more.

“Touch me,” she said suddenly through the pain.

“What?” I asked, not sure I understood what she wanted. My throat felt raw and dry.

“Touch me. Hold me. *Do something* . Anything to make it stop.” A sob racked through her body and a hand flew to her face to cover the grief intensifying there. I couldn’t hold her for risk of making her wounds agitate further, but that didn’t leave much for me to touch. I swore under my breathe and moved around to the other side of the bed so I could climb up. As gently as I could manage, I laid down beside her and scooted my body as close to hers as I dared.

I had nothing left to give her, nothing left to take away the pain. So I gave her the only thing that had come to me when my pain had seemed insurmountable.

My far hand stretched out across my body in Morrigan’s direction and a shy shadow crawled hesitantly down my arm coming to pause on the palm of my hand. *GO* , I commanded and it slid in a hurried, silky shot off of me to wrap itself around Morrigan. The pain did not leave her, but it did not intensify either and the hand covering her face relaxed a bit.

“How did you do it?” she asked.

“Do what?” I asked, again failing to understand her meaning.

Her free hand lying next to me groped on the bed searching until it found mine and when it did, the fingers rubbed hard over the rough scars and callouses that plagued my skin. *How did you do it? How did you survive this pain?* That was what her searching hand asked mine.

I didn’t speak, not at first. I didn’t know what to say anymore to her or anyone. I’d spent ten years living as a fool thinking I could heal from the horrors of my childhood only to find out I was wrong. Some things you can



never heal from. Some things will go away for a short while only to come back to haunt you in worse and more terrifying ways.

But I had to give Morrigan something, so I gave her the only certainties I had left.

“I didn’t,” I said in reply to her initial question. “Not everyday. Some days were a flood of darkness and torment so deep, I never thought they’d let me go. But eventually, you find something worth going on for and you choose to follow it out of the deep. It’s hard, but it’s worth it.”

I fell silent again listening to the sound of her breathing deepen as she began to drift back towards sleep. But a few minutes later, she spoke again with another question. “What did you find?” she asked. “What was worth you fighting for?”

A flash of memory burst in my mind: the sunlight on her hair, how soft her skin was against my neck as she pressed into me and we flew, her laughter loud and brimming with optimism and hope in my ear as she showed me how to feel the sun when most of my life had been nothing but the freezing cold of ice. I shook my head, glad her eyes were closed and she couldn’t see the struggle playing out on my face.

“I found a light in the darkness,” I said quietly. “It led me out.” Next to me, a small, soft smile settled on Morrigan’s face. “Don’t let the hard days win, Morrigan.” She squeezed my hand and fell back to sleep.

xx

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

## **The Nail**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/8075683) at  
<http://archiveofourown.org/works/8075683>.

### **Rating:**

[Mature](#)

### **Archive Warning:**

[Graphic Depictions Of Violence](#)

### **Category:**

[F/M](#)

### **Fandom:**

[A Court of Thorns and Roses Series - Sarah J. Maas](#)

### **Relationships:**

[Morrigan/Azriel](#), [Moriel - Relationship](#)

### **Characters:**

[Azriel](#), [Morrigan](#), [Rhysand](#), [Cassian](#), [Keir](#), [Feyre](#)

### **Additional Tags:**

[Violence](#), [Extremely Graphic Violence](#), [Torture](#), [Death](#), [acomaf](#)

### **Language:**

English

### **Series:**

Part 8 of [Shadowsinger: An Azriel/Moriel Fic](#)

### **Stats:**

Published: 2016-09-19 Words: 6,252 Chapters: 1/1

# The Nail

by [illyriantremors](#)

## Summary

Set in a would-be ACOTAR Book 3, Azriel is summoned to the Hewn City in the middle of war to deal with Keir who has been caught defecting to Hybern. Rhysand defers to Morrigan as to how Keir will die and it falls to Azriel to finish him off with an unexpected surprise that rattles the rest of the Squad.

## Notes

There is really rather dark, graphic violence in this one involving torture and death. Ye pirates be warned. And given that, I don't know what this says about me, but this is probably the chapter I'm most proud of out of this series of fics, so I hope anyone reading this enjoys it. :)

*We don't deal with outsiders very well. They say newcomers have a certain smell. Yeah, trust issues, not to mention they say they can smell your intentions. You're lovin' on the freak show sitting next to you. You'll have some weird people sitting next to you. You'll think, "How did I get here, sitting next to you?" But after all I've said, please don't forget.*

*All my friends are heathens, take it slow. Wait for them to ask you who you know. Please don't make any sudden moves. You don't know the half of the abuse.*

- Twenty One Pilots

---

Azriel keeps it in his pocket.

He has it stitched to the inner half of his right calf, a long stretch of dark fabric with a tiny slit at the top, imperceptible to anyone else but him. It's buried there in the darkness. He never takes it out. He never touches it. Never so much as thinks about it unless he's in the Court of Nightmares.

Visits to the Hewn City are the one time he allows his mind to slip. And it's so easy to do with his prey sitting right in front of him. He could open the slit and do the deed right then, be done with it. The shadows press in on his mind urging him to do it, just like they did the first time Azriel had visited and wondered what would happen if he held Truth-Teller up to the coward's neck.

Instead, he waits. Through battles and wars, sleep and wake, sunshine and starlight, he keeps the slit closed and the weapon covered up telling no one. It rusts. It rots. It grows old with time, but he never lets go of it, not for nearly five hundred years because he's saving it for the day Rhysand breaks or the day Morrigan asks. He won't touch it until someone gives him the say so. His deepest fear is that they never will, next to losing what he loves most.

So he waits quietly, patiently for that day when he's told to take it out even when they don't know it's there and he can unleash his shadows in full force.

Today is that day.

---

It's late by the time I finally fly into the cold mountains of the Night Court, landing at the entrance to the Court of Nightmares. The sky above has grown dark and filled with clouds. I can't quite tell without the moonlight to show me, but I'd have been willing to bet the clouds were a deep, stormy grey given the thunderheads I'd seen while leaving the Spring Court where my men would have to stay the night without me.

Only one thing could have torn me away. Only one thing could have dragged *all* of us away from the front lines of war. Everyone except Feyre who had to remain in the Spring Court even now in the thick of war to play her part. But if anyone had asked, I was glad she wouldn't be here for what we had to do tonight. Maybe it was better she stayed away and didn't see the monsters we'd shape ourselves into even if it was for a worthy cause.

A deeper selfish part of myself still afraid of the outside world was glad it would be just the core of us. Tonight was meant for myself, for Morrigan, Rhysand, Cassian. Cassian who greeted me on the steps of the Court of Nightmares, ready to cross over the threshold brother to brother. Feyre was blood now and I wouldn't have had it any other way, not when I saw what having her brought to Rhysand. There was a joy to him now that had never existed before like all the holes had been filled in where war, family, and death had ripped him apart. And on her own, Feyre was tough, a fighter. She more than earned her spot with us. In a way, she reminded me of Morrigan when I'd first met her, just learning the ropes and coming into her own. I liked her.

But we had been the four who had been there when everything happened. We'd been the ones who'd had to witness the pain, the horrors, and in Morrigan's case, *feel* it all too.

When the shadows came hunting for me earlier in the morning, I'd expected news of the war, of Feyre or Rhysand or anything else but the slimy word they snaked into my ear. I swallowed that word and felt it drop into the deep recesses of my stomach where it sat squirming around uncomfortably, not sure whether I should vomit it back up or shit it straight out.

*Keir...*

That was all the shadows had said, but it was enough. I knew what had happened. The paper with Rhysand's writing appeared next to me a moment later. No quill. No lengthy explanation. Just two little words written in his excellent penmanship: *Hewn City* .

I flew. All day, faster and harder than I ever had before save my long lone trip to the Autumn Court some five hundred years ago. Tension roiled within every sweep of my wings against the winds. A stitch pressed against my heart and the cold length of metal at my calf begged me to release it. It was anticipation. It was stress. It was anger and hurt. And it was shadow and bone and blood ready to spring out of the darkness I had been carrying around my entire life.

When I landed on that mountain, I didn't say anything. I looked at Cassian expecting an explanation while he appraised me with a look up and down my body, his brow scrunched together.

"You look like an angel of death like that," Cassian said, but he didn't sound surprised to see me so wrapped up in clouds of darkness. Not today. The shadows tightened on my body just as the few I'd sent ahead came slithering back to me from within the mountain itself. A heavy, familiar fog slid over my eyes and through the dark filter of voices, the shadows showed me an empty court void of inhabitants but for the two other people who mattered to me most.

"It's empty," I said.

Cassian nodded. "You know Rhysand," he said. "He likes to be dramatic."

Thunder sounded overhead, but neither of us shook. Such theatrics were trivial to us now after the horrors we had seen. "I'm not sure I'd call this dramatic," I mused. "He deserves it."

Cassian sighed and it was half a smile. "Yes he does, brother. Yes he does."

We met our High Lord in the heart of the Court of Nightmares where he normally held court. Today, the room was empty exactly as my friends had warned. I sent them back out once more not willing to trust what my eyes chronicles on their own, but the reports still came back in the negative. Not a single cretin was around for quite some distance. I only wondered if they had fled by choice in the war or some evil doing of Rhysand's magic.

The shadows were forced to fill me in on Rhysand's appearance as my mind became otherwise engaged. He stood tall and menacing at the center of the court. The damper on his power must have been taken off because an eerie fog had settled over the room, but unlike Rhysand's usual bravado meant to delight and bewitch, this darkness was filled with lightning and death, a sharp mirror to the trouble brewing outside.

But I saw none of Rhysand nor his darkness stepping inside the room. My gaze was reserved wholly for the one person this night would affect most.

She stood next to her cousin in a long luxurious dress the deepest shade of crimson. The neckline plunged far past her breasts stopping just above her navel. A blood ruby dangled from a chain of diamonds around her neck coming to a rest within that narrow opening along her stomach. And the slit on the side was a mile high up her legs.

She was a torment, my Morrigan. I couldn't help the cruel feline grin that spread itself across my face as I drank her up. What a beautiful sight she would make in front of her father as he died. A temptress wrapped up in a pretty box the color of Keir's blood meant to impress and inspire him with how powerful his daughter had become. What a promise and a wealth she could have been for him. What a savior for their family. And just when Keir saw her, I knew he would see it for the lie it really was. There was venom underneath that dress, not money and a maidenhead. And Morrigan would make sure every last ounce of poison she possessed would sink right into her father until he was too crippled with pain to even draw breath. I quivered at the thought.

Morrigan spotted my approach and our eyes locked. In that precise moment, I felt the world go still. The thunder wasn't outside, it was in my heart beating just for her. And the lightning in the room wasn't coming from Rhysand's



power, it was in my hands, itching for the sword at my back that it would spill the awful truth into the open for Keir to finally see.

So much was left between us, so much left unsaid. Five hundred years of history would come to a head tonight. I could hear her heart beating in her chest, could feel it speed up when she saw me and we both remembered the night she had almost died. I'd only gotten there just in time to bring her back exactly as she had once saved me and had continued to do so for centuries afterward.

I wanted to tell her. I wanted to scream at her every day how far I would go to keep her safe. There was nothing I wouldn't do. My blood was hers to spill, command, and control as she willed and by the Mother, I would obey if only it wouldn't damn us both.

Which was why I'd chosen to remain silent. It was what I'd done since the day Morrigan had woken up and asked me how to survive. Cauldron, it was so long ago, but I'd kept my promise to myself never to fail her again and that included keeping a careful distance from her even if I was never too far away. I'd kept that distance from all of them, in truth.

And it hadn't been easy. Not for one day and especially not in the beginning. But in time, the relationships between all of us had mended. Cassian and Morrigan became steady friends content to turn their fleeting act into a one-off joke to cope with humor, though even I could see something like lost longing written in Cassian's eyes now and then when he looked at Morrigan over the years. It wasn't romance exactly, just a simple *what could have been* had he not fucked up.

Rhysand and Morrigan's relationship had been the quickest to heal. She didn't rebuke him for the beating he'd given Cassian. Sometimes I got the sense she felt it was her fault in the first place, that she felt bad it had been poor Cassian who'd been home that night chosen by Fate's cruel hand and not some random Illyrian beast. And Rhysand, despite nearly losing his cousin, wouldn't force her to regret taking control of her own life and giving agency to her body and soul. It was easier for him to turn her into a queen over her family and his court, enabling her powers, than to let her actions continue to haunt her.

But those friendships had taken the longest to mend where I was concerned. With Rhysand, there was quiet understanding. The fact that I had been the one to go and get Morrigan erased some of the awkwardness between us and I would never forget his face as he was forced to hold me back from tearing the world apart to avenge his cousin. Sometimes, I still wondered if he *knew* the truth grappling under my skin trying to get free.

With Morrigan, her trust in me was implicit from the start, but that was only because I'd saved her and we'd become friends first. She knew I'd been hurt. It was too hard to pretend I wasn't when it had been plain as day in my eyes when I'd seen her standing behind Cassian reeking of sex and his scent. But that didn't matter to her because I'd saved her and for that, she was never letting me go, something she made very clear and it terrified me. No matter how far I ran from her in my mind, she was always there knocking at the door, begging to be let in. She was the last one to see me off when I left court and the first one to see me home when I came back, always, always waiting for me with something like concern in her eyes.

I tried to shut it down. I told myself over and over again it was only because she felt indebted to me for what I'd done and nothing more. We were a family all four of us together, but thinking of Morrigan and myself without the others involved was an impossibility she insisted on facing down. No matter how much I shut down or put her off, she wouldn't let me get away with it and eventually, I'd cave and take the chain off, turn the handle, and find her brown eyes staring at me through the sliver of the door I'd open just for her.

That was when it was hardest. To be so vulnerable and so close to the truth when I couldn't have any of it was Hybern's ash arrow flying next to my heart; it wasn't a kill shot, but it was close enough to feel like it was. How many times had I gone there before in life only to find myself pushed back off that cliff again with no wings to save me? No High Lord's son to swoop in and catch me at the last second? Being so close to Morrigan was more intoxicating and addicting than the high of war, but just as dangerous for my soul. I wanted her more than anything, but I'd already failed her in so many ways that I couldn't let it happen again. She was the sun and I was a block of ice orbiting small and cold on the outer reaches.

So no matter how many times she knocked and that door cracked me open, I made sure it was firmly shut again by the night's end.

Cassian had taken me the longest to work back into, but in some ways he had been simpler, more straightforward. For months, we didn't say a word to each other until one day we both found ourselves in the fighting rings facing each other just as we had the day we'd met and that was it. Punches and cuts and bruises traded apologies and answers and understanding across our skin where our tongues couldn't get the words across.

By the time the war came and we were all sent to different parts of the world without one another, only then did we realize the cuts had scabbed over and we could move on. Trust and brotherhood were rebuilt over years and years of war and separation and then some several centuries more of companionship with Rhysand in Velaris building our Court of Dreams.

And that was simply that.

"He defected," Rhysand said and you could have cut the tension in his voice with a knife. Most people thought he was angry when the room erupted into darkness like an explosion of light and sound. But that was the High Lord's mask. You always knew Rhysand was well and truly angry when the only indication of the beast prowling beneath his skin was that deadly call in his voice and nothing else. "Cassian brought him in from across the sea trying to get to Hybern."

The four of us stared at each other. We knew what came next. Keir had always been a lousy piece of scum, but he kept to Rhysand's bidding and never faulted. Now that he had abandoned ship and in just about the worst way possible, death was the penalty. And Keir probably knew it too.

It was a wonder Cassian hadn't sliced him up the second he'd found him. I couldn't help but to picture Keir squirming wherever Cassian had chained him up. As if he knew what I was thinking, Cassian caught my eye and subtly nodded, affirming that it wasn't pretty and this was just the start. He was excited - we both were. It was the one death neither of us were sure to never mourn. Our silent feuding suspended in the moments while Morrigan's life hung in the balance and we found ourselves knitted together in mutual hatred

of her father. As painful as tonight would be bringing back those horrible days, all those scars we each carried from it, it would be a celebration in a way too.

The only thing left to decide was how and that was a matter of...

“Morrigan,” Rhysand said. He stepped in front of his cousin so that his back was to Cassian and I and stared solemnly down at her. He spoke, but not before his shoulders dropped in time with a tense exhale of breathe. “It’s your decision, as always.”

Morrigan’s brown eyes were tense and glossy. Her head tilted to the side as she considered Rhysand’s words. Her decision. That’s what this entire fiasco came down to: her choice. Her choice to love and live as she pleased. And her choice to kill. There was no doubt in my mind Rhysand wouldn’t allow Keir to live, but that wasn’t quite the choice he was offering her. Either she could let Keir go quickly, or she could make it horrible.

And suddenly in the midst of Morrigan’s long silence, I found myself at a loss as to what she would do. Her face looked so grieved, so conflicted that I almost doubted where this was heading. Looking past Rhysand, she looked at Cassian, then looked at me, and her back straightened, head held high. We each gave her an encouraging nod that seemed to give her the fire she needed.

I saw her eyes sharpen, the edge of *the* Morrigan, our queen, flaring to life inside them. She was ready for this moment, had prepared for it for centuries. When she looked back to Rhysand, I knew what she would do. It would hurt her like hell to kill Keir despite what he’d done to her mind and body, but she was strong enough to go through with it. More importantly, she deserved it.

“Azriel,” was all Morrigan said at long last staring into her cousin’s violet eyes. I stepped forward, the shadows swimming in anticipation trying to understand what she would have of me this time. Rhysand stepped aside easily to let me by as if he knew this was coming. “Your sword,” Morrigan said as I stepped in front of her. I reached behind me and pulled Truth-Teller out of its sheath at once and held it out to her.

“It’s yours,” I said. Just as every piece of me had always been. If I was to be a blade in the night to her, then so be it.

But Morrigan touched the Illyrian sword and pushed it away from her, back towards *me*. “No, Az,” she said, shaking her head. “Not me.” Her gaze was hard unrelenting steel as cruel and unyielding as my blade and it asked everything of me, sung the story of that day in the inches that separated our hearts until I was practically bleeding before her. Could I kill him for her? Would it rectify the anguish broken on my face when I’d seen her? Would it mend the little fragments of our relationship that had never quite come back to us?

Give *me* the privilege, the one I had wanted since the day I took the nail from her stomach, and would it save us both?

My body stiffened while the shadows danced in gleeful suspense of the bloodshed to come. I swallowed the saliva built up on my tongue trying to erase some of the raw thickness from my throat when I spoke. “It would be my honor,” I said.

Morrigan did not smile. “Then do it.”

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Cassian moved almost immediately, slipping behind a near invisible door to fetch Keir. Rhysand returned to Morrigan’s side and took her hand. I fell back into the shadows of the court. “Ready?” Rhysand asked her.

“I was born ready,” she said and she sounded like a queen. She was one, a queen over us all, as Rhysand led her to the dais where his throne sat, stopping before it. He held her hand out towards the throne and let his own fall away so that only hers remained.

“It’s yours,” he said coolly.

“Rhysand,” Morrigan cut in with a quick snap. She seemed suddenly overcome with emotion.

“Don’t worry, I’m not *giving* it to you.” A ghost of a smirk lit his lips. “But you deserve a place of honor for this. In some ways...” He cast his head downward and I knew he was thinking not just of that day, but of every day they’d fought through since. “In some ways, Mor, this throne is just as much yours now as it is mine.”

Morrigan kissed his cheek softly, her hand affectionately resting on his neck, but there was some of her usual flare in her voice when she spoke. “High Lady of the Night Court for a night? I’ll take it.”

Rhys groaned even as he stifled a chuckle. “Just don’t put it quite like that to Feyre when you tell her, alright, Mor?”

“Who says I’m the one to tell her?” Morrigan winked and Rhysand rolled his neck, shrugging away.

Morrigan sat atop the serpentine throne and absolutely came to life. The red dress on her proclaimed her birth and all the blood she’d spilt to defend that position. Her hair was a halo of light, radiating her joys and strength, her ability to find dreams in the nightmares and sunrises after the longest nights. The image she projected gave me the courage that I might get through this in one piece without completely severing the fragile threads holding me together at her feet.

Rhysand came to stand next to the throne and together, we three stared into the center of the room waiting. After a few more minutes of tense silence, the side door re-opened and Cassian kicked a bound and chained Keir through the air flying towards the center of the room in front of where Morrigan sat. He landed with a hard thud crying out behind the gag in his mouth.

When Keir managed to gather his bearings and pull himself up, he did a quick double take of Morrigan on the throne in place of Rhysand. I could have sworn I heard his heart stop beating.

“What is this?” he said trying to sound like his confident self, but the shadows sung to me the sound of the adrenaline beginning to charge through his blood like a thousand stallions rushing down a hillside at full speed.

“This is you facing me as you always should have,” Morrigan said, no trace of love or empathy in her. “This is you taking responsibility for your actions. This is your opportunity to make amends. This is your death.”

Keir sneered. “Are you saying I have a choice? Apologize or die.”

“No.” The word was dead on her lips, unchanging. So ironic for poor Keir to refuse his daughter the right to have a choice at the cost of his own choice in death at *her* hands. I both saw and felt Keir’s body tense, but he couldn’t be that surprised at the outcome. “But I had hoped foolishly so even, that you might have just the smallest, tiniest,” she pinched her forefinger and thumb together so that only a narrow gap separated them, “ounce of remorse in you for all you’ve done. Pity.”

Keir spat and if this wasn’t Morrigan’s game to play, I know Rhysand would have misted him on the spot. “Be done with it then. I have no love for you.”

Morrigan’s face turned to stone as she stared at her father. It was perhaps the only feature they shared, that ability to be so cold and menacing when the call for it came in. Beyond that, my imagination failed me to understand how the Cauldron had created such an angel of mercy and grace out the grotesque demon kneeling before us.

“Begin,” Morrigan commanded. Keir looked somewhat confused when Morrigan didn’t move thinking she would be the one to end him swift and painlessly. I was delighted when I stepped out of the shadows and saw Keir’s head turn in my direction, a look of abject terror striking him. I watched his eyes slide back to Morrigan and when he did, she gave him a serpentine grin. “This might hurt a little bit,” she said with deadly grace.

One look at Cassian and he nodded, going up to Keir and dragging him from the floor. A chair appeared from thin air and Keir was shoved onto it as Cassian shackled him to it, the chains negating his ability to winnow away. “Strip him,” I said and before Cassian could so much as move for his clothes, Rhysand had them misted away on the wind his darkness produced and Keir was naked and exposed for all of us to see.

I pulled a small simple knife from within the pocket of my sleeve just below the wrist and stood in front of Keir. He glared at me trying hard to ignore the knife. I saw his toes curl, the only visible sign of his agitation. He would show me a lot more by the time I was through with him. “Shadowsinger,” he said with such disgust. “That blade’s a bit smaller than the one you’re used to, isn’t it? Am I not *worthy* of your precious Illyrian-”

The words literally died on his lips as I shoved the blade into his mouth and slashed it cleanly to one side so that his cheek was cut through from the corner of where his lips met all the way across one side of his face. A vomit-inducing flap of skin curled down over his chin and a blood-curdling cry split the room.

“No, you’re not worthy of it,” I said in a monotone voice, leaning over with either hand on the arms of the chair even as Keir’s body flailed with the pain ravaging his face. His hands spasmed trying to break free and go to the wound. It was sadistic in reality, but his fear made me giddy and glad of what I’d learn in the Illyrian mountains all those years. Blood dripped off his cheek and onto my hands. I swirled it around between my fingers, relishing the feel of his death on the cold of my skin.

I lifted the knife up to the flap of cheek hanging off of him and pushed at it with the sharp tip of my knife. “Ooh,” I said blowing hot air over the cut, my voice still flat. “That doesn’t look so good.”

With what little movement his jaw could make, Keir choked trying to say something. The words couldn’t make it past his exposed teeth.

“If you think this is going to be over quickly,” I said, leaning to whisper into his ear. “Then you’re in for a nasty shock. Do you remember, Keir? Do you remember what you did to her?” I ran the knife over his chest allowing his blood to smear off of it and leave a bloody trail behind. Keir gave a muffled sob. “Because I do. I remember *everything* .”

The knife sliced into the skin high on his abdomen, just deep enough that it hurt beyond the pain of a simple papercut, but shallow enough to avoid muscle and ensure that he would be conscious for a very long time.



“I remember every cut....” I dragged the knife a little further and Keir moaned, his body going rigid as he tried to resist. “Every burn...” A decent inch of skin came away this time and I flicked it off the knife and onto the ground where it fell at Cassian’s feet. Keir stared horrified as Cassian stepped on the skin and smushed it with his shoe as if it were a worm squirming in the mud after a rainstorm. Keir whimpered and when my knife again met his chest to carve away more skin, the scream that emanated from his mouth was horrifying.

Horrifying to everyone except the four of us standing in this room. Electric screams and near-silent words continued for some time.

“Every hole, every mark, every scar - I remember *all* of them. I counted. Did you know that?” Keir shook his head, tears streaming down his face as his eyes screamed shut. I grabbed him by his hair and shoved his face down. “Open your eyes, Keir,” I said, maintaining that dangerous calm in my voice. “Open them and *look* .”

Keir obeyed and gave a pitiful moan at the sight of his stomach laid raw, the muscle exposed in most places howling at the pain of open air on the fibres. I looked at Rhysand and he nodded, his hands in his pockets casually already manipulating Keir’s mind to keep him awake.

“Do you see red yet?” I asked. “All I saw at first was red. Your daughter, covered in nothing but blood. It took a while to distinguish the handiwork underneath it all, but when I did...” I pushed the tip of the knife into a particularly exposed stretch of skin above where his bellybutton should have been, but no longer was. Keir screamed.

“She had a cut here and it dragged all the way across, like this.” My knife retraced the first wound I’d found on her perfect skin and then moved to a fresh spot below the line. “And there were these beautiful holes in her - here, here, and here.” I darted the knife in and out in rapid succession, recreating the punctures from the Mother only knew what instruments he had used. “And just below that were these gnarled bits of flesh that had become pockmarked and raw from where you burned her.”

I dove the knife into the muscle and wrenched it away. Keir's insides became visible and he cried out in excruciating pain, but one look at the loathing on Rhysand's face and I knew Keir wasn't going to fade away anytime soon.

I stood up and I dropped the knife. It made a faint *clink!* when it hit the stone floor, the only sound for miles in the mountain save for Keir's wails. "But my favorite, the one I'll never forget," I said, allowing the wrath I'd felt that day to finally creep up into my voice, "was sitting just above her hips." I reached down to my calf and started to undo the pocket where I kept *it*, burning alive against the fabric of me for years and years and years. When I pulled the nail that I'd found buried in Morrigan's stomach out of my pocket, the room went very, very still.

I heard Morrigan gasp and looked up to see the most pained expression on her face. She was staring back and forth between me and the nail in my hand, stunned into silence. Her mouth hung open and I could see a single tear fall down her beautiful red cheeks. Rhysand grabbed her hand, his usually perfectly composed face now strained. Cassian's own mirrored him.

Never had I told them I'd kept it. I didn't know what they would think of me if they'd found out. It was the freak in me, the masochistic demon hellbent on revenge and blood who lived in the shadows so much that he was one himself, that kept the nail. Not their friend. Not their brother. Never the lover and never the victor. Just the Shadowsinger alone in the darkness hoarding his secret wants and wishes like an unfulfilled dream that could never come alive.

They were my life, these three people. I couldn't share all of the horrors the shadows brought to me. They had their own problems to worry about. Burdening them with my own when they were so much denser and twisted would have been a cruel betrayal to lay at their feet and a poor way to repay them for taking me in and fixing me when I was ready to die.

Some nights when I flew home to Velaris with so much blood on my person and shadows in my ears I couldn't see straight, I would remember what it felt like the day Devlon hurled me off that cliff and I thought I was going to die. And I would wonder what it would be like if my wings suddenly just...

stopped moving and I fell again. No one would be there to catch me and the world would end in permanent darkness where I'd been born.

But I would come home and Morrigan would smile and Cassian would hand me a drink and Rhysand would smirk with all of his self-assured arrogance and Amren would scowl and we would find a way to laugh again and make the world feel like a better place to live in, one with enough space not just for them but for me too. And my wings would flap before I could hit the ground and I would go home to them cursing myself for ever thinking even for a single second that I could leave.

I couldn't toss those demons onto this family. Never. I swore it the day Morrigan opened her eyes and looked at me with such a desperate will to live. Had she died, all of that would have gone away and it was entirely Keir's fault.

Stooping down so that I rested on the balls of my feet, I took Morrigan's trust and Cassian's lionheart and Rhysand's tireless hope and I made Keir face it in my eyes. The filter of black passed through my vision and I knew Keir could see the shadows stalking him with the message to be afraid. *Be ready to feel everything*, they rallied. *Be ready to die*.

"You hammered a nail into her *stomach*," I said, my voice shaking. I lifted the nail for him to see it. "This nail." Keir started to tremble, his entire body sobbing with fear of what he'd been begging me for over the last hour, but still I dragged it out, needing him to know the truth, to feel everything I felt. "You wasted the most beautiful gift to ever walk this earth for the sake of blood and money."

I jerked his face towards the throne, my fingers plunging painfully over the torn skin of his cheek and savored the last few whimpers I would hear from him. My hand holding the nail pointed at Morrigan. "*Do you see her?*" I demanded. "Even after all these centuries, do you realize what you lost? And for what? *This?*"

I waved the nail in front of him and realized I'd been suddenly shouting. But I couldn't help it. I loved her. I loved Morrigan. I loved her beyond the sun and stars and moon and everything I thought she was because in reality she was

the universe itself granting me the privilege of taking up some small infinitesimal space within her being. She kept me together and allowed me to live and breathe and do all the things I thought myself incapable of, spinning me back to life after every mission and wound and fall until I was more than a simple semblance of shadow and smoke.

Keir looked at me slumped in the chair, his body slowing down as he reached his breaking point and I knew that if not for Rhysand's grip on his mind forcing him to stay present, he would have been long gone by this point.

"If this is what you wanted so badly all along," I said gripping the nail in front of him, "then here, you can have it."

And with that, I grabbed his cock between my free hand and shoved the nail deep inside of it, garnering the last cries of anguish from Keir before his head fell backwards on the seat of the chair and his body came to a rushing halt. Truth-Teller found its way into my hands and though Keir didn't deserve her, I would spill the truth of his blood with the blade as I always had, even on that day I'd found Morrigan dying in the forest. The shadows whispered every last agonizingly slow, quiet beat inside his chest.

Finally, I shoved the sword into his heart and then Keir was no more.

xx

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## **The Dawn**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/8087737) at  
<http://archiveofourown.org/works/8087737>.

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# The Dawn

by [illyriantremors](#)

## Summary

In the aftermath of brutally killing Keir in the Hewn City among the company of the Squad, Azriel finds Morrigan dragging him back to Velaris to work through the death and finally confront the obstacles holding them back in their relationship. Comfort, angst, and smut ensue.

Best read as a sequel to the previous chapter, The Nail, but can be read as a standalone if so desired.

## Notes

This is the last chapter in the Shadowsinger fic. Thank you to everyone who has read and commented so far. I've found all of the feedback exciting and highly motivating to keep going! I hope you all like this final part and I welcome any further comments you have. :)

*Cause we all get lost sometimes, you know? It's how we learn and how we grow. And I wanna lay with you 'til I'm old. You shouldn't be fighting on your own.*

*And if you feel you're sinking, I will jump right over into cold, cold water for you. And although time may take us into different places I will still be patient with you. And I hope you know...*

*I won't let go.*

- Major Lazer ft. Justin Bieber

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I stood there for what felt an eternity staring at the body. I think we all did.

Cassian stood next to me, a hand on my shoulder, taking in the wounds I'd carved of Keir's stomach and the nail I'd taken to his cock. "Fuck..." he said and the normally jovial lull of the word was heavy coming off his tongue.

I should have felt relieved, but all I felt was additional weight pressing in on me. Keir's death was a liberation for the four of us and yet, I felt the chains binding his wrists to the chair wrapping around my lungs and squeezing. Another death. More blood. More shadows to chase me around forever. And Morrigan still sitting up on that throne feeling more and more untouchable.

Instinct driven by the shadows told me to fly far, far away back to the war cry that would accept my ability to inflict pain and death where I could spare my friends the aftermath of what I'd done. My hands shaking with tremors, I reached forward and removed Truth-Teller from Keir's chest, allowing the blood to flow onto the ground where I failed to clean it.

The air in the room cleared of lightning and storm as Rhysand came down from the dias. Morrigan stayed. Rhysand's hand gripped my neck as Cassian had done my shoulder, squeezing. The High Lord stripped off of him and I was left with the man who had stood by my side in the cold Illyrian Mountains once and understood my needs, killing my step-brothers and helping my darkness make sense of itself.



“It’s done,” Rhysand said. Those two words were so simple and so complicated at the same time. I must have been pulling away from the way he looked at me. I could feel the filter slipping back over my eyes to fade me into black and drag me back to a fight I understood on the battlefield, but Rhysand gripped me harder, his fingers digging in. “Breathe, Azriel,” he said, more a command than a request.

I stumbled back and his hand came away with red. Looking down, I realized I was covered in blood, further evidence of my destruction. And though my knees ached and my body begged to cry out, I couldn’t fall before them, couldn’t let them see me cave.

“Azriel.”

Her voice rang out clear in the still air of the throne room, a queen calling her faithful to attention. I looked up and met Morrigan’s eyes and they softened. She stood pausing a moment on the dias and then slowly descended down to my level, brushing past Rhysand with increasing speed until she’d encompassed me with her arms.

I jerked, trying to stagger away. “You’ll get blood-”

“I don’t care,” Morrigan said, her head resting on my shoulder. “Let it come. Nothing can stain me anymore.” She pulled back and indeed the blood was on her neck and down her dress. “You kept the nail. Why?”

I shuddered at the truth, but still I couldn’t quite admit it. “Do you really have to ask?”

It was more than I’d ever dared to speak aloud before to any of them, not just Morrigan. Her face pinched together, the deep brown of her eyes considering me before traveling the length of my body and noting the blood.

“Come back to Velaris with me,” she said softly. My body froze in her arms. “Just for tonight. Let me clean you up.”

“You can just magic it away, or...” I threw a sideways glance at Rhysand and Cassian, but they were silent and unreadable watching this play out.

“No, I couldn’t,” Morrigan said. “I want to do this for you. *Please* .”

That one small word slaughtered me beyond anything I’d done to Keir. I didn’t need to see the anxiety gripping Morrigan to know I would agree. She had me before the question mark had scored the completion of her sentence and she knew it. For her, I could deny nothing.

“We’re in the middle of a war, Morrigan,” Rhysand promptly reminded her. “Be careful.”

She nodded, but still she grabbed my hand and then we were gone, soaring through wind and smoke towards Velaris and landing on the balcony of her townhouse. The elements pounded on my back as soon as we touched down. Rain poured against us with wind bellowing into our skulls and Morrigan kept a tight hold on my hand to pull me inside. I dropped Truth-Teller as we went.

We stood in her bedroom dripping a mixture of blood and rain. She released me and walked into the bathroom off her room, pausing in the doorway to look at me over her shoulder. She lifted a single eyebrow. *Coming?*

She pointed to her shower, a silent direction to me to perch myself there atop the stone seat that sat in the open stall free of doors or curtains. It was open enough for my wings to stretch freely, but they remained taut at my back, too much tension in them to release. So I watched Morrigan instead, hoping to relieve the ache of death even though the sight of her beautiful face caused another ache to grow in its place.

Kicking off her heels almost angrily, she grabbed some towels and washcloths from a mahogany cabinet and brought them to the sink where she set them aside and began tinkering with her hair. Her fingers moved nimbly through the strands, untangling and separating them in small sections. A faint stream of moonlight coursed through a small window high on the tiled wall illuminating her body and when I looked closer, I saw her hands were shaking.

After she’d fixed her hair, she opened a drawer and removed a match, striking it to light a small ring of candles lining the room, brightening it as she

did every place she went. She retreated to her bedroom and lit a few more there and a warm glow settled over us that smelled of her familiar honeyed scent.

Standing back at the mirror, she turned the faucet on and let the water run while she stared at herself in the mirror. She looked on hard and pensive before her eyes turned and through the mirror found me staring at her. Something was off and it was all my fault. Guilt gnawed away at me inch by worthless inch.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

The water began to steam in the sink as it coursed through the pipes. She flung a few wash clothes into the porcelain bowl and let the water trample over the fibers. Her shoulders sank, a deep sigh echoing out of her through the room.

“It’s too much,” she said, the words tormented. “I should never have put that all on you. I’m sorry, Az.”

“No,” I said at once, horrified that she would regret the decision to let me kill her father for her. That she would regret any decision she should make. This was supposed to save us and although I knew the moment I’d sunk the blade into Keir’s chest that I was past redemption, Morrigan wasn’t. Keir’s death should have only helped her free herself further. The possibility it hadn’t - that *I* had prevented it - would destroy me.

“You needed me to,” I tried to reason with her. “And I would gladly have taken his life again and again if it meant you could be at peace.”

She turned the faucet off and wrung out a cloth, the steam hissing against her skin. “Then why is it that when I look at you right now, you look as though that sword sank through your own heart and not his?” Her voice was even, but the shadows told me something dangerous was lurking beneath the surface.

“I am fine, Morrigan.” *Liar*, they whispered in my ear. “I just killed *your father*. You’re the one I’m concerned with.”

Morrigan cursed and spun around to face me directly without the middleman of the mirror. The dam of restraint on her voice broke. “Do you ever stop thinking about me?” she said sounding exhausted. “Of any of us but yourself? You’ve given enough today, Azriel. And not just today, but every day since the moment I met you with little to no thought for your own well being.”

The shadows felt stale, paralyzed with surprise. They weren’t used to being called out and neither was I.

“I would give you anything you asked of me,” I said after far too long. I didn’t know what else to say. She had claimed I’d given enough today and for her, the answer was no. I could never give her enough. So I told her the truth, that I would give it all to her if she wanted it, whatever she needed of me.

Morrigan’s eyes widened quizzically. “Anything?” she asked. I nodded. “Your sword?” Truth-Teller was still strewn on the balcony floor. The rain had probably washed away the stain of blood on the blade, but there was still enough blood on my person to prove the weapon was hers to wield as she wished.

“My sword,” I agreed.

Squeezing the cloth so that some of the water dripped over her fingers, Morrigan took a careful step towards me. “Your life?”

Yes. I would sooner turn Truth-Teller on my own heart than let Morrigan die. Even with an ash arrow nested in my chest, I was prepared to let Hybern take me rather than let him cage Morrigan like an exotic, trophied animal to use in the war.

“Have it.”

Morrigan took a few more tentative steps and was within the realm of my reach inside the open shower. “Your heart?” she asked, voice suddenly almost too hard to hear. My body tensed with adrenaline, wondering at the question, and our eyes locked staring through an invisible line between us that neither of us had ever dared to cross. But Morrigan, it seemed, was ready not just to cross it, but to break that line entirely. Her voice softened.

She closed the gap between us and took my face in her hands. “Would you love me?” she asked.

She patted at my skin with the washcloth washing the blood away until I was clean again, off my face and neck and even down to my gnarled, burned hands. The cloth was warm and soothing to the touch, I couldn’t help but lean into it. I could smell the honey and chocolate mixing on her skin she was so close, but then, the scent of her father’s life was still there on her neck strong as ever, a reminder of the beast I was. One look at the washcloth now stained with his blood reprimanded me that this was wrong.

My heart was frozen, wholly unfit for her. It couldn’t beat. It couldn’t live. It couldn’t thrive. Not without Morrigan. Just having her so near with the moonlight falling over her face - never mind the blood soaking her neck and dress - she was a vision that sent my heart into a tailspin. But that was the problem. I was such a mess that even though I had loved her always, I couldn’t do so openly without ruining her by dragging her into the mess that my heart had become.

She was undoubtedly strong enough to survive whatever misfortunes my heart would envelop her in, but I would fade away in the process damning whatever relationship we’d repaired over the years in the process. It was either I risked us both perishing by trying to have her, or I could let her move on to someone who could fill her life with the sunshine she radiated in mine and let us both live.

But the question was still lingering on her lips as she stared me down unyielding. It was a moment in time we had relived so many times: what I would and wouldn’t do for her. And of course, as Morrigan saw me doubting, her eyes pressed in hard on me and begged for honesty, knowing I couldn’t deny her that much at least. I never had.

*Would you love me?*

“If you asked me to,” I said at long last and she cut me off before I could go on to add my addendums.

“I am asking.”

I sighed, my patience and ability to hold on to her starting to waiver.  
“Morrigan, I’m-”

But she cut me off. “You’re what? A bastard born Illyrian?” She sighed.  
“Azriel, they put a nail in my stomach. If that’s not low, then I don’t know what is. They made me no one, but *you* saved me and turned me into some *thing* so that I could become some *one* again.”

She leaned down, her head touching the top of mine so gently as her thumbs rubbed a loving caress over my chin. And Cauldron damn me, I sank into that touch. My mind and body were so weary with blood and death that I couldn’t resist her when she was so close as this.

“Azriel,” she breathed against my skin. “Don’t think I didn’t hear you in there today. I think I’ve heard you for five hundred years telling me how much you love me.”

And there was truth. She knew it without me even needing to say it out loud. I went momentarily blind with panic. “But I didn’t-” I started to say.

“Yes you did,” she cut in again. “There are a thousand ways to say you love someone without actually say it, and I’m pretty sure you used each and every one of them in that throne room today.”

“Morrigan,” I said, my voice raw. I slid my hands up over hers and gripped.

“Would you love me, Azriel?”

I gulped and for half a heartbeat I was ready to say yes, but... “Do you want me to?”

Her knees rose coming to sit on either side of me until she straddled my lap, the skirt of her dress pooling around her. And it felt right having her there. I hadn’t had her this close to me without some kind of fight or threat or basic need for transportation chasing us down since... since I’d flown her around the Illyrian Mountains. We’d stopped flying for the fun of it after the incident with Keir and Eris had happened. I had forgotten how warm her body was.

How perfectly it felt against mine. How much I wanted to tug it closer until nothing separated her and I and we were just two people made one.

“I have wanted you to love me for five hundred years,” Morrigan said and then she kissed my cheek. My skin hummed from the contact and a shiver ran down my spine causing my eyes to sink shut. “But say the word, Azriel, say it and I’m gone. I’ll stop and we can go back to pretending there’s nothing between us save for our casual sometimes lovers between the centuries and Cassian patrolling from the outskirts.”

I opened my eyes and my breathing deepened, my mind unwilling to believe what I was hearing. She was giving me an out and I couldn’t quite take it as much I knew I needed to. A thought flickered through my mind, less shadow and more my own invention, asking me if ‘need’ was really the right word. Did I really *need* to say no?

I reached a hand towards her as if I might feel her chin and cup it within my hold, but my hand stopped short and fell. Morrigan’s own caught it.

“Why won’t you give in?” she asked. “If you’re going to say no when I know you want the opposite, at least tell me why.”

“Because I hurt,” I said simply. And when she didn’t say anything, I pressed on nothing left to stop me now. I promised I would give her anything and so I would. “And because I love you so much that I think I might die from the pain of what I would do because of it.”

My head fell against her shoulder and Morrigan’s hands rose up to wind through my hair, holding me against her while I tried not to let the tears burst through. “Don’t do that,” she cooed against me, soft and low. “Don’t pull away. Don’t leave me.” Her voice grew as strained as my own, dropping to a low murmur against my ear. “The world would be empty without my Azriel.”

The world would be empty without my Azriel.

My Azriel.

*My* Azriel.

*Azriel.*

At long last after five centuries, I unwound in Morrigan's arms letting everything that had built up in me spring free ugly and pathetic for her to acknowledge. "But I am so empty, Morrigan," I said. "I have never felt so simultaneously empty and full to bursting as I do holding you now. The love I want to give you - the love you deserve - is too much for what I'm," and I held up the horrific scars covering my hands, symbols of a life meant for destruction and carnage, "capable of."

"It's like the first time I saw you. You were the sun made manifest and the light you gave off pierced me. All I could do - have ever been able to do - is stand back and soak it in from afar lest you burn the despicable truth of me into the light. Even then, it would be my privilege to die for you. But now like this, I am... hollow."

Morrigan pulled my face back from her chest and gazed at me with such disbelief, red lining her eyes. "So give me your scars," she said, her fingers clinging to me.

I blinked up at her. "What?"

She toppled off of me and stood in one fluid so fast it startled me. Gathering up the hem of her dress, she hoisted it above her hips and then grabbed my hands and placed them on her stomach where the scars her father had left remained even to this day. I hated to have the roughness of my hands so near her, but she held me to her pressing her hands harder over mine so that they were forced to stay on *her* wounds.

"Your scars are my scars," she said. "So give me your scars. Fill me with them. Give it all to me until there isn't a piece of you I haven't touched." The dress fell and I allowed my hands to fall away from the scars at her hips, but they only fell lower on her legs unwilling to let go of her completely now that her words began to break me apart.

"I love you, Azriel," she said. "You look at me and see the sun thinking you would taint me if you got too close, but I look at you and see the stars and worry that you'll never see the light shining out of them - out of *yourself*. My



entire childhood was cloaked in darkness under that mountain and for years I was told there was a darkness outside that was filled with light instead of rocks and dirt, but I never got to see it. And then Rhysand took me to the Illyrian camps and there you were and finally, I knew what it was like to look at the night sky and see something just as flawed as I was, but also wondrous and inspiring, full of light and stars. *And I have loved you for it .”*

Tears spilled over her cheeks. Her voice shook and it was all I could do to reach up and wipe the salty drops from her face. “You don’t need to see the sun to find the light, Azriel,” she said. And then, one more time and I knew it would be the last... “Would you love me?”

And this time, the commanding queen was gone, the one who had called me to attention and begged me be honest. Looking into her eyes, all I saw was Morrigan - my Morrigan - making a choice to love me exactly as she was and hoping with such great fear I would love her back openly the way I had secretly these many years. And that was all I needed. The simplest truth of them all that she loved me and I loved her was all I needed in the end to set us both free.

I stood up and strode to the sink and grabbed a fresh washcloth, wringing it out in a fresh stream of water before coming back to Morrigan. Gently, I wiped at her face watching her eyes close as she enjoyed the feel of the warm rag on her skin, soaking away the last remnants of her father’s memory away from her forever. She was right, as usual: nothing could stain her anymore.

When I was done, I cast the rag aside and sat back down on the shower’s stone seat before her. Silently, without taking my eyes off of hers for one single moment, my hands reached down and lifted the hem of her dress until they found her legs just below the knees. My fingers inched along her soft skin until it met with the backs of her knees where they paused to make light circles against the delicate skin.

Morrigan shivered feeling a tingle shudder along her spine. “Azriel,” she said, half a question, half a pleased surprise.

My hands ceased their caress and traveled higher enjoying the feeling of the hard muscles in her thighs that had worked so hard over the years to carry and train her through battles and wars beyond. Little bumps and scars met my hands as I went, but for once, I wasn't afraid that she would feel the callouses of my touch. Her scars were mine and mine were hers.

When my hands reached her hips and hit the fabric of her underwear - a delicate lace set a deep red that matched her dress; I had seen it briefly when she'd lifted the gown earlier so I could feel her stomach - my brow lifted in an unspoken question. Her lips quivering as if to smile, Morrigan nodded.

My fingers curled around the lace and the touch was no longer gentle. A hard grip flexed in my hands as I yanked the panties down in a rapid movement, tearing them off of her. I heard Morrigan's breath catch, but before she could react, I wrapped my arms around her and hoisted her up into the air whilst I stood so that her legs were forced to wrap around me high on my chest.

"Azriel!" she shouted in surprise, and it came out more like an infectious laugh. Her body fell over atop me and she sent her hands clutching against my head, my shoulders, my back - my *wings* - whatever she could get ahold of to keep herself upright as I carried her into the bedroom. When I reached the bed, she pushed against me trying to lay herself down, but I kept her facing towards the bed heaving myself atop it instead.

I laid down and with her having been wrapped around me so high on my chest, her knees came down just below my shoulders, sinking into the bed until the apex of her was just in front of me. My hands lifted the dress again and Morrigan giggled, a sound that told me this was right, this was perfect, this was what had been missing from my life for years.

"What are you-" she tried to say, but then my head ducked beneath the dress and my lips met with the folds of her at the apex of her thighs. Morrigan swore, her body crumpling forward against the bed frame as her fist pounded against the wall.

The taste of her was a glory I'd been searching for all my life. I loved the weight of her above me, the heat of the wetness hitting my tongue. Her arousal scented in my nose intoxicating me to the point of drunkenness and I

never wanted to to move away. Only wanted more. More, more, more of Morrigan.

My hands adjusted the dress so that I could see her sitting atop me while I kissed between her legs, my tongue circling on her clit winding her ever higher. She'd closed her eyes and leaned her head against the hand that had slammed on the wall, her mouth hung open in a pleasurable tremble.

Rekindling some of the force I'd used to remove the lace garment from her hips, I moved my hands against her thighs in time with the strokes of my tongue, each one bringing my mouth against her a little faster and my hands on her skin a little harder.

"Azriel," she moaned and the sound of my name on her tongue set me on fire. I ran my tongue a little lower on her so that it could dip inside the folds and when I did so, her eyes burst open and her free hand shot to roam through the hair on my head, stroking the strands over and over until that motion too was in time with my licks. Her hips rocked gently against my mouth, her eyes finding mine in the candlelit room as her breathing started to come in a succession of pants. "Azriel," she said again. I pressed against her a little harder as her hips jutted forward, my teeth grazing with just enough pressure over her clit and she broke with a whimpering "*Oh-oh*" crying out of her that never seemed to end.

My hands went around her hips grabbing her rear and pressing her forward so I could meet her more deeply and bring her through the final throws of the sensations washing over her. When she came down from it, her chest was heaving in great, quick breathes. "*Azriel*," she sighed, throwing everything from surprise to ecstasy to adoration into my name. She scooted back enough to allow my head to come out fully from under her dress.

"Guess that answers your question, huh?" I said. Morrigan laughed and fell backwards with a divine smile lighting up her features. I spread my legs to make room for her on the sheets of the bed as she fell back, my arms bracing her at her waist as she went.

"Here, let me help you with that," she said cheekily, her fingers reaching for the leathers I still hadn't removed, but that she had somehow magicked clean of blood when I wasn't looking. With each piece of clothing that came off

from the leathers to the weapons to the pants and the shoes, it was like I was being purified, stripped down to the most essential parts of my soul - the only ones she ever wanted in the first place. I felt lighter with one cast aside and when Morrigan was through cleansing me with her hands, she lifted her hands above her head so I could remove her dress.

I threw the crimson gown aside and Morrigan threw her arms around my neck pulling me atop her as we sank against the bed, never minding the ridiculous fact that the pillows were at our feet. And then there we were, naked save for our souls and pressed against one another body to body, a moment I never thought would happen.

Her skin was hot, her breasts heavy under my chest. And the way she groaned as my hands began to feel her everywhere told me my fingertips had pressed in precisely where she ached. They snaked a trail over her in the pockets of space where my body left regrettable gaps, starting with her breasts, then her stomach, and finally down to her hips where they dipped below back into the sweet folds of her where my mouth had just been.

She was as wet as I was hard and seemed to be growing tired of my constant teasing. No sooner had I slid my hand into the wetness did she reach out and stroke the sensitive membrane at my back. My wings flared open at the touch, sweeping out wide past either side of the bed as a pleasurable sort of tremor racked through me. I imagined I looked something like a bird of prey lying over her with my wings so crookedly bent and rigid.

Morrigan giggled at me, a blush kissing the paleness of her cheeks with a beautiful pink glow. "Oh I like this game," she said. She ran her finger along the other side of my wings and I groaned as a delicious feeling went jolting through the veins of my wings and into my body towards other parts that Morrigan could feel twitch. "I like this game *a lot*."

I smiled without restraint, enthralled by how wicked she could be, and leaned down so that my voice was rough and hungry at her ear. "I know a better one," I said. My knees parted her legs and I watched as Morrigan's eyes went wide when I slipped myself inside her, relishing how perfectly she fit around me.

Her hands flew to my neck and a sweet smile poised on her face. There was something of awe and wonder in that smile that made me pause. “What is it?” I asked.

“No shadows,” she said brightly, hands running over my face. “Only *you* .”

Confusion flickered briefly in my thoughts, but when I searched I realized she was right. My mind was empty, void of voices and darkness and filters of black and grey to see through. It was unnerving to find silence even in the deepest recesses of my mind, but Morrigan made the shadows unnecessary. I knew they’d be back the second we were parted, but for now it was nothing more than her and I, fiery stars prepared to light up the night sky.

I grinned at her understanding dawning on me of what true happiness meant. With agonizing slowness, I pulled out of her almost entirely and then thrust myself back in, causing Morrigan’s hold around me to tighten.

Her back arched on the second thrust allowing me enough space to reach my hands around her. The first traced a delicate path up her back until it was cradling her neck, my thumb stroking the skin just under her ear. The other hand went south to her lower back where it pushed in and urged her body further against mine. I felt Morrigan’s legs wrap around my back as I made my way inside her more deeply. Her hips lifted beginning to meet mine with each new thrust and I tightened my grip on her more deeply as she moaned almost as though she might cry, we were so close to each other. She wanted this, so badly she wanted this and it was causing her grief to finally have it within her hands as she clutched at me like I might disappear and this would all become a cruel dream.

I folded her to me as close as our bodies would allow, the hand at her neck coming out from under her to stroke back her golden hair. “It’s okay,” I said. “I’ve got you. I’m here. I’ve got you. *Morrigan* ...”

Her hands wove into my hair hugging me close to her. We moved as one with heartbreaking slowness that burned the stars alive and remade them one by one.

As our bodies began to build towards release, my name sang off her tongue in a sweet symphony of progressive pants and gasps, clipping syllables as they went. The eroticism of hearing her cry '*Azriel*' became a tender intimacy in '*Az*', until finally, there was nothing left she could offer save for a ravaged '*a-ah*' that told me how thoroughly ruined she'd become in my arms.

So I filled in the gaps, praying her name against her honey-scented skin with each push and pull drawing her in until I could feel her start to tremble and shake against me. I kissed along her chin, her ears, her neck and down across her chest and the valley of her breasts. When at last I felt her begin to clench around me, I stopped my kissing and leaned against her forehead not wanting to miss her face as she came around me.

"Morrigan," I said sounding utterly undone and watching her eyes glisten. Little beads of sweat gathered at the edges of her hair. She shattered and in my arms, I felt her entire body constrict around me.

"I love you," she gasped, cried after five centuries of waiting to say it out loud. "I love you, I love you, I - *Azriel* ." I throbbed inside of her, a pulse shooting through me. Her fingers reached for my wings and stroked tenderly once more along the membrane until I was a ruined mess at her fingertips, splintering inside of her.

We didn't bother to move afterwards or even rearrange the bed so that the pillows were by our heads at the foot of the bed. We just laid there wrapped around each other listening to the storm slow to a cool rain that was mere mist on the wind. The candles dimmed as the fires burned low on the wicks, but the still open doors to the balcony showed us a faint pink glow cresting over the skies of Velaris.

Dawn was here. Dawn where we had first met ourselves alone and afraid in Illyria, before we'd flown and everything had changed. Looking out into the sky, I realized that maybe I hadn't been looking for the sun all along and maybe she hadn't really been looking for the stars either. We were somewhere in between, her and I, just two celestial bodies meeting in the middle seeking a refuge.

Not that I was going to deny myself the sunlight suddenly. Morrigan's body was warm and wonderful against me on the bed. For the first time, my skin wasn't icy cold to the touch. Neither was my heart.

"Maybe it's a good thing it was Cassian," Morrigan said in the middle of all the stillness.

I looked down at her in my arms, holding her still as near to me as possible, unable to part with her for even a second. My brow lifted in confusion. "Cassian?"

Morrigan nodded. "I used to feel sorry I'd chosen Cassian and not you when Rhys first took me to the camps. I knew when I came out of his room that morning and saw you that I'd picked the wrong person even if he did send the boldest statement to my family about how I had supposedly 'debased' myself. But the thing is, whoever I'd slept with that night - Cassian or otherwise - became an impossibility from then onward. I never wanted Cassian romantically, but if I had, it wouldn't have been okay. I would never have allowed it after what it did to you and Rhys. If it had been you that night instead - like I thought I'd wanted the next morning - this could never have happened now and I don't think I would have survived the last five hundred years knowing you were an impossibility."

"And here I was thinking I *was* an impossibility all this time," I said chuckling as I leaned down to kiss her forehead and my heart melted at how grateful I was just to hold her and know she'd loved me in some way even back then.

"Az," she said, but she leaned her head against my chest and sighed. "Doesn't matter now. We'll have to go back soon - out there. Tonight might be all we ever get."

She sounded apologetic and mournful for what might be missed. "Hey now," I said, my hand guiding her chin up so I could look at her properly. "The war is inconsequential."

"How's that?" she asked disbelieving. "The war is everything right now. We might never come home."

I shook my head and ran my thumb above her eyes to soothe. “That’s not true. Now that I know I can come home and make love to you, Morrigan, spend my entire existence making you happy, nothing - *nothing* - could keep me from coming back to you.”

Morrigan smiled and then she leaned up and kissed me. It was a kiss we poured our souls and sun and stars into, all the love we’d built up over the years that had said the things we hadn’t dared to say out loud, that had calmed the storms and held us up from falling completely apart. My tongue licked gently against her lips and she parted them, letting me in to taste her slowly - always so slowly. When we stopped, Morrigan nuzzled into my chest, her hand finding mine so that our fingers could twine together and she squeezed.

“Nothing ever has, Azriel. Nothing ever has.”

Through the window and over the horizon, a new day began.

xx



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