- After the massacre

pages ∙ words

[revision note: this is almost suited for use in the wake of the academy massacre. minor changes should suffice.]

She awoke with the dull ache of forgotten horror and pain. The first thing she realized was that she did not know who she was. she didn't want to know. Knowing, somehow, seemed too terrifying to contemplate. She was weak and sore. The blankets atop her had the weight to crush her into the numb comfort of her bed. So, she lay, empty, and gazed long at her surroundings.

There was a soothing familiarity in the angled wooden beams overhead. The warm wood paneled walls pulsed in the glow of a hearth fire. The stone buttressed door and outer wall of the tower room sang to her from some addled memory. Despite the nagging sense that something was somehow wrong with it, this was undoubtedly her own bed chamber. That mixed reassurance salved away the lurking fear that haunted the corners of her mind, and she returned gratefully, once more, to oblivion.

Her dreams, if they could be called such, were too painful to remember, but sufficient to send her fleeing back into consciousness.

The dim glow of the hearth explained to her the passage of time. Otherwise, she would have sworn that darkness had held her for but an instant. It did not matter. As her eyes fell on the bed beside hers, she realized how very much her world was wrong. The feather tick was empty. The mattress bare. No sign remained to suggest that any comfort was meant or needed for her twin. Her other half.

A flood of anguish provided the strength for her to struggle free of her bed and propelled her to the abandoned frame. What was there to think? What was there to say? A naked bed was a sign of death. Hopelessness. Acceptance. Which was unbearable, because it was a message she was unable to accept.

She crumpled to the floor as her weakness proved the better companion to her grief. Dragging the empty tick with her as she collapsed, she begged for drowning tears, but instead she found an abyss of sheering rage. It made her gut clench, tearing itself on a knifing pain that somehow resided there.

Gasping, she jerked straight, smashing her head against the floor. That real pain cleared her mind a bit. Carefully, she sat up. Expecting the strange pain to resume.

When it did not, she pulled up her nightshirt and ran her hands across her belly. There were no wounds or scars to account for the sensation. Even as she discovered this, she realized unexpectedly that she was a girl. She paused, confused, because she was not surprised by the fact. She just hadn't known until that moment. And that bothered her. What in creation could have made her *forget* something like that?

A feeling of utter panic suddenly shattered the residual anger, pain and confusion, as the question echoed in her mind. There was no where to retreat from that sudden terror. She was too petrified to move. Too petrified to think. How unbearable the answer to her question must be, if even *wondering* about what had happened frightened her like this.

Safe thoughts were beyond her grasp, so that was where he found her hours later.

If it she could be more frightened, the sight of him would have made her quake with terror. Fortunately, she lacked the strength to betray herself with such a reaction.

Gently, and with quiet reassurances, he collected her up off the floor and returned her to the sanctity of her bed. Her hands and feet had gone numb from cold in her bout of parlysis. While she lay like a corpse, he rubbed some warmth back into them and then pulled the covers back over her. His face was grief tortured and filled with sad compassion. She was as unable to recognize this as she was unable to recognize him. He talked to her feverishly, but her mind recoiled from finding meaning. One word, he repeated again and again; and each time it was a hammer blow pushing her further and further beyond his reach.

For some time after, her fear of the waking world was only slightly less than that of sleep. She took senseless refuge from unthinkable nightmares in the paralyzed form of consciousness she had attained. He was only slightly less persistent a feature than the furniture in her numb perception of the world. His calm, loving voice—more valuable to her than what he might have been saying—slowly, haltingly, lured her back to the world of the living. His very touch was more nourishing than the soup he so painstakingly fed her.

She was so dependant on his attention that she absolved him of any association with the terror he inspired simply because of what he was.

A man.

After a while, there was only one thing about his existence that she despaired of. He never stopped saying that terrible word. Eventually, she realized that it had been—for all of this time—her name. It was the first thing resembling thought to ripple through her mind since that first night of awareness. It was enough, though. The wall of withdrawal was shattered much as it had engulfed her. It happened in an instant as he spoke:

"Morganna, please come back to us," he begged for perhaps the thousandth time. As her revelation cascaded through her, she turned and looked at him in the eye. she entreated him with the look of a prisoner asking for mercy. He was so obviously shocked, but at once he tried to speak. she reached up, with frightening speed and covered his mouth.

"Please," she breathed, her voice cracking, "never speak that name again."

He blanched. His thoughts were in immediate turmoil at her request. He had no idea how to interpret her first spoken words since waking. In a wounded and grieving voice, he asked her, "What... what am I to call you, then?"

She was at a loss. she looked over to the side and saw the other bed. Now that she had come back, she could not find escape from what the bed revealed. she had already consciously realized what was lost to her. What memory she had—and it was at best a gut feeling—said they had been brother and sister. They had made up names for each other. Pet names. She had called him Ash, and he had called her, "Ember," she breathed aloud. It was not meant to be an answer. But as this man repeated it with an unexpected ring of recognition, she found it less painful to hear. It was possible to bear.

She returned her gaze to him and examined his lean face. "That's what he used to call me," she explained.

"I know," he said solemnly.

Because she could not, in any sense recall him from memory, she finally asked, "Who are you? What are you doing here? Where are my parents?" In asking that, it hit her. She had not seen them. Only this man had ever visited. Deep down in her heart, she had wanted them to come. Needed them to come. To take away the fear. Any reason for why neither had ever shown would be terrible. She awaited the answer with dread.

"I thought you would remember me," he began, and clearly, he was not happy to answer her other questions. "I am Dalwyn. I told you to call me Dal, when we met. I am a healer, and I have been helping you and your mother recover. She is in her room sleeping," he answered and then looked away.

She probably didn't have to be told. She probably should have realized that anyone's bed could be unmade. But she wanted to hope. Right then she envisioned a convincing explanation. Father went to find her brother, or avenge his death. That was why he had not been here. That was why this healer had cared for her alone. But, she had a suspicion. "Please. My father. You have to tell me," she begged when he continued to stare away.

Unable to refrain, he turned to look at her. His eyes were red and his face was pale. In a rough voice, he slaughtered that young hope, "I'm so sorry, child."

It was too much. She recoiled as he tried to take her into his arms. Violently. She could not stand the double blow. She could not take the pain. At that moment she could feel nothing for the world but pure unadulterated hatred, and in that moment she focused all of it on him—a spear of agony ripped through her abdomen again.

"Don't *touch* me!" she screamed in instant fury. But he did, reaching out to calm her. With irrational strength, she flung her at him and scratched at his eyes, screaming louder, "Damn your eyes! Why didn't you let me die?! Why did you bring me back to hear this?!"

He stumbled back, away from the bed, to escape her clawed hands. With murder in her heart, she launched herself off of the bed. Latching on to him with her tiny hands, she tried to bite out his throat.

Her teeth locked on his forearm as he tried to ward of her attack. she felt them grating on his bones as he flung out his arm in pain. She went flying from the force of his swing, taking a bite of him with her as she slammed back into the bed.

The taste of blood in her mouth caught her attention, then. With sudden horror, she spit up the bit of flesh and began to retch. The convulsions ripped through her, awakening the peculiar piercing pain in her abdomen the first time she exerted herself.

Dalwyn watched warily with shock and fear, until he realized she was writhing in agony. Without a thought for the fury she had just unleashed on him, he was at her side, somehow soothing away the pain. As it passed, all she could do was stare at the blood welling out of his arm. Self loathing equal to her rage welled up in her. she couldn't believe what she had just done.

"I wish I was dead," she moaned. she couldn't even begin to apologize for her actions.

"No you don't," Dalwyn admonished sternly. He seemed unconscious of the damage she had done to his arm, as he picked her up once again and returned her to bed.

Hardly surprised, she found herself limp with exhaustion from her outburst. He noticed his wound as he pulled up her covers and chuckled grimly. While she cringed with shame, he stared at her with frank admiration.

"With fire like that in you, the last thing you're likely to do is drop dead," he pronounced. "However, I have enough patients to care for, child, so please refrain from attempting to turn me into one in the near future, alright?" he admonished her with authority and humor.

she bowed her head, then nodded timidly.

"Good," he declared, and then proceeded to search for the bite of himself she had spit out. This found, he tossed into the fire, and excused himself. she watched him go, while her mind whirled on the edge of chaos. she would not understand the reason for her confusion until a few days after she was well enough to move around a bit.