



It feels like you have been asleep for a very long time. Your eyelids droop and your limbs are heavy. How long has it been you might wonder. How long since the before? You aren't even sure of what the before was. But you are here now, you are here. You feel your newfound pulse racing within you.

Exhale, inhale.

This body is your own, and you might want to examine it, see what interesting features it has to offer. Everything appears to be in order, but you can't help but be drawn to a glow just beneath your chin. You crane your neck, but no matter what angle you try, you cannot discover the source of the glowing. However, you are soon distracted again by your new found senses, the green world around you rustles, and your nose is assaulted by a flurry of new scents. Rich scents, sweet scents, bitter scents, you cannot keep track.

This space is impossibly green and so pleasantly warm, the air is clear and clean and it feels good to breathe it in. A warm amber light illuminates the space, helping you to clearly identify the world around you. The space you are inside is impossibly large, but when you look up you see a solid ceiling above your head, coated in thick soft moss. It is the same moss that coats the floor, covering most of the open space. Only the large-leaved ferns and pale closed flowers repel the moss' soft embrace. You realise that you too have been lying on the moss, but you are on your paws now.

Simon and Anatoli, when you turn your heads you see each other. You aren't sure how, but you know in some way that you are related to one another.

Nutmeg and Bayrull, you lay eyes on each other. You aren't sure how, but you know in some way that you are related to one another.

"Hello?"

You don't know where this voice is coming from, but it sounds gentle and timid.

"Are you safe? Are you unharmed?"

The voice trembles, but not out of fear. It sounds very far away, and the distortion suggests that they are finding it difficult to reach you.

The Voice cuts out. You hear it no longer.

Simon | Anatoli | Nutmeg | Bayrull

Chapter 1 : Life 9

Start Date: 19th June, 2021 - End Date: 16th August, 2021

RULES

- Each post must be at least 300 words in length
- Ensure that your post includes: Character name, Pronouns, Post Number, and Word Count
- You cannot use tables to format, and text must be readable
- Images if used, can be no larger that 100x100 pixels
- Checkpoints are a week apart
- Actions must be **bolded**, and you must include a summary at the end of each post
- It might be a good idea to keep a Journal Record of the things you discover here in the garden. If you want to keep a journal, please link us to the file at the start of each post.
- [Art Link]





CHECKPOINT #3

29th July 2021

Simon and Bayrull, now safely on the other side of the river, with Nutmeg and Anatoli, will clamber to their paws after a few minutes of rest, pushed into action when the brightness of daytime fades, and the flowers around them blossom. Small orbs of light illuminate patches of the thickly moss coated ground, pinpricks of white petals in amongst the darkness.

The two tom cats begin to walk, searching for the teammates they separated from earlier.

Both Anatoli, studying a hole in the ground, and Nutmeg, kneeling over her prey, will pause at the soft pawsteps and the rustling, heads shooting up as Simon and Bayrull come into view. The shadows are thick, and it is difficult to see one another until they are up close.

There is no time to speak, however, upon reuniting – ahead of them, in the direction of the cat that was being consumed by the moss, there is a sudden snapping, and cracking, and a clicking on teeth. The sound of a scuffle, each cat will think. The noise is enough to jar them from their hunger, and to have the fur along their backs rise on end. Something dangerous...? Or maybe, just maybe, the cat has managed to wake up in time...?

Together the four cats move, edging through the darkness with the little bubbles of light as their guides, until ahead of them the cat comes into view.

Only... it isn't one cat. It's two.

A pale cream, and a deep red. Two sets of yellow eyes peer blankly into the gloom. The second must have been obscured by the mist and the moss, which has almost swallowed it whole.

The two strangers are still and silent in a way that brings to mind a very new word - a word that will squeeze the air from each cat's mind: **dead**. These cats are dead.

Their bodies have been brutally torn apart, their ribcages split open, their innards pulled out of the open cavities. Blood pools, thick, through the moss and what little of the earth can still be seen.

In the air hangs a thick, putrid smell of torn intestines, blood, and rotting flesh. The organs splayed across the ground are swelling as decay sets in, sickly sweet and burning in the back of each cats' nose.

As if that weren't enough, each cat in turn will realise two things:

The first is that beneath the reek, both of these cats smell distinctly of each other, originating around the weeping organ each holds beneath their forepaws.

Second is that on each of their left shoulders, a mark has very carefully been carved into dead flesh. The marks are only half visible in the low light, but when they are looked upon, a sharp burst of *awareness* slices through each cats' thoughts. Heartbeats race, breath quickens.

Even though neither of these strangers bears the light glowing at their throats, Bayrull, Simon, Nutmeg and Anatoli will know, instinctively, that these two cats **are just like them**. They are the same, all six of them, and they have been *destroyed*.

Nausea, anger, and fear take hold of each cat. Someone has harmed their own; someone could come back for more. And find *them* here.

The snapping and clicking of teeth returns and each cat will see, through the shadows, a bright white glow of eyes in the thick shadows beyond the cream coloured cat. Light glints off of wickedly sharp fangs, and a slick, tight black skin.

They're going to eat them. If the four cats leave the bodies of their lost comrades here, they *will* be devoured by these creatures, and those marks on their shoulders, pulsing with power, will be devoured too.

No. No. That cannot be allowed to happen.

Not at any cost.

It is too late to read the glyphs that were once surrounding the bodies, as it took too long to reach their sides.

However, not everything is lost.

You must guard the remains of EVELYN and MARGO from the creatures lurking in the shadows, and find some place to bury them, so that they cannot be consumed.

If you lose, the Garden will become a much more dangerous place...

DISCOVERY

Simon

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 21/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 1229

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

The swim itself was nice. Or, it might have been, if not for the lagging of his limbs as he was subjected to the current. Maybe if he hadn't over-extended himself in racing from the hotbugs and then climbing the tree... but it was too late to do anything about that now. Then there was the icey feeling that constricted his breathing, making him falter and go under briefly, before he splashed inelegantly back up. Worse yet, Simon could feel his long, long fur being weighed down further by the water, something that made him a bit regretful, for some reason. It was a long go for such a short distance, but Simon Kept paddling.

Suddenly, something forced itself past him beneath the water: something hard, large and with enough momentum to knock him out of the pitiful stride he'd finally found. Flapping about to right himself, Simon felt a squeezing sort of hurt in the back leg that had been struck, twisted all on its own. Gritting his teeth, Simon found a weak but sufficient purchase in the embankment and groaned as he all but crawled his way out and flopped onto his side, whole body heaving for air.

Rocked by his high of relief, Simon coughed out a small bit of water, hoarsely laughing as he dragged himself further onto the shore. Giddy, he thought the word was, and shaking more from the adrenaline than the sheer frigid nature of the water. He made it! Not without a new 'ouch' in his leg that was held up from the ground, but still!

He wasn't sure how much time he spent laying there, but when he finally found it in himself to once more peek open his eyes, he was alarmed to find the 'night' descending once more. In the distance, he could see Bay also on the shore, which bolstered the older cat enough to sit up, hissing out in pain as his hind leg thumped against the wet ground. Standing on it was just as bad, he quickly learned.

Ow, okay, that hurt. Testing it again yielded the same result, but after this Simon quickly figured out that he could move semi-safely with the leg pulled up somewhat off of the ground.

"Tolya? Meg?" he shuddered, half-heartedly shaking a ridiculous amount of water from his fur before being forced to stop by the jostling of his injured leg. Seemed like, even keeping it off the ground, it was still best to not make sudden moves until the pain went away. Looking to Bay, he nodded and joined the smaller tom as they made their way further inland. Thankfully, it didn't take long at all to locate both of the others.

Sense of smell stunted thanks to the blocked up nose, Simon could still smell the lizard that Nutmeg had caught, even before getting close enough to see through the fog. Wobbling on his three legs, fur a horrendous matted mess and ears drooping, he still somewhat managed a tinkling purr of praise at her as he limped closer, "well... well done." he chuckled faintly, "might have to catch something for us, at this rate." He flicked his tail jokingly, sending a small rain down onto Nutmeg with a tired smile.

The moment was short, though, as a cacophony of dull sounds erupted through the night, in the direction of where Bay had pointed out the Big Cat. Oh no... "Come on." He whispered, limping ahead cautiously. Pushing through the underbrush and fog, Simon emerged into the small clearing to see...

All thoughts vanished. His hunger, too, was gone. Even the pain in his nose and leg were cast aside. Like the life of the cats before him, any and all feelings he'd been experiencing previously were harshly stripped away. Leaving only the strongest sensation of absolute horror and anguish.

"This...this is awful..."

Simon couldn't understand what he was seeing. They were cats! Cats like them! Even without the glowing orbs that were part of his group, there was no doubt. But now they were dead. Dead like the hotbugs that had stung him. No, not just dead, but brutally and totally torn asunder by the sounds and teeth in the shadows. That's all it could have been, right? Going off of the sinister noises and flashes of fangs in the darkness. At this point, his orb had dimmed to the faintest glow, and he took a shaky step forward. Had they been too late? If he and Bay had been faster, would these two not have... have died?

Ears folded back against his head, Simon limped closer to the horrific scene. He was suddenly all too thankful that the hotbug had closed his nose, as the tang of blood and gore staining his tongue with each breath was already sickening enough. Walking around the cat with only half their body, Simon's gaze lingered on the odd lump of flesh held between their paws, which matched what the cream cat held close. Was that important? From there, his searching eyes zeroed in on the markings on each of their left shoulders. They'd clearly been put there, like when he and his friends had marked up the tree bridge to acquire the sap. Only, these cats --they-- did not leak sap. It was dark red and stank, though most of the red came from the gaping cavities in the cats' torsos, rather than the markings. So, why were they marked? It seemed too rhythmic to be random, too...

<u>Stopping in between the fallen bodies, he couldn't resist lightly lifting his damp paw to rest gently against the cream colored cat's marked shoulder, head lowering in sheer mourning.</u> What did it mean to be dead? To be unable to continue on and experience more and more of the world around you?

When he'd made the connection about needing to consume things to live, he hadn't thought about what that meant for cats like them. Now it was apparent that there were things—things in the encroaching shadows, that seemed to hunt them as they did the lizards and hotbugs. But that was natural, right? As he lifted his glistening gaze up toward the shadows, right into the eyes of whatever was waiting to finish their meal, he decided: no.

There was something so... so wrong about all of this. This wasn't natural. It couldn't be. These cats didn't deserve to be devoured and ripped apart and played with like this.

It. Was. Wrong.

Conviction filled the empty chasm in his belly, drawing him out of the numbing despair. What could they do?

Simon's lax facial features twisted into a small frown of determination. There had to be some way to hide these bodies, what was left of them, and keep the shadows from them. An image of the roots that had been beneath the earth flashed in his mind. Would that work? The thought to put them beneath the ground was a random one, but Simon had little else to offer at the moment, so he rasped out, "we-1, uh, we should hide them with the roots. Like...like the tree? Let them lie there, under the dirt. Keep the... the rest of them safe."

Lifting his head once more, he shifted his paw delicately to peer down once more at the marking-carving on the cream cat's shoulder.

Summary:

Crawling from the river, Simon is conflicted by the mix of pain in his foot and utter relief at making it to the other side. He rests for a time before he realizes that night has come again, and he reunites with the other three. He shares a moment with Nutmeg, but scuffling noises catch his attention. They all see the horror scene of the two other cats, and Simon feels grief and laments about death. As he examines the bodies, he makes a vow to do his best to let them sleep among the roots safely, while also examining their markings closer as he rests a paw on Evelyn's.

Roll: 18



Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 16 | Words: 812

When she connects to the rock, one of the creatures ends up caught between both her paws, scrambling madly beneath her. The moment her eyes had caught onto it's glowing body, she hadn't really been thinking; and it remains very much the same when she instinctively presses down on the animal to keep it still before sinking her teeth into it, feeling it fall limp in her jaws.

It tastes funny - not bad, in her mouth, and she tilts her head in confusion at its sudden lack of struggle when she hears a noise behind her. She turns her head, watching as the vague silhouettes of Simon and Bayrull finally drag themselves from the river, drenched in water and looking a little worse for wear. It's gotten dark now, the flowers around them lighting up like they had before, and the loss of one of her eyes isn't very helpful as she struggles to see. Thankfully, though, the glowing from their throats are able to illuminate a small area around each of them - it'd be difficult *not* to see each other's lights.

Simon approached her first, one leg lifted off the ground, much to her concern, and his fur matted in multiple places over his body, but he still had the same calm and comforting smile he always wore, a purr rumbling through his throat as he mewed praise to her for her catch. "Well...well done. Might have to catch something for us, at this rate."

His tail flicked towards her, sending small, chilled droplets to latch onto her own pelt, making her squeak in surprise. She giggled, nearly dropping the creature in her mouth as she struggled to speak around it. It still hadn't moved...had she scared it that much? Thinking about it...what was she supposed to do now that she had it? Her mouth was still watering a little as she held it.

"Migh ha to!" She affirmed jokingly, turning back to Simon. Before she could attempt another sentence, a terrible sound fills the air. Snapping, cracking, the gnashing of teeth. A scuffle?

Did she always know that word?

She frowned, turning to the others once more just as Simon whispered for them to move on. Apprehensive, she fell into step with him, noting his limp still and deciding to ask him about it later. She was so focused on her thoughts that she nearly bumped right into him when he stopped abruptly, and she glanced up, confused.

W....what?

Two cats. Cream, red, and dead.

Dead. She knows this word. She understands it, now, it's meaning. It's what these two are. Her jaw falls slack, dropping the lizard thoughtlessly onto the ground, and she briefly registers that the lizard is dead too. She killed it. It was *dead*.

She can't pull her eye away, no matter how much she wants to. It trails over the broken, torn-apart corpses, blood coating the grass, the moss, the bodies themselves, ribs poking through what wasn't already covered and glimmering lightly in the light of their glowing throat-lights.

The air is heavy and *rotten* with the smell of blood, of intestines, decaying flesh, and it makes her throat seize, her eyes water, and something is rising in her now - it *burns, it BURNS*-

She heaves, spilling acrid bile onto the ground beneath her, her legs collapsing beneath her as she shakes and shudders, the sight permanently painted into her mind and she *wants to forget*.

These cats were just like them. She doesn't know how she knows - she just *does.* Whoever - whatever, did this, it could come back, it could hurt them. Bayrull, Simon, Anatoli, any of them, and the thought of *them* on the ground instead, with their blood all over and bodies torn open makes her heave again, though there's nothing left to come up anymore.

Through her rough, panting breaths and shaky eyesight, she can hear, and see, that something is nearby. The snapping noise returns, and through the dark, she sees white, glowing eyes appear. Light glints off a row of fangs, and another shudder wracks through her body at the sight.

Whatever it was, it wanted to consume the two cats in front of them. Despite her disgust, her fear, her body telling her to *run right now, get away* - she knew that she had to do something for them. She couldn't leave them. She could never.

"we-1, uh, we should hide them with the roots. Like…like the tree? Let them lie there, under the dirt.

Keep the… the rest of them safe."

She didn't say anything. She couldn't. Her voice wouldn't work, and her throat still burned. But she wanted to help. And she *would*.

Raising her head, a small hint of determination in her eye, she **peered around the area, trying to find a** suitable place to bury the two bodies.

<u>Summary</u>

Nutmeg is happy to finally be reunited with all four of her friends, but her mood is quickly and utterly shattered moments later at the reveal of the bodies. Death. She learns it's meaning, what it is, and realizes that she had killed the lizard, just like whatever had killed these two cats. The stress and terrible sight before her causes her to vomit and wish herself away from the scene, but she wants to stay - she wants to help. **She looks around the area, trying to find a suitable place to bury the two cats.**



He lay sprawled out by the river for several moments. It was like his body was fighting against him, so dearly had it hated the river. His lungs jerked against him in several, wracking coughs, before finally settling back into normal

breathing. It was a good thing he knew the water was safe to eat. He was pretty sure he had swallowed some back there.

"Simon, it was so cold," he moaned, rubbing his paws over his face. "I don't like getting wet."

The water clinging to his fur began to grow cold as he laid there, and he reluctantly rolled onto his paws and shook out his pelt. He felt the urge to groom it like he had done for Nutmeg, but now wasn't the time.

Already, he could see the world around them growing dark.

Like before, the terror of being alone struck him in the night, and he rushed to Simon's side. Together, they could shuffle over to Anatoli and Nutmeg in the night, and maybe bring the strange moss cat into their group too.

His landmarks-he should look for his landmarks. It was dark but...they were close. This was the right area, but where was the moss cat? Had they gone somewhere? Had he missed it?

CLICK

CLACK

CRUNCH

Bayrull's fur pulled against him, some managing to stick out despite the weight of the water. "What was that?" he whispered to the others, looking around frantically into the dark.

As they cautiously stepped closer and closer to the sounds, the lights on their throats brought something into view. Not one, but two cats laying in the moss. Gore painted the landscape around them, spewing forth from the space where their skin wasn't.

"M-moss cat?" Bayrull began uneasily, taking a step closer. "A-are יםע-"

CLICK

CLACK

SNAP

He faltered as the monsters in the dark made themselves known once more.

Bayrull stared into the dark.

The dark stared back.

A foul feeling rose in Bayrulls throat, more evil than the sight and the smells surrounding him. It can from within, and he knew it to be hatred, fury. "You-you did this!" he hissed, stuttering as the beast snapped again.

"RRrrr" Bayrull growled as he arched his back, stepping forward again with his tail coiled behind him. "Get back!
Stay away!" he snapped back at the monster.

Two cats were dead. He knew it on sight. He didn't know how or why, but he knew these monsters wouldn't get to play with them any more!

"Get out of here! Go away!" he snarled, snapping a paw through the air as he faced the beasts.

It wasn't cat. It didn't belong here. They did.



Bayrull follows the others to a massacre, and desperately tries to intimidate the killers. They need more space.



* Anatoli *

He/Him • Post 15 • 586 Words

<u>Journal</u>

When the river came into sight so did the movement of a creature scuttling through the moss as well. Instinctively Tolya fell into a crouch approaching the source of the sound when one of the tiny lizards popped its head out from a hole in the ground. So that's where they went into hiding! He inched forward slowly and as quietly as possible and when he saw his opportunity to leap at it he launched forward. To his dissatisfaction the lizard disappeared into its hole once again leaving Anatoli to land in the dirt. "Пиздец!(piz-dets)" he grumbled under his breath.

His bad mood only lasted for a moment, however, when the sound of splashing and voices coming from the river caught his attention. A quick glance to the other shore confirmed that neither Simon nor Bayrull appeared to have left. Leaping forward, Tolya trotted towards where he had last seen Nutmeg while keeping his eyes on the river looking for his other companions. They sure took their time to follow them over, didn't they? "Simon! Bayrull!" he called out.

"Nutmeg!" he purred with a jingle coming from the light on his neck when he eventually closed in on her again "The others are coming. I heard them near the river." Spotting the lizard hanging from between her teeth, the russian blue felt a twinge of shame for not having caught anything himself but he decided to swallow down his pride for now "Nice catch!"

Just as sudden as the first time darkness spread around them, enveloping everything and making it incredibly hard to see if it were not for their tiny lights illuminating a small area around them. Anatoli spun around towards the river, squinting into the darkness until two distinct orbs of warm light appeared, growing bigger as Simon and Bayrull approached. "You made it. Good job!" He noted with a grin, though it would be a lie if he said they didn't look exhausted. Both their pelts were wet and ruffled up and Simon's hind leg was lifted in an attempt to not put any weight on it. "Are you alr-"

CRUNCH

SNAP

CLICK

Anatoli quickly followed the others approaching where their mossy kin was supposed to be found. But instead they found.. Horror. A massacre of blood and organs and bones splayed across the clearing, painting the whole scene in a gruesome color. And not only was it an awful scene to look at, the small creeping into Tolya's nose made him gag and he had to scrunch up his nose in disgust "What the.." he mumbled "Their shoulders.. Who did this?"

As if answering his question, something moved behind the *dead* bodies, slinking around the shadows before lunging forward to grab a piece of cat, glowing white eyes staring at their group from the shadows as it continued to crunch at the bones and flesh of the cats. The cats that were like them. Could they have saved them if they had been faster? He wondered.

"Keep the... the rest of them safe." Simons voice brought him back from his thoughts, the pictures of the two cats being torn apart by shadows followed by each of his companions befalling the same fate, faded. "Yes. Keep them safe." He agreed, gritting his teeth.

He leapt towards the creature in the shadows, joining Bayrull. Bearing his teeth he let out a deep growl followed by a long hiss "Piss off, твари!(twar)" He yelled, hoping to intimidate the creature to leave their fallen comrades alone.

* Summary *

Tolya fails to catch his lizards and meets back up with Nutmeg, informing her of Simon and Bayrulls crossing. He follows the others, discovering the horror in front of them. **He joins Bayrull in trying to intimidate the shadow creature.**

Roll, Intimidation (Strength): 19

Anatoli's yelling and hissing seems to still the shadowy creatures' approaches for now though they do not retreat. The monsters quiet down and watch, slinking through the gloom and the fog on silent paws. How many there are

surrounding them, now, Anatoli cannot be sure; but his attempts to hold them off seem, at least for the moment, to be working.

Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 17 | Words: 339

As her gaze raked across the area around them, she made an enormous effort to avoid lingering too long anywhere near the bodies. The sight, the smell, she could hardly stand it - grief, wracking her chest, her throat, for those that she'd never known but somehow *missed*.

Nearby, Bayrull's voice had risen, threatening and dangerous, as he made intimidating noises and gestures towards the hidden creatures just beyond their field of vision. Anatoli, seeing this, joined in, though his advance seemed to successfully halt theirs. So many deep, dangerous, bone-chilling noises echo around them and Nutmeg hunches in her spot, knowing they were surrounded. Fearfully, she continues her search - anywhere, anywhere would do, someplace safe, just for those two-

There!

Her eyes widen and she uncurls her body slightly as she spots it. A patch of very large, cone-shaped plants that stood tall and open, facing upwards, reaching as high as they could go. No moss has snuck its way around the dirt and soil that holds them to it, and she knows this must be the spot for them. It wasn't too far from the bodies, so they could pull them towards it, right? Though, the idea of getting *near* the bodies was enough to make her shudder again, risking a glance back towards the torn open and ravaged corpses, swallowing a lump in her throat at the sight.

They had to do this. She had to do this.

Taking only a second to gather herself, she looked towards the others, a paw pointed towards her discovery.
"T-T," She tried, stuttering, and she stopped to swallow again before continuing. "There. W-we can p-put...put them there."

She worked her way a little closer to the bodies, just a little bit behind Simon as she did her best to steel herself. "W-We, we have to move them. S-so, they can, be...be safe." She glanced towards her other companions, waiting for their response. She knew she couldn't do it alone, but she knew that she wouldn't have to, either.

<u>Summary</u>

Nutmeg, through her quick searching, discovers a clean patch of soil beneath a handful of open-faced tall plants. She points this out to the others in the group as a good place to bury the fallen.

Simon

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 22/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 622

Everything else was little more than a dull din to Simon's ears, as he found himself inspecting the corpses.

The way the globs of meat were put within the grasp of each cat, the fact that these clearly hungry beasts hadn't just gobbled these aspects of the pair down. It seemed far too... meant.

A thrum, akin to the one that reverberated inside of him but still very different, coursed through his paw as he rested it atop the carving. And suddenly, Simon felt watched by more than just the shadows. This cat was dead, no arguing that, but there was... something still there. It reached out to him in a way that sent a chill down his spine and was impossible to describe. This had been a living cat like him. The other cat, too. And, the longer he stood there between the bodies, the more obvious it was that these weren't just cats. They were a pair. They belonged together, no matter what, he now believed with his entire being.

Moving without thinking, he lowered his head to the cream cat's, murmuring to the air by their curled ear, "we'll keep you from them, somehow. You and your friend, both." It seemed right, dead or not, to speak these words, giving Simon a spark of encouragement in making it a promise.

"There. W-we can p-put...put them there."

Huh? What?

Simon stood back up and blinked rapidly. He tore his vision from the pair and followed Nutmeg's gesture further inland toward some odd tree-thin...things. He had to tilt back his head to even see the top of the towering things, but he was more interested in the soil around the base. Free of moss for now, and Simon was almost sure that, once that space was covered, the shadows weren't likely to get through. So if they hurried, and got the pair covered by the dirt before it reached the spot...

"G...." He cleared his throat, realizing just how haggard the younger cat actually looked. She looked utterly petrified, and, honestly, he felt the same. But it seemed much more apparent on her than himself, probably.. In spite of this, he didn't have to work hard to muster up a comforting smile to give her, "great find, meg. Nutmeg."

"W-We, we have to move them. S-so, they can, be...be safe."

"You're right. Together, too. Safe among the roots. We just have to get past them... somehow." Simon agreed with a nod, referring to the shadows.. At least they'd seemed to quiet down, thanks to Tolya and Bay. "Which we can do. Seems like these things aren't keen to rumble, yet," He tacked on as an afterthought, with a tone of affirmation he hoped might help not only Nutmeg but also himself. It sounded more possible when he said it aloud, at least. Just like his promise to the cream cat. But...

Simon considered the cream cat's body and the moss slowly crawling over them, his own wet fur lifting along his spine at the sight. To think they'd all woken atop this moss without a care not too long ago. First things first, he had to free the body from being covered further.

"Nutmeg, Friend... can you see the best way over there?" Simon asked rather absently as he positioned himself awkwardly on the cream cat's over side, pressing his forepaws against the cold fur and trying to make it budge from the encroaching moss. It was hard, given how he could only stand on one hind leg right now, but he was going to do whatever he could. "Tolya? Bay? Let's get them away from this moss. We have to get them to those tall things."

<u>Summary</u>

Simon makes a startling connection between the two bodies and feels the presence of the cream cat, dead but not all gone. It strengthens his decision. Hearing Nutmeg point out the towering things, he agrees and praises her, and then asks if she can find a way through the shadows, before calling to Bay and Tolya to help move the bodies. Tired and sore but refusing to leave the pair, he starts trying to push EVELYN'S body away from the moss, clawing at the green where he has to.





His hoarse voice hardly even phased the monsters. They didn't stop creeping closer, not until Anatoli stepped forward to ward them away as well. "G-get back," Bayrull stammered, shivering from the cold wet in his fur and the spiking fear in his body.

"W-We, we have to move them. S-so, they can, be...be safe." Nutmeg stammered.

Bayrull stared, shivering, at the monsters for a moment. "We need to do it together. They don't stop unless we're together." He glanced around, taking in their situation. They had two cats on the ground in the moss, and four cats standing on guard. So there were...six cats versus....four monsters. No-five monsters. Were there five? More than five?

Hopefully there weren't any more than five.

The spot Nutmeg pointed out didn't look too far away. They should be able to do this, he was pretty sure. There were six cats and only 5 monsters. More cats than monsters. That was a good thing, right?

"Um, new neighbors—friends," Bayrull began, licking his lips. "I—I don't know how um, being dead goes, but could you help?" The two cats had been remarkably still this whole time, in spite of the terror of the dark and the monsters circling them. Perhaps being unable to talk was a part of being dead.

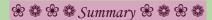
Would that mean his throat earlier...when it had been too sore to talk...had he been...

No, he didn't want to think about that. He was fine now, and he intended to stay that way.

"Here, I'll help you up," Bayrull said, moving to the red one's side and looking for a good place to grab. There wasn't much of a clear spot with all this moss. He decided to just take one paw in his mouth and pull. If the red cat helped out any, then they should be able to get them loose from the moss.

"Lome on Red-is your name Red?-let's 90!"

The bodies move as the two cats push each in turn. However, Bayrull and Simon will notice if he tries to push Margo too far from Evelyn's body he will be met with a sharp resistance.



Bayrull attempts to commune with the dead, and tries to move Margo towards the clear patch of dirt Nutmeg pointed out.



Nutmeq | She/Her | Post 18 | Words: 318

Simon followed her gesture, eyeing the tall, open plant from his place beside the two fallen cats before looking towards her, opening his jaws to speak. "G...." He tried, only to clear his throat as he *really* looked at her, his expression changing. A small, comforting smile slowly overtook his face as he tried to speak again. "Great find, meg. Nutmeg."

She wasn't calm, not even *close.* In fact, she doubted the incessant thumping inside her body would *ever* stop but...his smile *did* help her muscles relax; just a bit. She wasn't alone, here. She had Simon. And Bayrull. And Anatoli. They would be fine. They just had to stay together.

At her second suggestion, he nodded. "You're right. Together, too. Safe among the roots. We just have to get past them... somehow." He spoke, echoing her 'together' thought as he referred to the shadows. Nearby, she heard Bayrull say the same. Simon, meanwhile, continued. "Which we can do. Seems like these things aren't keen to rumble, yet,"

His tone was confident, like he knew what he was doing, and it further settled her racing heart, the anxiety and fear prickling at her throat and paws soothing into a dull, nervous ache. He asked her a question that she'd nearly missed through her messy train of thoughts, but she nodded in affirmation. "I-I can try." She mewed, turning her body to get a better angle of their end goal; the tall plants.

They were surrounded - she knew that. They - the shadows - could converge on them at any moment, really, while they were pulling the bodies along, completely unguarded. Was there even a safe way to go about it?

It doesn't matter, she thinks. She would look anyway.

While Bayrull tries to begin their plan by finding a hold on one of the cats, she tries to **spot the safest possible path towards the tall plants.** She manages to spot a mostly clear path, and directs the others towards it immediately. "Over there!" She mews, pointing with her paw once again. Shadows encroached on the path in some places, but other than that, it wasn't bad.

Summaru

Nutmeg is slightly soothed by Simon's affirmative words and smile, and quickly sets about doing what he'd asked of her; **trying to spot the safest possible path they could take towards the tall plants.** She finds the path, and directs the others towards it.

Roll: 14, Nutmeg spots a fairly clear route. It does drift into the shadows in places though.



It was hard to move the body of this much larger cat. Especially with his hind leg twinging with each accidental scrape upon the ground, moss or not. Not to mention how Simon felt it best to only use his paws to do the moving, so it was slow going. But he seemed to be making some progress.

"Here, I'll help you up," Bayrull said off to the side, and Simon glanced over to see him talking to the red cat-this cream one's other half. "Come on Red-is your name Red?—let's 90!" The smaller tom grasped a paw into his jaws and pulled, so Simon focused again on his own task. Did Bayrull think that the red cat would respond? Could it? Or...they? What was the best way to refer to one who's lost their being but left their body? It wasn't like Simon thought there was nothing left. It was hard to think so, given the striking insights he'd stumbled upon while examining the cream cat. These cats might never have their beings returned, but that did not negate the fact that they were here and that something still clung to their bodies, however ethereal...

Ethereal... a nice word that popped into his mind just now. Oh, he'd stopped pushing, oops. He took a few heavy breaths, still rattled from the river crossing on top of everything else, before continuing.

He found it a little odd, though. Was he the only one to have this intense sense of connection between the two bodies? No, because the others had agreed to bury them together, for which Simon was thankful, even if he couldn't quite figure why. Bayrull and the red cat were already further ahead, something that backed up his theory that the tiny cat, though smaller, was made for this stuff more than him. Tolya too, actually.

Oh, Nutmeg seemed to have found a mostly clear path. He gave a quiet purr to her as he passed, saving his breath for now.

This was really quite a lot of work, but he would see it through. It was clear he'd need some extra help, though, like when they had made the tree bend for them. "To...Tolya?" He shook himself as he looked to his own counterpart. He nodded to the body and then to the path that Nutmeg had discovered and pointed out, before resuming his tiring work with shaking paws.

Summary:

Simon acknowledges the path Nutmeg points out and <u>continues to push Evelyn's body in that direction</u>, <u>albeit much slower than Bayrull. He looks to Anatoli for aid</u>

<u>Roll</u>: 6

* Anatoli *

He/Him • Post 16 • 397 Words

Journal

Anatoli couldn't help but feel a bit of pity for the wet and shivering Bayrull next to him, especially when the monsters seemed to find his display to me more enticing than threatening, moving closer and closer until Tolya joined in. He let out a long sigh of relief when his own attempt at scaring off the gloomy intruders appeared a lot more successful. The shadows slowed down their advance until coming to a halt completely, instead moving back towards the trees where Tolya could see them slinking around their little clearing. They remained in the area and far too close for comfort at that and Anatoli was sure he could see more and more join them each time he checked, but it was too hard to tell. Either way, he hoped that he had bought them enough time to begin moving the cat's bodies.

He hadn't immediately noticed Bayrull slink off towards the red cat until the smaller tom started talking to one of the bodies. Tolya, too, had felt the urge to at least attempt to communicate with them despite the fact that their blank stares and torn bodies gave him the unmistaken feeling that it would be in vain. There was something empty about them but he could also tell that some parts of the cats were still left inside.

Anatoli continued to fend off the shadow creatures while the others planned their next steps. He had to tiptoe around some of the bones and organs splattered across the ground on occasion when one of the shadows dared to come too close to either of them. He even felt his paws almost slip in the moist sticky liquid coating the moss underneath a couple of times but somehow he managed until he heard Simon speak to him.

"To...Tolya?" He spun around at Simon's shaken voice and followed his eyes towards the cream colored body and their companions. He understood. Throwing back a last glance accompanied by an angry hiss aimed at the shadows, he joined Simon who appeared to be struggling a little with the weight of the cat. Or maybe it was the disgust all of them had felt when they first encountered the clearing..? "I gotcha." he nodded, grasping Evelyn by the scruff and beginning to pull them towards the path that Bayrull and Nutmeg were headed to with the other one.

* Summary *

Anatoli fends off the shadows while the others plan their next steps. **He joins Simon in dragging Evelyn's body towards the path Nutmeg had pointed out.**

Roll, Strength: 4

Simon and Anatoli manage to give Evelyn's body a hefty push. However, with their combined force they are moving more effectively than Bayrull and Margo. They will find once they reach a certain distance between the two bodies that Evelyn becomes more difficult to move. Whenever they do give a particularly effective shove, Bayrull finds that Margo suddenly lurches forward as well.

Nutmeq | She/Her | Post 19 | Words: 365

Nutmeg dropped her paw back to the dirt beneath her as the others took note of her discovered path. The shadows still made her uneasy, but it was overshadowed by the evidence of their progress. Simon had begun to move one of the cats by himself, slowly dragging them towards the path, while Bayrull took the red one himself.

It didn't look like an easy job. No one had asked her to help pull them, yet, and she was very, *very* relieved by that, but standing around and pointing out landmarks wasn't exactly her definition of helpful. She wanted to do more, but...how?

Simon said something, and Anatoli padded over to him to help him carry the body, leaving the two better able to pull ahead of Bayrull with their combined strength towards the path she'd discovered. She trotted alongside them, slowly.

Her expression morphed into one of uncertainty and malaise as she laid eyes on the red-coated cat that Bayrull was steadily dragging along, knowing what she had to do next. Since Anatoli and Simon were taking care of the cream cat, it was only right to help Bayrull with the red one, but that would mean getting close to the body, really really close, and even touching them-

She shook her head, rubbing a paw at one of her eyes in self-depreciation. She slowed down, waiting for the two to pass further ahead before she doubled back, pausing just before Bayrull as he caught up to where she was standing.

"I...I can h-help," She murmured, staring down at the body and mustering up all of her inner strength to *not look away*. She couldn't avoid them anymore, it felt *wrong*, somehow, to ignore them. To ignore their existence.

Swallowing past the lump that had seemingly formed in her throat, **she bent down to take the other paw of the red cat into her mouth, and began to pull the body alongside Bayrull to the burial spot.** This close, the smell would be even stronger, and she could feel her eye burn and her nose scrunch at the proximity of it, but still, she pulled. Together, they would all save the two strange cats.

Summary

Nutmeg, despite all of her inner turmoil, finally decides to get her paws dirty and **helps Bayrull transport**Margo's body to the burial spot.

Simon

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 24/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 369

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦₹

With Tolya joining in, carrying the Cream Cat was so, so much easier. At least, up to a certain point. Finding it suddenly much harder to push along the path, Simon stumbled to a clumsy halt. He looked over his shoulder fur at Bay and Nutmeg, the latter having joined in the moving efforts. She didn't look too well, though, which was understandable. After all, they'd all just learned a horrible lesson about the shadows and danger, at the cost of two lives. Again he missed the start of their journey, when things were happy and peaceful. This time, however, he'd want to have these two Others with them. No cat deserved this, he reasoned.

But, able to talk or not, Simon had to give it to Bayrull: he'd asked the red body to help and it looked like it was indeed jerking forward bit by bit by something other than his friends. It looked like the left-behinds of the Other Cats truly were determined to stay together! It was just enough to lighten the odd lump in his chest, and bring a bit of light back to his orb. Wait... Light... Simon cocked his head in consideration, oblivious to all else as he zeroed in his sights on the shadows leaking across their path. Hmmm...

"We're almost there, I think." <u>He told the smaller two, before he swallowed and stepped around Anatoli</u>
and the Cream Cat to limp forward along the path.

Maybe it was useless, but they had these lights, while the Others didn't--for some reason. And the lights of the Bright Flowers and the hotbugs had lit up the river side earlier, where it would otherwise be dark. On top of all of that, their presence --specifically Anatoli and Bayrull-- had driven the Things back enough for them to reach the bodies. The last thing he wanted was for the shadows to take a bite at the poor Others' bodies as they passed, so why not see if his orb light did anything?

So with a small shake of his worn body, Simon ambled forward, thinking not of the shadows but of the bond of the Others and how, soon, they'd be safe among the roots.

Summary:

Simon pauses in the task of pushing the Cream cat along. Not only to let Bay and Nutmeg catch up, but also to try and assess the path before them. He observes the shadows spilling in their way, and chances walking a bit closer to see if his proximity to them pushes them back. Does the orb of light affect them at all?

<u>Roll</u>: 20<u>!!!</u> ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦



His Holding Red's paw seemed to do the job, and before long they were making good progress over to Nutmeg's spot. There were moments where Red seemed to catch on the ground, giving Simon a chance to catch up, but as Anatoli joined Simon in moving the other moss cat Red found their...footing? again and slid forward on their own.

Bayrull's jaw went slack with surprise, letting go of Red's foot as the corpse moved forward on its own. He stared for a few moments, then perked up, light glimmering cheerfully for the first time in a while. "That's the Spirit, Red! Keep going, just a little farther!" He bounced forward, carefully getting a grip on the lost paw again to keep helping Red along.

"R' din gret" he attempted to say, words garbled by the literal foot in his mouth. For a moment, he was tempted to bite, see what Red tasted like, but he decided to focus on getting a good grip first. He could play with biting more when it was light out again. The darkness would pass soon, he was sure of it. It would pass just like it had the night before.

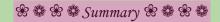
He felt a warmth at his side, the warmth of companionship as Nutmeg joined him at his side. "W'nna hulp?" he asked around Red's paw.

"I..I can h-help," Nutmeg replied.

"Grit! Ulm'st thur."

He readied himself for another good Red drag, waving his tail behind himself to get a feel for the ground. Nothing in the way, he was pretty sure!

Red remained quiet through all this. He'd have to try talking to them again once they reached Nutmeg's spot, before they buried the moss cats. He was pretty sure the dead thing must make it hard to talk, but only trying once felt like hardly trying at all.



Bayrull continues pulling Red along with Nutmeg's help.



Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 20 | Words: 353

"Grit! Ulm'st thur."

Nutmeg blinked, processing the garbled words for a moment before she nodded, slightly tightening her hold on the red cat's paw as she tried to match pace with Bayrull. However, she quickly found that despite having a tight hold on the body and being fueled by a copious amount of determination, it didn't really do anything to help her lack of physical strength or endurance.

Her paws slipped and slid on the dirt and moss beneath her, once, twice, three times; and in her surprise, her jaws unclasped from the red cat's paw as she promptly fell over, nearly landing face-first into the ground below. She lay there, dazed, staring unblinking at the vacant, empty gaze of the corpse they were dragging, and she fought off a shudder as she climbed back to her paws.

"U-um, slippery." Was all she muttered to Bayrull, as if that explained everything, before returning her hold to the red cat's paw, forcing herself to bite down even harder to keep her grip on it. Slowly, she dragged them along, muffled and ragged pants flowing from her mouth and into the red cat's fur, whistles of air blowing through her nose as she struggled to continue past her quickly-rising exhaustion.

They'd be there soon; they were going along at a rapid pace, and nothing from the shadows had tried anything. *Yet*, she felt herself think, and she felt something rumble in her chest, her throat - a very soft, annoyed growl, but she hardly even noticed it. She really had to stop scaring herself like that...everytime she did, she could feel her body fill with an anxious heat, and her mind and heart would race and race until she couldn't focus anymore.

Her eyes looked to the side, where Bayrull helped her pull, and she forced herself to relax, the fur on her back slowly lowering itself into it's normal position. Bayrull was right next to her, so she was safe. They both were.

Successfully preventing her mind from a diversion, **she returned to her efforts towards pulling the** red-coated cat towards the burial spot.

<u>Summaru</u>

Nutmeg almost immediately slips and falls from her first attempt at pulling the body, but she doesn't let this deter her as she tries again, **continuing to pull the body towards the burial spot**.

* Anatoli *

He/Him • Post 17 • 338 Words Journal

His jaws closed around the thick skin of the cream cat's neck felt different from the other three's. They each radiated a comforting heat at all times but the dead one's body felt cold and stiff between his maw, a shudder ran through him at that thought. It took a moment to find a good rhythm for him and Simon to pull the body across the path before them and Anatoli found himself slipping here and there but always managed to regain his footing in time. They quickly passed Bayrull and Red, who was still working on the other's body on his own.

Anatoli's gaze moved towards Nutmeg who walked alongside them for a moment. Her expression was distorted, likely still thrown off by the idea of having to grab onto one of the dead bodies, Tolya assumed. He was glad his own sense of smell had started to get used to the rotten stench. Or maybe he was simply losing his sense of smell... He couldn't tell. Either way he was thankful for this development.

Reaching a certain spot past Bayrull and Red, Evelyn's body came to a sudden halt, making Tolya lose his grip on her scruff. He moved around her, checking every limb and bone for whatever was holding her back with little success. "Come on now" He grasped her neck once more and with a reluctantly strong pull he managed to move her about a tail length forward. Frustrated, he let go of her once more "What's up with you suddenly?" he grumbled at the corpse, watching as Simon left his side next to the cream cat and moved towards the shady area in front of them. "Be careful.." he said, scanning the tree line for any of the shadowy creatures.

Not wanting to leave neither Simon nor Evelyn alone in the dark **he returned to pulling the body further along**, much easier now that Bayrull and Nutmeg, who had finally joined Bayrull in pulling Red, had closed the gap between them a little.

* Summary *

Anatoli stops pulling Evelyn's body, trying to figure out what was keeping them from progressing. When Simon leaves he continues pulling her forward by himself, more easily once Nutmeg and Bayrull begin closing the gap between them.

Roll, Strength: 19

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CHECKPOINT #4

13th August 2021

Between them, the four cats begin to shift the two bodies. Provided they keep pace with one another the bodies slide across the ground fairly smoothly towards the clear patch of dirt. It is a rather odd sight amongst such greenery, but the soil looks loose and burying the two dead cats shouldn't be too difficult. They are making good progress, and then, very suddenly darkness turns to light, and they are plunged abruptly back into the blinding artificial glow of the force that is powering this strange place.

When the sun came out last it drove away the shadows, they quickly fled back into the shadows of the bushes. However, this time it feels different.

The hairs on their necks stand on end, prickling against the smooth and inexplicable breeze that has suddenly decided to grace them with its invigorating presence. The wind carries a scent with it, something sharp, something tart, something black. Whatever the creatures are that are hunting them, they are still here.

A foul hiss spits out from a bush only a short distance from Nutmeg.

Something is emerging, blinking weakly against the light, its sharp teeth blared. It is a large shadow of a cat, inky black with an outline that shifts and squirms with each movement.

Another bursts out behind Simon from the bush closest to him. There are more and more of them pressing in from the sides, an endless trail of bleak darkness that consumes the green of the moss.

The cats are faced with a choice. Stay and defend the bodies or attempt to flee? Brute strength or do they try to outmaneuver them, plan strategically? Work alone, or work as a team? **The Shadow Cats cannot be reasoned with**.

Several paths lay before them, the choice is theirs to make.

They are in real danger now.

To take action against the Shadow Cats you must think before you act. Two stats must be combined to take on your opponents. You can do both in one post, or spread them out over two.

For example:

Simon reasons (Intelligence Base) that striking the Shadow cats in the chest will do them more damage. He lunges forward (Takedown/Hunting) in an attempt to strike.

Simon

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 25/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 683

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

Anything he might have figured out was lost to him as the cycle changed again and Simon winced back, eyes adjusting slowly to the sudden brightness after staring into the shadows for so long. Annoyance taking over his fear briefly, he huffed, ears twitching. But the nerves returned in the next rhythm within him when the Beings suddenly emerged fully and blocked their way. On all sides!

"Get back," He told his companions, shuffling back to them as best he could with his lifted hind leg.

This was made harder due to him not wanting to look away from the Shadow Beings that had appeared, but he managed.

They were all trapped. Maybe if they left the bodies-- no, that wasn't something Simon would consider even a bit. These Other Cats were like them and he knew deep in his gut that he'd never feel his orb shine again if he left them. That burning determination in mind, he looped around the Cream One's body, brushing unsteadily by Tolya, and put his front paws over the corpse. This way, his immense amount of fur shielded the Cream One, even if only a little.

But then, what? There had to be some way through...

Simon squinted against the new cycle's light and <u>tried -once more- to discern what he could about</u>

<u>these Things.</u>

Summary:

Simon is a little miffed that the cycle would change right then, but his thoughts are swiftly derailed by the ambush of the shadow beings. He quickly returns to his friends and the bodies, and places himself over the Cream One's body as he tries to figure out a way past the threat without abandoning them.

Roll: 1

<u>Result:</u> Simon studies the Shadow Cat nearest to him. The creature is bigger than a normal cat and Simon can tell at one glance how aggressive it is. He does however find his attention drawn back to the way the creature frays at the edges. He is almost certain that the creature they caught sight of in the bushes before was far more solid. He thinks he sees an opening. However, it closes again quickly. They are surrounded. If

a way through is to be cleared then he will need a distraction to draw their attention.

(Cont...)

Was he simply seeing wrong? No, he was certain. For just a split instance, the Being lost some of its mass and opened up a small gap, but by the time Simon blinked, that path was gone. These things were... different from him and his Friends. Not solid. At least, not anymore, Simon realized. In the bushes-- the shadows of the last cycle, they'd been far more dangerous.

Why would they come for the Cream and Red Ones now, then? Do they know what we're trying to do? Take their... their food away and put Them beneath the dirt so they'll be safe?

"These-they-these Beings... They aren't... whole, I think. Not like I-you-us, or them." he rubbed a paw over Cream One's stained fur. "Not in the...the brightness. But..." He began to say his idea for a distraction, but found himself stopping. He doubted he was fast enough to outrun any of these things, and suggesting someone else do it could lead to them getting hurt. Just like him and the hotbugs from before, when his own distraction worked but at the cost of being stung.

"Maybe our orbs can help-- maybe that is why... why these Others were taken and not us. I don't know." He lowered his head to further block the Being's sight of the Cream One. "Maybe if we push them like we did the tree, or the river that was not whole, either. We could move in it... but I am not leaving Them. There is a wrongness inside... when I think of it. It dims my light." Talking and breathing through one mouth was hard, he hoped the hurt that bloated his nose would cease soon. Sides expanding with each deep breath, he shook his head at an intrusive, inappropriate and wholly unneeded thought that caused a snort to slip out. Ouch. "Nutmeg, what did I say earlier? bout the jiggle paws? Think the same thing can... can be used for this feeling. We're together, we're whole. More than these Beings." Not the time for levity? Of course it wasn't, but his inner voice didn't care, apparently. Still, it was indeed enough to make him inhale deeply and raise his head, stepping fully over the Cream One to put them in the middle of their group, beside the Red One. "Don't even think... that these Things can breathe." he snorted again, more deliberately.

Maybe, maybe, so many maybes in his head. It was really annoying, actually. He shunted all of them from his mind as he moved forward, toward the Being directly blocking their way ahead, though he stopped about half way. If he had to, he'd move to intercept any attacks on the Others, but maybe his orb really would factor here?

Summary:

Simon rambles to the others his thoughts, trying to decide the best course of action, before he realizes they have to move or nothing will happen. He gets a stupid thought of how his breathing techniques and jokes helped Nutmeg earlier, and brings it up to try and rally his friends into fighting whatever fear they felt against these Shadow Beings. He even chances a step forward, toward the Being most blocking their path to the burial site, in case his light orb affected them at all.

Result: The shadow cat nearest to Simon backs away with a snarl and a hiss when the light is shone in his face. It parts, but the moment Simon tries to move or turn the light away the Shadow Cat will return. It also only appears to work on the individual that he's facing. More Shadow Cats continue to swarm pressing in around the cats closer and closer.

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

* Anatoli *

He/Him • Post 18 • 373 Words

<u>Journal</u>

With the two bodies closer together, Anatoli and the other's seemed to be making progress a lot faster already, even with Simon up ahead inspecting the strange darkness that stood between them and their chosen burial site. The russian blue was worried about the other tom getting too close to the shadowy creatures but before he could finish his thought the darkness faded and light filtered through the leaves above them once more. His eyes grew used to the sudden shift and brightness faster this time and Tolya could already see the spot Nutmeg had pointed out much closer. Only a little more!

His excitement got interrupted when the shadows began shifting around the tree lines, unlike last time they did not seem to want to back away at the light of day and instead remained nearby it seemed? Upon closer inspection, however, the tom noticed that these shadows were different and he was not the only one that had noticed as Simon's voice confirmed. Much less corporal but even more aggressive than the once they had faced earlier.

Anatoli felt like something was stuck in his throat when the new cat-like shadows began surrounding them. "These-they-these Beings... They aren't... whole, I think. Not like I-you-us, or them, Not in the...the brightness. But..." He tried his best following the rambled words of the cat beside him but struggled understanding. The shadows did not seem to attack just yet. Were they trying to intimidate them? Like he had done to the others earlier? If that were the case, Tolya argued in his mind, maybe their incomplete forms meant that they weren't actually physically able to hurt them? Or maybe they weren't brave enough to attack?

In that case, he thought, maybe the shadows expected the cats to stay back and be too intimidated by their threats to go for an attack themselves? Anatoli swallowed hard, that really was his best guess right now and as much as it scared him, doing nothing would help them even less right now. "We're not leaving these cats after all they must have gone through to end up like this" **He noted in a stern voice before lunging forward aiming at one of the shadows closest to him.**

* Summary *

Anatoli processes the new situation they're faced with. Facing the shadows he argues that maybe they're trying to just intimidate the four cats and don't expect them to fight back (Roll 1). Anatoli quickly lunges forward trying to take one of the closest shadows by surprise (Roll 2).

Roll 1, Streetwise: 3
Roll 2, Reaction Time: 18

Anatoli attempts to figure out the Shadow Cat's thoughts and motivations, but he is too distracted by the movement around him to focus. He gains no useful information. He lunges towards one of the Shadow Cats, and is momentarily panicked when several surge forward, perhaps to aid their ally. His paw makes contact. The Shadow Cats let out a hiss as Anatoli's paw makes contact. He brings down the first Shadow Cat, and the surge of energy he feels is enough to urge him on. The Shadow Cats are weaker than they look. Perhaps it is the light? They seemed to be sensitive to the light in Simon's chest.

[Anatoli takes out 10 Shadow Cats]

Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 21 | Words: 789

Since Nutmeg was solely focused on pulling and tugging the body along, struggling to match Bayrull's pace, the sudden change from the dark, gloomy atmosphere to broad daylight startled her more than it should have, especially since she'd already experienced the strange phenomenon twice already.

The area around them reacts to the change, though her body prickles uncomfortably as her hair stands on end, her gaze darting towards the shadows - something was wrong. The light usually brought with it the feeling of comfort and safety; but she didn't feel it this time around.

Something pushes against her, brushing against and through her fur and ruffling it around her face, her ears pulling back as it whistles faintly past her ears. With its presence, it brings a new scent, as well, one that makes her nose curl in surprise as it blows by.

She inhales, wincing as the action also grants her another whiff of the corpse nearby, trying to follow this sharp, tart-like scent, when something *hisses* nearby. She whirls on the spot, eyes wide and fearful as she spots it just as it emerges.

A shadow, large, black and...wavering? It blinks against the onslaught of light, fangs glinting and bared right towards the group of six, and Nutmeg's fur puffs out in all directions, an instinctive intent to make her look bigger than she really was. Another one makes itself known near Simon, flying out from the cover of the bushes, and Nutmeg trembles as more, and more, and more keep coming, from all around them.

She took multiple steps back, brushing against Simon just as he spoke. "These-they-these Beings... They aren't... whole, I think. Not like I-you-us, or them,"

"Maybe our orbs can help-- maybe that is why... why these Others were taken and not us. I don't know."

At this, she stops, an idea making its way through her head as she considers his words. She glances up at him as he calls her name, and she lowers her head in acknowledgement, her tail rising a little more from his words. He takes the first step, and it's immediately obvious that the orbs have some kind of effect on the dark cats, as the one closest to Simon quickly shies away, snarling and backpedaling to escape its intensity. It begins to part, but any shifting or removal of the light causes it to reform.

Nearby, Anatoli finally spoke, determination clear in his voice. "We're not leaving these cats after all they must have gone through to end up like this."

To her shock, he lunged forward towards the closest shadow-cat, taking it down with ease. He didn't stop there, either - he took out many more after that, leaving Nutmeg in awe at his bravery and strength.

Shaking her head - focus, focus - she considers two different ideas of hers. Before acting on either of them, she moves to step over the red cat's body, facing just opposite of Simon as she mirrors his action. She can't cover nearly as much of them as she'd like to, but she pointedly raises her chin, offering more room for her throat-orb to shine directly towards the opposing shadow-cat's position, hoping to make them falter and slow their approach - she needed more time to think - to talk.

"I...I have some ideas," She mewed, trying her best to be heard above all the hissing and spitting of the approaching challengers.

"T-the light, from us, it stops them. They don't like it. I-if, we could put both bodies, together, close, and stand around them, o-our lights...they can't get close." She doesn't dare try to turn to gauge reactions, in case her light falters.

"O-or...we can work, together, but...but separately? But close! Still close!" She spares a moment to sigh, annoyed with her inability to word herself properly. "S-so, Simon and Bayrull, together, stay with...with these two, a-and Simon, y-you could...you could use your light, while Bayrull...um...does what Anatoli is doing now." She remembers just how much strength Bayrull had boasted with the tree before - he wasn't to be taken lightly.

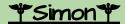
"A-and I could...I could help Anatoli. I'm fast! I can follow, and make them weak with light while he...um...does the same?" Her heart races, not at all comfortable in any kind of situation where she has a chance to control it - was what she was saying even *good?*

There was also a third option, but she couldn't voice it - she was too uncertain. The lights could only work on one shadow-cat, at least, at a time, when she observed Simon. She side-eyes the area around her, desperately thinking - was there a way to make their lights more effective?

Summary

After watching both Simon and Anatoli act, Nutmeg is rewarded with a few ideas of her own. Before voicing them, she **uses her light like Simon had to deter the closer shadow-cats**, before she uncertainly presents her thoughts to the others, not comfortable with her own ability to plan, but wanting to help in any way she could.

While awaiting an answer, she tries to find if there was anyway to make their lights more effective.



He/him ♦♦♦ Post 26/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 311

Watching Tolya strike forward and easily slice through the fizzling shadow Beings gave Simon courage that his orb idea was working. On top of that, and even more important, it made him grateful to have Tolya by his side. Simon honestly wasn't sure he would be able to act as fast or as surely as his Friend, even without the hindrance of his lifted leq.

Absently, he hoped it would feel better soon, like how he could at least slightly breathe through his nose again. And, crossing his eyes, he could see the swelling of the sting had gone down as well. Wait, no, focus.

He could hear Nutmeg behind him, and though he was sorely tempted to turn and look at her as she spoke, he was equally conscious of the danger in doing so. His orb kept these Beings at bay. And even turning his head a bit could be bad. So, instead, he listened, thought, and found himself in full agreement. She was so smart!

"Nutmeg, that's bright!" Simon purred, acquainting 'bright' with good, like their helpful orbs and the day cycle that offered safety. "Tolya, Bay, I agree with Friend Nutmeg... There isn't much else to do. We will help... pro... Protect you and our Cream and Red Friends, while you..." he paused, considering. "Maybe we only chase away a few, and you dig since we are close?"

Even with the several that Tolya dispatched, there seemed to be no end to the Beings. And he found his eyes glancing quickly up at the ceiling of the domain.

"Whatever we do, we Four should move like hotbugs. We cannot know when the next cycle will come. When it does... I think they will be more whole. And us less." He frowned slightly but with resolve, putting his trust in the two that had proven their strength already.

Simon, despite the situation, feels glee and pride as Nutmeg voices her plan, and agrees. He <u>adds on</u> the idea that while the two of them provide the light, Bay and Tolya can carry the bodies the rest of the way and dig (roll 1). He <u>suggests haste, considering there's no telling when the cycle will change</u> and the shadows become greater (roll 2).

<u>Roll</u>: 9 Roll 2: 14

Result: Bayrull and Anatoli will hear the urging tension in Simon's voice, they understand he wants them to move quickly, it is however, their choice what they do.

Simon's assertion based on what they've seen seems sensible. The shadows had far more solid forms during the night, it is unusual that they have come out in the day, but they do appear to be weaker at the moment.





Bayrull breathed deeply, the cool air rushing freely in a way that was almost soothing. The effort of moving Red called for more and more breathing, and he was grateful his throat felt free enough to take it. He'd have to thank the burning bugs for their warmth. It hurt, but it helped.

The world turned bright again, following in his improved mood as it lit the way. They were surrounded, true, but they were making progress too!

His ears perked up at his internal monologue. Those words sounded nice! Things really were looking up.

Words that sound right...maybe...they could help his friends put up a fight!

He dropped Red's paw. He'd be needing his mouth if he wanted to say anything properly, he'd worked out that much, and his teeth were getting tired anyways. "Guys, I think—" he began, cutting himself off with a frown and a shake of his head. No no, normal words wouldn't do. This situation was big, it needed good things to happen, and if they wanted good things to happen, they'd need to use good sounding words.

He took a deep breath, then repositioned himself to use his paws to move Red. "Let's bite the lizard," he said softly to himself as he focused hard on his next few words.

"Dur words will sound much better as one~" he began slowly, "Let's join together in a song." A melodic lilt entered his voice. The rhyme wasn't quite right-it was close but he needed to get it closer! He looked down at the bloody cat he was helping to move, deciding to take inspiration from the task at hand.

"My strength and speed will move dear Redinto the ground fit for the dead."

His voice was beginning to flow rhythmically now, the pace moving to match the melody.

"Our song will lead us to victory,
So come my friends and sing with me.
Carry our friends on with the tune
To see them deep in dirt cocoon."

That last line was funny, he thought, snickering. He took another deep breath, steadying his voice for one last, powerful line to motivate the others.

"We'll fight and shine and light the way
Our story will not end here today!"

They were still surrounded, but he knew just what to do. He'd move Red and find a way through. The cats did circle around their set, but he was sure there'd be room yet. Wait and see where it will be, then quick as you can, take what space is free.

He'd wait for a moment when the shadows broke their ranks, then dart forward with Red in his paws. They were almost there!



Bayrull tries to encourage the others with a song, and invites them to sing along with him. He attempts to time his movements with Red, hoping to dart forward into an opening one of the others makes.



Anatoli **

He/Him • Post 19 • 344 Words

<u>Journal</u>

The flock of shadows surrounding them distracted the blue tom and he couldn't quite figure out if his assumption about them was correct but he had to act and with that thought he launched himself into the nearest shadow cat, slicing through its weak form before it sizzled out underneath him. "They disappear! When they die!" he yelled to drown out the sound of adrenaline rushing into his limbs and ears. Just as he had finished, more shadows surrounded him. The adrenaline coursing through his body sent him surging towards the remaining shadowy creatures and one by one he took them down. They weren't tough opponents at the moment, maybe because of... "The light! It makes them weaker, I think."

He returned to the others, breathing audibly as he tried to regain his breath. "Tolya, Bay, I agree with Friend Nutmeg... There isn't much else to do. We will help... pro.. Protect you and our Cream and Red Friends, while you... Maybe we only chase away a few, and you dig since we are close?" Yeah, maybe. He glanced over his shoulder, they should be able to reach the place they were trying to reach if they could just off these shadows for a little more.

"I think.. It might be too dangerous to move separately." He mused turning around towards the fourth cat of their group, who had started.. singing? "Uh.. Bayrull? If we move Red and Cream together maybe we can push forward together. Protect each other's back while the others shine their light to keep us safe.. Er.. Safer" He quickly closed his jaw around the cream body's neck once more and pulled it over closer to Bayrull until the cream and red furs of the cats were touching.

He spun back around and noticed that the shadows were moving in closer again as Simon and Nutmeg looked around. "Keep the lights on the shadows.." he mumbled, jumping past the two swinging his claws at the approaching creatures once more. They had to thin them out before their plan could work.

* Summary *

Tolya returns to the others listening to their ideas. He thinks that it'd be smart for him and Bayrull to move the two bodies together side by side to protect each other in doing so. (Roll 1) When Nutmeg and Simon get distracted he jumps forward again, slashing at the shadows.(Roll 2)

Roll 2, Hunting/Takedown: 10

Anatoli is too distracted by his own movements to focus properly on his thoughts.

He makes a quick lunge for the Shadow Cats nearby. However, he quickly finds himself surrounded. It is only due to a lucky stumble that he falls clear of them avoiding the worst of the damage.

[Anatoli -5 Health Base]

Simon

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 27/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 000

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

Kk cold fury time

Summary:

Alarmed, Simon surges forward with the intent to move Anatoli back to the bodies while intimidating the shadow Beings into backing away with his light. Despite knowing they cannot reply, his cold voice 'asks' them to get away from him and the Others. He motions for Bay and Tolya to quickly move the bodies while the shadows are focused on him alone, even going so far as to continue distracting the shadows with his light by feinting one way and then the other, to throw them off.

Roll 1: 9
Roll 2: 13

Result: The Shadows are not intimidated nor fooled and continue to move forward.

Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 22.1 | Words: 326

"Nutmeg, that's bright!" Simon's praise broke through her musing, and her tail lifted at the way he worded them - that was good, right? Bright like their throat-lights? He continues to speak, addressing both Bayrull and Anatoli with a similar idea to hers. "Tolya, Bay, I agree with Friend Nutmeg... There isn't much else to do. We will help... pro.. Protect you and our Cream and Red Friends, while you... Maybe we only chase away a few, and you dig since we are close?" Nutmeg finds herself growing more and more relieved; with Simon in charge, things couldn't go wrong!

Her light grew brighter in her confidence, and she took a few, careful steps away from Simon to think of a way to aid his plan when Bayrull started talking, in a...different, no - usual, but slightly different way? It was funny, sounded and came together funny, but it was nice, too! She can't help but turn her head to look at him, seeing Simon follow suit, and immediately realizes her mistake as the shadow-cats encroach even further on their position, swallowing up their only opening.

She felt a tiny rumble grow again in her throat, faintly, but audibly, vocalizing her annoyance. They'd need to create another opening, for both Bayrull and Anatoli to do what they needed, but - how?

She spun in a small circle from where she stood then, **eyeing each shadow cat separately, trying to find the** spot where they were at their thinnest - somewhere, anywhere, there *had* to be the best angle to create an opening from...

And once they did, she could...she could what? Push forward with her light, maybe? She was fast, so she could do it in time, right? She had to be able to - the shadows were getting closer, closer to the bodies, and they needed an opening. Her claws dug into the ground beneath her, running through it in her stress and frantically thinking mind.

Summary

(post 1 of 2) At the loss of their only opening, **Nutmeg frantically looks around, eyeing each and every shadow cat, trying to find any available area that would be best to breach a new opening from.**

(CONT)

Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 22.2 | Words: 371

She couldn't find a good spot. They were *everywhere*, so clumped and so many of them that she could barely see past them. They needed to move, and fast; before there were *too* many of them to even try getting past anymore.

Sucking in a breath, she turned to Simon, an idea on her tongue before it was even fully formed in her mind. "We..." She glanced back at the shadows, towards Bayrull, and Anatoli, and swallowed.

"We need to...to push, o-our own way. They won't...w-wont stop coming, so, we have to..." She swallowed, again, lifting one paw, then the next, looking a little silly as she tried to properly word herself. "We can run around, the, um, the bodies. Stay the - keep, the lights, on the shadows, while going around, a-and, that should give us s-some time, o-or, Bayrull and Anatoli."

What she lacked in size, she made up for in speed - and what Simon lacked in speed, he definitely made up with size. More light, spread around, really fast - the simple idea melded together in her head, and she felt nearly confident enough to actually move to start it.

"I-I don't know what else to do, no other...no other ideas, so.." She murmured, glancing tentatively towards Simon before she took the steps forward to put her plan into motion. He would follow her, she knew that, and it made her feel a little better.

Exhaling, she stood just in front of one of the bodies, staring up at one of the closest shadow cats. Lifting her head high, she thought about the things that made her happy - being happy made the orb glow, she remembers that - and the more it glowed, the brighter it was.

Bayrull, Simon, Anatoli, the lizards they first met...the lizard that she *killed* - no, *no*, she wrestles that thought out of her head - she needs *happy*. So she thinks of her friends, **and wills her orb to glow brighter**, **as she begins to sprint around the bodies in a closed circle**, **daring to get as close to the shadows as she has to, turning to face them to momentarily halt them, then continuing on and repeating the process.**

Summary

(post 2 of 2) Nutmeg relays a new plan to Simon, and, confident that he will provide teamwork with her in it, falls into action. After willing her orb to grow brighter through happy memories and thoughts, she sprints in a circle around the bodies, getting as close as she dares to the shadow cats to stop, turn, flash them, then continue on and repeat the process.

Simon

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 28/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 341

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

"We need to...to push, o-our own way. They won't...we-won't stop coming, so, we have to..." Simon flicked an ear toward the young cat behind him, trying to divide his attention between her and the Beings. It seemed like his words from before had little effect. Or rather, none at all, so he was open to ideas. "We can run around, the, um, the bodies. Stay the - keep, the lights, on the shadows, while going around, a-and, that should give us s-some time, o-or, Bayrull and Anatoli."

"You're right, Nutmeg." He beamed as her sudden running and quick movements forced the circle to widen. Using her small body to their advantage... How could he help, though? Merely stepping up to the shadows with his orb wasn't working, anymore. Not to mention that more shadows were gathering.

And they were growing bolder. Fine. Then they- he- would grow bolder too.

Earlier, he'd been able to find a point where the Beings fizzled and changed against the light. It had led to an opening earlier, so... If he just slowed down and thought about the flickering bodies and looked...

There! He narrowed his already naturally squinted gaze at the place in the crowd that seemed the most viable. He waved his large, bushy tail to get the attention of their two male companions. "I'm going to make the path. Bay, Tolya. Be ready to go right away with our Other Friends." He meowed to them as he crouched. He had to put his hind paw on the ground for balance, but he thankfully didn't hold the position for long, as he surged forward a second later.

Orb shining, he rammed his large body into the 'weak' spot he'd seen, rearing up with a pained wince that marred his expression as he swiped out to disperse the Beings. (2) "Go!" Even if it didn't open a perfect way forward, it was this or risk the Beings growing too numerous to get through. If the others were fast enough, they could make it.

Summary:

Cajoled once more into action, Simon works in tandem with Nutmeg to finally break through to the burial site. Her speed and the glow must make it easier to pinpoint one they can use. He studies the shadowy ranks for a weakness and seizes it, hobbling forward with renewed confidence.

Roll 1: 11

<u>Result:</u> Simon notices that after Nutmeg finishes passing a particular point in her run around the Circle the line of Shadow Cats thins for a short while. It doesn't disappear completely, but perhaps if they can push through it at the right moment it might provide a clear path to the burial site.

Summary 2:

Simon finds the spot that seems the best option and, despite the wobbly balance of bis hefty body on three legs, jumps. **He tries to slam through the crowd with a body tackle while calling out for Bay**and tolya to MOVE. this could be their chance.

Roll 2: 16

Result: tba

* Anatoli **

He/Him • Post 20 • 407 Words

Journal

Hissing under his breath, Anatoli felt a sharp pain on his side where one of the shadows had managed to get him. He cursed himself for getting too risky trying to help out the others. He felt even more bad when Simon tried to help him but instead found himself in the middle of the shadows himself. Their plan was starting to fall apart before it had even really started. "We need to move!" he commanded, returning to Bayrull and the two bodies.

"This isn't how I thought it'd go but... we need to act fast or it'll only get worse" he concluded with the shadows showing less interest in Simon's light this time around, it did seem dimmer than before. Maybe the worry in the gray, fluffy tom got the better of him. Tolya sighed and turned back towards Bay "We each hold onto one of the bodies and move right next to each other so the shadows can't sneak up behind us, alright?" He waited for Bayrull's response before getting ready to move the cream body once more, this time with Bayrull and Red beside him.

"You uh you did that... singing thing?" He mumbled for a moment thinking about it "The rhythm it might.. Help us stick together and not get too far away." Tolya wasn't sure if his thoughts made sense, they sounded sillier said out loud than he thought they would. But they were already said now. No turning back.

"Your strength and speed will move dear Red into the ground fit for the dead?"

His tone was awkward but it felt like it could help them keep up with each other better, especially with the creatures threatening them. He felt the light below his chin light up a bit at a nervous chuckle at this ridiculous situation. This might be useful, he thought to himself before getting ready.

He gave Bayrull a nod before beginning to push Cream's corpse forward towards the clear patch of earth all while awkwardly singing along to Bayrull's little song doing his best to sync up with the other tom to make quick progress. Soon his awkwardness began to fade and the purpose of their action replaced the shame he may have felt about it before. With every line of text his orb went a little brighter and he used it to shine against any shadows that were to attempt to approach them on their way.

* Summary *

Anatoli returns to Bayrull and explains his plan in more detail. He joins Bayrull in his song and begins to push Evelyn's body towards the clear patch of earth sticking closely to Bayrull and Margo (Roll 1), using the song to keep the same rhythm. The song brightening his mood also brightens the source of light under his chin which he tries to use to scare off any shadows that may pursue them. (Roll2)

Roll 1, Speed: 19
Roll 2, Intimidation (Strength): 5
(Result below Bayrull)



"Fast, right!" Bayrull said, nodding at what he told him, Anatoli.

He craned his head back, trying to look for a good path between the shadows. He hadn't had much luck before, but that was probably just because he was trying to push ahead alone. With Anatoli there, he'd have better luck.

"The rhythm it might.. Help us stick together and not get too far away."

Bayrull's grin grew wide, and he whipped back around to Anatoli, beaming at the other's interest in the song. "Yeah, That's it exactly! Here, um, let me think." He gazed up at the trees, wondering just what it was making the place bright and dark again and he considered some brand new lyrics.

In the meantime, Anatoli continued the song.

"Your strength and speed will move dear Red into the ground fit for the dead?"

"Yes, that's it!" Bayrull said quickly, encouraging his friend. Anatoli was cautious with his first verse, if Bayrull would help, things couldn't get worse.

"arms out the sound to pick his pitch."

These scoundrels thus won't win tonight We'll light the way, we'll stand and fight For all our friends alive and not, We move ahead, to what we've sought

Sing now with me An-A-ToI-I
And we'll move far too gracefully
Their darkened form won't bother us
For we are far too brave and thus

We'll fight and shine and light the way

Our story will not end here today!

In time with the rhythm, he tugged at dear Red, moving along and further ahead. Anatoli moved with him, falling in step and in time with the music. Bayrull craned his neck back around. Nutmeg and Simon were clearing the way, making room between the shadows for their next attempt. With song and speed that's timed just right, they'd get there before the night.

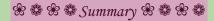
The light on his neck glimmered cheerfully, seeming to flicker in time with the tune. He hoped it helped. These shadowy beasts-they seemed to hate the light. It made them nervous, it gave them fright.

So careful now, through shadow go
These beasts would like to lay us low
Move there and now most nimbly
Through space our friends have now made free

Then to the ground we'll set our paws Where we will dig without a pause I'd rather starve a sorry wretch Than let their teeth, my neighbors etch

We'll fight and shine and light the way Our story will not end here today!

There! This was their chance!



Bayrull sings along with Anatoli, helping to synchronize their movements as **they attempt to charge through the shadows together with Evelyn and Margo**. **He boldly bares his neck light at the shadows to intimidate them** as he dashes forward.

Alone, Anatoli would not have managed it. However, with the combined force of Bayrull, the two of them slam through the Shadow Cats crowding around Simon and Nutmeg. Their strike is heavy and they break through the barricade. The opening will close soon if Simon and Nutmeg do not follow. Anatoli and Bayrull are now standing on the burial site.

[Anatoli & Bayrull take out 15 Shadow Cats. Total defeated = 25]





He/him ♦♦♦ Post 29/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 483

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

Hitting the shadows was a weird sensation. One that lasted both far too long and not long at all. One beat he was crashing, stumbling, into them, the next he was propelled back, tripping over his own paws. Crashing to the ground with a groan, he felt as the fur along his side was tugged, and he looked up just in time to see one of the Beings retracting with his fur. It'd tried to strike him, but the sheer amount of the fluff coating his body made it impossible! At least, for the moment.

A sigh of relief shot through his mouth as the rush faded, and he realized that, despite there being no damage, they were still in the circle. The same spot as before. But, just as his relief was turning to sadness at his failure...

"Your strength and speed will move dear Red into the ground fit for the dead?"

Tolya? He craned his neck around, the fluff that saved him making it harder so he dragged himself upright again.

"□000h~

These scoundrels thus won't win tonight We'll light the way, we'll stand and fight For all our friends alive and not, We move ahead, to what we've sought,"

It was a bit hard for Simon to grasp onto the flow, at first, but he found himself nodding along as each rhyme beat hit, one after the next.

"Sing now with me An-A-Tol-I And we'll move far too gracefully Their darkened form won't bother us For we are far too brave and thus,"

There was a smile working its way onto Simon's face as his spirits were lifted again. This crazy whirlwind and his words were truly something to be seen and heard.

We'll fight and shine and light the way Our story will not end here today!"

Simon watched, amazed and awed, as Anatoli and Bayrull let their voices ring out to aid them in bolstering their efforts. With Cream and Red in tow, the two surged forth and collided with the circle of shadows. They managed what Simon couldn't, and he trilled in triumph. Now he and Nutmeg just had to hurry along and--

Oh! He turned to find Nutmeg, having picked up on the fact that they should really follow their Friends, "Nutmeg! Our Friends have done it and brought the Others with them! Come along with your brightness!" He swept his tail in the direction of the gap, before he hurried that way himself. Going on three legs was easier than before, but he was still not nearly as fast as Nutmeg or the other two.

Still, he put the effort in, panting as he moved.

With all the elation and joy combating the bad feelings roiling in his middle, he couldn't help but lift his head to the shadows, unwilling to let those same bad feelings negate the wonders his companions were pulling off.

Summary:

Simon is thrown back, his thick fur saving him as he tumbles back into the circle. He watches Bay and Anatoli take the Others and bust their own way through, and he calls to Nutmeg to follow. He hurries after the pair with as much speed as his off balance will allow(1). He makes sure to let his pride in his Friends' ideas show through his orb as he uses the light to continue warding off the Beings as he and Nutmeg pass(2).

Roll 1: 11
Roll 2: 18

<u>Result:</u> Simon passes through successfully. His light holds the Shadow Cats at bay for now. However, the creatures seem less fearful of the light now. They he sitate for less time and don't step as far back.



Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 23 | Words: 303

"Nutmeg! Our Friends have done it and brought the Others with them! Come along with your brightness!"

Her chest heaving with exertion and adrenaline, Nutmeg skid to a stop near the middle of the throng, looking back towards Simon just as he gestured towards the opening. Anatoli and Bayrull had made it through with the bodies, and she watched with hopeful eyes as Simon followed them.

She was getting tired - she could feel it, gradually, a small ache in her legs from running so fast and stopping, then going, and doing it all again, but she could manage a little more. They were *almost there!*

She glanced around, struggling to catch her breath, needing just a moment to herself so she could force another burst of speed. The two bodies were there, they were safe - for now - and Simon was through, and he was safe with Anatoli and Bayrull. All three - five - of the others had made it, and she felt nothing but relief.

She turned away, just for a moment, to really look. There were so many shadow cats, more than she'd seen even just seconds before, filling in and almost managing to replicate the image of the straight line of wet and

cold stuff she'd jumped over with the others before. It was a haunting sight, and she couldn't even fathom where she'd gotten the bravery she had just moments before when she'd been darting in and out between them, stalling them and leaving room for Anatoli and Bayrull to drag the bodies along.

She inhales, exhales, and turns back to the opening. She had to join the others. Without wasting another moment, Nutmeg pushed off the ground in another burst of speed and aimed for the opening that the others had taken just before her.

Summary

(1/2) Nutmeg uses another burst of speed to run towards the opening that the others had taken. (CONT)

Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 23.2 | Words: 341

She passes through without trouble, throwing her paws ahead of her to act as a brake as she stopped just above the burial site. It felt surreal, to finally arrive at it after all the trouble and stress they'd gone through to actually get to it, and she appreciates the lack of damp, sticky moss beneath her claws as she flexes them into the dirt.

She turns her head, towards the bodies that Anatoli and Bayrull still held onto, and makes a gesture towards the ground beneath her. "Now, I-like earlier, with the hot-bug home, we can pull at the ground to hide them, r-right? The, the b-bodies," she mews, looking more so at Bayrull than anyone else. She glanced at Anatoli and Simon, too, just for a moment, gauging their states and expressions.

She then looked to the shadow-cats, noticing their further lack of acknowledgment for their throat-lights, and her confidence deflated, just a little. They would need to fight, and somehow, she already knew she'd be a terrible fit for the job. She'd already temporarily managed to push the dead-lizard issue to the back of her mind, but if she had to physically hurt something else again - even if that something was malignant - she'd be overrun with resurfaced guilt and grief.

She would just have to do something else, and she already had a pretty good idea of what she'd be a better fit for. She turned to look at the dirt, pushing into it with a paw, testing it's give. They'd need to make a lot of space for two bodies, and they weren't exactly that small, either.

She crouched down, lowering herself as she began to paw at the dirt, not enjoying the way it felt on her fur, beneath her claws, or *between* her claws, but not uttering a single complaint as she went.

She had only one focused thought on her mind - bury the bodies, keep them safe. And so Nutmeg dug at the earth with every ounce of strength she could offer.

<u>Summary</u>

Nutmeg makes it through the opening with the others, and upon surveying their current predicament, **goes** straight to digging through the dirt to bury the bodies.

* Anatoli *

He/Him • Post 21 • 426 Words Journal

The nervous lump in Anatoli's throat loosened with every step he and Bayrull took forward together to the rhythm of their little song. It felt less and less awkward but the blue cat caught himself getting a little distracted thinking about what the other two might think in the beginning, letting his guard down a little too long until one of the shadows came eerily close to him but thanks to Bayrull's own light the shadow withdrew again long enough for Tolya to take it out before they continued.

So careful now, through shadow go
These beasts would like to lay us low
Move there and now most nimbly
Through space our friends have now made free

Then to the ground we'll set our paws Where we will dig without a pause I'd rather starve a sorry wretch Than let their teeth, my neighbors etch

We'll fight and shine and light the way

Our story will not end here today!

Both their voices could be heard through the underbrush as they charged through the wall of shadow cats, which had been thinned out prior by their other two companion's combined work. Their brisk pace seemed to have done the trick, as Anatoli and Bayrull found themselves on their designated burial site together with the bodies of Red and Cream. A sigh of relief escaped Tolya's mouth but it wasn't quite time to celebrate just yet.

He quickly spun back around to spot Nutmeg running towards them, evading various shadows in her way with ease, soon followed by their last companion, Simon, making his way through their enemies. They did it! There was only one thing left to do: Put these two poor cats to rest like Nutmeg suggested "Now, I-like earlier, with the hot-bug home, we can pull at the ground to hide them, r-right? The, the b-bodies," "Yes, the earth will keep them safe I hope.. Nutmeg, Bayrull? You should dig." He thought out loud "The shadows.. They seem less bothered by the light. We might have no choice but to fight but.. Simon and I can protect you."

He turned to face the shadows that were closing in on them again with a growl. His tail was puffed up and his hair bristled along his spine in an attempt to appear as large as possible in order to intimidate the intruders before lashing out at the nearest shadow cats. He kept his eyes moving around the perimeter trying to catch any enemies trying to sneak past them to attack the digging cats behind him.

* Summary *

Anatoli and the others come back together on the burial site. He suggests that Bayrull and Nutmeg start digging while he and Simon protect them from the shadow cats. **He readies himself and attacks the ones closest to him**

(Roll 1) while keeping his senses sharp to try and take out any that may attempt to sneak past them to attack the other two. (Roll 2)

Roll 1, Hunting/Takedown: 6
Roll 2, Reaction Time: 5

Anatoli's attack acts as a distraction. However, his first hit doesn't hit with any particular force. He finds himself overwhelmed. He moves quickly to deter the ones closest to the group, doing his best to avoid the claws of the furious Shadow Cats.

[Anatoli takes 6 damage]
[Simon & Anatoli take out 10 Shadow Cats.

Total defeated = 35]

YSimonY

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 30/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 402

"--we can pull at the ground to hide them, r-right? The, the b-bodies," said Nutmeg as Simon made it to their sides.

"Yes, the earth will keep them safe I hope.. Nutmeg, Bayrull? You should dig," Anatoli chimed in. "The shadows.. They seem less bothered by the light. We might have no choice but to fight but.. Simon and I can protect you."

The long-furred male nodded in agreement. Slow with his paws as he was, Simon couldn't just sit and let Anatoli fend these things off alone. Especially with the danger looming closer than ever. He shook out his immense pelt, trying to summon up one more bout of the rushing energy he used to cross the river, before. Most of the fur bushed out, and he flexed his claws against the dirt as he swept his tail over Cream's body. He gave the odd shoulder carvings one more look, and then turned back to the other, living cats.

"It would be best to not... not get too far. Lest we leave a path for them as they did for us." He advised. To the diggers, he said, "We'll give you as much of a cycle as you need..." What was he trying to say, here? His eyes flitted up to the expansive ceiling overhead, considering the cycles of light and dark and how long each had been. A word was on the tip of his tongue... "time? Yes. Time. We'll give you as much time as you need." He cracked a tired smile across his whitening muzzle, "The shadows will go hungry." That didn't sound quite right, to his ears, but that was something to think about later.

As Anatoli bounded toward the Beings, though, he lifted his deep voice, He murmured some soft encouragement to the already digging Nutmeg and Bay, and then followed.

While Tolya dove into the fighting, Simon remained aware and back from the shadows, keeping the space needed for Anatoli to swing but staying close enough to guard his back. Whenever a Being got too close, Simon tried to obstruct the blow and knock the shadow aside, and this also went for when he would see a shadow cat trying to make for the diggers. IT was all very quick and confusing and a bit much for his head, so after a point he just tried to focus on keeping the shadows off of Anatoli.

Summary:

Simon agrees to team up with Anatoli in Keeping the diggers and bodies safe, though he cautions against getting too far from the site itself in fighting. Still, he doesn't hesitate to <u>watch Anatoli's back</u> when the other leaps into action, trying to leave as few openings as possible (i). At the same time, he tries to remain aware of the Beings that try and sneak around, and stop them when Anatoli cannot (2).

Roll 1: 3 Roll 2: 14

Result: Simon assists Anatoli and keeps the other from being overwhelmed in the fight. Together they take out 10 shadow cats, and successfully hold the enemy's attention.

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

* Anatoli *

He/Him • Post 22 • 377 Words

<u>Journal</u>

Side by side with Simon, Anatoli felt somewhat reassured to fight next to someone so they could watch each other's backs, however, Simon didn't always quite seem like a fighter. His doubt in the other tom's abilities was quickly proven wrong when Tolya launched himself at the closest shadow cats once again and similar to his previous attempt he was quickly overwhelmed by the sheer amount of them quickly bearing down on him, trying to get him by surprise the second he wasn't paying 100% of his attention to every single one of them. Luckily he had Simon, who rushed to his side and together they managed to take down a few of them.

Checking behind him, Tolya spotted a few shadows trying to sneak up on Nutmeg. Leaving Simon's side for a moment he crashed into them, tearing through them with his fangs. A painful scratch across his back made him yowl in pain and anger. He spun around to smack his assailant but found Simon had already taken care of it. He took a deep breath but winced at the stinging sensation emanating from the scratches and marks he had accumulated already. "This sucks" he growled under his breath following Simon.

His tail was lashing back and forth in annoyance and maybe to distract from the discomfort of his wounds as he stared at the shadows surrounding them, trying to figure out if there were any weak spots they may have missed in the mess. Something that would give them an edge in their battle against them or something that would help them hold off the shadow cat's approach long enough for Bayrull and Nutmeg to dig a whole deep enough to bury the two

bodies. Hopefully that would be enough, he thought, so far they haven't really thought past burying the bodies. But what if the shadows did not leave them alone after? Anatoli shook his head. They hadn't thought of that yet but they also won't have to until this is over.

Analyzing their enemies, Tolya thought he may have found a piece of information that may prove helpful in their endeavors. Hoping that his assumption would prove correct, he lunged forward in another attempt to take down some of the approaching shadows.

* Summary *

Anatoli fights side by side with Simon, taking out some of the shadows that try to sneak past them to attack the others. Anatoli analyzes their enemies trying to figure out a potential weak point. (Roll 1) Hoping that what he figured out would prove helpful he gets ready to defend against any incoming shadows. (Roll 2)

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Roll 1, Creativity: 3
Roll 2, Reaction Time: 1
(Result after Simon's next post)
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Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 24 | Words: 304

As she dug, Nutmeg could hear the sound of a fight behind her, of Simon and Anatoli's combined efforts to keep them safe. Simon promised to give them as much...time, as they needed, and Nutmeg knew they would need a lot. Two bigger bodies, only two cats able to dig...the surface of the dirt was removed now, at least - which would make it easier to continue, but she was slow. She didn't have enough force behind her digging to go much further with each scrape at the dirt, but she could at least make up for it with her stamina.

So, **she continued digging alongside Bayrull**, focusing solely on the job. She ignored the noises of battle, the hissing, growling, snarling, the sounds of of panting and running and the yowls of pain coming from Anatoli-

Wait!

Pausing mid-dig, Nutmeg's head turned in an instant, her eyes wide and fearful as she looked at the amount of scratches and red marks adorning Anatoli's dark pelt. He grumbled something she couldn't hear, and really looked more angry now than hurt, but sympathy and a pool of angry, protective rage broiled within her as she forced herself to return to digging.

She - they, her and Bayrull, they had to finish soon, so the shadow cats would give up and leave them all alone.

Soon...faster, she had to dig faster. She moved around the hole she'd been digging into and angled herself on the other side, leaning in further than she had been and flinging chunks of dirt out at a time, spraying it anywhere and everywhere as she went. If it hit the shadow-cats on it's way down, that'd just be a bonus.

Nutmeg's paws moved faster and faster as she dug, trying to speed up the digging process for Simon and Anatoli's safety.

Summary

Nutmeg is concerned greatly for Anatoli and Simon with their wounds as **she continues to dig with Bayrull,** and puts her energy **into trying to dig even faster.**



"Now, I-like earlier, with the hot-bug home, we can pull at the ground to hide them, r-right? The, the b-bodies,"

Bayrull nodded at Nutmeg. It'd work just like it did in the song. He'd dig, Red would hop on in, and he'd tuck her in with the dirt he dug. Nutmeg would help too, that way they could get the other cat helped just as much.

Between him and Red though, he thought Red was his favorite. Her name was just so easy to put into song.

Now all our friends stand close as one But our work has just begun Into the dirt deep down below We'll form a place for Red to 90

And as we dig our friends will stand
Our back they'll guard and work defend
We'll dig away tirelessly
While they face raw adversity

We'll fight and shine and light the way Our story will not end here today!

He moved his paws quickly, running through lyrics as fast as he could think them up and picking up the pace of his movements as he did so. Despite his attempt at speed though, it had truly been a long couple of nights. He'd been through a lot, and he was tired. His stomach still hurt from the bug he ate, contrasting with the chill of water from his time in the river.

Enduring it all was a necessity, and he took several deep breaths in his now clear lungs to regain some energy. He'd try shorter lines now, ones that took less breath to accomplish. It would save more energy for his paws.

We dig down low You deal a blow Through dirt descend Our danger end

Uncertainty Absurdity Collaborate Eliminate

We'll fight and shine and light the way

Our story will not end here today!

Dirt was beginning to pile up behind them. It was progress. It wouldn't be long now before they could rest and play like they had before. He still wanted to try a lizard. He never managed to catch his earlier.

* * * Summary * * * *

Bayrull helps dig a grave, relying on his stamina to keep going.

Simon

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 31/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 430

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

Blustering as he was with his body so far, Simon was able to keep pace with the shadow cats. Enough, at least, to keep them from swarming and overwhelming Anatoli. So far, at least, so good. His wild fur whisking through the air as he moved, Simon brought down another of the shadow Beings as he slammed a paw down on it. He watched it fizzle and disperse, before he turned to the next one.

The triumph he felt as he defeated the next one swelled his light and drove him harder.

It wasn't even the thrill of battle he felt. In fact, he hated the sensation of ripping across the black, semi-tangible pelts. But they threatened something he treasured. Something that, despite only knowing them all for a short time, he wouldn't let them take.

Out of the corner of his eye, Simon saw that Anatoli had disappeared from his side. Jerking around, he saw the other had taken care of a shadow cat that had slipped by and gone for Nutmeg. Only, Anatoli didn't see the one following him, either. Lunging forward, Simon reached them just as the Being struck, injuring Anatoli. With a jangling, hoarse growl, he grabbed the shadow and yanked it back, shoving it to the ground and dropping on it with both forepaws. He could only spare the other male a quick glance, as the creatures kept coming, but Anatoli still looked able to defend.

"We di9 down low "—You deal a blow

Ah, that was Bayrull, wasn't it? Behind him and Tolya, digging away with Nutmeg. Simon couldn't stop to listen to any of the words, of course, but the rhythm was repeating and familiar enough to remind him of the beating inside of him. He'd heard it most prominently both when running from the hotbugs and in the river, though now it was returning to thump in his ears and drown out Bay's song. Simon shook his head wildly for a second, and gave what he hoped was a reassuring smile as he followed suit with the rest of his body. It kept him alert, despite

the lull he felt, and let him shake off his own 'jigglepaws'- ones from tiredness rather than fear. Knowing he had to keep moving, he <u>once more dove in the path of a Being that went for Tolya.</u>

"We'll fight and shine and light the way

Our story will not end here today!"

He purred as Bayrull's enthusiasm spread over the group, finding he much preferred his words to the disorienting noises from the shadow cats.

<u>Summary</u>: Simon is glad that the distraction is working, but he isn't quite sure how long they can keep this up. Nevertheless, <u>he continues to cover Tolya when he can</u>(1), and when that's not needed, <u>he</u> <u>throws himself at any shadows too close to the dig site, lashing out</u>(2).

Roll 1: 3
Roll 2: 4

Result: The two toms work in unison together. Although their movements are clumsy, and for a moment they stumble. Simon fails to analyse anything useful about the Shadow Cats weaknesses, and their movements are slow and sloppy. But they work so perfectly together, anticipating the next cat's move like it's second nature. They manage to make progress and take out 10 of the Shadow Cats.

[Simon & Anatoli take out 10 Shadow Cats. Total defeated = 45]



Nutmeq | She/Her | Post 25 | Words: 341

As the two of them dug, Nutmeg could hear Bayrull talking beside her, like he had earlier while they were dragging along the bodies. He spoke in rhymes, flowing the words together beautifully in a way that made it just a little bit easier to keep scraping at the ground underneath her, and made it all the more easier to breath through the strenuous process. Scrape, dig, pull, push, *breathe*. It was exhausting. Her paws throbbed, almost like the hot-bug bites she had received earlier, and it hurt more and more after each scoop of dirt she pulled from the hole. The soft, fleshy parts of her paws stung too, and she struggled to work through it, fighting to keep a whimper from breaking past her mouth. She could do this!

The hole they'd been creating was sizable now, at least, and she could tell they were nearly done. The red-furred cat would be able to fit easily, but the cream one would need much more room, which would prompt them to dig even further.

She angled her paws at a slight curve, trying to avoid the soil from brushing constantly over the same spots on her pads **as she continued to dig.** Bayrull was hard at work next to her, still speaking, and she let the words distract her from the discomfort. Sucking in a long, deep breath, she attempted to pick up her speed again, **trying to hurry along the digging process** for the cream cat's body.

She tried to glance behind her, every now and then, to see how both Simon and Anatoli were faring. From what she could occasionally gleam, the two were working together nicely, protecting each other's blind spots and keeping the shadow-cats far from Bayrull and Nutmeg, and she feels a surge of...something, flow into her chest at the sight; and despite the tension, stress, and general feel of their situation at hand, she allows herself to feel a little more at ease with the two stronger toms keeping them safe as they dig.

Summaru

Nutmeg finds comfort in Bayrull's song as she allows it to distract her from the discomfort filling her paws, continuing to dig and attempting to speed up the process once more.

Simon

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 32/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 351

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

It was odd how easily he and Anatoli were about to weave around one another and fight back to back. Odd or not, though, Simon was more than happy to be right there, by Tolya. Well, mostly. He'd probably be much happier doing just about anything else. The feeling of slicing into the shadow things--it felt awful.

A dodge here, a close call there. How long had they been fighting? He wasn't sure, but Simon was really starting to feel the strain on all of his legs. It was like the river all over again, only longer. He got lucky, just now, having nearly slipped and stumbling right into a swathe of the Beings. Thankfully, he'd managed to right himself at the last moment and use the momentum to swipe right through a different shadow, though he gave a small cry as he leaned onto his twisted leg.

He was forced to stumble, limp, backwards and let Anatoli take the front, just long enough for Simon to re-orient himself and wait for the cruel throbbing to subside to miniature thumps of pain. It was fine, though, as he had every faith that the other blue cat could

While he was regaining his breath, Simon found himself suddenly worried over the thought of more shadows coming to join the swarm. They'd appeared so many and so fast, before, what if more were coming? He threw a look over his shoulder, observing the many shadows that encircled them with a touch of dread. Was it just him... or were there not as many as before? Not that Simon had thought to count. Something pricked at his head, less intense than the hotbug's sting, but maybe more annoying. Chasing the loose thought, he realized: there was definitely less now. The ones they forced apart with their paws and fangs were not being replaced by more!

This wasn't a fight of attrition-- there was an end to be seen!

Spirited, he lifted his chin as he hobbled back to Anatoli's side, "They're not as many, now. Almost there!" He wheezed, before getting back to it.

<u>Summary</u>: Slicing at another creature, Simon laments, briefly. Rolling to his feet, he takes a chance in the lull of combat to glance around the mass of shadows. <u>Are they making a dent in the mass with</u>

how many Beings they've struck down(1)? Then, he adjusts himself and leaps back into the thick of it with Tolya(2).

Roll 1: 18
Roll 2: 7

Result: (1): Simon can gets a clear glance of the number of Shadow Cats. Although the Shadow Cats they have defeated have faded into obscurity, he thinks that he can accurately remember the number. It seems they have taken almost half of the Shadow Cats down.

127. 104

* Anatoli *

He/Him • Post 23 • 316 Words

Journal

Their lack of experience in this kind of situation, or any type of situation really, was blatantly obvious by the way they clumsily fought off the shadow cats side by side but to Anatoli's surprise they managed to keep the worst of it away. Every now and then one or two would almost slip past them to get to Red, Cream and their digging friends but as if reading each other's minds they always managed to swoop in and pick them out before they managed to reach them. Tolya sent an encouraging nod at Simon when he spotted the progress Bayrull and Nutmeg had been making with the hole. It seemed almost big enough to put the two to rest finally and hopefully, he prayed it really would turn the shadows away from them. He wasn't sure how much longer he could stand the assault.

"Almost there it seems!" he meowed, hoping to encourage Simon and the others to hold on just a bit longer. He took a deep breath and squared up at the shadows once more, standing guard, his flank burnt where one shadow had left its mark, or maybe it had been multiple at this point. Tolya wasn't entirely sure.

When he noticed Simon's leg slip away under him he was ready to leap forward only for Simon to already be back on his legs, albeit less steadily as he retreated behind him. Anatoli moved in front of him to give him time to recover, throwing careful glances back between attacks to see how the other was doing "You alright?" he asked in a moment of peace noting the observation Simon had made about the number of shadows encircling them. "Seems like it yeah.." he confirmed checking the number of shadows "But there's still way too many." he growled, preparing to defend against another wave of attacks as the remaining shadows charged forward.

* Summary *

Tolya continues to fight side by side with Simon (Roll 1), attempting a more defensive approach to save his energy. (Roll 2) He encourages the others that they're almost there.

Roll 1, Takedown/Hunting: 9
Roll 2, Stamina: 16

Simon and Anatoli move in perfect unison, dodging the incoming attacks. They strike out at the shadow cats with masterful precision, and take down 15 of them in the process.

[Simon & Anatoli take out 15 Shadow Cats. Total defeated = 60]

Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 26 | Words: 300

Nutmeg's mouth hung open permanently now as she sucked in gasps of air, her legs and paws shaking with the effort of each pull, each shove, each flex of her limbs. She was so tired, but she knows it can't possibly compare to the exhaustion of the two fighting for their safety behind her. They had been going all this time, taking down shadow after shadow, earning nicks and cuts for their efforts, and she flinches everytime she hears one of them grunt or hiss from a hit.

She glances over at Bayrull, listening for his ragged pants, seeing how fast he can still manage to move. She then looks towards the hole again, now just nearly big enough to fit both bodies. She imagines the two cats, fit side-by-side in it, together and safe, and it fills her with just a little bit more spirit to keep going. They were almost there, almost there.

"Almost there it seems!" Anatoli says, mirroring her thoughts. "A-almost!" She replied shakily, shoving a chunk of dirt underneath her and to the side. The hole got bigger and wider still, the mounds of dirt removed from her and Bayrull's digging piling up to her size as proof of their work. "Just a little more, Bayrull, t-then they'll, w-we, will be safe." She spoke softly, trying to invigorate her companion next to her.

She continued on with her digging, leaning into the hole as far as she could go without falling in herself and scooping out arm-fuls of dirt at a time. She also **tried to regulate her breathing a little,** hoping to last just a little longer to finish the hole. Her chest was beginning to hurt, her paws had long since gone numb, but she needed to last as long as she could.

Summary

After encouraging Bayrull to keep going, Nutmeg **continues to dig,** and **tries to regulate her breathing** so she can last just a bit longer.

At last they have pulled back enough of the soil to form a reasonably sized hole. However, without warning, the remaining Shadow Cats lunge.

Nutmeg steps back, falling into the hole when one of them strikes her. The claws caught her chin and she can feel the warm blossoming blood stain her fur. It hurts when she hits the ground, but this fall saved her from the more serious onslaught.

Simon is caught heavily around the ear, and for a moment all he can hear is the sound of shrill ringing. His head spins, and another Shadow Cat catches him across the side, claws tearing his pelt.

Bayrull is descended upon by a large group, and by the time he manages to pull himself free his body is coated in the blood of many thin scratch wounds.

Anatoli gets the worst of it. The Shadow Cats fall on him, tearing and biting. When he is finally able to shake them off, patches of his fur are missing and he is bloody and bruised. His front left leg is suspiciously painful when he tries to put his weight on it.

The three adult cats regroup around the hole, Nutmeg is still in it, and the two cats they're guarding lie behind them.

Nutmeg takes = 25 Damage Simon takes = 36 Damage Bayrull takes = 37 Damage Anatoli takes = 39 Damage

Simon

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 33/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 503

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

The onslaught was sudden and all encompassing. One moment, he is slashing away at the shadows with Anatoli, confident in their progress. They'd managed to cull a good lot more of them since he'd taken his moment of respite. But then, something seemed to stir within the Beings. The shadows raged and thrash with a new energy of their own, and, almost disturbingly quiet, the aggressors rammed full tilt into him.

For a beat, two, all Simon could hear was intense ringing. Everything had moved so fast that it took him a few delayed seconds to realize what just happened, leaving him prone on the ground. He'd been knocked down by one of the beings, a large one, with a mighty blow across his head. It'd left him stunned, head spinning and ear bleeding from a tear as he lay gasping. Too shocked and winded to retaliate in time, Simon could only feel some form of detached understanding of it all as the Being threw itself onto him. It dug its claws past the long fur with a malicious glee, yanking the poor old tom swiftly back into reality as he choked on his yow!. This was apparently what he needed, though, as the pain pushed through his shock, unlocking his limbs from their pseudo-paralysis. With a hefty kick, he knocked the Being away and rolled onto his paws, frantically lashing out to keep it away.

His side stung as the same ichor that coated Cream and Red seeped sluggishly from him, Simon didn't have to check to know as much. He could feel it clinging to his fur, the long strands now clumping and growing sticky like when he'd touched the sap, before. The Being and others had backed off just enough to let Simon zero in on Cream and Red.

They were so close. What was this all for, if these creatures got to the bodies? Or worse-- took one of them instead?

Weakened greatly, he drove the Beings away with difficulty, before grasping Cream's nape within his jaws. He had to get them into the hole. The bodies had been right by the digging, so all he had to do was get Cream to the edge, and then let them fall in. Aiding Cream into the hole as best he could, he glanced worriedly at Nutmeg who had fallen in. He found that no words would come, so he just lightly brushed his tail over her as he staggered back to haul Red along as well. Hoping that was enough to

shield them from the threat of another attack, he gave Nutmeg a pained smile and turned, shooting his large paw out to return the favor back to the Beings.

"Stay back!" He looked around for Bayrull and Anatoli, spaying red droplets as he shook his head.

They had to be okay! He forced his battered body toward them to assist in keeping back the crowd once more, though he stayed somewhat back to let them have the most rein.

<u>Summary</u>: Simon had gotten lulled into a false sense of security and was utterly overwhelmed by the swarm. Ears ringing and one boxed oddly, he struggles to his paws and grasps Cream's body to haul into the hole beside Nutmeg (1). Twisting around with the last of his adrenaline, he strikes out at the shadows closest to him to keep them back (2).

<u>Roll</u>: 5

<u>Roll</u> 2: 8 **♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦**



All of a sudden, Bayrull was broken out of his musical digging and into a rush of swiping shadows and pain. "A-AH! That HURTS!" he hollered, paws flail wildly to drive back the shadows. As swiftly as they rushed forward, they retreated, biding their time for another assault. His pelt burned and hurt in a new way, different from the bug and different from the difficult breath and cold water. It was sharp, and in his rapid whirling to face the enemy, he caught sight of red rising from his own fur. Already it had been covered in blood from Red as he helped move her, but now, it seemed like it was his own.

Being hit hurt. Being hit made you bleed. Being hit was different from anything else he'd tried so far, and he really really didn't like it.

"Get back you-you-" he spat, fur bristling as he stepped away from Red. He huffed, baring his teeth as he followed a lingering shadow closer to the edge of their protective ring. He'd get them back for this! Time for a new song. No more digging songs, this would be a battle ballad!

I see you strike without remorse...

Stay back foul fiend of flaws!

I'm sharp and new as you'll soon see

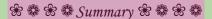
I'll strike without a pause!

My time to dig is over now I want to see your blood It's just not fair at all you see To be the only flood

The shadows whirled around, clearly cowed by his vengeful verses, but that wouldn't be enough to sate him. He struck sharply, trying to let his claws do the damage as he did.

These claws may be all caked in mud But let them fly now true
This earth shall see them under now It's moss encrusted bloom

For every scratch they put on him, he hoped to give them twice as many. They'd regret this!



Bayrull switches to a new form of poetry which, unbeknownst to him, is a ballad. Enraged by the assault of the shadows, he turns on them and lashes out, using all of his strength and speed to do so.



* Anatoli *

He/Him • Post 24 • 310 Words

Journal

Slowly but steadily Anatoli and Simon found a rhythm at which they danced around each other keeping the other's back guarded while slashing at the shadows that dared come too close. One after the other fell by their claws and teeth and disappeared into nothing but the shadows soon learned and the tom's defensive stance seemed to not be quite enough anymore. In a sudden wave the shadows lunged forward as a group, far too many for just the two of them to fend off.

Anatoli felt a sharp pain descend upon his left paw and lost his balance, toppling over only to be rushed by more shadows. He saw Simon and the others get buried by the wave of shadows as well, having a hard time to make out their forms aside of the spare tail or paw poking out from beneath. Scratches and bites covered his body and he felt the warm liquid of his blood pour out of him causing him to let out a loud yowl of pain. "Черт возьми(chort vaz-mi)" he yelled out fighting back against the flood.

Eventually the shadows appeared to retreat, leaving three of them bloodied and battered before the hole. Wait. Three of them? The russian blue watched Bayrull lunge back at the shadows, ripping through their forms one after the other, he'd be fine but where was... "Nutmeg!?" He yelled out for the smaller dame.

He hurried towards the hole and found her equally battered form sitting at the bottom of the grave they had dug. "Are you alright? Here.." He meowed, reaching out for her "Let me help you." He waited for her to hold on tight before pulling her upwards and out of the hole. "We need to move Red and Cream. Quickly!" While still speaking he grasped the cream body by the neck and lifted her up.

* Summary *

Anatoli is in pain and suffering and regretting his life choices. He finds Nutmeg in the hole and **reaches out to help pull her out** (Roll 1). **He moves to Evelyn's body in order to move her body into the grave with Nutmeg** (Roll 2).

Roll 1, Strength: 17
Roll 2, Speed: 13
(Result after Nutmegs next post)

YSimon¥

He/him ♦♦♦ Post 34/? ♦♦♦ Word Count: 366

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Apparently, Simon was more thrown off by the spinning and noise in his ears than he thought. He'd barely made any headway with the bodies of Cream and Red, and he'd stumbled over his own paws as dizziness overcame him. A Shadow suddenly appeared in his line of sight and knocked him to the ground again, and this time his legs refused to listen to him. Why was his body so weird? The others were all still fighting so why couldn't he?

As he watched the Shadow close the gap between them, their figure coming in and out of focus, a smaller cat raced past him, cutting off SIMON'S attacker'S path to him and laying waste to them. As he watched and realized it was Bayrull, the other's high voice filtered through the shrill ringing, heralding:

"—— see your blood It's just not fair at all you see To be the only flood!"

Bay continued, but Simon could barely comprehend the words. This small but fleet cat was so angry at the Shadows--with good reason, but the fervor that Bay showed in both song and action took him aback. He and Anatoli had fought them too, but he hadn't had the space or time to think about it beyond the waves of unease.

"Nutmeg!?"

Simon tilted in the direction he heard the panicked Anatoli, who was helping Nutmeg out of the hole. Like a second strike to the head, he remembered that they were doing all of this for a reason. And objecting now would only make their own ends swifter. Besides, he couldn't just let Bayrull run about with no one to help him!

Fuzzy as his head felt, he took advantage of the time Bayrull bought him and slowly forced his paws to move. A trial in and of itself, <u>Simon hopped a few paces after the little whirlwind and did his utmost to help</u>. They were thinning the numbers, somehow, and <u>he fought as hard on the outside as on the inside to keep the</u> <u>optimism of that fact burning in his orb to keep him going.</u>

"I'm here, Bay. Right behind you," he coughed, slamming into a Shadow about to pounce upon Bayrull.

<u>Summary</u>: Simon struggles with the disorientation and pain as he checks on the others of the Four and the bodies, having slipped in his own attempt to help. Not wanting Anatoli and Nutmeg to be targeted, <u>he stands</u> <u>between them and the shadows one more time, relying on Bayrull to take care of the ones further away as he fights (I and 2)</u>.

Nutmeg | She/Her | Post 27 | Words: 499

With one last shove of her paw to remove the dirt in front of her, Nutmeg finally steps back, taking a moment to admire the size of the hole Bayrull and her had created. It was definitely big enough for the two bodies now, and she exhales in relief. Finally, they could-

Before she can finish her thoughts, movement erupts from her peripheral view, and she manages to snap her head to the side just before she's struck with a blow from a shadow cat. It scores the underside of her chin, and she can feel globs of something warm welling up where she'd been hit. She has no time to react, though, before she's stumbling into the hole from the shock and hitting the bottom of it with a grunt.

The air is forced out of her as she lands, and it takes her more than a few moments to recollect herself before she can try to move. Above her, she can hear the sounds of a fight, of cats hissing and clawing and biting, and she grits her teeth as she struggles to put her paws underneath herself and *lift*. Her paws throb and ache in unison as she pushes herself up, and the side she'd landed on definitely had felt much better before her fall. But maybe it's the adrenaline, and the lingering fear of failure, that keeps her from feeling too much just yet. Her head tilts up as Simon's face appears above the rim of the hole, and it fills her with relief.

He looked more hurt and exhausted than she'd ever seen him before, and it made her chest hurt, watching him cast her a strained smile that was probably only for her own benefit. After depositing the bodies closer to the hole, he turns back into the fray. Almost immediately after, she hears her name being called in a panic; Anatoli!

The cat in question peered at her over the hole and glanced worriedly down at her, but Nutmeg's tail only rose in joy at the sight. That was two of them that were confirmed to be safe! He reached into the space, offering her a way up, and she wasted no time in taking it. With her back claws scrambling for a hold in the dirt lining the side of the hole and Anatoli heaving her up from the top, she was able to escape in record time, now able to spot Bayrull taking out clumps of shadow cats at a time. They were *all* safe, then.

"We need to move Red and Cream. Quickly!" He lifted one of the bodies into his jaws, urgency clear in his posture, if not his voice, and she nodded. No time to relax, not yet - they weren't done. She took one of the cat's paws in her mouth and heaved, her muscles straining with the effort as she tried to move as quickly as she could to drop the body into the hole.

Summaru

Nutmeg falls into the hole and is stunned for a short time before she can get her bearings back; when she does, she's relieved to find Simon and Anatoli are safe. Taking the latter's offer of help, she escapes the hole and musters the strength and speed necessary to move the body into the hole alongside Anatoli.

Working together, Nutmeg and Anatoli roll Evelyn's body into the hole. The large cat falls to the bottom with a heavy sound, body twisting at an unnatural angle. The cuts encased in his gut fall over him like a grotesque

blanket, splattering the fur along the length of his stomach and face a deep crimson.



His paws felt like they were hardly hitting more than air. Softer than wood, but not soft the way moss or a cat was. It was almost like water with the way he could run through them, just feeling some uncomfortable resistance in his claws.

They scattered before his paws like so many drops of water. They were cold like the water on his pelt, but they didn't stick to him the same way.

He was stronger than them.

The realization surprised him. "Oh~" he crooned, perking up with a wondrous grin, "And here I thought you were scary."

So shadows fall so easily
Should I temper my claws?
When ten or more can fall per blow
Their fight is a lost cause

Us cats have almost got you beat I'm sure you won't last long
So seems that there's not much time left
For me to sing my song

I'll rest my throat, I'll make it grand
The final verse to be.
My maw can have another use
To find your flavor, see?

Bayrull licked his lips, wondering if the sharpness he felt in his teeth was anything like his claws. He knew one good way to find out. Bite the lizard, right?

The shadow cats whirled around him, still many but distinctly less numerous after his last strike. It was a bit harder to find his rhythm without breaking back out into song, but he wanted his mouth free for good bites. Nobody else seemed to be singing anymore. Maybe he could just carry the tune in his head while he worked out that grand finale.

We'll fight and shine and light the way

Our story will not end here today!

That was a good one, he'd have to remember that one, he thought, trying his very best not to hum as he lunged for a shadow cat teeth first.

% \$ % Summary % \$ % \$

Bayrull continues his ballad for a bit longer, then decides to try a new fighting strategy. He bites at the shadow cats, intent on seeing what they taste like.



<u>Doc 3 --></u>