

## and I swear I could slit my throat with your dull knife

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## and I swear I could slit my throat with your dull knife

by [Scared\\_Rodent](#)

### Summary

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### Notes

[https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4ffaoDPe8yRQCuR6ofsgS7?si=M3ffIK7FREGu4zNxSFwONw&utm\\_source=copy-link](https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4ffaoDPe8yRQCuR6ofsgS7?si=M3ffIK7FREGu4zNxSFwONw&utm_source=copy-link)

Autumn, somewhere over the globe. A fletch of birds flew over the sky, a kind of unknown names

and origins; flying together with tails trailing behind them like shooting stars.

Look! Branzy can still remember his voice, fluttering like a lit candle before the breeze, thumping like a heartbeat, calming like the ocean. It's the sound of something withered, then revived, stuffed full, then emptied out all of the same time, all from the same man. One whose inside is nothing more than marrows and flesh, and bones

Branzy can't recall the shape of their wings or the sound of their calls. The only thing he could remember, however, was a person right next to his side with a finger pointing out into the sky. Look, he said, to the direction he pointed; not at him.

Look; he said, as an invitation, not an expression

Like a frozen lake, Branzy noticed how Ashswag's expressions hardly changed, how nothing he saw surprised him at all. Branzy remembered falling in love, remembering dates by the beach with nothing but his smile. On the deadliest server in the world, Branzy remembered him.

Ash

Ashswag

He was a scary man; he was short-tempered, he was cruel, and he was very LifeSteal. There's no way a person could argue against that; not even when that person had seen him, harmlessly curling up in his bed, taking in shallow breaths, on the verge of disappearing. Not even when they had heard the sound of his half-hearted laugh at Vitalasy's stupid jokes, cackling sharply like taking in breaths. Not even when they had felt the blood on his skin, thumping with muscles and scars, shining like quicksilver under the moon.

Not even when they had fallen for him, seeing his face in every dream.

"You see, when birds migrate, they move from the colder side of the globe to the hotter one," Rekrap said, eyeing the spread-out map he had opened on the floor. "They need to find a warmer place to live and grow healthily"

Branzy nodded, further asking him with pure curiosity "What if they arrived in the wrong place then? If their navigation was wrong and they never arrived at the correct location with sunshine and food?"

Rek scratches his chin, "If they arrive at the wrong place?" He repeated "I've never seen that happen before... but if that were to happen, the birds would most likely die"

"Ah! That would make them lemmings then" Chief chimed in, raising his head from the scattered pile of books in his library; nodding lightly, Rek exclaimed

"That's actually... Yeah, that would make them lemmings!"

Both on the way of migration, one fell from cliffs while the other watched from above the clouds.

But then again, what differentiates birds from lemmings if none ever survived in the first place?

It's a similar story, of birds and migration, of death and spinning blades

“Why do you think they didn't stop?” Ash asked, he was telling a story of that foreign flock of birds; one fell through the turbines of a flying machine, one after another, shredded rough and variegated before falling through the sky, down the cliffs, onto the pile of lemmings at the bottom of the hill. Painting the ground red

“Maybe they don't know how to, they were following the leading bird. Maybe they didn't see the blades spinning before them” Branzy said, a piece of information, completely made up and fantastical. He can tell Ash was not believing him, he can tell Ash was smiling, satisfied, entertained by his answer

“How can they not see a trap?” There was an edge on his voice, something ringing, neither malicious nor kind-hearted

“Maybe people didn't put up a sign to warn them”

Branzy didn't get to finish the sentence, words on his tongue swallowed down along with the taste of Ash; clogging his throat like smoke, still burning on between Ash's fingers, like heat, falling onto the surface of his luxurious shoes, leaving behind a dusty burnt mark, like tension, from the nails, grabbing a hand full of his silver hair.

“Maybe we should start putting up some signs for them” Branzy couldn't count the seconds, couldn't register who it was between them who pushed away. Ash turns his head slightly, taking in a breath before handing Branzy the other half of his unfinished cigarette. “Maybe that would stop them from falling next time”

Maybe, he said; like it doesn't matter, like it never worked

He was right, Branzy realised. There aren't many warning signs on LifeSteal. A few were put up throughout the years, but not many remained after countless battles had gone due to explosions and withers.

"People always repair spawn, I've noticed, but never the signs that were blown up." Ash yawns, placing another block onto the edge of their staircase. There wasn't a rail before, he's making one. Subz complained about this a while ago, though it was only yesterday when Ash tripped and nearly fell off the side did it come to mind how a safety caution would have to be put up

"I hate doing manual labour" He wrinkled his nose; and all most instantly, Branzy replied "Me too"

He can hear Ash's little chuckle as he holds a hand forward, slightly rough and dirty with stone dust

"Hey! Branzy!" he chimes, waiting like it's the last time he will ever do so. Maybe he knew what will happen between them, far better than Branzy ever do

Hey! He hissed

Acid water, an arrow, one single heart, a star

His last sound was one that Branzy could still remember. A squeak when the door opened. A hard thump when he closed it. A rumble on the floorboards when his feet pounded on the stairs. A voice of a man who doesn't want to be heard but is still shouting through the distance.

A man that Branzy can no longer see face to face and come back alive.

“Watch it, Branzy!” A hand on the table, pushing him back a little. A voice in his ear, calling his name above the crowd. A light in his eyes, piercing his mind out. A voice through the darkness, coming from far away. A flash that could only go away with time. A voice he thought he would no longer hear.

Branzy lifted his head. He was staring at the ceiling, decorated in red and black, he recognized this, there was a shift next to him, Branzy turned over to see Clown, turning in his sleep.

Harmless, he exclaimed; almost content to strangle him to death... But Branzy knew better, Clown with his hand-knitted below his pillow? He always kept a jagged knife underneath it. It's a losing fight in his mind, and yet Clown looked so harmless in his sleep.

Why?

He asked himself, brown hair on green pillows, purple glitching against black cotton, raven pressed onto white sheets. They're all the same, Branzy used to wake up next to them, Godamn it

Branzy reached out, a hand found itself curling up in Clown's hair, scraping his calves. Through sheets of paper, light bleaches through the windows with glee, dancing against Branzy's pale skin. The indents where the shapes of furniture sat made Branzy sick, so he covered them with papers, papers and papers; Clown didn't say anything against this, he need not, Branzy knew the humanoid-shaped shadows made up of pieces of furniture and light made Clown sick too.

One by one, he covered all of them like newly hatched bird eggs, fragile, sometimes cracked all to bits, but still, he covered them. A man is walking on the paper eggshell, covering it with his feet. A man with a very familiar husky voice, a man with a very familiar face, a man with a very familiar shape.

“Hey, Branzy,” Ash said, still standing on the pages he just covered, still with his face behind the papers, still with his feet sinking through the paper

“Look,” Ash walks forward, taking one step after another. The room was small, like a bird cage, covered in papers, covered in words. But the man walking towards him was a trigger. He was a trigger, he was a cause, he was a reason. Branzy reached out towards him, covering him with the papers too, with the words he could no longer say.

“Hey, Branzy,” Ash said again, it was the last time Branzy ever heard his voice.

Ash

Ashswag, he remembered calling until it was audible

Ashswag

"Ash"

He remembered his raspy voice as if strangled by a rope

"Don't call me Ash, say it properly, alright?" he remembered a voice replying to him

"Sorry"

"It's alright," He remembered his words, smiling, the hanging rope broke free from the wooden ceiling. It hit the floor with a heavy "thud" as if something had fallen along with it, something tasted of metal, of old blood. The taste of iron lingered on Branzzy's tongue as Ash spoke to him. It was bitter, like a mouthful of blood. He licked his mouth, tasting the sharpness of his words, like a blade across the tongue, burning, hot and raw.

Sorry, inaudible the way Branzzy turned and stared at Ash, soaked in blood with his chipped sword tossed over to the side. He is crouching, eyes glued on a single butterfly wing fluttering against his slim finger. The insect lept into motion, kissing his closing eyelid.

"Branzy, look!"

He grinned, staring back. Someone should put up signs, Branzzy thought to himself, for the migrating birds, for the lemmings, for them before they few down along with those animals

He finished the railways then, safe and secured keeping everyone in and death outside. Now everyone will be safe and not die because of stupid reasons.

"There's smoke coming from the horizon," Ash said yesterday, during dinner

"Someone's moving to our location" he raised his shoulders and Clutch nodded, they all know what that means

Ash eyed the stone railings as he spoke, they all knew they would move tomorrow. Changing the base to somewhere further to the north during the night.

On feet, on netherrack, leaving the railings behind

Maybe Ash will put them up again at the new base, unlikely but who knows? Maybe he will, maybe he won't, almost as simple as the thought that they won't have to die if they don't want to

But Branzzy would just be kidding

"You still call his name in your sleep sometimes, you know?"

"What?"

"It's true, you said Ashswag"

Clown hummed, cheek slumped against his opening palm. His mask's lying on the table, facing up. Branzzy tried to protest, face clouded with unknown anxiety. He opened his lips, then stopped, then frowned. Feeling his heart racing in his chest, Clown slightly shifts

"Did he say he liked you?"

"He did"

"Poor thing" was all Clown had said, setting up the table without bringing up the subject again. He knew something about Ash, they all do. All but Branzy.

The thought of this made his guts turn inside out, so he took a bite

Branzy would have slammed his fist down the table standing up; would have screamed at Clown asking what he meant when he said that; would have puked and smashed his head against the counter so hard it started bleeding.

He would have done it, Branzy thought, but he continued eating, biting the meat and swallowing it down. It tasted like white sand in his mouth, iron, bloody, like a dead animal bleeding out on his plate.

Branzy felt nauseous, so nauseous he would rather die.

"I think I liked you"

He said, from on top of his position seated high up; shadow casting over Branzy.

"Y--.. really?" Branzy asked, head tilting upwards with his eyes wide open. Behind Ash, the sun dies; bleeding out droplets of blood and burning flesh. Painting the sky crimson, of fire, of dynamite and burning gunpowder

"Yeah" His carefree attitude, curved-up smirk, and glinting eyes are all beautiful and bright and decorate him. More beautiful than ever the moment Ash stood up, Ash stares down at him, and he smiled "I like you, Branzy. Do you like m--"

Ash repeated, unable to finish his words before a weight pushes all air out of his lungs. Branzy tightens his embrace, eyes squinting, a hand covering the man's mouth

"I do, I like you, Ashswag"

He choked halfway on his own breath as the feeling of Ash's own finger scraped through his spine; Branzy could tell he was searching for something. He didn't ask, only hugging him closer

"You have beautiful wings Branzy. Fly higher next time." Ash said, his words didn't reach Branzy, barely meeting his ears; Ash said, ever so quietly as if he was mumbling a spell carved into his bones. Branzy can feel Ash, twitching slightly on the ground with an arrow piercing through his eye. Feet tapping against the soil. Branzy can hear Ash, singing without the song of instruments like it would be the last time he would ever be alive. Air scratching against scars. Branzy can see Ash, running through an open field with no words in his mouth. Branzy can smell Ash, the taste of sour apples crunching in between his lips. It's like a curse sometimes, how the images of Ash, of him, Branzy is made of them; of shattered panes and monochrome lens. Black and white, and grey, and purple, stuffed so full to the brim he could no longer recall if any part of him was solely him or not.

His smile, his voice, his words.

Like little ghost

Like green apples, unripe and tore open from his skin like blooming vines. Ash turned his head, the butterfly flew from his eye socket. It was crystal white, covered in blood and poison; green apple; fluttering in the wind as the man below it stares by; green apple; naive, sour, they didn't wait for it to grow before taking a bite out of it

"How is it?" Branzzy asked

"Not good," Ash answered, throwing the eaten apple on the ground; slightly smudging it with his shoe, and pushing it near the stump. "Should have taken the red one, let's go" Ash smiled before turning away,

"You look sick... did you not know what his affection is like?," Clown shrugged, "You don't have to let him have all the fun, you know"

Branzy raised an eyebrow, "what do you mean?"

"You know what I mean" Clown breathes out; he's looking at Branzzy now, up and down. Searching for the sign of a joke; he did not find any.

The food was not even in his stomach before he was up and stuffing his clothes on and out the door. The air was thick like molasses and it choked Branzzy. "Where are you going?" he saw Clown through the glass door, his mask still lying on the table

"Out"

"But it's too dangerous"

"No, it's not"

"Yes it is, Branzzy" Clown hissed, content to stand up.

"STOP" there was a punch landed on the wall next to him. Branzzy does not flinch, his knuckles ache "Just leave me alone, alright?" his words stumbled out; he almost couldn't believe it was himself speaking. He opened the door without waiting for an answer.

It slammed shut behind him, breaking the glass. Branzzy grabbed the bronze knob, shaking it slightly; knowing it was useless to try and move, his leg gave out and he kneeled onto the doormat motionlessly. Branzzy felt sick

There was a clash against Branzzy's shield, sending sparks through the air where they collided. He took in a sharp breath through his teeth, breathing in the sand and misty dust where it swirls up in the air. He knows who the person is, Branzzy realized; how could he not? If it was him, Branzzy would know from just his breath alone, how his step shook the earth, how his hair fluttered in the air. He would know him with both eyes covered, he would know him through death and back.

Ash

"Ashswag" there was a tremble to it, Branzzy can feel his glinting eyes, sharp and shiny as a hawk. "Yes?" Ash retreat his sword and swings for the second time, a grin visible now that the smoke had cleared out.

"Hey, Branzy," he dragged out the y, purposely forcing his opponent to take a step back. Giving Ash space to press in, deadly, Branzy remembered him, beautiful, how could he forget?

If he had had words in his mouth, Branzy would have been consequenceous by Ash's absence. But he doesn't, so he fights back; swallowing it down and spare

"Why did you leave?" Branzy can't feel his words, neither can he feel his body; all he felt is eyes staring down at him, bright like a hawk

"It felt like the right thing to me"

Silence, their feet tangled and Ash's breaths lingered next to him, awfully close to Branzy's neck.

"But you said it would be the two of us, you promised, you- you said you liked me, was that also one of your lies?"

"No" muttered

"Then what is it?" Ash stayed silent, he was thinking of an answer.

"What is it?" Branzy said again, impatiently. "Tell me, Ash!"

"Don't call me Ash" He hissed, eyes sharp with his figure looming over Branzy. Sword locked below his chin, nowhere to run now.

Branzy can feel himself tremble, slightly against the blade; it was close, so close he can even feel Ash's grip, tighten up before loosening

"I like you, Branzy... Do you like me back?" Ash asked, smiling

"I do" there was a choke in his words, shaking violently as if to prove that it was here, that it exists, that it is real. "I love you" Branzy felt it, again, a stun in Ash's expression against the word.

There was something, battler and bruised the way Ash was chewing on it between his teeth. Something red, and bleeding, and burnt. "Oh, Branzy" was all Ash had to say before spitting the thing onto the ground next to him. A heart, red, bleeding, burnt, but still alive, Branzy didn't have to look to know what it was. Before it was Ash's, it was his.

"I like you, Branzy, always do. But I don't love you, never did" Ash lowered his blade, he was saying something beyond it. Something Branzy could not hear above the ringing of his ears, deafening. Like a goddamn anvil crushing against his chest, it felt hard to breathe; Branzy reached for the heart, painfully silent as he gave it one last beat.

Clown. He can feel it. So loud in his head, he screamed until the name became audible.

"CLOWN!"

Ash flinched, turning his head before realizing the trap. He faced Branzy again, mushed-up flesh and blood dripping from his socket and onto Branzy's cheek. He smiled, an arrow pierced through his left eye. A poison arrow, Branzy thought as his finger trembled against the wooden bow.



"Clown huh? At least you found someone who would like you more than I do" Ash smirked, soft as melted butter. He cupped Branzy's cheek with his fingers, holding his eyesight straight.

"Hey. Branzy." Was all he had to say before tumbling over and onto the ground with a heavy thud, twitching slightly from the poison

Branzy reached for him, figure dissolving like a ghost with his eye opened, still smiling

Hey. Branzy

He said, seconds before death took him. Branzy do not recognize his own name, it sounded foreign on Ash's tongue.

Branzy, he thought numbingly

Branzy,

Branzy,

"Branzy!"

Clown said, rushing over. He obviously must have come to aid him haven heard the call. He did not startle, just gently worried. The battle must have been over by now, Branzy would be naive to think so... but he couldn't care any less at this point

"How are you feeling?" He asked on the way back, Branzy wanted to laugh at that. So hard he could crush his spine in between his skin and allow the cracks of it to tear him wide open.

Pain, aching betrayed and amused. Like it was both happy and sad, disgusted and pleasure at the same time. He couldn't register his own emotions, it feels as if it was everything, yet nothing at the same time. The people of Echocraft sometimes call this a bipolar reaction, a kind of sickness in his crumbling unstable mental mind. They might be right, if not for Lifesteal proving otherwise. To be sad or happy, or angry, or afraid; they were all his choice to do so, they are all his emotions, goddamn it. So what if he smashes them together sometimes, so what if he mistakes one for another? What if these emotions were crowned to him for outbreaking himself, what if he fought for them to become his?

"It's not bipolar if we're all sick, isn't it? A disease would never even exist in the first place if everyone had it running in their veins" A foot away from him, Ash stood, on the same eggshells covered in paper; with that same figure, hidden behind paper. Branzy took a step, he could feel his nails tearing the paper; from the cracking shell of Ash, butterflies flew out in a fearsome storm of blinding white. Branzy stopped, feeling pieces of scrap against his feet. He took a breath, he kneeled, he cracked open

"How are you feeling?"

"Everything"

Clown nodded, retrieving back into silence. Branzy liked it better this way.

Ash, laying on the ground peacefully

Ash, speeding through the field on his skeleton horse

Ash, too fast and not enough

Ash, crashing the destination with too much glee in his eyes

Ash, of ripped jeans

Ash, and unfixd tie

Ash, messy suit drenched in blood dripping from his own eye.

Ash, through a layer of unspoken words

Branzy stretched his arm, desperately cleaning strings of red liquid from his figure. Red stuck onto his fingers, red bleached his hair and drenched him in it. Even if Branzy sink in, he didn't even step back

He rubbed and rubbed and rubbed. Swearing to God he would take away all war and pain from him, using pieces of himself to make him clean again, to make him Ashswag again.

"Branzy" Clown muttered weakly, hand reaching for him through the dark. "That's enough"

He looked back at Clown; then at Ash, Branzy couldn't register his face, not anymore. He had never been Ashswag, not the one Branzy saw in his memories or dreams. That is, if "Ashswag" ever existed in the first place.

Enough.

"Let's go home"

Branzy turned, reaching for Clown

Their hands met

And there was light

It was weeks before Branzy could unwrap the star from its cover

"For me?" Clown asked, fingers cuddling the little star in his palm. Slightly chipped but still glinting like a diamond, there is blood staining it from the moment Branzy gave it to him

"Of course" He answered, barely meeting Clown's eyes. Branzy opened his mouth, his throat felt dry. "Uh, Clown?"

"What's the matter?"

"About Ash... had he ever loved anyone?"

Clown didn't answer, only rubbing his chin "Once, yes; they worked together, pretty famous businessmen. You might know him, the name's-"

Branzy slowly shook his head; with a trembling smile, he hold a finger before his lips and Clown stopped

Of course, it was him

Always was

Branzy folded himself over, desperately holding back his hiccups. It was never Branzy, he never even had a chance. He felt pain, too much, yet not enough. Branzy felt like a man breaking in and out of himself, he felt like lemmings, like birds, like wind turbines and cliffs; like being alive, like dying, like choking himself to death with his very hands

"I hate him," he sobs "I hate him" so much I had fallen for him

Ash, Ashswag, that man is like the universe. So cool and so breathtakingly beautiful, even when Branzy thought he had him within his grasp. It was never the case at all. Even when he thought he had understood everything, there was still so much more he couldn't fathom

He was stupid, achingly stupid

He had fallen in love with the universe

Over the sky, a single butterfly flew through the storm. Fluttering fiercely before turning into birds, bloodied and jagged like poorly cut paper. Their wings gave out, falling off and down into lemmings, towards the cliff where they died.

Branzy watched on; they're different from these animals, he thought. They can stop if they want to, they don't have to die.

But he would only be humouring himself.

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