

Then It Hits (That I'm Damned)

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Then It Hits (That I'm Damned)

by [ssomethingwild](#)

Summary

“Rozy—shit,” he manages, voice strangled, want bubbling molten and inescapable in his gut, hips trembling with the force of not rudely bucking up into Rozanov’s warm, far too talented mouth.

Because I just wanted you to fuck me, he thinks after he’s finished making Shane unravel with soft, unforgiving motions, as Rozanov—as Ilya—laves his tongue hungrily over the mess dripping down the planes of his abdomen, blinking overwhelmed tears away from the diminuendo of pleasure. But then I became greedy. And now all I want is for you to love me.

Or: despite the initial fear, the world doesn't end when Shane Hollander realizes he loves Ilya Rozanov. Now, he just has to convince Ilya of that same truth.

An adjusted timeline. A collection of moments. A story about completing someone, despite the odds.

Notes

no i have not read the books but ive been doing this gay shit for a long time i think i got their dynamics like 50% right

title from tarmac by blondshell, which describes the current onscreen depiction of them right now. very complex very much mired in desperation. they're perfect and i want them to be happy

this is a collection of moments and vignettes! some scenes will be short. the timeline is weird. dont think too har dabout

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

You stare, now. Your mouth moves and I try to repress that splintering urge to summon the words. It's okay. I already know what burrows in your silence. I already know your unforgiving pace, how you'd clap a palm to your chest and forswear crenellated horror. These phantom limbs are a mockery: severed shielding, anxious invitation managing to insist: come bring me to where the wounds are carved.

I'm not sure I'd stay, if I were you. I'm not sure I want you to. I'm not sure if I deserve to crave anything before I have repented — before the disbelief mashes its maw against my crying mouth. Violation. Or just the necessary bloodletting. How drastically can one change themselves before it becomes wholly different than metamorphosis? Before it becomes a kind of murder?

Project 47, Anna Glyndwr

—

There is one time, at the very beginning. It's fleeting, and on a day where both of them are so laden with tension, crenellating each of their respective hurts yet seeking a blameless place to lay their shattered bodies, that the conversation was bound to give way to twin half-truths.

There is one time where he says the words, seeking to make them count, floundering at the sight of Shane so evident in his hollow pain. They are here for *their* fix, not for *a* fix. Still, he wonders—

“What is this?” Ilya asks, hovering in the doorway. He watches Shane where he sits on the edge of the bed, shirt hanging open, working the laces on his shoes. Methodical. Practiced motions. It's painstaking and so, *so* cute.

“Does it matter?” Shane mutters without looking up. “It's whatever you want it to be.”

Which does remarkably little to relieve the conflict writhing, snapping teeth, in Ilya's chest. “...And what *you* want?”

“Does it matter?” he repeats down to the floor.

That gives Ilya pause. His stomach lurches, guilt rolling in his gut, but he quiets it with the promise of *I can be good to him. I can make him see.*

“Maybe not,” Ilya acknowledges hollowly, and shuts the door.

—

Ilya makes a habit to let the truths of his infatuation bleed out into the sex, because there's a lot of it to be had, and a lot of words to say that his lips do not understand the shape of. Even when he's being mean, he's admitting one thing or another: in the slow pressure applied like reverence, like veneration to the pliant muscle laid beneath him, thankful for every inch he is trusted with; in the constellation of kisses he paints warmly to Shane's nape, honeyed and

often-filthy and steeped in honesty; in the adoration thrumming in his bloodstream, threaded through his every motion.

It gets particularly intense when they've been apart for long. When Ilya doesn't get the chance to *admit*, in his wordless way.

"You're—fuck, hah—such an asshole," Shane gasps against him. "You know that?" He's trembling where he kneels in Ilya's lap, though with each time that Ilya works him higher, winds him tighter, only to deny him and pull back in the final moments, he slumps more of his weight onto Ilya's chest and shoulder.

"Yes," Ilya agrees conversationally. "I know that." He tightens his grip and starts to fuck his fingers into the warm heat of him again, fisting his other hand as best he could in Shane's short hair and raking teeth across his throat. "Are you with me, Hollander?"

Shane just whines and struggles against him, so Ilya sinks his teeth in, brief, but hard enough to mark.

"*Hollander*," he snaps. "Are you with me?"

"I'm with you," he grits out. Ilya lets go of his hair and wraps his arm firm about his waist instead, prompting Shane to let out a hiss at the pressure against his bruised side. He drops his forehead against Ilya's shoulder and repeats in a pained gasp, "*I'm with you.*"

Even in a haze of scarcely-coherent arousal, every word he utters had the air of hoping it was the *right* one. He's searching for the response that would yield him a better understanding in turn, like any other fact-finding mission he has undertaken: always thinking ahead, no time left for the moment. But this is not the time for thinking. And while Shane's body understands this, his mind does not. Not yet.

So Ilya skates his teeth—raw, with abandon—across the long, tantalizing line of Shane's working throat one more time before shifting his grip. A sharp cry of pain lances through the thick, low-toned air of their shared exhales as Ilya tightens his hold around his middle and, without warning, hauls him around, presses him down on the mattress, and gives him the only sort of satisfaction there is to be had here, tonight. His lips find the damp, shining skin of Shane's back, drifting over the sweetness of sweat and exertion and *realness*, *it's him, it's him, it's always going to be him*.

"Stay with me," he murmurs into Shane's neck, letting his own weight pin the other man. It is a slick, heavy sliding of limbs. Hazy synchrony. They are the finishing halves of each others' every movement. He reaches between them and thrusts his fingers faster, grip tighter, a measured and relentless pace. Threads his fingers through the sweaty hair at Shane's forehead and holds him firm to still his thrashing. Ghosts his lips over flushed cheeks. "*Stay with me.*"

It could mean a thousand things. It could take on a thousand different tones, fit a thousand different hues. In actuality, it has only ever fit one plea. It has only ever meant *forever, forever, forever*.

Shane comes with a choked sob, the tremors wracking his body so violent that Ilya instinctively moves to press them away with his hands. He is resplendent: tears caught in his lashes, lips parted in crossed-wire agony. Ilya thinks, for a moment that stretches into eternity, that there must be nothing greater than this.

They meet up more and more often. It only gets more and more obvious. They meld—they shift—they make room for one another's realities without even knowing, without even meaning to, without even measuring the consequence of *this*, of trading oxygen, of pressing Shane up against another twilight-laden rooftop wall—

—and Ilya pulls back. Their mouths part slickly, and the way Shane is panting heavily into the space between their lips is sending a rush of blood south.

“You look good, Hollander,” Ilya murmurs.

The other man's eyes flick up to meet his gaze. It's a rare sight to see them so half-lidded; typically, it's that wide-eyed anxiety bringing on all his inhibitions, not the dizzy warmth of desire.

“I'm *feeling* good,” is the half-breathless reply. The grin that curves his (bitten-red, spit-shiny) lips upwards is arresting—shit, Ilya really *has* rubbed off on him.

Nails dig into the back of his neck, dragging Ilya's mouth back down with uncharacteristic harshness, betraying the urgency of the motion. The other man is both pliant and greedy, melting into Ilya's firm grip on his waist, but he can taste the sound of each whine as he consumes them, the vibrations betraying exactly how needy Shane is.

Some part of Ilya wants to tear himself away again just to tell him to be *good*, to be *sweet*, but the violent, feral fervor is a different kind of dizzying. Each time he feels Shane's teeth, his body flashes hot, half-stunned. It's another indicator of how *thoroughly* he has left his mark on the other man, bled his influence so deeply into his skin that Shane has developed the wherewithal to *bite*, and bite *hard*.

Cigarette smoke stains the kiss. Ilya takes him home without a second thought of the fact that they're in Montreal. Of what *home* is. Of how little he cares, actually, that home has ceased to bear a location to Ilya for a very, very long time.

Then—there's *after*. After it *all*. Where they shared inhales and exhales and grins and moans and gasps with such tender synchrony that it became impossible to tell what came from Ilya and what came from Shane. Where Ilya reached and reached and expected what felt so boundless to truly bear no end. Where his expectations fell short, and the world went technicolor with pain.

He's been mean, tonight. A manhandling, tense cut of limbs in the unrecognizable dark of the hotel room. And he doesn't want revenge, not really, because he understands. But beyond the

understanding is the absolute nature of betrayal, of disbelief, of the way his body parses the desire and the forgiveness and the reconciliation, but his mind does not.

Every wiry muscle in Shane's back tenses in some mixture of surprise and bracing anticipation when Ilya spreads him with one hand and smears the mess in the other against him, before carefully positioning himself, lowering his weight atop Shane's prone form, scraping his teeth under his ear. "Is nice to see you like this. Like—ah—*docile*," he murmurs.

"Fuck you," Shane snarls, half-muffled into the sheets, and then punctuated with an additional hissed, "*Fuck*," when Ilya shoves artlessly into him, whole body going taut. It's like he wants to fight but is keenly aware that there's nowhere to go, not without hurting himself in the process.

"Settle down."

"Yeah," Shane gasps into the bed, "sure." He turns his head and stammers out breathlessly, "When I said you could kill me—"

Ilya drives deep and hard all at once, mostly to shut him up. Shane twists his face back into the bed, shaking and panting with the occasional wet gasp slipping out while Ilya presses his mouth to the join of his neck and shoulder and holds still for a long minute. "Good boy," he says, when the tension starts to bleed out of Shane's form; feels the full-body shudder that ripples through him. When he settles, as much as Ilya imagined he would, he shifts and grunts, finds a better angle, and starts taking him in deep, sharp thrusts. "You should have been honest with me."

Shane grumbles discontentedly, and Ilya doesn't think he's imagining the red flush of embarrassment spreading across his neck.

"You say you are mine. Say you belong to me. It does not feel like it. You understand?"

The sound of Shane's breath hitching is almost lost to the sheets, to Ilya's own gasps of unrestrained pleasure and exertion, but the twitch of his shoulders gives him away.

"You—you, *haah*, make me so reckless," he grinds out. Then, in Russian, because he cannot find the words: "*You compromise me*." He laces his fingers through sweat-damp hair and turns Shane's head sideways, so he can see his flushed face, hear his ragged breathing.

"You've always known what I am," Shane bites out, teeth gritted, eyes red and wet. "Playing the victim doesn't suit you."

Ilya doesn't respond, simply withdraws and shifts up to kneeling, dragging Shane gracelessly up by his hips. He shoves a rough hand between Shane's shoulders to keep his head down, and he takes, and takes, and *takes*.

Ilya throws him his pants, after, with a halfhearted joke about the lack of folding.

Shane smiles blankly. Like a stranger.

Ilya realizes it now. He's *waiting*.

There's something dormant in Shane; it writhes, ensnared, in his chest cavity, bleeds out past the skin with every lick of quick wit, surfaces in his gaze in those disarming moments where he gets still and serious. He remembers, now. He *realizes*.

When Ilya had been curled up at the bottom of the Earth, the outstretched hand and steely sincerity had seemed like little more than a joke proffered by a blindsided child. It did nothing to stabilize him, not really. *You think you can save me*, he had thought to himself then, drinking in the guileless smile, humorless mirth pulsing in his chest. *You think you can save me. How cute*.

But those eyes had demanded something of him. He had fired back not as a concession, but as a response to the call.

Shane is not stable—now Ilya knows this. Knows his shaking limbs and wide eyes and fixation on being the *rescuer*. But in that moment, if Ilya had surrendered his words to him, if he had he met Shane halfway with a truth of his own, Ilya thinks that they would not have made peace with one another.

Those eyes had begged for ignition, insisting on being set alight. Those eyes had craved a fight. Those eyes had not been kind.

Who was Shane Hollander before he knew how to be kind?

There is one time, at the beginning. It's ensnared in such a *monsoon* of tragedies and frustrations and horrors that Shane forgets it's even happened until years later, when their blood has cooled from Boston, from the club, from the overcorrection of it all, and he's trying to trace when he *realized* it was something beyond more—something that grazed *everything*, something that foreswore consumption.

It's somewhere scattered in the amorphous, strangled pain of 2014—curling even further into *we didn't even kiss*, into something infinitely more damning. Something infinitely harder to forget than *it's whatever you want it to be*.

But 2016 is devastation, and 2016 is awash in everything Shane longed to hide.

Except—he can't afford to hide, now. The crux of the disquiet of *pretending* is that it is comfortable. But what is comfortable if it can't be real?

“Be good, Hollander,” he says, and Shane hisses. Rozanov doesn't falter. “Mm. Is what you want, yes? To be good?”

It stings. Shane buckles, feels uncomfortably vulnerable, but there's nowhere to hide. He fucks himself down onto Rozanov's fingers almost brutally in lieu of replying. Rozanov slows him down with his free hand on his hip; horny frustration (as well as conflicted arousal at Rozanov's self-assured sense of *dominance*) sings in his too-hot blood.

"Quit stalling," Shane bites out, but Rozanov rubs his thumb over his hip joint and something inside him goes pliant. "I know you can wait," is what Rozanov says instead of finally fucking him. Shane groans; it pitches into a moan as Rozanov slides another finger in. They're long—it's been a while, and Shane *wants*.

Rozanov fingers him steadily at first. Shane isn't sure where he gets the self-control—after all of this, he feels just about rabid—but the other man thrusts into him slow and on pace, rendering him dizzyingly full, his hands brushing over the rest of his body. He rubs the fading bloom of bruises beneath his ribs, slight pressure that brings warm, heavy pain drifting to the surface of his gut, and Shane feels it in his stomach.

Everything they do, at this point, feels utterly lawless: even the way Shane shudders and leans heavily onto Rozanov's front, nails reddening the skin of his pecs; even the way Rozanov groans appreciatively at the way Shane's legs fall further open, just one tremulous motion, as the tip of his fourth finger teases his hole; even the way sweat slicks their thighs and stomachs and chests from where they are pressed tightly against one another. It all feels like skirting too close to the edge.

I've become selfish, Shane considers to himself. *When did I start wanting this—this—carelessly? Wanting what I can never have?*

"Haah. Fuck, Rozanov, can you just—"

"I'm getting there."

He sobs, clenching around his fingers, tossing his head like a caught animal. Rozanov stares up at him, amused, wholly enraptured by the uninhibited show of desperation.

"I want," he pants incoherently. *"Please, I just want—"*

"I give what you need. *Exactly* what you need. No more."

Tears flow more readily at that. Heat curls in his stomach. He bites Rozanov's neck, *hard*, in a poor attempt at self-consolation. The consequential groan, deep and throaty, is resonant and full and perfect. Every sound the man makes hits fucking *bone*.

Rozanov pulls away and shoves his hips down onto the bed, mouthing at the soft skin there, kissing and biting with the tactlessness of a man starved. As he sinks to his knees, Shane pushes up onto his elbows and drags a hand tenderly—too tenderly, like revelation, like admission—through Rozanov's sweaty curls.

Rozanov pauses; gazes up at him, pupils blown wide like he's something worth wanting. Like his body goes hot at the sight of Shane, the same way Shane's does at the sight of him. His breath catches uncomfortably in his throat.

The other man lowers his head to press his tongue against the underside of his dick, languid, luxuriating in the moment. Candlelight curves over Rozanov's features in a dim, golden arc, casting shadows over the severe lines of his face. He's magnificent. He's not *his*. He should be anywhere but here, wasting time to the tune of Shane's wrenched-out whimpers.

"Rozy—*oh—hnggh*, shit," he manages, voice strangled, want bubbling molten and inescapable in his gut, hips trembling with the force of not rudely bucking up into Rozanov's warm, *far* too talented mouth.

Because I just wanted you to fuck me, he thinks after he's finished making Shane unravel with soft, unforgiving motions, as Rozanov—as Ilya—laves his tongue hungrily over the mess dripping down the planes of his abdomen, blinking overwhelmed tears away from the diminuendo of pleasure. *But then I became greedy. And now all I want is for you to love me.*

He muffles his moans between gritted teeth as fingers teasingly circle his hole once more, a promise instead of a taste; shudders deeply as he lays back on the bed. The sound of Ilya murmuring slick praise-filth-*something* in potent, guttural Russian fades into oblivion with the rest of all sensation as, for the first time in his life, laid bare, flayed by the touch of a man so fleeting and mercurial and *wondrous* that he may as well be a myth, Shane prays.

With a dazed, faraway anguish, he *prays*.

(That Ilya will never realize what kind of mistake he's making. That this moment will crescendo and mount forever. That his desire to be held, and kissed, and *wanted* doesn't shine as brightly in his eyes as it does the thunder of his heartbeat.)

—

One night, bodies curved around one another, sweat cooling on their skin, Shane manages to ask it—that nagging question nestled uncomfortably in his brain matter. Ilya has no reaction, pulling another drag from his cigarette.

"Why don't you quit?" he repeats. For a moment, they are ensnared in a strange silence. Ilya drops his hand to smooth it across the bare skin of Shane's stomach; he shivers, arching up like a needy cat into the touch.

The question is intentionally vague. *Quit what?* he thinks to himself, ducking his head away from the smoke and pressing his ear to Ilya's heart. He loses himself in the rhythmic thump. *Quit the smoking?* He hears Ilya shift to put the cigarette out on the ashtray, the one Shane only has for one reason. *Quit the job?* Ilya slides further down the bed, wrapping his arms around Shane's waist. *Quit the lifestyle, quit the attention, quit the havoc, quit any of it, all of it, all at once?*

There's still no answer. In the quiet, Ilya's heartbeat is steady. Unchanging. Unflinching. Shane swallows down a bitter laugh—the idea that this could be constant. That *he* could be constant. Yet, hasn't he?

Still: there's an entirely different question he's asking, one that threatens the pledge they make, the vow for which no words exist.

This love is the rush of damnation. It wakes you up, gives you body—suddenly, you’re the most real you’ve ever felt, and the air traces your skin differently, and the sky splits open because you want to taste the constellations. You fit somewhere, alongside someone, and for a moment, it doesn’t matter that you’re fitting right in to hell.

Yes, there’s an entirely different question he’s asking. *Why don’t you quit?* he wonders. *Why don’t you quit me?*

The slow, entrancing lull of Ilya’s breathing gentles his tense frame. Shane begins to accept that his question will hang there, untouched, for the rest of the night, and closes his eyes.

But the moment he does, Ilya’s heartbeat changes pace. It slows—briefly, but enough, enough to say it all before Ilya even opens his mouth. And he replies, at last, quiet and solemn, “Why don’t *you*?”

It’s answer enough. They press ever-closer, and while neither of them sleeps, Ilya doesn’t leave until the sun is cresting over the horizon.

—

The world does not end when Shane Hollander realizes he loves Ilya Rozanov. The world does not end when Shane Hollander’s vision cuts out with excruciating precision, nor when sterile walls mark his return. Both times, however, it feels like it comes pretty damn close.

The day comes back to him in bleary, nauseous gasps of memory: the crowding, the roar, the deafening silence, a void of sound so thick he could *feel* it—then the piercing, panicked holler of his name—the way his teammates bristled, then faltered, like cut-string marionettes at Shane’s desperate, fractured plea for Ilya’s touch—the warm, trembling press of hands around his hips—words he didn’t understand murmured in low, terrified tones into his ear—the rhythmic rocking—an argument held over his own head—Ilya, unrelentingly, unrepentant in the face of all those who questioned him—swearing that *I’m fine, I’m fine, Ilya, so good to see you, so happy you’re here, I’m doing just fine*—

Shane loves him. Fuck, he *loves* him.

But when he wakes, Ilya isn’t there. It’s a small, private evisceration to recognize this. Hayden is sympathetic, his mother is imploring, and none of them are what he needs. His world clenches and curls, sundered, in the small, private death room meant to keep him alive.

—

They don’t see each other for four months. Ilya texts him sparingly in the absence, pantomiming normalcy, leaving Shane all kinds of raw. It feels like vindication, and he isn’t sure how to handle that. Isn’t sure how to *repent*.

And then Boston comes into perfect, trepidatious, *terrifying* focus, and he plays like shit, and nervous, unyielding desire brings all his inhibitions to stuttering halts, because he’s on Ilya’s doorstep unannounced, and sunset is dripping treacle-slow through the windows and

softening the edges of Ilya's scowl, and he's barely letting Shane in through the front door, and Shane is insisting that—

“—it's not *about* the game.”

“What is it about, then, *Hollander*? Tell me. You are so good at words now, I hear.”

Ilya shoulder knocks harshly against his, halfway to leaving. Heat runs through Shane's body, a Pavlovian response to the roughness he's come to associate with boundless, untamed desire. It brings a flush to his face—he feels like a damn *dog*, inextricably synced to every one of Ilya's motions of command.

Shane closes his eyes and counts, reminding himself of all the reasons why he's not allowed to grip Ilya by the front of his *stupid fucking hoodie* and crush their mouths against each other; breathe this tremulous frustration—this visceral, inundating horror at the betrayal—into his lying smile; press his whispering call of *come home, come home for good, burden me, burden me once more* into that unmarred, waiting stretch of skin at his throat.

“It's about *you*, you fucking idiot,” he snarls out, rage crescendoing along with nausea. He hears Ilya's breath hitch. The world pulses in dizzying color. He doesn't know how his mouth finds the shape of the words, but it does, like it's muscle memory, like it's all he knows. “It's always been about *you*.”

“You don't mean that.” It's so close to toneless. So on the verge of *something*.

Shane shakes his head with his whole body. Nothing feels *right*. He can't wrench the truth out of himself properly, can't verbalize it. Why can't he make him *understand*? “When have I ever lied to you?” he says, instead of the dozen ill-fitting admissions lacing his tongue.

Ilya turns quickly on his heel at that. Their faces are so *close*.

“When you—when you *bled* in my *arms*,” Ilya bites back hotly, then falters, body going slack as his face twists in pain. “And said you... you were *fine*.”

A strangled, guttural cry spills in sputtering waves past Shane's lips. He can't fucking *breathe*. “*I was*,” he laughs out, caught in between it all. “*I was fine. I was fine. 'Cause—*” a dry swallow, a shudder, eyes wide, skirting oblivion, “—you were there.”

And, okay. Okay. They're doing this. They are.

“I always knew where this was going. I know it now, and I knew it then. But Ilya—I *didn't even mind*.” His lungs burn, skin hot, blood rushing in his ears; it's all noise and fever and *you, you, you. Damning, ruinous you*. It is as though his chest cavity gapes, interior yawning with the desire to be flooded with Ilya's excruciating zealotry. He'll internalize it all: the fanaticism, the ardor, the insanity.

“I didn't even mind,” Shane repeats, hand sliding up from where it rests beneath Ilya's jaw to press insistently into the side of his face. Ilya stares, flayed; his eyes flick over Shane's expression, tortured and bright, and Shane never wants to let him look away. “I made my

peace with this long ago. Everything you have taken from me, I would've given to you freely. All you've ever, *ever* had to do was *ask*."

Ilya flinches at that. Shane doesn't let him shy away; presses closer; fists his hand in Ilya's tangle of hair. Their faces are infinitely closer, now, and something in his body hums to life at the proximity, his veins a gnarled web of live wires; like this, Ilya receives no pressure release—the reality where their gazes lock and the world falls away offers no crevasse for him to slide into, no convenient exit to lie his way towards. This is confrontation: blood smeared on their teeth, mania crawling restlessly in their eyes.

Like this, Ilya must bear the truth. Like Shane did, all those months ago.

Look at me, Shane thinks, near hysterical. *Look at what you have made me. Look at what you have carved me into.*

"Are you satisfied with leaving me dry? With running?" Shane asks; frantic, broken, seething. "Because that is what this is. *That is what we are. Together*, to the end. You're not allowed to run. You're not allowed to pretend this isn't the path you've guided me on. That this isn't *what you want*."

His hand drags back down Ilya's face, tears spilling over his own cheeks. Shane's fingers tense on Ilya's shirt. *Look at me. Please. Don't ever stop looking.*

"And I *knew*—" His voice splinters, a sharp intake of breath lancing through his composed fury. His body shudders as he stumbles back a half-step, as though his very viscera is rejecting the cage of his skin, head dropping. Everything feels *wrong*. It—it *hurts*. The compulsion to apologize listlessly, create as much distance as possible, and leave is strong; why does he remain here, laying out honesty at Ilya's feet with repeated distress?

Eyes wild and downcast, he thinks with no small amount of desperation, *why am I still here?*

After some time, Shane manages to eke out in a frustrated, stony whisper, "I knew this would ruin me. Which is why I... why I left the first time around." His eyebrows are furrowed, gaze boring into the ground. *Why am I still here?* "The first time I saw you, I knew. But I welcomed it. And—and look: I don't want to recover from you, Ilya. I don't want an escape plan. I don't want a safety net. I want you in every way you'll let me have you."

Shane raises his head, hand interlacing with Ilya's as he searches his lover's eyes, imploring. *Why am I still here? Why am I still here? Why?*

"But I'm *here*, now," he manages, his voice warbling with the intensity of it. "If there's nothing else you can believe, know that that is true. That it will never *not* be true, *ever* again."

But their eyes meet, and his heart thuds thunderously against his ribcage, and the ebb and flow of his tremors fall strangely into sync with Ilya's breathing, and *he knows*. He knows.

There are no words for it. The truth comes with the slow press of their lips, with the tender manner in which Shane coaxes Ilya's mouth open, with the tension mutually bleeding out of

their rigid frames.

There are no words for it, but he knows.

Shane winces, gasping loudly, when Ilya presses roughly against the wound on his side. Ilya flinches back, guilt and desire warring in his gaze; Shane's fingers close in a claw-like grip around Ilya's arm, curling their bodies even closer together, water sloshing around them at the stuttered interruption.

"I'm fine," he insists hoarsely—and they both know that what he really means is "*you've done worse.*" Yet the gentleness comes. The gentleness returns.

They are starving spots of heat. They talk one other back into the clutches of comfort, trade horrors bodily and spiritual alike; they breathe quickly and promise that nothing either of them holds within is so grotesque that it makes them less made for love. *I see your indignity plainly*, Shane thinks, massaging shampoo into Ilya's scalp with slow, soothing motions. *It doesn't make you unfit for my tenderness.*

And to them, it is an unfamiliar exchange: nothing is bloodless in the realm of humanity, where they dance around revelation armed with micro-doses of candor, sweating out the suffocation of those who came before. Yet it feels right. Their limbs tangle so closely that it is impossible to tell where Ilya begins and Shane ends. Warmth passes between their skin, chests rising and falling in sync.

When he looks back in the mirror, there are two strangers now. *Who are you?* Shane wonders. But like always, it is the wrong question. Perhaps the right one is *will you let me find out?*

Still, this act is something uncharacteristically and damningly tender. Soap rises to Shane's chin as he sinks low in the water, shoulders settling against Ilya's ribcage as they idle in the blissful curls of steam, the horrors of their lying mouths momentarily forgotten. Here, in the unbidden quiet, in the gentleness they dare not invite in (but that finds them all the same, anyway), their indignities meld as they wash away one another's tension.

This is ours, and only ours, he thinks. *You can fuck anyone, but with whom else can you sit in water?*

They sit long past the bath growing cold.

Ilya is mean, still, because he always is. He drawls *get on your knees* and clenches his fingers too-tight in Shane's hair the way he knows sends heat pooling in his gut and bruises his hips. But this feels less like vengeance. This is return.

When Ilya's heaving chest begins to still and his labored breaths begins to slow, Shane rolls away from that tantalizing warmth, wincing mildly at the way the come-slicked hair of his

stomach has already grown stiff and dry. His hand flexes, uncertain, in the rumpled fabric of his sheets.

Cotton lays, vast and wrinkled, between them—and yet Shane feels frozen and lost. Nowhere to go, nowhere to run, nowhere to hide.

Ilya's head falls sideways onto the bed, pressing a tired grin into the sheets. His eyes shimmer with the sleepy, pleased joy Shane never dreamed he would be allowed to drink in. Lamplight drawls in bronze arcs over his smiling lips; moonlight cuts across his cheekbones. Shane feels his lips tick up in return even as the songbird in his chest beats its wings, frantic.

Peace in rivalry. Goodness in atrocity. Together, like this, it just *makes sense*. How are they meant to adhere to the rule of *no attachment* when the joint press of their skin is like broken, perfect harmony? How are they meant to move on from the insistent magic of savoring familiarity, a secret, a coven mired in nameless wanting? How are they meant to turn away the sheer, sacred ease of falling into one another time and time again, drawing out the surrender that neither of them were prepared for, but found themselves needing all the same? It's not giving in—it's just *giving*. Hunger, and then satiation.

Yes: together, like this, they just *make sense*.

But remorse and uncertainty do not seem to truss Ilya's muscles like they do Shane's; he is easy and loose-limbed, the paragon of uncomplicated bliss. It's an answer. It's an admission. And Shane is a simple man, despite it all. He returns. The gentleness returns.

He watches dawn break, just to be sure. Ilya never leaves.

—

I sleep. I dream. I make up things

that I would never say. I say them very quietly.

The trees in wind, the streetlights on,

the click and flash of cigarettes

being smoked on the lawn, and just a little kiss before we say goodnight.

It spins like a wheel inside you: green yellow, green blue,

green beautiful green.

It's simple: it isn't over, it's just begun. It's green. It's still green.

Meanwhile, Richard Siken (from *Crush*)

End Notes

and thats all i got! for now

12/27 -- finally got around to editing this. winced the whole time. hope it's a manageable mess now!

im over on twitter [@ssomethingwild](#) :)) find me and lets chat about everything and anything.

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