

Within my sights

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by [Dark_Huntress_Moony](#)

Summary

An AU where there are no zombies and everyone is still alive. Rick goes to the local bar with a couple of buddies from the Sheriff's department. After having fought with Lori before work earlier in the day he's really not wanting to go home. It doesn't help that there's a new bartender that catches Rick's eye and sends him head first into a different world.

Chapter 1

Life in a small town can get pretty boring, everyone knows everyone and everyone is always in everyone else business. It was like an Olympic sport to see who could gossip more, and for Rick Grimes it was a royal pain in the ass. He was part of the Sheriff's department with his life long friend Shane and married to Lori. The town knew this and they also knew that things between the two of them weren't so good anymore. Lori's yelling had disturbed the neighbors a few times and had the local brother-sister team, Sasha and Tyreese, in the department had to come and check it out. Usually those nights ended with Rick leaving with Sasha and Tyreese to go do paperwork at the precinct and then go have some drinks. He'd gotten to know the local bartender really well, Michonne was good for a laugh and over the years had wormed her way into his life as a friend, occasionally coming over with her girlfriend Andrea when Lori wasn't being a total bitch. Rick also found himself getting to know his neighbor because of her frequent calls. Carol was a wonderful woman with a tragic past and he found himself sharing a cup of coffee with her in the mornings before leaving for work.

Today was just another one of those days, Lori was pissed at him for some god-unknown reason and he just tuned her out. He walked out to see Carol getting her morning paper, mug in hand and he walked to the fence, waving as she noticed him. She had moved in not to long ago and quickly became friends with Carl and Rick, being only pleasant with Lori. She was a god send for Rick the day he found out that Lori had been having an affair...he quickly banished that thought from his mind and smiled at her. "Morning Carol." He said pleasantly.

She smiled at him. "Good morning Rick, rough night?"

"Something like that." He sighed scratching a hand over his chin. "I have no idea what I did wrong this time but she woke up pissed at me for something. I swear even if I'm asleep I do something wrong." He shook his head.

"Well...could be just mood swings." Carol said with a shrug as she sipped her coffee, "she is still in the first trimester of her pregnancy."

Rick sighed as he ran his fingers through his hair. "I guess." The pregnancy was a touchy subject, she was nearly 3 months along and Rick had doubts about if the baby was his. The thought made him sick to his stomach and he sighed.

Carol eyed him. "You should stop by the salon so that I can cut your hair, bring that boy of yours too." She laughed, quickly changing subjects. Carol owned the local salon and she nagged on people about their hair getting long. "Maybe give you a good shave." Her eyes glittered at him from over the top of her mug and he rolled his own eyes.

"I happen to like my beard thank you." He growled at her.

"Oh it's a fine beard, if you're in the running to be Santa Clause at this years Christmas Pageant, though you'd need to gain some weight."

They heard the door slam open to Rick's house and Lori's yell for Carl to come back inside. Rick turned to see his perpetually pissed off son storming out of the house with Lori behind him, her cheeks red in anger as she glared after the boy. Carl made a beeline right for Rick, who was already dressed and ready for work and he looked up at him. "Dad will you drive me to school?" The teen asked, he looked up at Rick from under the brim of Rick's old hat that he had given to Carl on his 12th birthday. He looked to see Carol and he politely tipped his hat back, like he'd seen his dad do a thousand times. "Morning Mrs. Peletier."

She smiled at him. "Good morning Carl."

"Course son." He said with a nod. He turned to Carol and tipped his own hat at her. "Have a good day Carol...and I'll consider your offer on that shave."

She laughed as she waved them off while they got into Rick's squad car. Carol heard the crunching of gravel and looked to see Lori walking up. "Good morning Lori." She said as pleasantly as possible. Lately the woman had been rubbing her the wrong way.

Lori cut her a hard look. "Have a pleasant talk with my husband this morning?" She asked, a slight sneer to her voice.

Carol chose to ignore it. "As always. It's always nice to share a coffee with a friend in the morning."

"Maybe you should find a husband to do that with then and leave mine alone." Lori muttered, but Carol still caught it.

The other woman arched an eyebrow. "Oh? I wasn't aware that you cared one way or the other, funny I guess you're the only one aloud to socialize, even with Officer Walsh's car in your driveway instead of your husbands hm?" She challenged. "I'd be careful what you say to me Lori, I might just let slip the things I see." She promptly turned on her heel and walked back into her house, leaving a stunned Lori behind.

Meanwhile Rick looked over to where his son was slouching in his seat. "You ok son?" He asked softly. The boy had been moody since entering his teen years and Rick figured it was just what teens do. but it never made him not miss the boy who would beg Rick to show him how to shoot a gun.

"Mfine." the boy muttered.

"And I'm a monkey's uncle. Something is bothering you Carl. Did you fight with your mom this morning?"

Carl sighed. "I just...I hate how she's treatin you....you ain't doin anythin wrong." He muttered. Carl had been the one to find out about the affair first and he came to Rick. "She's the one whos doin wrong and she's punishing you because she got caught....so I told her so."

Rick pulled the car to a stop in front of Carl's school. "Carl..."

"No dad! it's not fair. How can you be so calm about it? Arent you at all upset?" Carl asked, he knew his dad had a different way of dealing with shit but Carl was tired of dancing around everything. He remembered the night he heard his mom rush whoever had been in the house with her out the back door when they heard Rick come home from work. He'd also heard the hushed phone calls and it just grated on him that his dad was so calm about it.

"course I'm upset...I'm just...trying to make it work."

Carl sighed. "Course you are, because you're Rick Grimes devoted father and loving dad." Carl shook his head. "Sometimes dad, I wish you'd be selfish and look after yourself for once." He pushed the door to the car open and quickly got out, slamming it after him as he ran up the stairs to the school, leaving a stunned Rick behind.

The drive to the station was a blur and Rick found himself on autopilot most of the day, even Shane left him alone but Rick noticed that Shane had been doing that alot. They seemed to grow apart the last year, eventually not working as partners on patrol, each of them taking a new partner to train. Rick had ended up with a burly but kind man named Theodore but he preferred to be called T-Dog. He pulled up to the station in time to see said partner standing outside and talking with Tyreese and Sasha. He got out of the car and smiled at them, already feeling better. "Morning, why is everyone loitering out here?"

"Boss man's laying into Shane and Maggie. Guess Shane fucked up some paperwork and now Maggie is taking the heat for it." Tyreese grunted as he shook his head. "That girl puts up with more shit from him than anyone....well 'sides you."

Rick shook his head as the door to the station opened and Shane stormed out looking a little maniacal as he got into his car and took off. Maggie walked out running her fingers through her hair and sighing softly. She saw everyone waiting and shook her head. "How he still has a job is beyond me." She said shaking her head.

Rick chuckled. "So what's the verdict?" He asked her.

"Desk jockeys until further notice. So you guys are gonna have to do all the patrols."

Rick nodded his head. "No big, small town can't really miss much. So what paperwork did Shane mess up?"

"Problem down at Michonne's bar last night that we caught. Brought a guy in and Shane fucked it all to hell so our perp walked without any kinda sobriety test and when i looked him up dudes got one hell of a rap sheet." Maggie shook her head. "Fairly sure the guy was on somethin last night too."

"Who was it?" T-Dog asked.

"Merle Dixon."

All of them let out a collective groan. "Man, that guys a total asshole." Tyreese shook his head. "How the hell did Shane mess that up?"

Maggie sighed and shrugged. "Who knows. So we all going to Michonne's for drinks after shift tonight?"

"Yes." Rick groaned nodding happily. "Lori's giving me all kinds of shit, woke up pissed at me for some reason or another and I have no idea what I did."

"I'm telling you man, you should just give her the paperwork." T-Dog said.

"But-"

"Carl." The other four said in unison as if he had said it a thousand times before. Sasha gave him a sympathetic smile. "We know Rick...but look at yourself, you're starting to get scruffy and you have bags under your eyes. You hardly look like you've eaten and I bet we can count your ribs."

Rick glared at her as she poked at his side. "Why does everyone say I look scruffy? I think the beard makes me look distinguished."

"Rick...you are a few shades away from looking like my old man." Maggie pointed out.

"Alright alright I'll let Carol give me a shave!" He grumbled making everyone laugh. "C'mon, lets start rounds and shit. T-Dog you up for coming with me to pick up Carl after school?"

"No prob." The other man said.

Rick smiled at him as he went inside the station to clock in and get his gear. He came back out to see the other man still talking to Maggie before he went to their squad car. Rick squeezed her shoulder comfortingly. "Have fun."

"Yeah shuffling paperwork is going to be exiting." She said making a face at him. "At least we're going for drinks tonight."

Rick nodded as he went to the car and slipped into the drivers side, slipping into a comfortable silence with T-Dog as they started their day.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Now I might be moving kinda fast, but I gave myself a pre-set number of chapters but I'm planning on making this into a series.

The day went slowly with Rick and T-Dog busting a few kids for skipping school. By lunch time they didn't want to go back to the precinct even to save poor Maggie from what was sure to be a brooding and pissy Shane. They stopped at the dinner that was run by their friend Andrea and that Carl worked at a few nights after school and on weekends for some extra cash. They walked in to find Sasha and Tyreese already occupying their normal booth and they slid in, T-Dog next to Sasha and Rick next to Tyreese.

"Told you they'd be here. Pay up." Sasha said holding her hand out to her brother.

Tyreese glared at her as he slapped a 5 into her waiting palm. "I think you already knew they were gonna be here."

She laughed. "Yeah bro, I'm psychic didn't you know that?" She said tucking the five into her pants. She looked up and grinned as Andrea walked over, the blonde woman smiling at them as she began setting down their normal drinks. "Hey Andrea."

"Well if it isn't my favorite cops. where's Maggie though?"

"baby-sitting Shane." Rick said as he snagging his coke and sipping it. "He fucked up some paperwork that let Merle Dixon walk outta lockup."

Andrea's face darkened and everyone knew why, her and Shane had a rough past. "Dixon you say? Why does that name sound familiar?" She asked tapping her lips with her pen. "Oh, that's right Michonne just hired a new guy named Dixon." She shrugged. "Anyway, ya'll want the usual?" She turned her eyes to Rick and a smirk made her lips turn up. "And a big burger for you Rick? Gettin kinda skinny on us." She gave his side a bat earning him swatting at her.

"Haha Andrea." He paused and looked at everyone. "Do I really look that bad?" He asked with a frown.

Sasha sighed. "Not terribly bad...but enough to have us worrying. Ever since you found out about the affair you don't look like your sleeping and with how many times Ty and I have had to come haul your ass out of the fire before your wife did something stupid it is making us worry." She reached over and squeezed his wrist.

Rick sighed and shook his head. "I'm sorry guys." He began to think back to how Carl was looking at him now and it made him feel even more like shit. "Fuck...and I've been making

Carl worry too." He buried his face in his arms and sighed. "I am such a jackass." He mumbled.

Andrea rubbed his back. "It's ok Rick...want me to talk to him when he comes to work tonight?"

"No...no it's alright. I'll talk to him. I don't have work tomorrow and we are going to go camping just me and him in that little wooded area on the north side of town." He said softly, not looking up from his arms. The others all looked over him and just left it alone. Rick sighed again as he felt his phone buzz and he picked it up seeing a text from Lori reminding him that she was leaving the weekend with her girlfriends for a weekend in Atlanta and he felt a small burden lifted off his chest. "Lori's not gonna be home tonight.....who feels like playin poker at my place tonight?"

Andrea looked around the dinner. "I could probably close up early tonight, I'll talk to Michonne." She said with a nod.

Everyone nodded their agreement and settled in to have lunch. They ate and went on their way, Andrea promising to text Rick with Michonne's answer and the cop went with his partner to do what they had been doing. By the time 3:30 rolled around T-Dog and Rick were sitting outside of Carl's school waiting for the kid to walk out. Andrea had gotten a hold of Michonne and she had agreed to shut down the bar and bring along some beers and hard booze, but only if she could bring her new employee, stating that the guy needed to get out more. Rick had agreed, trusting Michonne to be a good judge of character. They had agreed to meet up at Rick's place by 6 and Rick had convinced Carol to join them and she even agreed to cook dinner. They saw Carl walking out with Beth, Maggie's sister who was a few years older than him, and his science partner Patrick and Rick opened the door to get out. He saw a smile break across Carl's face as his eyes landed on his dad and the three of them walked up, Beth throwing her arms around Rick and hugging him hard.

"Hey Rick." She said smiling up at him.

"Hi Beth, Patrick." He said nodding to everyone. He turned to Carl and smiled at him.

"Hey...so you aren't working at the dinner tonight."

"Huh? But I always work Friday nights. Andrea always needs the extra help."

"Well Andrea and the gang are going to come over to the house instead. Your reminded me that she's leaving for the weekend for her Atlanta trip. So Carol's agreed to cook a big dinner and Michonne is going to come over too so everyone's gonna be there." He saw Carl's face light up and it made him ache a little to know that Lori had destroyed so much of their happiness that the reminder of her leaving for a few days would make everything seem brighter to the boy.

"Cool! What are we going to do?" He asked. "Wait are we still going camping?"

"If you want to." Rick said with a nod.

"Well the only reason why I wanted to go camping was to just hang out with you like we used to." He shrugged. "But if it's everyone's coming over to hang out lets just do that then." He said.

Rick nodded and opened up the back of the car. "You two need a ride?" Beth grinned as she got into the back after Carl, Patrick shook his head.

"No thanks Mr. Grimes my mom is here." He waved as he walked off to another car.

Rick got into the patrol car as Beth and Carl burst into laughter at something T-Dog said, Rick arched an eyebrow and T-Dog shook his head. "Ya missed it man, ain't gonna tell it again." Rick rolled his eyes and drove to drop the kids off at his place. He saw that Lori's car was gone and let out a breath of relief as the kids piled out of the car. He rolled down his window and leaned out. "Alright T-Dog and I are gonna be back in a couple of hours. Can you clean up the house a bit and make sure Carol has room to use the kitchen?" He asked Carl.

"Sure dad."

Beth smiled. "I'll give him a hand and let my dad know that I'm gonna be here with Maggie and Carl."

Rick smiled at her. "You are a god send Beth, have fun kids." He said as him and T-Dog waved and they drove back to do their reports and paperwork for the day. They got there to see that Maggie was doing paperwork by herself. Rick arched an eyebrow. "Where's Shane?" He asked, secretly glad that he wouldn't have to deal with the other man.

"He's going on vacation for the next week remember?" Maggie reminded him.

Rick blinked. "Oh...yeah the usual all guys trip to Nashville....huh I totally forgot about that." He felt a small pang of hurt at not being invited but he fond himself glad that he could spend time with Maggie and the rest.

Maggie gave him a sympathetic smile as she stretched her arms over her head. "Oh Glenn has to work tonight but he said he'd be over after his last delivery at 10:30."

Rick chuckled. "Just try not to hide out in my spare room again." He laughed outright at the blush across her pale cheeks and dodged the pencil she threw at him. He went back to his office where T-Dog was already slouched on a chair, laptop on his lap and a folder in his hand. "What do we got?"

"Well looks like we're supposed to be putting our old files into the computers for easier access, bookings, charges, fingerprints, everything." T-Dog said. "We've got the last names A-G, Sasha and Tyreese are at H-N, and Maggie's been working on O-U, then another rookie's got the rest." The bulkier man slid a pile to Rick. "I've already got A-C so you get these ones."

Rick sat down and pulled the first folder to him. He looked at the name and blinked. "Daryl Dixon?" He asked as he opened it.

T-Dog looked up. "Must be related to Merle somehow."

Rick nodded as he opened up the file and came face to face with a stunning set of blue eyes in a face that just screamed 'fuck you' under all the grime and blood. He looked at the rap-sheet which was only two things. *Shop lifting and traffic incident*. He read and noticed that they happened on the same day. *Must be why he's all bloodied up*. He mused. He didn't reflect much on it as he quickly put the kid in the computer and moved on.

Time flew by quickly and everyone piled into two cars to head to Rick's place. Rick saw the lights on the lower level on and knew that Carol was already over, he also noticed that Andrea's car was there and he smiled as he got out of the car T-Dog on his heels. He heard the music before he opened the door and when they went in they were greeted with the heavenly scents of pork chops and the sound of Beth laughing made everyone head to the kitchen. Carol was bent over pulling a pan from the oven as Carl was making faces with Andrea making Beth laugh. Rick felt the grin pull at his lips, he hadn't heard Carl laugh so freely since the affair was discovered and it did his heart good. Carol was the first to spot them and she smiled as she set the pan in her hands on top of the stove. "Welcome home Rick."

Rick smiled at her. "Carol...you really went all out."

She rolled her eyes. "I rarely have anyone to cook like this for so it's nice that I can tonight. Besides you look like you could use a good meal." She said. "I made pork chops in a cream of mushroom gravy and a french bean casserole as well as some funeral potatoes because i know how much you loved them last time i made them." Her eyes sparkled. "And I even made a peach cobbler in my cast iron crock pot. It's ready for the oven once we start dinner." She looked past him as Sasha and Tyreese walked in with Maggie. A light blush crossed her cheeks as her eyes met Tyreese's and Rick chuckled as he began to unbutton his work shirt, showing a white T underneath.

"Hey Andrea where's Michonne?" He asked.

"She said she was on her way, she was just marking out the beers that she was going to bring. She also has that new bartender she hired coming with her."

"What's his name?" Rick asked, thinking back to the first file he read earlier that afternoon.

Andrea shrugged. "All i know is it's Dixon."

Rick hummed as the door opened announcing that someone else was there. "Right in here Dar." Michonne's voice drifted from the hallway and Rick turned around to see her walking in, and he felt his heart jump into his throat as he was pinned with jaded blue eyes peering out from under a mop of dirty blonde hair. The man before him was in a dark leather vest, the muscles of his arms bulging and showing off as he carried the crate filled with beers and Rick found his eyes drawn to the man's face. He was still fairly young, Rick was thinking late 30's at least, his face was all hard angles with a scar under the left eye that only added to his appeal. Sky blue eyes met his and Rick felt....something in his chest. Before he could think on it a pair of fingers snapped in front of his face and he blinked rapidly as he was brought crashing down into reality. He turned to Michonne and offered a sheepish smile.

"Hey Michonne."

The woman rolled her eyes. "Good job paying attention Grimes. Anyway, as I was saying I brought a few cases of beer and a couple bottles of Jack. Oh and this is Daryl Dixon my new bartender, guy needed to get out and I told him that ya'll were a good group to be around, even though over half of you are cops." She laughed giving the man a slap on the back.

The other man, Daryl, cut her a glare before his eyes landed on Carol and they went wide. "Carol?" He asked softly, his voice all gruff with a deep drawl.

Carol stood up from where she was sitting and walked over to him as he set the crate he was carrying on the counter. She pulled him into a tight hug and laughed softly. "Never thought I'd see you again." She said as she shook her head.

The man looked stunned at the affection but eventually his arms wrapped around her and he hugged her back. "Been a long time." He muttered.

Carol nodded as she pulled back and turned to several stunned faces looking at her. "I knew Daryl when he was a little boy. I was his babysitter back in my younger years." She said. "Daryl, this is Rick Grimes."

Rick quickly held out his hand and he watched as Daryl eyed him for a moment before taking his hand in a firm grip that sent sparks along the cop's skin and he watched as Daryl quickly pulled away. Carol went around introducing him to everyone and Rick noticed how he seemed drawn to Carl and Beth, talking with them more than anyone else. He worked to busy himself with getting plates ready for dinner. Maggie leaned over to Andrea as they watched Rick.

"You seein what im seein?" Maggie asked her softly.

Andrea nodded as she caught how Daryl was watching the older man move. "Oh yeah."

"I had no idea Rick swung both ways."

"I don't think Rick knows."

Michonne draped an arm over Andrea's shoulders as she sat down. "Know what?" She asked causing the other two women to shush her. She arched an eyebrow and waited.

"C'mon babe you can't tell me you aren't seeing what we are. Rick was stunned into silence when looking at Daryl and Daryl's eyes haven't left Rick since he got here." Andrea said quietly.

"So?"

"Well with everything going on with Lori we've been trying to get Rick to serve her the papers, maybe Daryl is just what he needs."

Michonne's dark eyes sparkled with interest. "So we want to hook Daryl and Rick up? How do you know if Daryl even swings that way."

Maggie cursed. "Good point...how do we-"

"Guys we're going to be drinking and playing poker, we can do this." Andrea smirked. With the plan in motion they joined everyone in the dinning room to eat. Dinner was a lively affair with only Rick and Daryl staying locked in their silent staring contest. Soon enough Carol went home, claiming that she had several early appointments and offered to drive Beth home. Beth left as Glenn got there and Carl bid everyone goodnight as he went up to his room to play video games with some of his online friends.

Rick moved the group into his den and everyone found a seat around the poker table. Everyone was still pleasantly buzzed from the few beers with dinner and he began shuffling the cards only to stop at Michonne's challenging look. "What?" He asked her.

"Why don't we make this interesting?" She said with a smirk. "Strip poker."

Rick blinked. "Um..."

"Shit...I aint played strip poker since I was in high school." Daryl suddenly chimed in, shocking everyone. Eventually everyone began chiming in and Rick sighed in defeat.

"Can't believe I'm sayin this but fine. I'm in."

Michonne laughed as she poured a round of drinks and picked up her cards. "Lets do this then!"

Rick slammed back his first shot with everyone else and looked at his cards. The games progressed, each round with one or several people losing a piece of clothing with the exception of Daryl who had a really good poker face. About two hours into the game nearly everyone was down to their under clothes with the exception of Daryl and Rick. The cop looked at the cards in his hand and watched as everyone else folded and he locked eyes with Daryl who was watching him back. Rick laid down his cards and smirked. "Royal Flush." He announced proudly.

Daryl let out a snort. "Ya got me Sheriff." He said with a shrug as he pulled off his vest, showing off a flash of ink on his chest that made Rick want to trace his tongue over it.

The cop shook his head and quickly swallowed down some of his beer. "Alright...well I don't think anyone else can survive another round-"

"Lets play never have I ever!" Michonne said with a grin.

Tyreese chuckled. "Nah I think I'm gonna get headin on home." He said as he pushed away from the table, Sasha and T-Dog nodded as they got up too, grabbing the clothes they had lost. Rick laughed and shook his head.

"Ya'll good to drive?" He asked, making sure his friends would be ok.

Tyreese nodded. "I voted to be the designated driver. Sasha is gonna sleep it off at mine and T-Dog's place tonight." He said holding his hand out to Rick.

Rick nodded as he stood up and took his hand pulling the other into a hug and thumping him on the back. "Alright, drive safe bother. See you Monday."

The three walked out and Maggie and Glenn stood up too. "We're gonna take off too. Maggie's got to train rookies on the range tomorrow."

Rick chuckled and shook his head. "She's going to have fun with that hangover." He laughed as he watched the young woman glare halfheartedly at him. He watched them leave and he turned to the last three guests. "So?"

"We playin or what?" Andrea asked. "Or is the great Rick Grimes too chicken shit?" She taunted him.

Rick glared. "You are on." He growled.

Daryl shrugged when Andrea looked at him and stretched his arms over his head, groaning softly as his back popped.

Rick noticed and looked to the small couch and chairs by the flat screen with a low coffee table. "Let's move over there." He said as he scooped up his beer and walked to a chair falling into it. He watched as the other three followed, Michonne flopping semi-gracefully onto the couch while Andrea sat in the other chair. Daryl opted to sprawl out on the floor looking more than comfortable where he was, and Rick noticed that he didn't put his vest back on, instead using the article of clothing as a pillow. He had to take a quick sip of his drink to wet his dry mouth and he looked over at the women. "Alright, how do we start?" He asked Michonne.

She looked up at him over her beer before pushing herself up and lining up the first four shots. "Alright, so game's pretty simple. One of us says something we have never done and those of us who has done it has to take a drink. Andrea start us off." She said.

Andrea nodded as she tapped her chin. "I have never...rode a horse." She said with a shrug and watched as Rick, Michonne and Daryl all drank their shot.

Michonne slapped her drink out and poured three more. "See easy. Alright I'll go. I have never gone hunting." She watched as Rick and Daryl both took a drink.

Daryl arched an eyebrow at Rick. "Whatchu hunt for?" He asked.

"I take my son deer hunting every year. Last couple of years we've gone duck hunting too." He eyed the other man. "What bout you?"

"Been huntin all my life. Hunted everythin from deer ta squirrel." He said with a shrug.

Rick blinked before he felt something hit him in the head and noticed that Michonne had thrown a pillow at him. "What?"

"It's your turn." She smirked.

"Alright....I have never gone streaking." He watched as Andrea, Michonne, and Daryl all took their shot and he had to instantly battle away the thoughts of a naked Daryl running anywhere. *why the fuck would I think of him naked?* He thought to himself. *I'm not gay....but I've only ever been with Lori-* He was jarred out of his thoughts when Daryl shifted.

"Right...I've never....had a long term relationship." He said with a shrug as if it were normal.

Rick winced at the bite of the Jack and quickly chased it down with his beer. "Seriously?"

Daryl cut him a glare. "Yeah, ain't ever been with anyone who woulda bothered with me to keep me round." He mumbled.

The game continued on until about 2 in the morning when everyone was very expertly smashed. Rick looked at his two friends and the new commie in his life and he sighed. "Ya'll ain't drivin home tonight. Crash here." He mumbled. "Andrea and Michonne can have the guest room and Daryl can crash on the pull out."

Michonne snickered as she helped pick up her very drunk girlfriend off of the chair. "You sure you're sober enough to pull it out?"

Rick thought for a moment. "Fine he can crash in my bed. I'll sleep on the couch."

Daryl shook his head, seeming to be the less drunk of them all....until he tried to stand. "Ain't gonna kick ya outta yer bed."

"It's fine."

"Ya both are big boys, just share the bed." Andrea giggled as Michonne pulled her up the stairs.

Rick sighed as he got up and stumbled, only to be caught by Daryl's rough but strong hands. "Thanks."

"Yer to drunk, lets just man up an' share the bed." He said, his voice low and dark.

Rick looked over, blue locking with blue and he found himself nodding slowly. He steadied himself and found that he was the more stable of the two (Daryl had surprising done alot in his life that the rest of them hadn't) and Rick grabbed Daryl's arm slinging it over his shoulder. He felt the heat from the other man and he found himself really close to Daryl's neck. A scent caught his attention, it was musky and dark, smelling of the woods, sweat, and something a little darker that must of been just Daryl. It stirred something in the cop and he found himself wanting it. Soon enough he was at his bedroom door and he pushed it open.

"Damn Sheriff, that's a big bed." Daryl muttered.

"California King." Rick said as he fell onto his side and groaned into the pillow. "Gonna regret this in the morning. ain't as young as I used to be."

Daryl snorted as he stretched out on the opposite side. "Aint yer wife gonna get mad bout you havin another sleep on her side?"

Rick snorted. "She'd have no right...she's the cheater." He grumbled and promptly shut up as the other man arched an eyebrow at him. "Nevermind." He said.

Daryl shrugged. "Ain't my business." He said as he stretched out and folded his arms behind his head, closing his eyes.

Rick reached up to hit the switch for the lights and bathed the room in darkness. He chewed on his lip, feeling his heart thunder in his chest. He wondered if he should say anything and was opening his mouth when the other man spoke.

"Jus go to sleep Sheriff. Let the hamster off the wheel for the night."

Rick let out a startled laugh and shook his head as he cuddled down into his own pillows. "Night Daryl."

A grunt was his answer and Rick felt himself slowly drifting off into a very comfortable sleep with someone other than Lori in his bed.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Now just for my own peace of mind I'm going to stick Rick in his late 40's. On their profiles on the Walking Dead Wiki it states that Daryl is in his mid 30's to early 40's while Rick is in his mid to late 40's. So....Rick's gonna have a good 7-8 years on Daryl. Mostly because Rick's a silver fox and that's just how these things work.

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

Rick groaned as he rolled over and lifted his head at the sound of loud country music and the smells of bacon and eggs. He groaned as his head swam and he looked to his bedside table to see that there was a bottle of aspirin and a glass of water. He picked them up gratefully and downed the pills and water. He noticed a note sitting under the pill bottle and he sighed and lifted it to read it.

Rick,

Figured you might need this, Andrea and I had to take off. saw you and Daryl sleeping and didn't wanna bother you. Carl was awake to let us out. Have a fun weekend.

Michonne.

Rick rolled his eyes and got up, stripping himself of his rumpled shirt and he walked down to find Carl listening intently to something Daryl was saying as the man waved the spatula. Rick paused in the doorway and just watched, Carl had a huge grin on his face, one that Rick hadn't seen in months and it made his heart ache. He found himself thinking that Daryl was the one who belonged in his home. He shook his head and walked in. "Morning." He said as he sat down and snapped a bit of bacon, avoiding the spatula that tried to smack his hand.

"Ya look like shit Sheriff." Daryl snorted as he lifted his thumb to lick something off of it.

Rick's eyes traced the movement and he wanted to do the same thing. He shook his head and turned to Carl. "Ready to go camping?"

Carl nodded and quickly swallowed down his eggs. "Yeah, Daryl said that he could point us to a good campsite. Lets face it dad, when you pick we end up starving all weekend because you can't catch anything."

Rick glared at his son. "That is not true!"

"Daryl, tell my dad about when you took down a deer with your crossbow." Carl seemed to practically vibrate in his seat.

Daryl rolled his eyes. "I been huntin an fishin since i was younger than your boy. I know all the good places." He said, puffing up a bit in pride.

Rick felt the smirk on his lips and he shook his head. "Well Mr. Hot-shot-with-a-crossbow why don't you just come with us and show me now it's done?" His mind caught up with the question and he felt the blush on his cheeks.

"Yeah! that would be awesome!" Carl said happily, "I'm gonna go get the jeep ready." The boy quickly ran out the room leaving the two men by themselves. Once Carl was out of earshot of the two men he pulled out his cellphone and quickly dialed Andrea's number. She picked up after the first ring.

"Carl....did it work?"

"Oh yeah. Daryl's coming with us camping." He grinned into the phone. Before they had left Andrea and Michonne had filled Carl in on their plan. He wanted his mom out of the house just as much as they did, she was slowly killing his dad and he didn't want her to take him away too, not after taking away the happiness in the house.

"Oh man Carl, I knew you were a little con-man. I owe you one."

"Yeah you do." Carl laughed, he thought back to all the looks during dinner last night and walking in on his dad and Daryl in the same bed. Sure he was a little shocked, but somehow there was just a rightness to them. During clean up last night they worked as a silent team, in sync with each other and Carl knew that Daryl was just what his dad needed to be happy again...even if his dad didn't know it yet.

Back in the kitchen Rick looked at Daryl with a sheepish smile. "Um...sorry to throw you under the bus like that. You don't have to go if you really don't want to."

"Nah, its fine had the weekend off anyway and I was gonna go out and do some camping myself. This way I can have someone to share a beer with." Daryl's eyes traveled over the other man, for a cop...Rick Grimes was pretty fucking hot. Daryl came to terms with his sexuality years ago, after his dad finally kicked it and he was able to be honest with himself (and Merle) he found that life wasn't total shit. He didn't go out all the time and get fucked by some bar jack ass, but he wasn't a total idiot a human touch every now and again was nice. He found that he wanted that with Rick, but the man was married and with a kid....made things a little complicated.

"Well, count us lucky then." He paused and sighed. "Look...I know I said something last night about my wife-"

"Man I already know, small town remember...there's been talk at the bar between a couple of your people at the department when word of the affair broke out. Course Michonne shut it down by slamming that sword of hers down on the table sayin if they said shit she'd give 'em a new hole." He shook his head. "Ya got some damned good friends Sheriff. Better than what I had growin up." Daryl blinked and blushed hotly. "Shit what is it about ya that makes me wanna tell ya my whole fuckin life story?"

Rick blinked and chuckled. "Ya know, I get people askin me that all the time. Dunno must have just one of those faces." He laughed. "I better go get changed. Do we need to stop and pick anything up from your place for you?"

"Nah, I got my stuff with me on my bike." Daryl watched the man as he left the room and he looked around the kitchen. *what the fuck are you doing Dixon?* He thought to himself. He'd known about Rick Grimes for many years, the man had arrested Merle a few times and was there the night Daryl got booked on the shoplifting charge. His mind drifted back to that night when he was still a stupid and reckless teen. He wasn't surprised that Rick didn't remember him. It felt like a million years ago...but the memory was still fresh within Daryl's mind.

At 16 Daryl had already done more things than most his age had to do. Mom died when he was a kid, Dad was a mean drunk with an iron fist, and his brother was in and out of Juvie then tried to straighten out by going into the military. Without the buffer that Merle served Daryl ran away more than a few times, learning to survive on his own (and even wiping his own ass with poison oak once) but sometimes the stupidity that was in his nature caught up. He got caught stealing a lighter, a stupid little BIC that was like a buck. Instead of being smart and just going with the cops that were there he decided that he wanted to hop on the bike his brother had left behind and race off, of course as a stupid that idea was...wrapping said bike around a lamp post had been even worse. Bloody and pissed off Daryl sat in the police station, knowing that his dad wasn't going to come get him and waiting to go away.

"Daryl Dixon?" A voice that was pure sin made him look up from his clasped hands and he found himself swimming in deep dark blue eyes.

"Yeah?" He growled, even though his insides were quivering.

"I'm Rick Grimes, I'm supposed to get you settled into a cell for the night. Need to call anyone?"

"Nah, ain't got no one to call. Dad's a dead beat drunk, moms dead, and my bro's down at Fort Benning." He shrugged, trying to avoid the look of pity in the cops eyes. 'dont look at me like that....I'm not worth it.' Daryl's mind said, though his lips remained closed.

Rick sighed. "well...guess we'll be hanging out tonight then. I've got over night duty, wife's not to happy about it but gotta be grateful when I don't have to get up with the baby." He tried to be funny, but the joke fell short.

"You got a kid?"

Rick reached into his pocket and pulled out a picture of a newborn, all squish faced and looking pissed off with blue eyes that screamed that he was going to be a little hellion growing up. "His name's Carl."

Daryl snorted. "Kid looks pissed."

Rick's face lit up with a laugh and Daryl wished he could keep the man laughing, he was stunning. "Yeah he was. Though it was Lori taking the picture not me, kid never looks pissed

off when I get him." He shook his head and motioned for Daryl to get up and follow him. "C'mon, lets try to get you cleaned up."

Daryl went to stand but his head spun and he felt a pair of strong arms catch him as he pitched forward. "Fuck."

"Alright, standing wasn't the best idea." He quickly took off the cuffs and slid one of Daryl's arms around his broad shoulders. "Lean on me, It'll be alright." Rick smiled that brilliant smile at him again and Daryl would have gladly followed the man into hell.

The rest of the day went smoothly. Daryl leading with Rick and Carl in the jeep behind him. He lead them several miles out of town and down a dirt road to a secluded part of the woods around their town. He stopped his bike and knocked the kickstand down, swinging his leg over as he turned to see Carl and Rick looking around as they got out of the Jeep. "Here we are." He said gruffly as he pulled his camping gear off the back of the bike.

Carl looked around and grinned. "Wow, this is awesome."

Rick nodded. "How did you find this place?" He asked the younger man.

Daryl shrugged. "when you just drive and drive, where you stop tends to just be that. A place to stop. Sides there's a river that's just behind those trees there. We can catch some nice fish for dinner."

They went about setting up camp and Daryl took them down to the river, he looked at Carl, his mind going back to the little baby he saw in the picture and he chuckled. "What's the sour look for kid?"

"We don't have fishing poles...how we gonna fish?"

Rick looked to Daryl, "he's got a good point."

Daryl smirked as he reached into his bag and pulled out a collapsible fishing pole. "Seems like I'm the only one who knows how to come prepared."

"You got bait in there too Mary Poppins?" Rick challenged.

The redneck rolled his eyes and looked around on the ground until he found a rock and flipped it over before pulling a worm out of the ground. "Bait." He said simply and smirked at the look on Carl's face. "Catch kid." He flung the worm at him and laughed out right as Carl ducked out of the way. "How ya gonna catch any fish if you cant even touch the worm?"

Carl glared at him and Rick laughed as he laid out on the ground, enjoying the sun and the sounds around him. Soon enough Daryl showed him how to fish (it was debatable if it was the proper way or not). by the time the sun started setting Daryl had helped Carl catch several big fish, and showed him how to prep them for eating. Rick had gathered some firewood and they all walked back to camp ready to cook. While Daryl finished showing Carl how to fix up fish for cooking, Rick got a fire started. He looked over his shoulder to see that Daryl was tormenting the boy with fish guts, and the sight just made his heart beat faster. There was

something there he hadn't felt in a long time, not since Carl was born. After Lori had the baby she didn't seem interested in Rick anymore, looking back now he just saw that him and Lori should have broke it off a long time ago. Rick thought back to high school, he remembered that he had a crush on someone on the baseball team. A kid that was tall and blonde with a wicked sense of humor. Then because his mom was always pushing him to date girls he pushed that side of him down. He loved Lori, he truly did, found her beautiful and thought she was his everything. He shook away the thoughts, today he was here with his son and a new friend. He knew he could call Daryl that, because the man had fallen into his life as if he were a missing puzzle piece...and that thought scared the hell out of him.

Chapter End Notes

And just a teaser chapter because I am a cruel person.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Ok I think I tortured you all long enough, Enjoy this new chapter.....because for some reason Atchin Tan wants to be a bitch and not come to the forefront of my mind.

Night quickly fell on them and the ominous sounds of thunder rolled above them. Rick looked up at the sky and cursed. "Really? There was no rain in the forecast." He grumbled.

Daryl laughed. "lil rain never hurt anyone Sheriff." The hunter moved to his tent and cursed.

"Everything alright Daryl?" Carl asked.

"Yeah...just a huge fuckin hole in my tent." He growled as he glared at it. "Could have sworn I fixed that shit last week."

Rick shook his head. "You could just crash with me, my tents supposed to fit a family but Carl prefers his own tent." He offered, his heart picked up as Daryl simply nodded and began moving his sleeping bag and such to Rick's tent. Even with the temperature dropping Rick felt the heat on his skin and it made everything just seem...so much more. He felt something peg him in the side of the face and turned to see Carl laughing at him as he continued to throw bits things at him. He glared playfully at the boy before throwing a small stick at him earning a laugh and a bright smile. He felt something drop in his lap and looked to see that Daryl had deposited a paper bag. He arched an eyebrow as he looked up at the younger man. "What's this?"

"Jus' open it." Daryl said as he took his seat between Carl and Rick again and went back to using his knife to whittle sticks to points.

Rick arched an eyebrow as he opened the bag and looked inside before laughing. "What happened to the whole only eating what we catch?" He asked lifting the bag of marshmallows out.

Daryl just have him a look that basically called him a fucking idiot. "Ya got a teenage boy out in the woods, ya seriously dont think to bring sweets?" He blinked as if he realized just what he said and groaned as he scrubbed his face with his hand as Carl howled with laughter. "Fuck that sounded so wrong."

Rick snickered. "Just a little bit." He said with a shake of his head as he opened the marshmallows and popped one into his mouth. He smiled around the sweet as he tossed the bag to Carl who caught it and began to stick marshmallows on one of the sticks. He took the one that Daryl offered to him and snagged the marshmallows back. He watched as Daryl dug into the bag and pulled out bars of chocolate and gram-crackers. "Damn you just think of

everything don't you?" He asked as he watched Daryl blow out the fire on his marshmallows and begin to eat one, the sticky cream of the treat sticking his lips in a way that Rick really wanted to lick it off.

"I gotta sweet tooth Sheriff, ya gonna arrest me for it?" He challenged, his blue eyes dancing in the light of the fire.

Rick smirked. "Just might." He challenged back.

Daryl rolled his eyes as he threw a marshmallow at Rick who threw one back, eventually Carl joined in and they were all a sticky mess. Rick pulled out a thing of babywipes and tossed a pack to Carl. "Clean up and get some sleep Carl." He watched as the boy nodded, thanking Daryl for the treats and he slipped into his tent much to Rick's surprise. "It's never that easy." He chuckled as he reached into the cooler at his side to bring out some beers. he tossed one to Daryl...who was once again licking his fingers. He felt his breath catch in his throat and he quickly cleared it before looking into the fire again.

Carl called out a quick goodnight before he hunkered down in his tent, making sure to leave the other males alone but he shot off a quick text to Andrea telling her that the other two men were sharing a tent now...and saying she owed Daryl a new tent. He grabbed the headphones for his Ipod and put them in, turning the volume up so that he could make sure he could sleep.

Outside Rick was still watching Daryl, his cop senses were trying to tell him something. He knows that he never really spoke to Daryl before, probably seen him around town a handful of times, small towns are like that after all. Of course he knew Merle Dixon, having arrested the man a few times to let him sleep it off in a cell, and he knew about their father having been there when the calls came in to drag the man out of a bar when he was a rookie. It suddenly clicked in his head. "I remember you." He said softly, watching as Daryl tensed. "I was the one on over night duty when you got booked after that spectacular crash. I helped you clean up and was even the transport to the hospital because you seriously fucked yourself up."

Daryl sighed and nodded. "Yeah...titanium eye socket and some screws in my nose." He muttered.

Rick nodded. "Never saw you again after that....was glad that you kept yourself outta trouble." The older man laughed softly and he shook his head. "Man...who would have thought a cop and one of his old bookies would be camping in the woods together?"

Daryl cut him a glare. "That all ya think of me?" He growled softly.

Rick blinked in surprise. "No, course not. I'd like to think of you as a friend. I wanna get to know you Daryl. You know my lifes gone to shit since i figured out about the affair...but what you've done in the short hours of me knowing you as a man...I can't thank you enough for it." He said honestly.

Daryl watched him and he felt the blush on his cheeks. "Ain't done nothin..."

Rick reached over and took his wrist, opting to ignore the spark of electricity that jolted up his arm at the touch. "No, don't put yourself down. You made Carl smile in a way I haven't seen in months. I was drownin Daryl, the affair knocked everything out of me and it knocked so much more out of my son. He was turning in on himself, lashing out at people. This is the first time I've seen him smile in a long time."

Daryl looked down at where Rick was touching him and he felt the touch spark against his skin, it made him crave more. "Kid just needed someone to talk to. Says he don't talk much at school cause he don't want the other kids parents ta know what's goin on. Says he's tryin to protect you." He said softly.

Rick blinked, that was unexpected. "My son's talking about protecting me?"

Daryl nodded. "He blames your wife ya know? Says that if she was so unhappy she shoulda just left, stead of sneakin someone round your house."

"Why didn't he ever tell me this?" He asked softly as he looked to the tent where his son was. "Why burden himself with this?"

"Says he wants to be strong like you."

Rick laughed and shook his head. "Ain't strong." He looked over at Daryl, his thumb brushing along the other mans skin without either one of them paying much attention. "How'd you know all of this?"

Daryl shrugged. "Kids are easy to talk to. For some reason kids love me."

"Got any of your own?"

"Nah nothing like that."

"Never found the right girl?" Rick asked.

"Girls ain't really my thing." Daryl said before he seemed to flinch, his wrist pulling away leaving Rick's hand feeling cold.

"Daryl, it's no big deal." Rick offered. "I'm not...exactly straight myself." the cop admitted softly.

Daryl let out a snort. "YEah right."

"It's true. My first kiss was Tim Sanders in the lockerroom after a football game." Rick laughed and shook his head as he ran his fingers through his hair. "but you know, back when we were growin up it was all about finding a nice girl to settle down with, work a decent and respectable job, white picket fence, and a house full of kids. And when I met Lori, sure I thought she was the one for me, but as we grew up...I dunno i realized that maybe I was lying to myself. But I kept shoving it down because Carl came along and I was so damned happy to have my own son." He shook his head again and looked down at his own hands. "Now in the span of three months my world has been turned right on it's ear and I have no idea what to do anymore."

Daryl watched him. "What do you mean?"

"Michonne and the others...they say I should file for divorce, serve Lori the papers and tell her to get out of the house. Somedays I want to...somedays I'm so angry I want to tell her to get the fuck out and leave me in peace. Other days I wonder where I went wrong, what did I do to drive her away?" He jumped as he felt a hand on his back and he looked up to see that Daryl had moved closer. "Why do I feel like I can share everything with you? I've never told anyone any of this...not even Carol."

"Dunno, but not like I'm minding. I like that ya don't try to hide. Hate it when people do, yer honest Rick...maybe ya just need ta finally be honest with yourself." Daryl was leaning in really close and Rick made no move to lean back. "I feel like I could talk to ya bout anythin too...I aint around people much Rick...huntin and campin I do those by myself. But you an Carl...ya'll just kinda pulled me in...like I ain't got much choice. This just...feels right." He admitted softly.

Rick nodded as he locked eyes with Daryl, the man's eyes were stunning and they drew Rick in. "Yeah...it does." He said softly as he began to lean forward. The crack of thunder broke through their spell and both men jumped back as if they were burned by fire. The rain started coming down and Rick chuckled as they scrambled to clean up and get into the dry shelter of his tent. Once that was done, both men, soaked to the bone, sat in the tent listening to the rain above them. Rick watched Daryl out of the corner of his eye and he sighed softly.

"Daryl....about-"

"Nothin happened Rick, we didn't do nothin wrong." Daryl said softly.

Rick felt his features slip into a smile before a frown came to his face. "Lori's pregnant....and I don't know if it's mine." He admitted.

Daryl pushed himself up to his elbows to look at the other man. "Shit...that's...fuck that sucks."

Rick nodded. "I wanna get a paternity test done...but then again I don't. The fact that she betrayed me and everything we had over the years....I can hardly look at her. I sleep down in my den more nights than not because I can't stomach sleeping in the same bed as her. Last night was the first night i'd slept in that bed in two weeks." He sighed and laid back to look up at the ceiling. "Everyone wants me to serve her papers..."

"Ya know, I keep hearin you say what everyone else wants from you...what do you want?" Daryl asked, his voice hard.

"I just..want to stop hurting. Stop lying to myself and everyone round me, tellin them I'm ok when really I want to scream and break something." He looked at Daryl for a moment.

"I...want to serve her the papers." He admitted softly.

Daryl nodded at him. "Then I'm gonna stand at your back." He blushed slightly. "A-an ya know that everyones gonna have your back too. Carol an all them." He rushed to say.

Rick felt a blossoming warmth in his heart and he nodded. "I-thank you." He finished reaching out and squeezing Daryl's arm gently. "We should get some sleep, Carl wants to try hunting to see how good you are with that crossbow of yours."

Daryl nodded as he settled onto his sleeping back. "Night Rick." He said softly.

"Night Daryl." Rick laid back and felt a peace with himself that he hadn't felt in a very long time.

Chapter 5

The next morning, the birds were singing brightly, and a patch of sun filtered in through the tent....right onto Daryl's face. He grunted softly and turned to his side, he opened his eyes as he remembered that he wasn't in his tent...and that he had nearly kissed Rick. He propped himself up and saw that the man in question was still asleep and laying on his back. He was still the most beautiful man that Daryl had ever seen and Daryl slowly got up from his bed, using his years of being alone in the woods and stalking animals to move closer to Rick, acting as if the man was a skittish deer. He saw that Rick's face was lined with a tight frown and the look caused Daryl's heart to ache. He reached out and gently smoothed Rick's sleep curled hair from his forehead, watching as the other man seemed to calm at the touch and he sighed softly in his sleep.

"Daryl..." Rick whispered causing the other to jump.

Daryl searched his face for any sign he'd been caught and he slowly drew his hand back to leave the man to sleep.

Rick's brow drew down again and he shifted in his sleep. "No...don't leave." He begged softly.

Daryl leaned forward. "Aint goin anywhere." He said softly before placing a gentle kiss on Rick's forehead.

Rick sighed happily in his sleep and rolled onto his side, his back to the hunter.

Daryl shook his head and slipped out of the tent, a wide smile on his face as he gathered up his bolts and crossbow. He sat in his same spot from the night before and he began to inspect his weapon, getting it ready for taking down a deer. His ears perked up as he looked to see Carl crawling out of his tent. "Mornin'" He said gruffly around the bolt in between his teeth.

Carl shielded his eyes from the son and blinked groggily at the man. "My dad still sleepin?" He asked.

Daryl nodded and pointed an arrow over his shoulder. "Better wake him up if we wanna catch something now."

Carl nodded as he slid into his dad's tent and crept over to his dad. "Dad?" He reached out and shook his dad's shoulder, letting out a surprising yelp when Rick grabbed him and rolled over, pulling his son into a tight hug. "Jeez dad!" He groaned.

Rick chuckled sleepily and hugged Carl tight. "Morning son." He said, his voice still filled with the rough edge of sleep. "Carl...there's something I wanna talk to you about." He said softly.

"What's up dad?"

"I'm going to give your mom the divorce papers. I can't....seeing you the last couple of days so happy without her around...I've realized just how selfish I've been in keeping the constant source of pain around. She's going to fight me of course...trying to get-"

"I ain't gonna live with her dad...I don't want to." Carl said in a rush.

Rick nodded as he kept his grip tight on Carl. "I know son...I'm just saying we might have to move out of that house. I'm going to do everything I can to keep you with me. I just...this isn't going to be easy and there's going to be a lot of tension. I just wanted you to know that no matter what I love you Carl." He said softly.

Carl nodded. "I know dad. I love you too, and I'll be there for you so you don't have to go through this alone. Carol's gonna be there too...and Michonne....and the others....and now Daryl too." He sighed and rested his head on his dad's shoulder. He hadn't done something like this since he was a kid. When he was younger it was always his dad who checked under the bed and in the closet for monsters, talked to him about bad dreams, sang (badly he might add) and stayed home when he was sick, watching movies with him or playing catch in the back yard. He sighed softly. "I just want you happy again dad....You don't smile like you used to. You just...please just stop trying to please everyone else and be happy again." Carl felt the tears in his eyes. "I don't wanna lose ya dad."

Rick sat up and stroked his hand down Carl's back. "I'm not going anywhere Carl. I'm always gonna be right here for you." He said softly. He rocked the boy for a few minutes until he had collected himself. "I'm assuming Daryl is out there waiting for us to go get this deer?"

Carl sniffed and pulled back nodding. "Yeah, he said to wake you up or else we weren't going to catch anything."

Rick rolled his eyes. "You both really like to bust my balls." He said giving Carl a light shove.

The boy laughed as he crawled out of the tent with his dad close behind him. Rick paused as he looked at Daryl and he knew that last night had been more than just the beer talking...but he knew that Daryl wouldn't do anything with the information except keep it. He was also thrown back into his dream of the other night;

Lori had just been served the papers. She had screamed and shouted at him telling him that he was worthless and didn't deserve to have her. He felt his world collapsing in on him as she was able to take away Carl and leave town. He was in that house by himself...slowly wasting away when a hand came down and stroked through his hair. "Daryl?" He had asked as he looked up, and before him was the other man and he was surrounded by the glow of the outside world, looking every bit the savior he was turning into. Rick had reached out and took his hand...but the other man had started to turn away. "No...please don't go." He begged softly. Daryl turned around, giving him that same little smirk that curved his lips ever so invitingly. "Ain't goin nowhere Sheriff. C'mon got a surprise for you." He had said drawing Rick out into the light...

He had woke up then to hear his son and Daryl talking and he had a warmth in his chest that told him that he was going to be alright. But the only thing he thought about that was wrong

with the dream was Carl. Lori wasn't going to take him, the boy was 14 now and could decide for himself who he wanted to live with. He smiled as he saw Daryl ruffle the boys hair and motion for them to follow him. The day went just like that, the younger of the two adults teaching the other two how to track and move silently in the woods (Carl picking it up easily while Rick fumbled and tripped a few times). Unfortunately there were no deer roaming around but Daryl did show off his hunting skills by catching a few rabbits. They cooked up a hearty rabbit stew and finally packed up camp to head back into town so that Carl could finish up some homework and get ready for school the next day. as they pulled up to Rick's home he saw that Lori was there....as was Shane's car. He felt a ball of dread in the pit of his stomach as he stopped the jeep and got out. Carl looked at the cars and up at his dad.

"I thought Shane left town for the week..." He said softly.

Rick felt the beginning swell of anger and then he felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked to see Daryl looking at him, not with pity but with a look that said he'd be right there with him. He nodded as he waked up to his home and opened the door with a slam. He heard fumbled curses from the livingroom and walked down the hall to see Lori and Shane struggling with their clothing. "So...this is who you've been fucking around with." He growled, his voice cold with a hard edge to it.

Shane had the balls to look at Rick as if he did nothing wrong. "Ain't my fault you cant keep her happy." He sneered.

Rick moved forward to punch Shane when a hand wrapped around his arm. He turned to see Daryl holding him back. "Ain't worth it Sheriff. Ain't worth goin to jail over a piece of shit."

Lori's eyes went sharp as she saw Daryl. "Oh so your taking our son to hang around white trash?" She sneered. "And I thought those two lesbians were enough."

Daryl simply shrugged off her words. "Least I know what it means to be loyal." He shot back making her go white before an angry flush crossed her face. She opened her mouth to start shouting when Carl stepped out from behind the men.

"Carl..." Shane and Lori said together.

Carl gave his mother a murderous look. "How could you?" He asked softly, his fists clenched tightly at his side.

"Carl..." Shane tried.

Carl ran forward and gave Shane a good sucker-punch to his middle making the man grunt and double over. He went to hit him again and Rick ran forward and grabbed the boy, hauling him back as Lori tended to Shane.

"Carl, apologize." Lori demanded.

"No! I ain't gonna apologize to that piece of shit! He betrayed dad and so did you!" Carl screamed.

Rick felt his heart break at the fury and betrayal in Carl's voice and he gently handed the boy off to Daryl. "Take him over to Carol...try to calm him down. I'll take care of this." He said softly, watching as the other man nodded and did as he was told without a fuss.

Rick turned to Lori and Shane and he felt his heart harden even more. "I want you out Lori. Go live with Shane, you'll have the papers served to you tomorrow." He said. "Take all your shit and get the fuck out of my house." He snarled, trying to keep the anger in before he did something stupid.

Lori glared at him. "You brought this on yourself. Shane gives me everything that you can't and he's twice the man you are." She snapped.

Rick shook his head. "You have no idea what I sacrificed for you Lori. Maybe some day you'll see that but you need to get the fuck out. I will see you in court." He said as he turned on his heel and went to leave.

"I'll take Carl!" She screamed at him.

Rick paused with his hand on the door frame. "You can try, you can sure as hell try Lori. But Carl is not a little boy, he will be asked who he prefers...and which one of us has been there through everything? Checking under the bed or in the closets for monsters, or playing catch in the back yard?" He turned and smirked at her. "It sure as hell wasn't you. I want you gone before it's dark. Carl's got homework and we don't want you here, I'll be calling Tyreese, T-Dog, Sasha, and Maggie to make sure you are gone if you aren't...well you'll just have to see." He said as he walked out of the door with a slam. He hopped the fence to Carol's place and walked through the front door like he had hundreds of times before and he saw Carol sitting on the couch with Carl sobbing into her shoulder and she stroked his hair. Daryl sat on the coffee table in front of them and looked up as Rick walked in. Rick slowly sank down onto the opposite side of Carl and drew him into his arms, feeling his own tears start to fall at the betrayal and the hurt that the two people he trusted fully had both hurt him, and more so hurt his son. He rocked Carl gently as they both cried.

Carol motioned for Daryl to follow her into the kitchen and she set about making something light for them to eat. "What happened?" She asked him softly, Carl had been too upset to say anything when Daryl had brought him to her.

Daryl sighed and scrubbed a hand over his face. "Rick finally found out who she was having an affair with." He shook his head. "Fuckin Shane Walsh."

Carol sighed and shook her head. "I had my suspicions. Finding out after having what I assume was a good weekend..." she trailed off to look over at him.

Daryl nodded. "Yeah it was pretty fuckin great. Rick decided he was goin to serve her the papers after seein how happy Carl has been the last couple a days without Lori round." He shook his head again. "We had a great time, hangin out talkin-"

"The great Daryl Dixon was talking with another human being?" She teased him lightly making him give her the finger.

Daryl chuckled. "Yeah...kids kinda awesome and Rick....Rick's just Rick." He knew his boyhood crush was shining through and he tried to hide it much to the older woman's amusement. "Guy's shit at roughin it though, didn't bitch bout sleepin on the ground just cant hunt or track worth a damn."

"thanks for that vote of confidence." Rick said from the doorway to the kitchen causing the other two to jump. Rick sighed and shook his head as he pulled up a chair to Carol's kitchen table and sat down. "So I guess you heard what happened."

Carol nodded. "I'm sorry Rick...I had my suspicions but I...I didn't say anything."

Rick sighed and shook his head. "It's ok, I guess...part of me was suspicious about it too." He sighed again and raked his fingers through his hair. "Shane's been pullin away from me for a while now...and Lori being distant...I just was ignoring it so I could try to make everything work." He put his face in his hands. "I told her to get out. That I wanted her gone by the time night rolls around. Mind if we stick round here till then?" He asked looking up at her with pained blue eyes.

Carol smiled gently at him and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Of course not. I was just going to cook up a light lunch. You boys need to eat something."

Daryl's phone started to ring and he pulled it out, looking down at it. "It's Michonne." He flipped it open and listened. "Yeah, alright we're over at Carol's. Ok see you in a few." He hung the phone up and shook his head with a small smile on his face. "Seems like everyone's Rick senses were tingling. She says that everyones going to show up."

Rick sighed, thankful for his friends. "Of course they know something's wrong. I swear Michonne is psychic." He said with a weak chuckle. "Now I guess I have to find a lawyer."

Carol cleared her throat. "Funny story about that Rick...." she said with a slight blush. "I actually have a degree in Family Law."

Rick and Daryl's eyebrows shot up into their hair as they looked at her. "What now?"

She nodded. "Before I married my late husband I was in school and actually got my law degree. I didn't really get to practice because i met a man and thought i was in love. Well you know what happened with Ed...and Sophia." She shook her head and sighed. "anyway. I'll gladly help you draw up the papers and even offer my services as your lawyer."

Rick gave her a grateful smile. "Thank you Carol." He said softly and he felt the tears in his eyes again. "Thank you." He laid his head down on his arms and let out a strangled sob. Carol rubbed his shoulders soothingly and listened as the door opened and everyone started filing in. After a light lunch, some good conversation, and an explanation Rick looked out the window to see that both Lori and Shane's cars were gone. He let out a small sigh of relief and looked at Carol. The woman had a pair of glasses perched on the end of her nose as she finished drawing up the papers she had in her office. She had sat down with him and gone over everything he wanted to ask for in the Divorce, and surprising all of them with how much of a hard-ass their soft spoken and sweet Carol could be. She had given the papers to T-Dog who went to go take them to Lori and Rick shut off both his and Carl's phones for the

night. He looked over to where his son was laughing as Michonne squirted canned cheese into her mouth and made faces at him. He looked around to each of his friends, eternally grateful for them and glad he had such wonderful people to lean on. His eyes landed on Daryl, who sat a bit back and just watched everyone and Rick realized that he was more grateful to Daryl than anyone else. The man had taken Carl out of a bad situation, held him back when Rick was ready to rip into Lori and Shane, and had given him hope that there was going to be more to life without Lori. Soon enough everyone was ready to go home and Rick and Carl walked with Daryl back to their house. Daryl paused by his bike and sighed.

"Guess I better get going home."

"Daryl? Will you...please stay? I don't think I can-"

"Still got some beers in the fridge?" Daryl asked, not making Rick explain himself.

Rick smiled gratefully and nodded as he lead them into the house. It was quiet and Carl went up the stairs to his room, telling them he was going to do homework and go to bed. Rick let out a small breath as he shrugged off his jacket and hung it up, running his fingers through his hair. "Daryl..."

"About those beers?" He asked nudging Rick into the kitchen. "Ya don't have to say shit Sheriff. I ain't gonna judge anytin ya do. Far as I'm concerned your wife's a fuckin idiot. She threw away an amazing kid and a fucking awesome husband. She's fuckin lucky that she got ta have both ya...an she threw it away for a man that Ive had ta kick outta my place more than once."

Rick's brow drew down. "You had to kick Shane out of your house?"

"Yeah, fucker would come round and hang out with Merle...ain't sayin he did anythin but....well ya get the idea." He shrugged as he went to the fridge as if he belonged in Rick's home and grabbed two beers, popping them open and handing one to Rick. "Just...thought you should know. Wasn't gonna say nothin but with everythin that's just happened...well." He trailed off shrugging his shoulders.

Rick watched as Daryl took a drink from his beer and he quickly walked over to the man. He stopped in front of him and set both their beers down on the counter. Daryl opened his mouth to say something but was quickly silenced when Rick cupped his face in his hands and drew him into a soft kiss.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

*****EDIT*****

Here's the ages we are at so everyone can get a general timeline sense:

Rick and Daryl are roughly 10 years apart.

Carl is 14-15 as a freshman in high school since him and Beth are roughly 4 years apart.

Rick and Lori were married right out of high school so that puts their marriage at roughly 20 years.

So if Daryl was 16 when he was arrested that would put Rick at 26, fresh out of the academy and a rookie on the force.

Now when Rick says that Carl was an infant during his rookie days when Daryl was arrested that would put Carl in his first year of life, so 15 years since Daryl got arrested would be about 14-15 age range for Carl.

Ok I think that clears it all up, thanks everyone!

Daryl froze at the soft touch of Rick's lips against his even though it sent his body alight with sensations. Rick's lips were warm and dry and the faint scratch of their stubble rubbing together was like sparks of electric energy through the younger man. He lifted his hands to Rick's shoulders and held onto him as his knees went weak (a fact he would later deny). He pulled back with a small whimper and looked at Rick. "Rick..."

"Sorry...sorry I shouldn't have done that." Rick said softly as he pulled back.

Daryl kept Rick close and sighed. "No...I wanted you to." The hunter admitted. "Wanted you to do it last night."

Rick rested his forehead against Daryl's and closed his eyes. "I'm still married."

"Waited for you this long...don't mind waitin lil longer." Daryl said and then flinched as a deep blush covered his cheeks.

Rick arched an eyebrow at him. "How long have you been wanting this?"

Daryl's blush deepened even more and Rick wanted nothing more than to figure out just how far down that blush went. "Since...since that night ya took care of me." Daryl muttered.

Rick felt sucker punched as he looked at Daryl. "That was...15 years ago. you've been wanting me that long?"

Daryl groaned and scrubbed a hand over his face. "Dont make me sound like such a girl. Yes I've dreamed about ya for 15 years, happy?" He asked pouting at him.

Rick chuckled as he pulled Daryl into a hug and rested his head on the other's shoulder. "Sleep in my bed tonight?" He asked softly.

Daryl rolled his eyes but smiled gently. "sure...no groping though." He laughed as they downed their beers and went upstairs.

In Rick's room the room was just...trashed. His clothes were strewn everywhere and the bed was a disaster. Rick sighed and shook his head as he rubbed his face. "You've got to be fucking kidding me." He growled as he kicked at a pillow. "We're grown fucking adults and she does something like this." He sighed as he bent down and began to pick a few things up, the crunch of glass caught his attention and he moved a shirt, showing their wedding photo smashed onto the floor. He picked up the picture and felt his heart break. They had been more than happy to be married and finally together...he looked at himself looking at Lori with a look of love and admiration. She had been so beautiful that day, her dark hair curled so becomingly around her face and the beautiful white satin gown clung to her seductively. He felt the tears in his eyes again and he sighed. "When did the floor fall out from under me?" He asked softly.

Daryl sighed as he pulled Rick up from the floor and walked him to the bed. "Sometimes man....shit just happens. aint no rhyme or reason fo' it, just happens. Now let's get ya to bed." He sighed as he helped the other into bed. He looked around the trashed room and sighed. "Just...deal with it in the mornin' delt with enough for today." He said as he moved to the opposite side and kicked off his boots before laying back. He felt the bed shift and then a warmth at his side. He looked over to see that Rick had moved over and laid his head on Daryl's shoulder. Daryl looked at him and brushed his hair from his face. "It's gonna be ok Rick...ya aint alone." He promised softly.

Rick nodded against his shoulder. "Thanks Daryl...for everything." He mumbled before he slipped into sleep. Daryl laid awake for a little while longer, before sleep claimed him too.

The next few weeks went by in a whirlwind of chaos. Lori was hell-bent on making Rick's life in their small town hell, trying to make him out to be the unfeeling husband who left her emotionally abandoned with Shane as the white knight who rode in to save her. Of course the town talked now that Daryl Dixon was added into the mix, while the man hadn't caused any trouble he wasn't exactly Mr. Popular, not with a brother like Merle Dixon. Maggie had caught the brunt of everything from Shane because of being the man's partner. Finally she'd had enough and slapped him so hard she split his lip...which caused her to get suspended without pay. Rick found an apartment a couple of blocks away from Carl's school (and Michonne's bar) and he had been working with everyone to turn it into a decent place for him and Carl to live. Rick and Daryl avoided talking about the kiss that still burned in their minds, but Daryl was never far from his side if he ever needed him, and that by itself was enough for Rick. He found himself falling in love with the man, hard and fast and it terrified him. He didn't talk to anyone about it just enjoyed when the man came over for football and beer by himself or came over with the whole gang to play cards. There were still a few more camping trips as fall faded away, but none with Daryl sharing a tent with Rick. Fall chilled and turned into Winter and Rick was now sitting in the small courthouse with Carol on his left and Carl on his right. Daryl was at work but promised him a beer when he got to the bar

to let everyone know how it went. He fiddled nervously with a pen until Carl gripped his hand.

"Dad, seriously chill. You are driving me crazy." He begged.

Rick sighed and nodded as he instead gripped the pen tightly. He hated having to do this, but Carl insisted that he be in on everything, it affected him after all. Carol laid a soothing hand on Rick's and gave him a gentle pat. "It's gonna be alright Rick, I'm not going to let her hurt you any more." Before he could answer the doors opened and Shane helped a very pregnant Lori into a chair. Rick couldn't help but notice that she didn't look so great. Another man walked in and Rick had to fight the urge to snarl as Lori's lawyer, Philip Blake, made himself comfortable in a chair. Another man walked in and sat down at the head of the table, Judge Stevens was the one who was going to hear them out and hopefully they could sign the papers tonight and be done with it.

"Good morning Mr. Grimes." Stevens said with a nod. "Now then, shall we get down to business?"

Carol nodded curtly and fixed her jacket. "Yes, have you had the time to go over what we are asking? Lori can keep the house as well as her car, the wedding china as well as most of the house. Rick only asks to keep the things in his den and the things in Carl's room. Rick has already found a new apartment across town, that is closer to the school for Carl, so he can be done with the house in about a week. As well as an even split of the bank account." Carol began flipping through papers. "Ah yes, and Rick wants custody of Carl, which Carl stated that he wished to live with his father. And Rick want's a paternity test done on the baby."

"Absolutely not!" Blake said slamming his hand down on the table. "Your honor Mr. Grimes is grasping at straws, he has no right to a paternity test on the infant."

"And why do you say that Mr. Blake?" Stevens asked.

"Its simply a violation of my client."

"The hell it is." Carol snapped. "Rick has every right to ask for a DNA test to determine if that child is his or not. If Lori had been faithful then we wouldn't even be here. Instead she committed adultery and hurt the family in the process. She lost all right to be trustworthy and in the end she's getting more than Rick. He is giving up a home and nearly everything in it."

"Yet it says in the custody agreement that Carl only wants to visit his mother every other weekend. How is that fair to her."

"Who says I even want that?" Carl asked from his seat. "I don't want to be around Shane or her."

"Carl." Rick said softly gripping the boy's hand.

"Dad...he's supposed to be your best friend...Patrick would never do something like this to me....why do you say it's ok?" Carl asked.

Stevens sighed. "Enough, I have yet to hear from Mrs. Grimes on the matter." He cut a glare at Shane when the man opened his mouth. "I said **Mrs.** Grimes. You shut your mouth Walsh, I still have a bone to pick with you on another case."

"I don't think I should have to do a paternity test. the baby is Shanes." Lori said stiffly as she shifted and looked like she was in pain. "This pregnancy is hard enough as it is. Just give me the damned papers so I can sign them and go home."

Stevens looked between Rick and Lori. The woman was cold while Rick looked utterly defeated and he made up his mind. "I am going to grant the papers as they are. Mrs. Grimes you get the house and everything in it as well as the split of the bank account. Carl will live with Mr. Grimes and visitation to Mrs. Grimes will be every other weekend unless the young man himself states otherwise." The man pulled the papers to him and signed them off before handing them over to the other parties to sign. "Oh and Mr. Grimes will have his paternity test, should you not comply then I will throw your ass in jail and the baby will go to Mr. Grimes anyway. Do I make myself clear?" He asked.

Lori glared as she signed the papers anyway and shoved away from the table, storming out with Shane close on her heels. Blake tipped his head to Rick and Carol before following his clients out.

Rick looked down at the signature and slowly signed his own. Carol took his pen gently and slid the papers to Stevens to make sure that everything was in order. The judge nodded and stamped the papers. "You are officially a free man Mr. Grimes." He said as he held out his hand to Rick.

Rick took the offered hand numbly and shook it. "Thanks?"

Stevens sighed. "Look Rick, I'm gonna be honest with you. Your ex-wife reminds me of mine, royal bitch who didn't give a damn about who she hurt. It's gonna hurt for a while, but I know you Rick, you've got some damned good friends in this town and everyone knows what a damned good cop you are. you're gonna be just fine son." The man said before he left the room.

Rick fell back into the chair looking at the door. "Its...its over." He said. He looked at Carol and gave her a grateful smile. "It's finally over."

Carol nodded. "It is. C'mon I baked a special cake for tonight and everyone is coming to my place. Then tomorrow we can pack everything at your place up and move you to your new apartment." She smiled as she pulled him to his feet and lead him out of the courthouse. They piled into Carol's car and drove back to her house. Everyone's cars were parked in Carol's drive as well as the side street. The three of them walked in to cheers and hollers of all of Rick's friends, even Patrick, Beth, and Hershel were there waiting for them.

"The conquering hero has returned!" Maggie laughed as she hugged him. "How's it feel to be a free man?"

Rick chuckled weakly. "Surreal." He said.

"Well Michonne and Daryl aren't here yet, they are gonna close down the bar again and bring us some good shit to drink. We are having a party after all!" Tyreese said as he moved over and placed a kiss on Carol's cheek, his arm around her waist.

Rick nodded at them and moved to take off his coat and boots. He saw Maggie practically vibrating next to Glenn and he arched an eyebrow. "You ok Maggie?" She turned to look at Glenn before holding out her hand, showing off the beautiful engagement ring on her finger. Sasha, Andrea, and Beth all let out a cheer as T-Dog clapped Glenn on the back. Rick smiled at them. "Im happy for you two...really." He said.

Glenn gave him a sheepish smile. "Actually Rick...I wanted to ask you to be my Best Man." He said scuffing his socks on the floor. "I wouldn't have met Maggie if it wasn't for you."

Rick's brow furrowed before he let out his first laugh of the day. "I brought her in to pick up a pizza."

"Love at first sight man." Glenn said with a stupid big grin on his face.

"I'd be honored Glenn." He said with a smile.

The front door burst open and Michonne let out a happy yell. "Let's get this party started!" She said with a big grin on her face.

Rick turned around and his smile got wider when he saw Daryl, but dropped when he noticed that he had a black eye. He walked over and tilted his face up to look at it. "What the hell happened?"

"Bar fight last night." He said gruffly, pulling his face out of Rick's hand and brushed past him to put the crate of beer on the table. Rick followed after him and took his arm.

"What happened?" He asked again.

"Told ya, bar fight. Couple'a assholes thought it'd be funny to try to badmouth ya. Course they waited till Michonne was in the back doing inventory. Told em to get the fuck out of the bar and they picked a fight with me. Shitty thing is that Merle just happened to be there too...and Shane." Daryl snorted. "Got my damned stupid brother locked up cuz he landed a nasty punch to Shane's gut, almost as spectacular as your boys."

Rick frowned as his thumb brushed the ugly bruise. "You got this cause of me?" He asked.

Daryl rolled his eyes. "I got this cause of me. I ain't gonna let someone talk shit bout ya, not now not ever. You're a damned good man Rick Grimes, an anyone who says other wise is gonna have to deal with me and the rest." He said, his voice was hard but there was a vulnerability in his eyes that melted Rick's heart.

Rick smiled. "thank you Daryl." He said softly.

"Food's ready!" Carol yelled from the kitchen and everyone went to pile up their plates and move to the back yard where Carol had her patio set up for them. The enclosed patio was nice during the cooler months with a space heater and a nice view of the sunset over the woods.

Rick sat on the swing and began eating the pulled pork, he moaned at the sweet taste and held a thumbs up to Carol.

"This is amazing Carol."

Daryl chomped into his own sandwich and nodded as he licked the sweet barbeque sauce off his thumb. "Fuck yes it is. Ain't had pulled pork like this since I was a kid." He said. Daryl noticed Rick watching him out of the corner of his eye and he decided to tease him. He ran his tongue over the pad of his thumb teasingly, giving a slightly exaggerated moan at the taste. He watched as Rick shifted in his seat and tug at the front of his jeans slightly. They had been dancing around each other, Rick still in his marriage (even though the vows had been broken) and Daryl because he didn't want to fuck anything up for the other man. Now...Rick was free and Daryl was more than ready to pounce on him. The party went on smoothly, everyone getting rightly drunk and by the end of the night Rick was more drunk than anyone. Carl, Patrick, and Beth had gone over to Rick's place to work on a science project and Carol offered people to sleep at her house. Before everyone turned in they gathered in the back yard, huddled close together to avoid the signaling chill of winter.

"C'mon Rick! You gotta do it now!" Glenn laughed, his face rosy from the alcohol. "Carol did it!"

Carol laughed as she leaned into Tyreese more for the fact that they had finally declared their love for each other rather than warmth.

Rick looked down at where his wedding ring sat and he looked to see Daryl watching him with a barely restrained hunger that turned his insides into liquid. He slowly twisted the ring that had sat on his finger for almost 20 years and held the thing in the palm of his hand. He looked at all of his friends and a slow smile spread across his face. "I'm Rick Grimes and I'm finally free!" He yelled happily as he pulled back and hucked the ring over Carol's fence and into the dark woods behind her house. All of his friends cheered and he laughed. "Alright, alright lets call it a night before we get the cops called on us."

"We are the cops!" T-Dog yelled earning cheers from the others and making Rick laugh.

Rick went to take a step and stumbled, making Daryl catch him. He leaned into the warmth of Daryl and sighed softly. "Thanks."

"And I think that means it's time to get ya home Sheriff." Daryl laughed into his ear. He waved to everyone and lead Rick back to his place. The kids were down in the livingroom all huddled around the coffee table with some movie playing on the TV. He nodded to them as he dragged a very drunk (and handsy) Rick up the stairs. He shouldered the door to Rick's room open and looked around, there were boxes piled around and Daryl moved them to the bed. "Lets get ya outta these clothes." He muttered, batting Rick's hands away from his crotch as he unbuttoned Rick's silky blue button down.

Rick gripped Daryl's leather vest and pulled him close, landing a sloppy wet kiss to the side of Daryl's mouth. "Want you...been wantin ya for weeks. Dreamed bout ya." Rick slurred.

Daryl arched an eyebrow at him. "Oh yeah?"

"Always with ya over me, been all protective an dominate." Rick muttered as he began to place hot open mouthed kisses along Daryl's neck.

Daryl let out a strangled moan as his jeans became extremely constrictive. "Fuckin hell Rick." He growled as he slid his fingers into Rick's hair and pulled his head back. "Ya keep doin that I ain't gonna let ya sleep."

"Don' wanna sleep...wan' you." Rick panted, his cheeks flushed and his eyes nearly black with lust.

Daryl growled as he slammed his lips onto Rick's, the taste of the man making his head spin. He could taste the booze that the man had had earlier and it reminded him that Rick was drunk. He pulled away and looked at Rick. "Your drunk...don't want ya to regret me in the mornin'."

"Daryl...please." Rick begged as he slid to his knees and nuzzled into his clothed erection, causing the hunter to moan loudly and fist his hand in Rick's hair. Rick made quick (and surprising) work of Daryl's belt and pants, getting them open, pulling them down, and freeing Daryl's aching cock to the cool air of the room.

Daryl watched wide eyed as Rick nuzzled and gave little kitten licks to the tip. Rick moaned loudly at the taste of Daryl on his tongue and he looked up at him through his lashes, seeing that Daryl's eyes were blown wide with lust. He had never done this before but he was determined to make it good for the other male. He opened his mouth and drew Daryl in slowly, his tongue tracing patterns on the underside and he tried to mimic what he liked having done. He tried to take more of Daryl into his mouth and gagged. "Rick...it's ok." Daryl said softly as he helped draw Rick's head back. "Just take it slow." He murmured. He looked down to see that Rick's eyes were closed, his lips stretched wide around Daryl's girth, and his chin was shiny with the mix of precum and saliva. He also noticed that Rick had himself in his hand and was jacking himself as he sucked him off. "Fuck." He gasped. He could feel the heated coil in his belly draw taunt. It had been way to long since he had had this done and even though Rick wasn't any good and it was a drunk, sloppy blowjob, it still felt fucking amazing. "R-Rick...gonna...fuck if ya don't stop I ain't gonna..."

Rick pulled away with a pop as his free hand continued to jack the other. "It's ok Daryl...wanna taste ya." He whispered before opening his mouth again and working to take Daryl as deep into his throat as possible.

Daryl let out a long groan as he gripped Rick's hair tightly and began to thrust his hips lightly, gasping as he felt Rick moan around his cock. "Shit...Rick...been wantin ya for so long...doin so good for me baby." He panted, his praise seemed to trigger something in Rick and he watched as the other man tensed and came all over his hand and the carpet, moaning around his cock. Daryl let out a startled yelp as he pulled Rick's head back and came as well. He watched in awe as Rick swallowed it all down and cleaned him off. When the cop pulled off with a pop Daryl growled as he yanked Rick up and kissed him hard, chasing the taste of himself on the others tongue. They pulled away from each other, and Daryl rested his forehead against Rick's, panting softly. "Fuck...that was...probably the best blowjob Ive ever had."

Rick gave a horse chuckle. "G-glad you liked it." He croaked.

Daryl smiled at him. "Seems like you got a praise kink too Sheriff." He teased, earning him a smack on his hip. "Lets get ya undressed an in bed." He got the man stripped to his boxers and into the bed finally. He turned to leave when Rick reached out and grabbed his wrist.

"Dont leave." He begged.

Daryl gave him one of his rare full smiles as he shook his head. "Fine, I'll stay with you." He said, putting on a face as if it were such a hardship, earning him another smack to his flank. He stripped down to his own boxers and nudged Rick over. The older man curled into his side, his head resting on Daryl's chest. Daryl flipped off the light and stroked his fingers through Rick's hair, enjoying the warmth and closeness of the other man. They soon both drifted off into an easy restful sleep.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The shrill sound of the doorbell made Rick flinch from his sleep and he shot up with a groan clutching at his head. He heard another groan and turned to see Daryl burying himself in the covers. "Daryl?"

"What fuckin time is it?" The man grunted.

Rick looked at his watch and groaned. "7 am." He growled, the doorbell went off again and he heard Carl and Patrick's voices in the hall. He pushed the covers off and noticed that he was in his boxers. The doorbell went off yet again and he pulled on a pair of sweat pants. He walked down to see Carl standing in front of the door, his arms folded over his chest. "Carl?"

"It's mom." He said over his shoulder.

Rick walked over and laid a hand on the boy's shoulder, "why don't you go on in the kitchen and figure out what to do for breakfast. Don't burn the place down. Is Beth still here?"

"She slept in the guest room while Patrick took my floor. We still need to finish up our science project and Hershel said she could stay." Carl explained.

Rick saw the sharp look in Lori's eyes. "Letting girls stay over now?"

Rick folded his arms over his bare chest. "Beth working with Patrick and Carl."

"She's a senior."

"And Carl and Patrick's partner for the science fair. They cleared it with Hershel and myself." He said. "I trust Carl to make smart decisions. He's a good boy and has never given me a reason not to trust him." He heard movement from behind him and knew that it was Beth and Daryl from the faint voices within the house. "What do you want Lori? You're going to have the house in a week, maybe less I plan on finishing packing and moving my stuff to the new apartment."

"I want you to re-think the paternity test." She said.

"The fuck I will, if that child is mine...well I plan on taking care of it."

"you already took Carl, I won't let you take this one." She hissed at him.

Rick opened his mouth to say something when an arm snaked around his waist and he felt a pressure at his shoulder. He turned his head to see Daryl watching his ex-wife with ice blue eyes. "What's goin on?" He asked, his voice still rough from sleep, but his eyes were sharp.

"Lori wants me to not do the paternity test." He said, leaning back into Daryl's warmth. The other man was shirtless as well and Rick could feel the hard line of the others muscles, it was an alien feeling to him, but one he found he really enjoyed.

Daryl snorted. "Ain't she gettin 'nough? She gets this big ol' house, all tha nice shit innit, an her car." He asked, as if she weren't there.

Lori snarled at him. "What's he doing here?"

"Who me?" Daryl asked, as if realizing that she was there for the first time. "Why I played sleepover with Officer Friendly too...an boy let me tell ya, he sure was friendly." He smirked.

Lori rounded on him. "So what you're some fag now?"

Rick felt Daryl tense up and he growled at her. "You don't get to judge my lifestyle Lori. You were the one who fucked my best friend, who broke our vows and allowed another into our bed."

"At least Shane was there." She snapped.

Rick's control snapped then. "I was always there Lori. I was providing for you and Carl." He went to take a step forward and he saw the fear in her eyes that let him know she knew she went to far. He felt Daryl's arm around his waist and turned to see the man shake his head.

"She ain't worth it. Never was." He smirked at the look on her face and glanced past her to see another Sheriff's car pull up. He saw Sasha and Tyreese get out of the car. "Looks like the backup has arrived."

Rick sighed. "Just leave Lori, we're done."

She glared, "Just wait till the judge hears about this. No judge would let a young boy stay with two fags." She spat.

"Your judge was Judge Stevens right? Brian Stevens?" Daryl asked looking up at Rick. When Rick nodded he chuckled, "Funny, Brian always orders the same drink every Friday night. Bourbon and Coke, no ice, also good to go hunting with."

Lori's face went red before she spun around on her heel and stormed away, pushing past Tyreese and Sasha who simply watched her get into her car and drive off. The other officers looked between him and Rick. "Everythin ok?" Sasha asked.

Rick and Daryl seemed to just sag against each other. "Fuckin' great." the bartender muttered.

Rick rubbed at his temples. "Definitely not something you wanna deal with with a hang over."

"Then you really aren't gonna like what's about to happen." Sasha sighed.

"It involves Merle." Tyreese scrubbed a hand through the beard on his face and Daryl went stiff.

"Whats wrong with my brother." Daryl asked quietly.

"He's in ICU." The younger woman said. "Found him in his cell beat to a bloody pulp. Heard he got booked by Shane last night so we went in early this mornin to see if we could get him out, cause you know Shane probably booked him on a bullshit charge because Merle got a pretty good hit on him last night at the bar brawl from what the others said."

Daryl was already tearing away from Rick and running back up the stairs. Rick turned and looked at them. "Thanks....I-"

"Just go with him. Carl's old enough to watch out for himself and we'll go and find out what happened at the station."

Rick nodded and watched as they walked back to their car before running up the stairs to find Daryl yanking on his clothes before sitting heavily on the bed and tugging on his boots. "Daryl..."

"Don' say a fuckin word. Ain't your fault." Daryl growled. "That stupid sonofabitch got himself locked up cuz some jackass had ta say somethin bout me fuckin a cop...and a married one." He grumbled.

Rick walked over and laid his hands gently on Daryl's feeling the other man shake and tremble. "Want me to go with you?"

Daryl looked at him gratefully, his eyes saying more than his lips would allow. He watched as Rick got dressed in his uniform, looking as sharp (and hot) as ever. They walked down the stairs and Carl threw them a questioning glance. "Trouble with Daryl's brother, you gonna be ok for a few hours?"

Carl rolled his eyes. "Dad it's me Beth and Patrick, how much trouble do you expect us to make?"

"After I had to clean red gunk off the ceiling last month, quite a bit. No experiments with something that's going to make a mess in the house. if your gonna do that go outside." He hugged his son before nodding to Daryl. "Let's go."

The two walked out, Daryl sliding into the passenger seat of his patrol car and Rick, just because he could, turned on the siren to get them to the hospital quicker. They went in through the big double doors and walked up to the receptionist desk. The young woman looked up and her eyes went wide. "Deputy Grimes, how can I help you?"

"I'm here to see Merle Dixon."

"I-I'm sorry but he's in ICU, only family-"

"I am his family." Daryl growled. "And Grimes here is helpin me so he's got permission to come with me."

"O-of course Mr. Dixon. He's on the first floor. third door on the right past the elevator."

Rick tilted his hat to the woman and he followed Daryl down the hall. They reached Merle's room and saw the man laying on a bed, hooked up to all kinds of wires and tubes, bandages covered his head, chest, and one of his hands. There was a man in scrubs checking over Merle's chart and talking to himself softly. Rick tapped on the door. "Excuse me?"

The man turned around. "Can I help you? This is ICU, unless you're family-"

"What the fuck happened to my brother?" Daryl growled as he walked into the room.

"Oh, you must be Daryl Dixon. I'm Dr. Victor Brown, I was the one in charge of your brother's surgery. It went wonderfully, but I am worried."

Daryl growled as he rounded on the man. "Just tell me what the fuck happened!"

"Well it seems that your brother suffered a sever head injury, as well as multiple rib fractures and even a punctured lung. We also had to remove his hand."

"You what?!" Daryl lurched forward only to be held back by Rick's arms around his chest.

"Please Mr. Dixon, when he got here his hand was nearly black, the fingers were all at awkward angles and there was just no hope of saving it. Honestly this looked as if the man decided to take on the Russian Mafia by himself, the sheer level of brutality is something I have never seen in our town before." Dr. Brown sighed and shook his head. "I'm not sure how long he was unconscious when he was brought to us. The Deputies that brought him in had no idea what happened."

"Do you know who brought him in?"

"Yes Sasha and Tyreese, then they said they knew where his brother was and they were going to go get him. Now I need to check on my other patients, he's stable for now so you can sit in here, but please try to keep calm. I will be back in about an hour to check on him again." Dr. Brown nodded at them before he left.

Daryl sank into the chair by Merle's bed and let his head fall to his clasped hands. "What the fuck happened? I know Merle is a piece of shit, but no one deserves this."

Rick laid his hand on Daryl's shoulder. "I'll find out who did this-"

"I already know who did it." Daryl said quietly.

"How-"

"It was Shane....There's something you don't know about your old friend Rick." Daryl raked his fingers through his hair and tugged lightly. "Remember when I said that Shane was hangin round my place?"

Rick watched the other man wearily. "Yeah..."

"It's because Merle was his dealer."

Chapter End Notes

Yep just a short chapter this time, but wow....the shit I've just spilled out.

Chapter 8

Rick was stunned as he watched the younger Dixon sit by his brother's bedside. "What?"

Daryl's eyes lifted and he nodded. "Yeah...I-I shoulda told you earlier...but...shit Rick m'brother-"

Rick laid his hand on Daryl's shoulder. "Daryl...I'd never do anything to hurt you or your brother you know that." Rick sighed as he looked to where Merle was hooked up to machines and flinched at the bruises blossoming on the others skin. While Merle wasn't someone he'd willingly hang out with on his own he put up with the man to be around Daryl. Merle was loud, crass, and a semi-unpleasant human being with a rap sheet a mile wide. Course they couldnt get him with anything because the man was slippery like a snake. But he was protective of Daryl, years of regret from leaving his little brother in the hands of their abusive father. Course some would say that Merle wasn't any better but Rick knew Merle wanted Daryl to be happy. He thought back to after being around Daryl for a few months when they were celebrating Michonne and Andreas 3 year aniversary, Merle had pulled Rick to the side to talk to him.

"Been seein how ya look at my baby brother Officer Friendly." Merle had said, sipping his beer.

Rick tugged at his tie and flushed slightly. "Um..."

"Don't play stupid." the elder Dixon growled. "I know Daryl likes dick, ain't gonna try to beat it outta him like our old man tried...jus gonna say ya hurt 'im I'm gonna come after ya."

Rick blinked at Merle. "I don't want to hurt him..." Rick's eyes traveled to where Daryl was rolling his eyes at something T-Dog had said, a smirk playing on the redneck's thin lips. "He's....something else. He's special." Rick watched as Daryl's eyes caught sight of him and Merle and concern flashed across the younger Dixon's face. He tilted his head and Rick simply shook his causing Daryl to shrug and go back to what he was doing. Rick turned his eyes back to Merle. "I'll gladly let ya kick my ass if I hurt Daryl."

Merle eyed the cop before he snorted, thumping the man on the back. "Yer alright by me Officer Friendly."

"What's goin on over here?" Daryl asked as he finally walked over, eying his brother and Rick.

"Shit baby brother, just tellin Ol Rick here that Im happy ta have a cop in the family." Merle laughed as he thumped Rick hard on the back, making the man choke on his beer. "Get yer panties outta that twist Darylana, I ain't gonna fuck up yer man." He laughed again as he walked away leaving a severely blushing Daryl behind.

Daryl groaned as he scrubbed a hand over his face. "Rick-"

Rick rolled his eyes as he gripped Daryl by the vest and pulled him closer. "Daryl it's fine." He said kissing him softly.

Daryl's eyes went sharp as he glanced around. "Ya said you weren't gonna do that til after the divorce was final. I don't wanna have yer case fucked cause of me."

Rick sighed. "It's just us Daryl, the gang is here and no ones gonna say anything." He said as he leaned in for another kiss, this one just a gentle brush of their lips together.

"Rick?" Daryl asked, drawing Rick out of the memory.

"Sorry...sorry...I was just...thinkin back to what Merle told me at the party." He said softly.

"Ya never did tell me what he said."

"I'll let him tell ya when he wakes up." He said as he bent down and kissed Daryl softly.

"And when he wakes up I'll take his statement and we can put Shane away if this was him."

Daryl nodded. "I'll be here."

"I know. I'll come by for lunch and check on you."

"Don't have ta do that."

"I want to, indulge me. I'm a free man who's got an infatuation with a bristly redneck." He laughed ducking the punch that Daryl aimed at him as he walked out the door.

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Work was hell, T-Dog, Tyreese, and Sasha had been working all morning to figure out something about what had happened in the cells but the cameras for that night had stopped working and the books were messed up so no one could tell who was on duty for the cells. Shane said that he was with Lori that night, and by the time Rick had gotten there Shane was gone on patrol with his new partner since Maggie had requested to transfer to the evidence room. Rick dropped to his chair and sighed as he looked at T-Dog who held up a cup of coffee to him. "Thanks."

"How's Daryl?"

"Worried...T...shit ya didn't see Merle. it's bad. He's hooked up six ways from sunday and they had to take his hand. something about his hand turning black....Doc said he had to remove it."

T-Dog paled a bit. "Shit...Daryl's probably ready to go on the war path."

"No...he's just worried about his brother." Rick looked out the door and leaned forward, "Daryl thinks it mighta been Shane."

"Shane? The mans an asshole sure but I don't think he'd go that far."

"Merle was Shane's dealer."

"What?!" T-Dog yelled then quickly looked around before leaning into Rick. "What do you mean dealer?"

"I have no idea man...it's what Daryl told me. He told me a couple of months ago that he'd had to kick Shane out of the place he shares with Merle on more than one occasion..."

"But you would have noticed something like that wouldn't you? You were best friends with the man since you were in school."

Rick groaned. "Don't remind me." He said as he ran his fingers through his hair. "I can't work on this case because of my involvement with Daryl, I'm too close to it and the Sheriff would never let me on it."

"That's why we're working on it." Tyreese said as he walked in with Sasha following behind him.

"But Daryl's..."

"A friend yeah, but everyone knows how close you are to him Rick. Ty and I are going to work on this. Sheriff Miller wants you to go home, he's going to give you some time off."

"He wants you far from this while we look into it." Tyreese said with a shrug. "Besides, ya got that new place to move into and set up."

Rick sighed and rubbed his face with his hand. "Carl's moving some stuff over with Beth and Patrick. Beth got to use Jimmy's truck."

Sasha moved over to him and laid her hand on his shoulder. "Go home Rick, go change, grab a couple of burgers from that place down the street from the hospital and go sit with Daryl, he needs you." She said with a smile.

Rick, knowing when he was beat, simply got up and left the department.

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Daryl sat at the hospital watching his brother. "Ya look like shit big brother." He muttered with a humorless chuckle. "I told ya...ya shouldn't have gotten involved with that dirty cop. Knew he had a temper and ya kept pokin the bear. Fuckin idiot." He growled, as he wiped angrily at the tears in his eyes. "Ain't gonna fuckin cry either, don't need ya wakin up and seein me bawlin like a baby." He listened to the monitors beep softly and watched as Merle stayed motionless on the bed. "Shit Merle....need ya to wake up...still need ya round, even iffin I don't act like it...need ya big brother." There was a knock at the door and Daryl jumped before turning around to see Merle's doctor walking back in. "Oh, it's just you Doc."

"Yes, I wanted to give you an update. His scans show that there's no swelling in his brain, his MRIs and other tests came back alright..."

"So why's he not wakin up?"

"Well...sometimes the body just sleeps to help the trauma to the body heal. The theory is that during sleep the body will heal its self. thats why you see those sleep study cases on insomniac patients who go insane from lack of sleep." the Doctor shrugged. "Gods be willing he'll wake up, for now just let him sleep...talk to him even, some people think that talking to coma patients helps them wake up."

Daryl gave the man an odd look before he sighed. "Thanks Doc." He said and the doctor nodded before he finished his check and left the room again. The younger Dixon looked down at his brother and saw that the other man's lips were curled into a slight smirk. "Merle you son of a bitch." He growled.

"Ah shit baby brother, only way ta hear how ya really think o'me is ta fake sleepin. Did it all tha time when ya were a kid." the older Dixon chuckled cracking his good eye open.

"Fucker." He growled, but he felt the tears in his eyes, thankful that his brother was at least awake.

"C'mon now Darylena ain't gonna leave ya baby brother, to fuckin stubborn to roll over and die like our old man." He said with a shrug, he looked past Daryl and his smirk got wider. "Well howdy officer Friendly."

Daryl turned to see Rick in the doorway with a bag of fast food and a drink holder in the other hand. "Rick..." He knew his face was showing every emotion he felt for the other man and he wanted to beat his own ass, he wasn't used to being this open and raw. He also noticed that Rick was dressed in his civilian clothes, dark-wash jeans that hugged his ass and thighs, the black boots that Daryl had bought him for his birthday, a simple white T-shirt that hugged his torso and his dark zip up jacket with the warm fur trim. Daryl knew that he was long gone for the other man, he just refused to admit it.

Rick blinked as he saw the older Dixon already awake. "Shit...Didn't realize you'd be awake already or I would have picked ya up something to eat too." He said as he walked into the room. He set the food on the table next to the bed and laid his hand on Daryl's shoulder. "Well, I picked up a couple of burgers if you think you can eat something." He said, watching as Daryl ripped into a burger.

"Nah, aint even hungry...may hit up one o' them nurses for a sponge bath." Merle smirked making his brother groan, even though he reached over and snagged a fry from Daryl.

"Why are you here Rick?" Daryl asked, "N-not that I'm not glad you're here....but I thought ya had work."

"Sheriff Miller made me go home, says I'm to close to this and gave me some leave. Tyreese and Sasha are on your case." He said as he scratched his fingers through his beard. "Figured we could set my apartment up in my time off...maybe go camping or something." He looked at Merle. "Spoke to your doctor on the way in, he said that you're gonna have to stay here for a while. Gotta get used to not having a hand." He shrugged as he grabbed his own burger and bit into it.

Merle glared down at his wrapped up stump. "Can't believe they took my hand, that was my steadyin hand too, ain't gonna be able ta shoot worth shit anymore." He growled.

Daryl snorted. "Yeah well...ya weren't that great of a shot to begin with." He laughed leaning back from Merle's swipe at him.

"Just wait till I can get outta this bed ya fuckin-"

"Oh Mr. Dixon you're awake." A pretty young blonde said with a bright smile as she walked in. "How are you feelin?" She said as she walked over and began looking over his chart, she was probably in her late 20s early 30's with blue green eyes and her blonde hair pulled back in a high ponytail.

"Well hello nurse." Merle said with a crooked grin. "And please, the name's Merle."

"Or asshole, depends on what you prefer." Rick smirked making the older Dixon flip him the bird.

The nurse laughed. "Well I'm Evalynn Marsdon, but everyone calls me Evie. I'm going to be your physical therapist and help you get back into tip top shape." She said brightly, her voice holding an accent that one one could place.

"Where ya from darlin?" Merle asked, trying to weasle his way closer to her. Daryl rolled his eyes, Merle had a thing for blondes, trying more than once to get into Andreas pants only to take to calling her Sugar Tits.

"Oh, you can't place my accent huh? I'm from Athens but moved to the states when I was 4. My mom and dad still speak a little Greek around the house so my voice still has some of it's Grecian habits. Though I grew up in the suburbs of LA." She said with a wide smile. "Now, you must be Merle's younger brother Daryl, it's nice to meet you." She said happily before turning her eyes to Rick. "And you're Deputy Grimes, always nice to see you, I've seen you come and visit some of the other patients and your son's friend Beth is my candy stripper."

"Oh so I'll be seein lil Beth here?" Merels face lit up, he'd had a soft spot for the youngest Greene girl as did everyone in the town.

"Yep, she's actually looking to become a nurse like me. Soft heart like her though I'd direct her to the Maternity Ward where she can play with all the babies." Evie chuckled and shook her head. "Now then...I can come back later if you need me to...I was just going to go over everything with you so there's no nasty surprises."

Daryl shook his head. "We'll just leave ya alone. gotta go an move Rick into his new apartment." Daryl said as he stood up. He reached out and Merle took his forearm in his hand like they always did.

"Go have fun baby brother. Ain't gonna be goin no where, not with Nurse Evie here ta keep me company." Merle grinned as Evie laughed and shook her head.

Daryl smiled slightly and nodded as he pocketed the number. "Thanks Evie."

"Dad we're just piling in the last things from your room. Though Beth found a stain on the carpet she couldn't get up...mom's gonna be pissed bout it."

Carl nodded. "Yep."

Daryl wrapped his arms around Rick's waist and he rested his head against the other man's back. "I get it...shit I jus....dunno how ta help ya."

"What?"

"Just...glad you're here. Wouldn't have been able to handle alot of the shit that's gone on the past couple of months without you." Rick said, enjoying the blush on the younger man's cheeks.

"Fuckin sap." He grumbled. "Git outta my kitchen," he growled flicking a towel at the laughing man who simply held up his hands and walked out of the room. Daryl paused as he thought about what he just said. He just claimed the other man's kitchen as his own and he wanted to kick himself. The man had just gotten divorced and Daryl was acting like the man was his husband. He shook himself and finished cooking, choosing to ignore the want in his head and just enjoy what he had with the other man.

Beth and Patrick left, Carl going with Patrick to stay over at the other kids house to play video games, leaving Daryl and Rick alone with a couple of beers and a random game on TV. Rick looked over at Daryl and smiled. "So...we got the apartment to ourselves...wanna stay over?"

Daryl rolled his eyes. "We fuckin 16 or some shit?" the redneck snorted.

Rick chuckled as he leaned forward and began to kiss and lick at Daryl's neck. He listened to the other man moan softly and smiled. "Is that a yes?"

"Fuck you." Daryl growled, fisting his hand into Rick's hair.

Rick looked up at him, his eyes dark with heat, turning them into glittering pools of melted sapphires. "That's the general idea." He said as his lips curled.

Daryl felt all the blood rush from his brain, they really hadn't gotten further than the blowjob the night before. "Rick?"

"Tired of dancin round it Daryl...want you...and this time ya can't use me being drunk as an excuse." He smirked as he got up, dragging the other man up and back to the master bedroom. once the door was closed Rick yanked Daryl close and slammed his lips against the younger mans. He knew he was going to be the bottom for Daryl...and Rick didn't mind at all, the thought of feeling Daryl inside of him made him whimper with want. They began to pull at each others clothes, finally they fell back on the bed, Rick arching up into the glorious feeling that was Daryl, naked and hard against him. Rick let out a guttural groan as he gripped the others strong arms, his hips bucking up to grind their cocks together.

Daryl hissed and nipped at Rick's neck hard. "Shit Rick...gonna fuckin kill me like that."

"Better hurry the fuck up then." Rick growled. "Under the pillow."

Daryl's hand went searching and he arched an eyebrow as he pulled out the brand new bottle of lube. "High hopes?"

"Nope, just knew what was comin." He smirked as he shifted to lay back on the pillows, he chewed on his lip nervously.

Daryl stroked a hand down Rick's thigh. "Movin to fast?"

"Just...never really done anythin like this." He muttered.

Daryl nodded. "I'll be careful." He said as he nudged Rick's legs apart, exposing the small puckered entrance of the other man. Daryl took a moment to take in the other man, Rick was

perfect, his skin tanned and his body toned from years of being on the police force. He traced his lips down Rick's chest and he opened the bottle of lube, squirting some onto his fingers. He worked to warm it up before he circled the other's entrance, listening to the soft moans from the other man. He drew his tongue down Rick's cock as he slipped a finger in.

Rick gasped as he arched his back and bore down on the other's finger, his breath hitching as Daryl added a second one while sucking down his cock. He moaned loudly, thankful that Carl wasn't there and that they could be as loud as they wanted. He reached down and threaded his fingers into Daryl's hair, his hips bucking lightly. "Daryl..." He panted. "Please."

Daryl pulled out, a smirk playing on his lips. "If only the group knew that the great Rick Grimes was a beggar." He chuckled.

Rick groaned as he pulled Daryl up to kiss him hard. "I doubt you wanna tell everyone about our sex life."

Daryl seemed to think for a moment. "Good point...this is mine and mine alone...you're mine." Daryl's eyes flashed with an inner heat that made Rick tremble.

"Yours." He whispered as he leaned up and kissed Daryl. His legs slid along Daryl's and he felt the other man's cock brush against his entrance. He grabbed the lube and put some in his hands, slathering it over the other man's cock. He helped guide Daryl to his entrance and held his breath as the younger man braced himself over the cop.

"Just relax Rick...ain't gonna hurt ya." He said softly as he dropped his head down to kiss Rick softly as he pushed into the other man.

Rick groaned into the kiss as his thighs tightened around Daryl and he angled his hips to let the other man slide in deeper. The burn felt good and he slid his fingers into Daryl's hair. He saw the stars behind his eyes and when Daryl was fully seated inside of him he pulled back to look at the other man. "F-fuck Daryl."

Daryl panted as he looked down at Rick, the flush on the other man's cheeks was sexy as fuck and the warm tightness around his cock made him groan. "Rick....y-you alright?" He panted.

"Fuckin hell move damnit...feels good." Rick gasped as Daryl slowly pulled out and pushed back in making Rick arch his back.

Daryl soon settled into a steady rhythm as he helped angle the other man's hips to drive Rick crazy. He listened to the other man's litany of curses and moans and they only served to pick up the pace. He reached down and began to stroke Rick in time with his thrusts. "C'mon Rick...wanna feel ya cum round my cock." He growled. "Ya feel so good."

Rick moaned loudly as he arched his back, his fingers digging into the other's shoulders. "Daryl!" He cried out as he saw stars when the younger man slammed into his prostate making his orgasm hit him like a train. He tightened around Daryl, dragging the other man's orgasm out of him and trembling at the wet warmth inside of him. He felt Daryl collapse on top of him and he stroked his fingers through his hair. "Fuck..." He panted.

Daryl listened to Rick's rapid heartbeat and nodded against his chest. "yeah..."

Rick lifted Daryl's chin and kissed him softly. "Daryl...I love you." He whispered against the other man's lips. He felt Daryl stiffen against him and he pulled back to see Daryl watching him.

"W-what did you say?"

Chapter 9

Rick watched as Daryl started to pull away. "Daryl-" He reached out for the redneck only to have Daryl shy away from his touch.

"I gotta go." He muttered as he yanked his pants up, a panicked look crossed his face as he searched for his shirt.

"Daryl stop." Rick growled as he pushed himself up in the bed. "Why are-"

"Ya don't love me...ya cant." Daryl whispered as he raked his fingers through his hair.

Rick swung his legs around the edge of the bed and looked at the other male. "Why is it so hard to understand?"

"I ain't good fer you." Daryl muttered, rubbing at his arms as if he were cold. "Ain't good 'nough for ya...aint good nough for nobody." He could feel the tears in his eyes and he wiped at them angrily. "Ya deserve so much better." He looked panicked. "I need ta go." He said as he ran out the bedroom door.

Rick cursed as he struggled to untangle himself all the way and he ran out of the room after the other man, only to hear the front door slam shut. Rick cursed as he slammed his fist into the wall. "Fuck!" He yelled into the now empty apartment. He slid down the wall and let his head rest on his knees. He knew he should have kept his mouth shut, but the way Daryl made him feel he thought the other man had the right to know. Rick had been in love with Daryl for a long time now, his heart warring with his mind about telling the other man the feelings he had developed for him. But tonight, after everything, he felt that Daryl needed to know just how Rick felt. Rick looked miserably at the opposite wall as tears filled his eyes. "I'm sorry Daryl." He whispered to the empty apartment.

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Daryl didn't know where he was going, he just ran out of Rick's apartment, his heart in his throat and his eyes burning with tears. He didn't know why he ran, he just had to get away. He found himself at Michonne's bar and he walked in, sitting down at the bar while his boss served him his drink. He took the shot and slammed the glass down before rubbing his face miserably.

"Well, ya look like shit." Michonne drawled as she looked him over. "what happened?"

Daryl sighed. "Helped Rick unpack an get settled in, made dinner since ya know that the man can't cook worth shit."

"Uh-huh?" Michonne raised an eyebrow waiting for him to go on.

"Ended up sleepin together-"

"Look at you, finally gettin laid." She laughed as she thumped his shoulder across the bar.

He glared at her and swatter her hand away. "Ain't like that."

"So for someone who just got laid you're lookin like you're gonna kill something."

"Rick said he loved me."

She blinked. "and you ran away?" At his nod she clipped him upside his head.

"Tha fuck was that for?" He snarled.

"You're a fucking idiot Daryl Dixon!" Michonne growled as she leaned forward. "Ya fuckin ran out on him after that? I should kick your ass right on outta here." she paused as she saw the miserable look on his face. "You love him too."

Daryl sighed as he rubbed his face. "I just...I don't know what to do."

Michonne's face softened and she sighed. "Daryl...you need to just accept that you're good enough. I know what's going through your head and it's not true. You are someone who deserves love. you deserve everything good to happen to you."

He sighed as he got up. "M gonna go see Merle." He muttered as he turned. He looked at Michonne over his shoulder. "I'll...I'll think on it...would you-"

"I was just closin shop, I'll stop by and check on Rick." She said motioning for him to go. She watched his retreating back and unhooked her keys tossing them to her other bartender. "Close up, Ive got shit I have to do." She said as she walked out of the bar.

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Daryl walked into the hospital, waving to the nurse at the desk as he walked to his brothers room. He heard a soft voice and caught sight of something in a room a few doors down from Merle. He poked his head in and saw Carol sitting in a chair reading from a book out loud, to a girl in the bed that was hooked up to every machine and he blinked. "Carol?"

The woman jumped and looked over at him, tears evident on her face and she quickly brushed them away. "Oh...Daryl. what are you doing here?"

"Just came to see Merle....is that?"

Carol smiled sadly and brushed some of the girls hair out of her face. "This is my Sophia. She's been in a coma since she was 10....her father was driving drunk crashed them into a tree. He was dead when they got here...they tried to help Sophia but she slipped into a coma. I come here every night and read to her, tell her about my day, tell her about the wonderful man that is my neighbor and his wonderful son. I talk to her and hope that she'll wake up and be my Sophia again." She sighed. "Shes the same age as Carl and I want so badly for them to meet but I don't know if she'll ever wake up. Sometimes Carl will come with me and talk to her too, hes such a sweet boy." She looked up at him. "Something's wrong, what's troubling you?"

He sighed, she'd always been able to read him like a book, even when he was a little boy.
"Rick told me he loved me."

"Oh Daryl! that's wonderful!" She said happily, until she saw the look on Daryl's face. "You ran away..."

"He deserves better, I'm just some low life piece o'shit. Ain't good fer no body."

Carol sighed at him. "Daryl, you are. You are such an amazing man, you grew up in a shitty situation but you didn't let it define you." She shook her head. "So what are you going to do?"

Daryl shrugged. "Gonna give him space..."

"Just don't wait to long Daryl...even Rick has his limits." She said as she turned back to the book, taking up the reading again. Daryl watched her for a moment before he turned away to go to Merles room, her words echoing in his head.

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Two weeks...that had been how long since Rick had seemed to break everything he had with Daryl. He hated having to tell his son that things were complicated and watch that look on his son's face when he noticed that Daryl wasn't coming around. Rick went to work, avoided Michonne's bar, and sat on his couch drinking a beer alone. Shane was in jail now, after a 'random' blood test was done at the precinct, and he came back dirtier than a wrestlers jockstrap. They were able to get more evidence against Shane to lock him up for a while without putting Merle into jail. They had given him a deal, as long as he got clean and stayed clean he wouldn't serve jail time, he apparently had something to really stay clean for this time and that came in the form of the pretty blushing nurse next to him. Tyreese had finally manned up and asked Carol out on a date, T-Dog and Sasha had gotten closer, and Carl had the guts to come out to Rick and tell him that him and Patrick were going out. The last one shocked Rick but he was glad his son had found some happiness. He watched as all of his friends found their happiness and he still found himself pining after Daryl. He looked for the man whenever he was in town, whenever he had to run by where he knew Daryl was living or he went to the hospital to see Sophia with Carol. He found himself missing Daryl like no other, he found a hole in his heart that was filled by Daryl after Lori and now it was back and hurting even more. He scratched a hand through his beard and sighed, it was getting out of hand again but he couldn't bring himself to care. His phone rang and he sighed as he picked it up. "Hello?"

"Deputy Grimes?" A voice asked.

"Yeah."

"I'm Dr. Bob Stookey."

"Um..."

"Lori's OBGYN." The man said patiently.



"Oh...right, what's wrong?" He asked, getting the prickly sensation that something was wrong.

"I'm sorry Deputy Grimes, but Lori came to us due to bleeding we thought she was having a miscarriage and when we got her in things went bad really fast. We had to act quick and do an emergency C-section but due to your ex-wife's preexisting condition we couldn't revive her."

Rick felt his heart drop into his stomach. "And the baby?"

"A baby girl, perfectly healthy 6lbs 4ozs." the doctor said. "We need you to come down here...we know that Mr. Walsh was changed to her emergency contact but because of the situation with him that is not possible. We also know that you were requesting blood tests on the baby to determine the father so-"

"I'll be there." He hung up the phone and left a note for Carl when the boy got home from school for him to go right to the dinner and stay there. He drove to the hospital, parked his car and he saw Daryl standing outside smoking a cigarette. He froze in place as the other man saw him and froze too. "Daryl..." He said softly.

Daryl stamped out his cigarette and took in the other man. He was looking like shit, there were bags under his eyes and his beard was starting to get out of control. He also noticed a haggard and worried look on his face. "What's wrong?"

"Lori...she...she died during the C-section." Rick said softly. He should be angry at the other man for not returning his calls or bothering to come back over and talk to him, but seeing Daryl helped ease his heart and his soul. "She's gone Daryl."

Daryl's eyes went wide as he quickly stepped closer to the other man and wrapped his arms around him. The move was automatic and he tried to stamp down the feeling of love and hope that was in his chest. "Rick-"

"Daryl...please...I need you." He said softly. "Please...don't pull away. I need you now, I've been needing you for two weeks. I-I wanted to give you space, I wanted to say I was sorry for scaring you off I just-"

"Rick shut up." Daryl said softly. He sighed as he pulled back to look into Rick's eyes. "Let's go and talk with Lori's doctor and then we can talk later."

"You'll stay with me?"

"Merle's to busy with his nurse." He said in his way of saying he'd stick around.

Rick nodded as he took Daryl's hand and they walked to the maternity ward. An hour later Rick was sitting in a hospital room watching as Daryl cooed and rocked a screaming baby girl, a bottle of formula in his hand. The man was amazing, Rick couldn't even pick up the screaming girl and he looked away when they took a small sample of her blood to run against his and check paternity. Daryl hummed gently under his breath as the baby slowly started to quiet down and he gently knelt down in front of Rick.

"You're gonna have to hold her." He said gruffly.

"I-I can't...I don't-"

"that baby is yours Rick, ya gonna let her go into the system? You're a cop, ya know how that works." Daryl challenged.

Rick sighed and shook his head. "No...course not." He soon found himself with an armful of a tiny little girl. Her blue eyes looked up at him and he felt his heart break. "I-" He felt Daryl lay a hand on his chest and he looked up at the smiling man.

"I'm gonna stay right here Rick." He said softly. "Ain't goin no where." Daryl leaned forward and kissed Rick softly over the baby girl. "Rick...I love you too."

# Epilogue

## Chapter Summary

Here we are, at the end of a great story! I hope you all will enjoy this epilogue to wrap up everything all nice and neat for us. Thank you to all of you, my freaky little darlings, for reviewing, faving, and giving me feedback on how the story worked out for you.

## Chapter Notes

On a side note, I did go back and edit a chapter, as well as add a little note about how the timeline of this story worked. Chapter 6 is where you will find the timeline.

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

~~Epilogue~~

-1 year later-

Rick sighed as he sat down at his desk at the station, he tapped his fingers impatiently on the wood as he watched the clock. It was Christmas Eve and he wanted to get home, it was his turn to host having everyone over and he wanted to get home to the people that he now called family. Finally the clock hit 3:30 and Rick was out the door in a flash, hopping into his beat up old Chevy that even Daryl made fun of on the odd occasion. He loved his Chevy, and it had helped when he had finally gotten Daryl to move in with him. They now lived in a one level four bedroom house on the outskirts of town, it was far enough that Daryl didn't feel like he was being watched, and close enough that it wasn't a hassle of trying to and from work or school. Seven minutes later he was pulling up to his spot next to Daryl's bike, a smile crossing his face as he caught sight of Daryl in the window of their living room, spinning with Judith in his arms and Carl and Carol laughing as they watched him. He could still remember the day after Lori died, Daryl hadn't left his side and Beth had drove Patrick and Carl to the hospital and Carl had asked if they could name the baby after a teacher he had when he was in elementary school. Rick thought it was fine and put her name down as Judith Caroline Grimes. They had buried Lori a week later in her family plot, everyone had come to say their goodbyes and Rick had also gotten the results of the blood test to find out if he was Judith's father. The letter was sitting in a drawer in their kitchen untouched because he knew that he was Judith's dad.

He smiled to himself as he saw Daryl pause in the window, catching sight of his car and he saw Judith get a big grin on her face as she slapped her hand on the window. Rick got out of the car and walked into the house, his grin only growing wider as he saw everyone already

seated in the living room. Glenn sat with Maggie on his lap in an overstuffed arm chair by the fireplace, his arms around her waist as she talked with the newest addition to their family, Tara, a sweet but shy girl who was Maggie's new partner on the force. Carol sat with her legs resting across Tyreese's lap, a glass of wine in her hand as she talked quietly with him and Sasha, who was watching a game that T-Dog, Beth, Patrick, Michonne, Andrea, and Carl were all playing. Hershel sat in the other arm chair next to Glenn and Maggie, reading a book but listening to the conversations around him and occasionally joining in.

"Was wonderin when you were gonna come in." Daryl teased him lightly as he walked over.

"Dada!" Judith squealed happily as she squirmed in Daryl's arms, her chubby hands reaching out for Rick as she grinned at him with a toothy smile.

Rick smiled as he took her from the other man and leaned over to kiss Daryl lightly. "I was lost in thought in the car, that's all."

"Nythin bad?" Daryl asked.

"Nah, only good thoughts." Rick said with a reassuring smile as he kissed Daryl lightly. "Who's cookin tonight?"

"Merle and Evie, Merle showed up with a huge buck and a couple of rabbits and Evie said she was going to make Kourabiedes."

"The fuck are those?"

"Traditional Greek Christmas cookies." Evie laughed as she walked out of the kitchen, drying her hands on a towel. "Trust me everyone is going to love them, my Mer-bear loves them." She said.

"Damnit Evie I told ya not ta call me that." Rick heard Merle growl from the kitchen, everyone laughing.

Rick laughed along with everyone as the stress from the day began to melt away and he settled into his home with everyone. Dinner was a lively affair, everyone eating their fill of meats, veggies and having their beer or wine. Rick noticed that Maggie was avoiding her wine and he narrowed his eyes at her. "Maggie...why arent you having any wine? I thought you liked this brand."

Maggie looked at her husband and saw him nod before she grinned. "Glenn and I are pregnant!" She said happily.

Beth let out a squeal of delight as Hershel smiled happily, dabbing his eyes with his napkin. Everyone gave their congratulations to the couple as they finished up dinner. They all worked to clear away the dishes before moving into the living room again, everyone sitting around the tree. Rick put on a Santa hat, much to Carl and Daryl's amusement, and began passing out gifts. As per a tradition they had started the year before, everyone bought each other one gift and they would get together on Christmas Eve to have a 'Family Christmas' before going their separate ways the next day to do their own family affairs. Rick, Daryl, Carl and Judith would

drive the 4 hours to his family's home in southern Georgia to have Christmas lunch with his parents and older brother before coming back and doing Christmas with Merle and Lori's parents who were still a big part of Carl and Judith's life. They had been shocked to learn that Lori had cheated on Rick and broke their marriage and a bit more shocked when Rick informed them that he was seeing Daryl, but they were supportive and admit about staying in the children's lives, and Rick didn't have the heart to deny them that. Once gifts were passed out and opened everyone was enjoying just being together when Merle cleared his throat loudly.

"Hey Ya'll shut the hell up, I got somethin ta say." He grumbled, looking slightly flustered as he knelt on the floor in front of Evie. "Evie, you've been an angel that dropped into this idiots life. Cause of ya I got clean an am stayin clean, nothin in this last year was easy and ya have been there fer me through it all...and I wanna ask...Evalynn Marsdon will ya do me the pleasure of becomin Evalynn Dixon?" He asked as he held up a simple but beautiful single diamond ring.

The room was stunned silent and Evie looked close to tears as she nodded, holding out her hand. "Yes...yes I will!" She said happily as he slid the ring onto her finger and she flung herself at him.

"Well I'll be damned." Daryl laughed as he cuddled Judith. "Never thought I'd see my big brother get married." Daryl smiled as he reached into his own pocket. "And here I thought I was going to steal the show."

Rick looked over at him with an arched eyebrow to see Daryl holding out a silver ring in his palm. "Daryl?"

"I know Georgia ain't got Same-sex marriage yet...but I wanted ta give ya somethin to tell ya that I'm yours fer the long haul. I bought myself a matching one." He admitted softly.

Rick smiled as he took the ring and slid it onto his finger, the same finger where the ring that symbolized his comitment to Lori once laid. "I'd love nothing more than that." He grinned as he saw the matching ring glinting on Daryl's hand and he leaned over to kiss Daryl softly over Judith, even with the cat calls from their friends. They all settled in to enjoy the cookies that Evie had made and share stories and jokes when a knock was heard at the door. "Who could that be?" Rick wondered as he got up from his seat next to Daryl and went to the door. He opened it and saw his boss standing outside of the door. "Sheriff Miller...what a surprise."

"Sorry to interrupt Rick...but there's something you need to know."

Rick's brow furrowed. "What's wrong?"

"Shane's been let out, his lawyer found a screw up in our case and he was released from prison."

~~TBC~~

## Chapter End Notes

BUM BUM BUM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Hope ya'll enjoyed!

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