

Hold Me Tight

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Hold Me Tight

by [Darylsllover33](#)

Summary

After joining the Reapers, Daryl is trying to keep the people he cares about safe, when a ghost from his past returns. Daryl/OC, Beth/OC. Co-Written with WalkingPotterGirl14. AU in parts of season 11.

The Silence

The woods were silent, aside from the occasional sound of the birds chirping in the distance, as walkers stumbled around hungrily. An arrow pierced the skull of a would-be bride, in a tattered, bloody, and white wedding dress.

Daryl let out a deep sigh as he followed Leah into the woods. One of the Reapers had spotted a group of seven people twenty miles from Meridian.

Pope had ordered all of them to attack the travelers when it became dark, and they would have the advantage. He was praying like hell that it wasn't people from Alexandria who had come to search for him.

"They'll reach the road in two hours. We need to be ready to ambush them, Daryl," Leah informed him quietly. He nodded. A part of him wondered if Pope had asked her about the young family that Leah had chosen to spare from being killed.

"I know the plan, Leah. Like I said, I'm here for you and not Pope," he said coldly, making that clear. At that moment, one of their other allies, Brandon, came over, waving his hand in their direction to follow him. Daryl does so, watching the man with quiet eyes as Leah spoke to him quietly.

He was still trying to get over the fact that Brandon was a Reaper. Shit, he'd known the guy before the turn. He had been kind, hardworking, military man who cared deeply about his family. Now he was cold, a killer. Daryl had seen the man tear someone's fingernails out. It was disgusting, to say the least.

He shook his head as the face of a young woman appeared in his mind, but he shoved the thought away.

She was gone, just like almost everyone else that he cared about. Which was what made this so much more important.

He looked to see where Brandon was and found him walking next to Shaw. The man had changed into someone that he didn't recognize, sure, but he could still see some of the old him, just barely there under the surface. He sighed as they all got into position and was glad that he hadn't been given a mask.

He hated that he was having to do this shit, but if it meant keeping Alexandria safe then he would do it. A part of him was also glad he had left Dog at home - better to have him safe and sound than in his mess.

"They're coming down the road," Powell said quietly, pulling on his mask. Daryl moved to the shadows. He wasn't going to hurt these people.

The weather was turning cold as a young dark blonde-haired woman walked down the road with her seven companions. Suzanne Giroux walked quietly alongside her friends, as she looked around uneasily at the road that they were on.

She couldn't help but get the sense that someone was watching them. But then again, they were being watched everywhere, weren't they?

Suzanne glanced over at where her husband Gavin was walking up ahead with Melinda, her younger sister, and Jose.

Her ribs still ached from the beating she'd gotten last night. Gavin had found out that he'd been picked to go on the trade with Alexandria, and he didn't like that. Not one bit. If there was one thing her husband hated, it was having to leave the comfort and privilege of leaving the nice, extravagant house that he was allowed to have.

And then that anger was put onto her.

She swallowed as she looked at Ronnie, who was limping slightly. He'd gotten hurt, keeping Melinda safe. He'd sprained his ankle and Emil was helping him walk.

"I think we should go the other way, guys. There's something off about this road," Lindsay voiced what most of them were thinking. But of course, someone had to respond - and that had to be Gavin.

"The other road will take us an extra three days to get to Alexandria, and unlike you people, I don't want to sweat any more than necessary. We're going through Meridian. Now shut the help up, you stupid bitch," Gavin snarled angrily, causing Lindsay to glare at him.

Suzanne sighed quietly. She hated how Gavin spoke to everyone who didn't have a good job. Her husband had worked as a wealthy defence attorney before the world had gone to hell, and the Commonwealth treated him with respect and gave him privileges.

She thought of Eugene, Yumiko, Princess and Ezekiel then and hoped they were alright. She was especially worried about Tomi who had disappeared, and Eugene who was in a cell, after punching Sebastian Milton.

Not like the little punk didn't deserve it most of the time though.

Just as she was about to stand up for Lindsay, they reached the road and were greeted by the sight of bodies strung up all along the sides.

"Holy fucking shit, what the hell happened here?" Carlos asked horrified, as he stared at the bloody scene. Suzanne felt uneasy and gripped her bow tightly.

Before anyone could answer, Ronnie was shot in the head with an arrow, while Annie had gotten three knives impaled in her chest, stomach and leg.

"Run for it! Save yourselves!" Edward screamed terrified. Suzanne quickly ran behind a tree

as Gavin and Melinda fled into the woods in terror. Arrows were fired at them as she dragged Annie behind her.

As she looked on from behind the tree, she saw a group of fourteen people wearing masks, stalking towards them.

Who the hell were these people?

Suzanne swallows heavily and turns to Annie. "I saw an abandoned mall up ahead - follow me!" she whispers fiercely to her, and the younger woman nods, holding onto her hand as they ran through the shadows, trying to avoid gunfire and arrows.

Daryl heard one of the people from the group yelling at everyone to run for it as the Reapers began attacking them. He tried to see if he could help any of them when he saw one of the Reapers slit a young woman's throat. He swallows a bit, shaking his head.

"Two of them ran into the forest! Carver, Shaw, Dixon follow her!" Pope ordered ruthlessly. All of them nodded. Daryl felt sick but kept his face emotionless as he followed after the young woman.

They could hear their footsteps, but it seemed whoever the woman was actually seemed to be quicker. It wasn't long before they lost track of them in the darkness. Leah curses as she radios Pope, but all he says is that they need to go after them and make sure they're dead. The others were chasing the last few.

"Where the hell could they have gone?" Brandon mutters.

Daryl shines his light down into the fallen leaves below them, and there, he starts to spot tiny, indiscreet tracks. His brow furrows slightly, impressed.

These weren't normal footsteps. These were the footsteps of someone who knew how to track. Who knew how to hunt. She specifically made sure her steps weren't as large as they normally would to try and throw off her track.

But, luckily for them, he was still a slightly better tracker. Still, he had to give it to the girl. Maybe he could throw them off the two somehow. Until then, he had to keep his wits ahead of him.

"Ey," Daryl states to the two of them, nodding towards him. "This way."

Leah and Brandon look over and he aims at the tracks. The three of them nod before running after them, moving as fast as they could.

It was still dark as night when Suzanne found her way through the clearing, and the mall wasn't that far from sight. She takes Annie's hand and guides her into the farthest store, one that seemed to once sell clothes of some sort.

God, the hours she would spend searching for outfits here. A part of her smiles a bit as she remembers the moment shared between friends, trying to look perfect for their dates. Sadly, those days were long gone now.

"Come on," she urges Annie. "Keep going. Don't stop!"

Annie stays close to her as they move forward, breaking down the doors. As soon as they do, three walkers stumble towards them, ones they take care of very quickly. Once they were dead, they grabbed a store shelf, pushed it in the front, and quickly looked around.

"Changing rooms," Annie suggests to her quickly, and the two of them run to the back, slamming the door behind them. As soon as they were in there, Suzanne grabs clothes from racks, taking them into the changing room behind her, and throws them over her body. Hopefully, if they did somehow come in here, they would just mistake her for a pile of clothes.

God, she prayed for this to work. Prayed that this all worked. She didn't want to die. Not like this. Not at all.

The sun had just started to rise when the track ran cold, and it led them right to where an abandoned mall used to be. It wasn't big - one of those strip malls that everyone used to go to for something quick, like medicine, a pop, or some shit.

But if the trail lead here, that meant something was up.

Leah nods to them. "You two, check out the back end. I'll do the front."

The two of them nod, separating off into two sections. Daryl and Brandon head towards one of the stores, pushing the door in. It looked to be an old greeting card store. He remembered the first card he ever got her - one that had a puppy on it or some shit. She had been wanting a dog so badly. He gave it to her with a stuffed animal.

Being with Brandon was bringing back all these damn memories he had been trying to suppress for so long. So, he lets out a cough and glances at the man. "Hey." Brandon glances up. "Ya wanna tell me how you ended up with these people?"

Brandon raises his brow. "I thought you were with us, Daryl."

"I told all of you. I'm here for Leah 'cause we were somethin' once. But I don't get how someone like ya ends up here. That wasn't ever what you were - not even in the military."

Brandon glances away again, holding his flashlight, looking around. "That version of me is a long time ago, Dixon."

Daryl was silent for a moment. The two of them head deeper into the greeting card store, finding nothing. His question lingers on his tongue. "You ever think about 'er?"

Daryl doesn't need to specify who *'her'* was. Brandon knew. He lets his flashlight lower for a second. They had avoided speaking about it since they ran into each other. But now, Daryl had a feeling Brandon was going to let it out.

"I do," he admits quietly, looking out the window at the rising sun. "I think about her smile. Her laugh. How she always seemed to make the best out of a bad situation. I think about when you two were younger and you used to punch the kids who made fun of her. That was funny shit. You earned my respect." He raises his flashlight back to Daryl's face. It causes him to squint. "I also remember you lost it when you broke her fucking heart, so now, we don't have to talk about that shit anymore."

Brandon stalks off after that. Daryl lets out a long sigh before coming up behind him. "It was for the better. She deserved-"

"You say she deserved better, I'll throw you into the biters," Brandon warns, turning to him. "What happened after you left her ended with a shitty guy, making her feel like shit. And that shitty guy ended up being the reason she's gone now." His voice cracked at the end, eyes narrowed, glazed over in anger. He forces himself to turn away from the quiet archer. "It was more than a decade ago, Dixon. It doesn't matter now. She's gone, we're not. Now, what matters is finding those two survivors and killing them. That's it."

Brandon heads out of the store at that, leaving Daryl behind. Daryl glances at the ground, hand holding his crossbow tightly. He had taught her how to shoot...

But Brandon was right. It was better to move on.

Suzanne shivers as the wind blows through the old clothing store. She had been sitting in this damn changing room for hours, hearing voices outside, muffled ones, and it was causing her whole entire body to remain on edge. Annie was silently waiting in one of the other rooms.

She wanted this to be over.

The voice began moving away and she quickly went to get Annie, who was bleeding badly from her stab wounds. She tried to clean the wounds as best as she could, but Melinda had run off with the medical equipment.

"You should leave me behind. I'm slowing you down," Annie told her quietly as she shook her head. Suzanne scoffs. She didn't leave people behind, unlike the other Commonwealth residents.

"I'm not leaving you, Annie. We need to get to Alexandria as soon as possible. There's people who need our help," she said firmly. As she helped her stand and move out of the changing rooms, they came across Carlos, who was bloody and beaten, but alive.

Seems he had followed their blood. Which meant that the others might not be too far.

"What the hell happened to you, Annie?" he asked shocked. Annie grimaced as Carlos helped her lay down. Suzanne glanced around cautiously. This place was unnaturally quiet.

"Got stabbed with knives by that group that attacked us on the road...I'll be alright," Annie said weakly, Suzanne placed clean bandages around the stab wounds, wincing when she saw how deep the ones were on her stomach.

Fuck, she hoped that the knives hadn't caused any internal bleeding or pierced an organ. She was worried about Annie. Her left upper thigh was bleeding uncontrollably, even though she had bandaged it as best as she could.

"C'mon, let's get to the checkpoint. We're close to Meridian, but we can take a shortcut that can get us directly to Alexandria," Suzanne said encouragingly. Annie nodded, and they started to cautiously move through the back exit of the store.

Brandon had never thought that he'd see Daryl Dixon of all people again, for fuck's sake. The last time he'd seen the man it had been when Daryl's grandfather, Norman Dixon, had passed away from lung cancer.

That had been the last time he'd seen the man, until two days ago when he had been traveling with that group. Daryl had said that he wasn't one of them, but he didn't buy it for a minute.

He looked different. His hair was longer and there was a scar that went over his left eye. That made him curious. Brandon knew from Leah that Daryl had lost his group who were like family when they had encountered another group.

According to Leah, Daryl was the only one left and had been living in the wilderness. It didn't surprise him. Daryl was made for this world.

As he did a sweep of the clothing store with Daryl, he came across fresh, wet, bloody bandages and a blood trail. Someone was bleeding badly, and there were footprints.

"Dixon! Got a blood trail that leads upstairs," he called out. Daryl came over then. He saw the blood trail and muddy footprints. It looked like two women from the group were trying to escape and find somewhere safe.

"Can you tell if it's a man or woman?" Leah asked quietly as she spoke to Washington on the radio. Daryl nodded as he followed the tracks, and saw it led outside to the basement.

"Yeah, it's two women. One of 'em is hurt badly. Probably the woman that Boone threw the knives at earlier," he answered grimly. Leah nodded, and they started following the bloody footprints.

Fuck, he hoped they got away.

Suzanne turned on her torch cautiously as she looked around the room. She was relieved that it was clear for the moment, and that Annie could rest. She glanced over at Annie, who had slumped onto the sofa, her face pale.

"I'm not gonna make it out of here, Suzie. I'm losing too much blood, and I'm slowing you down. You have to leave me behind," she told her friend firmly. Suzanne shook her head.

"No, I'm not leaving you behind. We can get past these people," Suzanne said insistently, but tears stung her eyes. A part of her knew deep down that Annie was right. She was losing too much blood, and it was possible her organs had been pierced. There was no way out of this for her.

As stubborn as Suzanne was.

Before Annie could say anything to comfort her, something was dropped down near them. They both glanced over, and Annie paled when she realized what it was.

A nail bomb.

"Get down, Suze!" she screamed quickly, throwing herself over the woman. The bomb went off, the sound shattering to Suzanne's ears. Blood sprayed the walls.

Suzanne looked up quickly and looked around frantically for Annie.

"Annie?" she whispered quietly, trying to be quiet and turned on her torch. She saw a body nearby and cautiously walked over, feeling her stomach roll in horror and grief.

It was Annie - or what was left of her. Her upper torso had been impaled with nails from the nail bomb. Hot tears trailed from her eyelids as she futilely tried to check for a pulse.

'I'm so sorry, Annie. I'm so sorry...why did Pamela send you with us on this trip?' she thought distraught as she wiped her eyes. Suzanne quickly stabbed her in the back of the head to stop her from coming back, taking a deep breath before standing.

Wiping her eyes, she grabbed Annie's backpack and put all of her things into the one she had. She wished that she could bury her, but the best she could do was put a pale, blue sheet over her body.

Wiping her eyes shakily, she opened the fire exit door and started running into the woods. She couldn't help but blame herself for Annie's death. If only she'd just stood up to Gavin and spoken up for Lindsay.

But for now, she needed to run. Carlos was already ahead.

Daryl, Leah, and Brandon had found the body of one of the four young women who had been on the road. One of the other Reapers, David Boone, had thrown a nail bomb into the basement to draw them out, and it had worked.

The blonde-haired woman had run into the woods, and Boone wanted to use Dog so he could track her scent. Thankfully, Brandon and Leah backed Daryl when he pointed out there were more walkers than usual in the woods.

He wasn't putting Dog in danger. He wondered if Maggie and Negan were luring walkers to Meridian to create a diversion. If they were, then he was damn well impressed.

"Carver, Shaw and Dixon - follow them into the woods," Boone instructed coldly, and they nodded as they followed moved through the dense forest, trying to follow the sounds.

Suzanne found herself in the woods, as she tried to keep an eye out for any sign of those bandits. As she ran, she couldn't help but feel there was something hidden within the shadows. And as she stepped on a branch, crossing a river, one of those fuckers jumped at her from a bush.

Thank God her instincts weren't completely gone.

She kicked him in the crotch, hearing him grunt in pain, but he grabbed her by the throat, choking her. She grabbed the handle of her sickle, before slamming the blade into his carotid artery, hearing him yelp in pain. Suzanne kicked him again, stabbing him in the head. He slumps over, blood spurting from the fatal wound, dead.

Suzanne started running further into the woods. As she ran towards a stream, her feet were ensnared by a whip and she was dragged backwards, her head hitting the ground, and the whole entire world upside down.

She pulled out her knife, frantically trying to cut herself loose from the rope. As she did, she suddenly saw Emil running over, emerging from the woods, and helped get her untied from the rope. Carlos was nowhere to be seen. He must have gotten ahead.

"We need to get out of here," she said quickly. Emil nodded and cut her down, landing clumsily on her feet. They both started running, but as they did, Emil got caught by another hidden whip, and was dragged away.

"RUN!" Emil shouted at her quickly. Suzanne tried to get him back, but someone threw a knife at her. She avoided it narrowly, the blade just slicing the left side of her neck.

"No, Emil!" she cried distraught, not wanting to lose another friend so soon after losing Annie. She stayed completely still, when she heard the faint sound of footsteps creeping up behind her.

Grabbing Emil's sickle, she threw it behind her, and heard a cry of pain. She quickly ran over and yanked the sick from the Reaper's shoulder quickly, before running again.

She heard people yelling, and as she ran, Suzanne prayed that Melinda was safe. Yes, her sister was a selfish, self-centred woman, but she was her little sister.

It started to rain lightly. She came across a clearing and found the body of a dead walker. She pulled out her knife, as she started cutting open it's stomach, and covered the front of her coat in walker guts.

It was better to hide among them for now.

Daryl and Brandon had managed to follow the trail, and saw it led to a clearing, where they found a murderous David. His left shoulder was bleeding heavily as he glared murderously.

"That little bitch stabbed me in the shoulder!"

Leah grimaces as she comes forward. "She go far?"

"No...over in that clearing," David grunts out, holding his shoulder.

"You two, take care of him - I'll find the girl."

Daryl and Brandon nod. Daryl watches Leah head off, gun in hand. He knew Leah's hunting skills were good. He had seen them first-hand. But the last thing he wanted was for her to kill this innocent girl.

He really hoped she had gotten out. But for now, he needed to help out this fuck.

Suzanne stood in the corner of an old shack, walkers and biters stumbling around, avoiding her due to her scent now. She just needed to lay low for a little while. Just a little bit. Until they let.

But unfortunately, that didn't seem to be the case now, as the door to the shack was slammed open. Instantly, whoever was there fired several shots into the group of walkers, killing them quickly. Suzanne took a deep breath, trying to keep her breathing slow, watching each walker fall by one.

When they were all dead, the person who had shot walks in, gun aimed, looking around. Suzanne was hidden in the corner, her hand reached for her sickle she had in her side. The woman walks forward, seeing the walker she had taken the guts from on the ground.

The woman chuckles. "You're smart, girly. I'll give you that. But you're not getting out of this."

Suzanne watches as she walks forward a couple more steps, holding her sickle tightly in her hands. There, she takes the moment to break from her spot and lunge on the woman. The attack surprises her and she shoots her gun, the sound echoing off the walls, and Suzanne sunk the sickle into the woman's side.

She cries out in pain as Suzanne jumps off, running towards the door. However, the other

woman was quicker, and she grabs her gun, shooting it right in Suzanne's thigh. The bullet lodges in her skin and she falls to the ground, now unable to walk.

"Fuck!" she cries out, holding her leg.

Suzanne fearfully looks over at where the woman was, wobbling as she stood, holding her side as she took out the sickle and threw it to the ground. There was a look of murder in her eyes.

"You have led us on a chase all fucking night," the woman growls. "I hope that was worth it."

Before Suzanne could speak, the woman takes the butt of her gun and hits her in the back of her head. The world blacks out, and she collapses in a heap.

It Can't Be Her

Chapter Summary

Daryl and Brandon are reunited with someone from their pasts. Suzanne is reunited with a lost family member, and a childhood friend.

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Do not own The Walking Dead or any associated characters. If I did, I wouldn't have killed off Beth, and Merle. I only own Suzanne Giroux.

Warnings: Mentions of torture

Daryl and Brandon had found a way to help David heal back at Meridian, getting his stitches done. Daryl had been waiting anxiously to see if Leah had returned with the girl - and unfortunately, he saw her come through, not that long after, dragging a body that had a bag over its head.

He doesn't show his disappointment. "Is she...?" Daryl asks as she heaps the woman into the room. Brandon comes over, taking the girl into the interrogation room.

"No... little bitch put up a fight though." Leah walks over to their medical unit, Daryl following after her quietly. "Used her damn sword or whatever it was on me. Sliced me up good." She glances over at Daryl as she wraps bandages around her gash. "Why are you so concerned if she's alive or dead?"

Daryl plays it off. "Don't care, really - but she could be of use to us. Have information we need. Would be a damn shame if after all that chasin' it would end in her dyin'."

Leah bites her lip, eyeing him up and down before nodding. "Yeah, I agree." Brandon comes out afterwards, coming to where they were. "She all tied up?" He nods. "Good. Time to wake her up. You two did good - I'll handle this."

Daryl and Brandon nod, watching her head back towards where the girl was. As soon as she was gone, Brandon lets out a sigh and heads towards where they slept. "I don't like it, you know." Daryl's brow furrows as he follows the man out. "Killing random people like that...I understand why we do it, but I don't like it. And I don't like torturing them either. Just have to do it."

Daryl says nothing, walking to where Brandon usually slept. There on his nightstand, he could see that there was a picture of Bossie, and a couple of things next to it. Daryl's brow furrows.

"What's all that?" Daryl asks quietly.

Brandon glances over at it and feels himself grimace. "Couple of Bossie's things...figure if no one else wants to remember him I might as well keep his memory alive." Brandon lays back on the bed, hands behind his head. "This place...they're the only people I can trust in this world, Daryl. I know we're brutal, but underneath it, they're good people."

Daryl's brow raises. "Pope is good?" He asks.

"Pope is...something else." Brandon runs his hands through his hair before glancing at the window. "But he's kept us alive this long. Might as well keep going with it."

Daryl shakes his head slightly, walking over to his bed. He didn't feel the same way about that, to say the least.

Suzanne gasps for dear life as she's woken up with water being poured down on her through a bag, barely able to get air. When the bag is yanked off her, she sees the glaring face of the woman before, the same one she had stuck her sickle into.

"Good morning, sunshine," she sneers to her. Suzanne spits up water as she does, coughing to try and get oxygen to her lungs. "Have a nice rest?"

"Fuck...you..." she breathes out, barely able to form a coherent sentence.

The woman snickers and shakes her head. "Sadly, other men have tried but I'm not into that sort of thing with women." Suzanne glares at her as she kneels down low to get to her level. "You either tell me who your group is, and where they're located, or we're going to have a bad time here. I can make your death easy or painful - your choice."

Suzanne's eyes narrow at the woman. "I'm not...giving my group...away."

"Don't say I didn't warn you then," the woman said grimly. There was a flash of regret in her eyes, but her face hardened. She nodded at Paul to start waterboarding her again. Suzanne struggled to breathe.

The bag felt like it was suffocating her as she struggled to breathe. The table was lifted upright. She gasped for breath and almost choked when they stopped pouring the water over her face.

"The others who were with you - are they with that woman and the tall skinny guy?" Paul asked harshly. Suzanne took a chance then and there.

"No... but they're probably all dead now thanks to you," she admitted quietly. The woman with light blonde hair was watching her intently.

"Why are you so far away from Georgia? You've got a southern accent," Leah asked suspiciously, Suzanne swallowed quietly. She missed her old childhood home and hoped that her grandmother was safe at the Commonwealth.

"Georgia belongs to the dead now, or the living who go around killing people, like you lot do. I was with my family, my husband, niece, and grandmother, she revealed cautiously. It wasn't a complete lie.

She was scared that she would forget her two older brothers and older sister's faces, including her niece. Her grandmother, Josette, had photos, but it wasn't the same.

"Where about in Georgia are you from then, little missy?" A man questioned coldly. She recognized him. It was the man that she had stabbed with Emil's sickle.

"I came from northern Georgia, but I've lived in many places for a long time," she admitted quietly, praying that the rest of her group had gotten away.

"What you got in that backpack?" the blonde-haired woman asked intently. She didn't say anything in response. She nodded at one of the men to take her backpack, so they could search it.

"Take her to a cell - see what Pope wants us to do with her," One of them suggested. They nodded. Before Suzanne could do anything, she was hit over the head and dragged out of the room.

Pope had sent Daryl and Brandon to do a sweep of the area, and while they did, both of them noticed a lot of walkers roaming around in the area.

"Looks like a herd's coming past Meridian," Brandon observed quietly. Daryl nodded in agreement. From the corner of his eye, he saw one of the walkers at the front of the herd, sign to him and he realized with a start that it was Maggie.

He signed back to her, letting her know that the Reapers had captured a young woman and were hunting the rest of her group. He saw her nod and move along with the herd.

"Probably from the cities in search of food. Happened to me when I was in Atlanta," Daryl said distantly. In his mind, he thought of the group that was his family, and how many had been lost, from Merle to Rick to everyone. It hurt, thinking about it. He sighed quietly, as he looked at Brandon.

"Let's head back. Tell Pope what's going on," Brandon said finally. He nodded and followed after him as he thought of her then. He hoped the young woman was still alive.

Once they returned to the town, Powell gave them an update on their newest prisoner, and

how they had caught another one. A man. And he was begging for them to let him go in exchange for offering information.

As they walked, Daryl noticed more bodies hanging upside down and recognized some of them. His stomach dropped as the bodies of Agatha, Cole, Duncan, Roy, and two young women were hanging upside down. Maggie must be heartbroken.

He glanced at the fence where Frost was tied up to, snarling and growling. He wished that he could put the man out of his misery. He knew that Frost's deepest fear was to turn into a walker and hurt people.

"Pope wants you two and Boone to question the woman while Shaw questions the man. Hopefully you three can make her crack more than Shaw is doing. She's going soft," Deaver said disdainfully. Brandon glared at him.

"She's upset about Bossie and Turner. Give her a break, he said warningly. The man scoffed as he walked with them to the building which they used as a prison.

"Bossie was a spineless bastard who abandoned our brother and Turner was getting cold feet. You saw how he reacted when Boone and Ancheta started raping the women. Hell, you fucking protested what we were doing and ended up getting marked for it along with Washington, Powell and Shaw," Deaver said contemptuously. The three men, including Daryl, glared at him.

No way in hell was he forcing himself on that young woman. He was a lot of things, but he didn't fucking do that.

"There's something fucking wrong with you, Jared. For fuck's sake," Milo Powell said repulsed as he lit up a cigarette and moved away from the man, as far as he could.

Jared shrugged and glanced at Daryl with a smirk on his rat-like face. He felt like punching the prick.

"So how was it? Fucking Leah all those years ago? Shit, I bet she was wild in bed," Jared said disrespectfully. He'd tried flirting with Leah, but she would always turn him down.

"That ain't none of yer business," Daryl said coldly, as they reached the cell and saw the young woman sitting in the corner of the cell. It was dark, but there was sunlight coming through the barred windows.

"I'll leave you to it," Leah said finally, and walked out of the cell as Brandon, Daryl, Powell, and Jared enter the room. She didn't like the way that Jared was looking at the young woman.

"I'll take her first," Jared eagerly volunteered.

Pope granted him permission, and Jared drags her out with the bag over her head.

Suzanne felt someone shove her into a cell and sat down on the cold, concrete floor. She looked around and saw the cell opposite her was empty, but there was dried blood on the floor.

Whatever had happened to the person who'd been in that cell, it hadn't been pretty in the slightest. She swallowed as she heard footsteps and looked up to see a man standing outside her cell.

"What's your name?" the man asked coldly. She realizes that it's the same man that she stabbed with her sickle. Fuck, this wasn't good.

"Suzanne," she said quietly. The man chuckled as he stood in front of her and tugged her hair back. He pulled out a knife and began trailing the tip of the blade down her throat.

"Suzanne...that's a pretty name. My wife's name was Charlotte. You look like her a lot," the man said thoughtfully, and she could smell the alcohol on his breath.

"What do you want from me?" she asked wearily, trying to move away but froze when he pressed the tip of the blade against her throat.

Jared chuckles darkly before he lowers the knife towards her belly. "You're gonna tell me who your group is, sweetheart. All of them. Or else we're going to have problems."

Suzanne narrows her eyes at him before she hacks up all the energy she could and spits right into his face. "Screw you," she grunts to him.

Oh, he didn't like that. He didn't like that one bit. He instantly threw her up against the wall, causing her wounds to ache from the pain, and then grabs her wrists, pinning up against the stone. "You want to play that game, huh?" he growls. "I'll make sure you never play that game again, you little cunt!"

His hands start to travel towards her blouse and Suzanne begins to panic. Thinking quickly, she knees him in the ground, causing him to blunder with his grip and drop a hand and curse. She takes this opportunity to dip down and bite hard onto his hand.

He yells in pain, screaming at her, but she holds it down until she chomps right through his bone. He holds his hand as he backs away, blood oozing out and spurting from where his index finger had once been. "You little cunt!" he screams.

Suzanne spits the finger out of her mouth, blood and flesh coming along with it. "You want to try that again?!" She asks angrily.

The man narrows his eyes at her before standing up, heading towards the door. "Your days are fucking limited, you bitch!"

He heads out and slams the door. Suzanne collapses in a heap on the floor, before bringing her knees close to her chest. God, she prayed her group got out safely. Prayed her sister was safe. Prayed for everything.

But what use did praying do in a world like this?

Jared had stumbled out not that long after trying to talk with the girl. He hadn't said more than three words.

"She bit me."

They were rushed, angry, and Daryl was confused at first what he meant. But when he saw that the girl had fucking ripped off the man's whole ass finger, he was a mixed bag. On one side, he was genuinely impressed that this girl could do that and since he fucking hated Jared so much, the man deserved it.

On the other hand, if he pissed her off, he didn't want to be on receiving end of that.

Deciding to take a different route after that, they moved to where Edward, he said his name was, was residing. He wasn't beaten bloody. He wasn't hurt. In fact, he had wanted to offer information up as best he could to get the hell out of there.

Daryl felt partially disgusted that the man was so willing to give up his community to survive, but at the same time, it's not like everyone had the bravery to take a beating. He knew plenty that wouldn't make it.

"You said you have information for us?" Leah asks as they had closed the door.

Edward nods from his seat. "Lots."

Brandon nods at him to continue. "Go on."

Edward sighs and sits back. "Where to start?" he mutters before looking to them. "Our group comes from the Commonwealth, a community that was rebuilt. Structured, has rules and regulations. Even a governor. Recently, we paired up with this other community called Alexandria." Daryl felt his hands turn to fists in his pockets. "We were tasked with heading to them to give them food, us and a big group."

Leah raises her brow. "What's going on with Alexandria?"

"Low on food, supplies, lots of shit. Commonwealth has it all and we were willing to trade."

"Where is this place?" Brandon asks.

"Not sure how far. I know we had to cut through Meridian to get there - hence why we were on your road."

Leah chuckles a bit. "You think that a place like that is going to last forever?"

"It's been doing a hell of a good job for a while," Edward states, shrugging. "This is really the

first time something went wrong. Pamela usually takes good care of it - but this time, we fucked up. Simple as that. They don't live that far from here - maybe a hundred miles as the crow flies. Would take maybe a day to travel on horseback or something."

Leah and Brandon share a look before nodding. "Who would know the way to get there?"

Edward sighs. "That would be Suzanne, Lindsey, and Gavin."

Instantly, both Brandon and Daryl perk up slightly. Daryl's brow furrows as does Brandon's. "Who?" Brandon asks, coming forward.

"Well, Lindsey was the main person who knew the route after speaking with Pamela, but Gavin is a bit of a dick and likes to control everyone so he took us on this route that ended up in us getting sliced to shit...Suzanne looked like she wanted to speak up for Lindsey when Gavin called her stupid but then you guys came."

Daryl glances at the ground, trying to keep his face plain, but inside he felt like his heart was beating a million miles a minute. "Suzanne...that the girl we brought in?"

Edward bites his lip. "Blonde hair? Brown eyes? Southern accent?"

Leah nods. "That sounds like her."

"Probably. She may not look like much, but she is a fighter - knows how to kill. If only she could kill her husband."

Brandon takes a step back, the names suddenly registering in his mind. "Is Gavin her husband?"

Edward tilts his head in confusion. "How did you know that?"

Brandon instantly brings his hands to his head, muttering to himself. "It can't fucking be."

Leah looks at Brandon, her brow furrowed before looking at Daryl. He had leaned against the wall, his eyes closed, shaking his head lightly. There was no fucking way that was her. There was no fucking way that the girl they had hunted down...the girl Leah had shot in the leg...the girl that had bitten off Jared's fucking finger...was her.

And yet...everything made sense.

"Why do you two look like you've seen a ghost?"

Brandon and Daryl exchange their own look at step back. "I - we gotta see Suzanne. Now."

Emil didn't know when he had stopped running, but what he did know was that he was fucking hurt, and his body ached and everywhere was bleeding. Somehow, he had cut himself down from the rope, and made his way to a clearing where he had been hiding for so long.

Now, he felt like death was around the corner. But he was too stubborn for that shit.

As he tried to stand up, he felt himself groan a bit. When he turns around, he feels his heart stop when he sees three walkers, staring at him. Instantly, he goes to grab his knife, but they raise their hands.

"Stop," one of them whisper, shocking him to submission. What the fuck?

The one at the front takes off her mask, and he's met with a woman with dark brown hair - and surprisingly mistrusting but kind eyes. She was analyzing him, but he had a feeling he wasn't in danger.

"You look hurt," she states. Her drawl was from Georgia, like Suzanne's. "Reapers do that to you?"

Emil grunts, glancing down at the gash along his side. "Yeah...fuckers hunted down my whole group. Took in a couple too."

The woman sighs. "They did the same to us...one of ours is in there." She glances around. "There's a horde we're building up to take them down. If you can help us out, we can maybe help you get your friend back - I just want to take out these fuckers too."

Emil looks at her and nods. It was better to stick with other people anyway with these people around - even if they were strangers.

"Sounds fucking fantastic to me," Emil sighs before holding out his hand. "Name's Emil."

She takes it, shaking it. "Maggie. This here's Negan and Elijah." The other two walkers remove their masks, nodding at him. "I'll get you bandaged up, and then we can get a mask on you - best we stick together until all of them are dead."

A Chance

Chapter Summary

Daryl reunites with a childhood friend from his past. Beth welcomes the Commonwealth supply team, but is unsettled by two of the group members. Brandon tries to protect his sister, by appealing to Pope.

Chapter Notes

Thank you, to everyone who has reviewed, and given kudos to the story. This story is also on FF Net under the name, DarylDixon'sLover.

Warnings: This chapter has a racist slur directed at a child.

"Thank you. So much - we need to get two of my friends out of there, and I think one of the guys wearing those masks is her brother. But...I don't think he's there by choice," Emil explained quietly, worry in his voice. He hoped like hell that Lindsey and Carlos had gotten away with the supplies.

He couldn't give a shit about Gavin, if he was perfectly honest, or Melinda either. He knew that she was Suzanne's youngest sister, and that Suzanne loved her very much, but it was clear to him that she didn't care.

"If you're saying that they aren't there willingly, we'll give them a chance," Maggie decided. He nodded in thanks as she patched him up. Negan with the help of Elijah carved him a mask and, he put the mask on with great care.

The smell was disgusting, but if it meant rescuing his friends, then he would gladly do it.

Suzanne had lost track of how long she had been in the cell. She knew it had been hours, but it felt like an infinity. She prayed that the rest of the group had gotten away and delivered the supplies to Alexandria. If they didn't, she was going to hate that they went through all of this for nothing.

She hated the thought of people slowly starving to death and struggling to survive. Brandon had always said that she was too nice. Same with Jaime too. He said she was naive and needed to toughen up.

Well, she had toughened up in a sense. She gently looked at her silver heart locket that had photos in five of the twelve photo frames. It was a special one, one that she had had for years, since she was younger, a kind of locket that could pull out frames and keep in as many pictures as one person wanted.

She sighed sadly, and hoped that her grandmother was alright, staring at the photo. She flicked through some of the frames, seeing her brother, some of her family, until she got to the last. A sad smile comes on her lips as she looks at that one.

What she wouldn't give to see them again...

Suddenly, she heard the sound of footsteps approaching and quickly closed her locket, as she looked up. There were two men standing outside of her cell, one of them was dressed in all black, and the other one was wearing a dark blue plaid shirt, dark jeans and a familiar leather vest that had angel wings on the back.

One wing was white, the other was an electric blue, but she would know that vest from anywhere.

The gate was unlocked, as the two men entered her cell. She couldn't believe who was standing in front of her. Her body was frozen in shock. She didn't know whether to be surprised, stunned, happy, or all three.

Brandon and Daryl. Her big brother and old best friend were standing right in front of her. Alive.

Brandon stared at her with an expression of disbelief, shock, and joy at seeing her. She got up shakily, limping slightly because of the gunshot wound to her left leg but hugged him tightly. He was hugging her hurt just as tight, and seeing tears in his dark brown eyes.

"I can't believe you're here," he whispers, shocked into her neck before pulling back, looking down at her bruised face, cupping it lightly. "You're alive..."

"So are you," she whispers, shaking in happiness before swallowing. "Gran's alive, Brandon, and so is Melinda...God, I'm so happy to see you," she said emotionally. Brandon nodded as he glanced at Daryl, who was watching Suzanne with relief.

"Thank God they're alive. What about Jaime and Matilda?" he asked worriedly, keeping his voice quiet. The last thing he wanted was to draw attention to the three of them.

Suzanne sighed heavily, as she thought of her two older siblings who she hadn't seen in the last four years.

"Jaime went to Nebraska with Cheyenne. They heard about a safe zone in Omaha, Nebraska. Matilda and Jericho went with them," she explained quietly, wishing that they hadn't gone. But she couldn't blame them though.

They hadn't liked living in the Commonwealth and if she was perfectly honest, she didn't like it either. She hated how the upper-class treated people like they were slaves. She knew Gavin didn't mind making people feel like they were useless.

He did it to her all the time.

"We'll find them, Suzie. I promise...but there's someone else here who I think missed you like hell," Brandon said quietly, glancing over at Daryl who looked surprised at his words.

Brandon nodded at him and kissed Suzanne on the forehead, happy to see that she was alive but determined to get her out. He wouldn't let the others hurt her.

Daryl cautiously moved towards where Suzanne was standing. His mouth felt dry as he tried to get over the fact that Suzanne was standing right in front of him. The person who'd never judged him. Who'd always been kind to him and bathed his cuts when his old man would use his belt and fists on him.

She'd never hated him, not even when he had hurt her when they were younger. He swallowed thickly, remembering what Beth would tell him when he felt lost.

'You have to have hope, Daryl. I know you lost someone that you loved more than anything, but she wouldn't want you to be this way,' she had told him at the shack.

"Is that really you, Daryl?" she whispered, shocked, moving towards him, but he reached her first until there was only a short distance between them both. They both stared at each other. He noticed the silver heart locket that she wore constantly. God, she had kept that all these years?

"It's me, Suzanne..." Just looking at her brought back a montage of memories in his head, ones that made him regret everything. Ones that made him feel like shit for never finding her all these years. For thinking she was gone. "Fuck...I'm so sorry," he said roughly, trying not to cry in front of her. She walked towards him, barely touching his shoulders.

Tiny Dancer, he had called her, or Songbird. He always loved listening to her voice.

She said nothing in response, but very gently wrapped her arms around him, as they both embraced each other. He felt something wet on his chest and looked to see she was crying.

"I'm the one who should be sorry, Daryl. I'm just happy to see that you and Brandon are ok," she says softly, before looking at Brandon. "Is Leah here along with all your military buddies? She's the one who shot me," she asked suddenly. Daryl felt a lump in his throat.

Shit, he'd have to tell her about what happened to Michael and how poor Bossie had been burned alive. The poor fucker. The terror he felt must have been agonizing.

"Bossie, Matthew and Michael are dead, but Leah's alive and so is Danny," Brandon responds quietly, glancing away. "Leah had to do what she had to do...it's what Pope ordered. She had

never met you before now." He moves his eyes to where her face was again. "Did Jared do that to ya?" he asked gruffly, seeing the purple bruise on her left eye. Suzanne sighs and shook her head.

"No, it wasn't Jared who did that to me...that was my husband. He just lost it," she admitted hesitantly, not wanting to burden the rest of them. "It doesn't matter though - what matters is what is happening right now."

But that wasn't how Daryl felt. Daryl was pissed. He was gonna fucking kill that prick or give him one hell of a beating. But for now, she was right - anger wasn't going to be what got them out. Planning would be.

He looked at her quietly, her dark blonde hair had gotten longer, and there was a scar on the left side of her neck.

"I've missed you," she admitted quietly, shyness in her voice as she looked back at Daryl. He gripped her hand tightly. He'd heard from Brandon that she had become a fully qualified and experienced Neonatal Intensive Care Nurse and had just gotten a qualification in Midwife Nursing.

He was glad that she had accomplished everything she had wanted.

"I missed ya too...Merle did too even though he never admitted it, Suzie..." he said roughly, a lump in his throat as he thought of his big brother.

Suzanne smiled but winced when she saw the bruises on Daryl's throat from where Brandon had tried to choke him. She swallowed, and she looked at him.

"You and Brandon were there when we got attacked?" she asked quietly. He nodded shamefully. He wasn't proud, and he knew Brandon, Chris, Washington, and Fisher weren't either.

Brandon sighs a bit and runs a hand through his hair. "It's what we have to do sometimes...I didn't think it was you we were tracking down."

Suzanne's brow furrows as she looks at him in surprise. "So, it only changed because it's me? What about the other civilians that you hunt down on a daily basis?" she asks, staring at him. "Both of you."

Daryl instantly responds back. "Hey, I'm only here 'cause I was captured, just like ya," he retorts, gesturing to her lightly. "They attacked my group."

Brandon raises his brow at him. "So now you finally say they were your group when little Suzie comes here?"

"Yer people killed mine. Didn't know if I could trust ya, but I know I can trust her," Daryl responds back firmly. "I saw ya slit the neck of one of my men."

Brandon nods a bit a moment later. "Alright, fair, but you weren't just here to survive - you could have broken free. You were here for Leah."

Suzanne's brow furrows as she looks at Daryl. "Leah? You knew her?"

Daryl felt backed into a corner. The last thing he wanted to fucking talk about after seeing Suzanne all these years later were his escapades with Leah years ago out in the woods. But if Brandon was going to play that game, he might as well come clean. "I didn't know her from before. Never knew she was close to Brandon. But I met her ages ago in the woods when I was alone...we were together for a bit. Broke up for other reasons."

Suzanne was quiet for a moment. She didn't look pissed or surprised - just indifferent. "Oh. Wow. Small world, I guess," she says softly before shrugging her shoulders. "Is... are you two...?" Her words trail off, and Daryl shakes his head.

"Nah, ain't like that. But I stayed here to make 'er happy. I even feel like she sometimes doesn't wanna be here." He looks at Brandon. "We can't let them keep torturin' her. Edward said all of ya were going to Alexandria?"

Suzanne rolls her eyes. "Edward told you everything?"

"He didn't want his ass beat."

"Asshole," she mutters before sighing, nodding. "Yeah, we were. To help them. Daryl, are you from there?" He nods again. "Jeez...have we all been this close this whole time? That's insane to me." She crosses her arms against her chest. "I...do all of you want to stay here?"

"No," Daryl instantly responds, to which Brandon slaps his back. Daryl raises his hands in surrender. "Hey, ya fuckin' knew why I was here. Pope scares the shit outta me and I can see he does the same for ya. Suzanne suddenly pops up, yer sister, after years and you want to stay? When she's your way out? I don't care what ya do, I'm goin' with her."

Suzanne feels herself smile a bit at that. It was sweet to see that even after all these years, Daryl was still on her side...even after what they had gone through.

Brandon sighs. "I didn't say that. I just was going to say if we wanted to sneak out, what about Leah?"

"What about me?"

The three of them all turn to the corner, where Leah's arms were crossed, looking at them suspiciously.

"What the hell is going on?" she asks as she comes over. "You know this woman?"

Brandon sighs softly before looking at Leah. "This is my little sister. Suzanne."

Leah looks over at her and suddenly, her eyes widen a bit. "Oh...oh shit. I had no idea."

Brandon showed me a really old picture of you from when you were kids, I... I had no idea."

Suzanne sighs. "It's not that big of a deal. Just don't shoot me again."

"We can't stay here anymore, Leah," Brandon states, causing Leah to stare at him in shock.

"So you're just going to abandon everyone? After all we've done?"

"No. I want to give you a chance out there too." Leah looks at him with an expression of anger across her features. "I know why you're here. You're scared you'll be alone again. I know that. I can see that. But Suzanne is right. We've spent years here just hunting people down and killing innocent folk, ones that didn't deserve it. The longer we spend here, the bigger the risk. Pope isn't the same man we once knew. You know it. I know it."

Leah was silent for a moment, looking between Brandon, Daryl, and then Suzanne. She glances back at Brandon. "How do you know the world is going to be better for you out there? You're safe in here."

"Safe taking things from others? From killing innocent people just so we have walls? Daryl told me what you did. You let that family go." Leah glances away. "You're a good person, Leah. Deep down, I know you are. I knew you from before all this. We can get out together. Have a better life somewhere else."

Leah looks back at him and then at Daryl. "Are you leaving too?"

There was a hint of bitterness in her voice, but when Daryl looked at Suzanne, there was no denying his answer.

"I can't stay here, Leah," he says quietly. "I have people to take care of. I ain't lettin' Suzanne head out there alone. All I know is she's not stayin' here. And neither am I."

Leah looks between the three of them before letting her head drop. "I can't believe I'm saying this," she mutters before looking at them. "There's food we can take to your group. Wherever they are...and if you need a way out, I have an idea."

Brandon smiles at her words, and nods. "Then let us know."

Beth Greene stood at the watch tower as she watched a group of about four people come in, all looking bloody and bruised but alive. One of them seemed to stare up at the walls of Alexandria in disdain, his eyes looking at everything but the people.

As she listened in, she heard that it was people from what some called the Commonwealth, and they were here to help after someone sent them supplies. While she was thankful for anything they could get, something felt off about a couple of these people. Two of them - she thinks her names were Lindsey and Carlos? - they seemed nice, but the other two...she didn't know.

Especially the tallest man. She heard from Rosita that his name was Gavin. And there was this sneer on her lips that she just couldn't help but feel unnerved by.

"What a shit hole this place is, Melinda. I can't believe Ezekiel, Eugene, Yumiko, and Princess live here. What a fucking dump," he said disgusted. Melinda nodded in agreement, her blue eyes showing disgust as they looked around.

Some of the houses were in the process of being rebuilt, and the walls were being fixed. Beth watched silently as Carol and Joel carried crates of fresh vegetables, meat, and a barrel of fish to be placed in the smokehouse and freezer.

In exchange, the Alexandrians had given the Commonwealth tobacco, which the Commonwealth Council accepted. Carlos had explained to Beth and a couple of the others that a trade agreement would be set up once the rest of the Commonwealth supply run team had arrived.

But that polite conversation was interrupted by a cunt.

"Look, Gavin, there's a half-breed bastard!" she exclaimed horrified, pointing at RJ, who looked confused at the insult. Tennessee came over to speak up for him as Beth glared.

"He's not a half-breed and you better not say that filthy word again," Beth said threateningly. Melinda sneered at her as Gavin strides over and looks her over.

She didn't miss the fact that he was looking at her breasts, rather than her face. There was something off about this man. She didn't like him or Melinda one bit.

"Better watch your tone, missy."

"Better watch yours if you want to step into our home and do that shit," Beth growls to him. He doesn't say anything else but steps away, scoffing at her. Beth rolls her eyes, arms against her chest.

Lindsey and Carlos were nice enough though, but there was something about Gavin and Melinda that made her uneasy. She told Kal, Scott, and Rosita to keep an eye on them.

"According to Lindsey, they were attacked by the Reapers and lost two of their people to them. The other three, Emil, Suzanne and Edward weren't killed, but I think the Reapers have them. We'll wait and see if they come back with the others," Aaron explained quietly. He really didn't want Alexandria to fall.

Hopefully, when Daryl and the others came back from Meridian, they would be able to manage through the winter.

Brandon had gone to talk with Pope to convince him that they could use Suzanne, since she was a nurse. The Reapers had lost their medic when Pope had killed Bossie by burning him alive after accusing him of abandoning Michael.

"So, you think your little sister can assist us by using her medical skills? What kind of nurse was she before this Armageddon occurred years ago?" Pope questioned suspiciously. He'd been getting more paranoid since they had failed to locate Maggie, and the rest of her group.

"I know she can, Pope. She stays calm under pressure. She was an NICU nurse. But she's helped with a lot of high-risk pregnancies before the Outbreak," Brandon explained honestly, praying that he could keep Suzanne safe while Daryl's friends gathered a massive herd of walkers to attack the town.

Pope was silent as he contemplated his words with a thoughtful expression on his face. He then glanced at the younger man with sharp, intrigued eyes.

"Didn't your sister have a baby when all of this happened?" Pope asked suspiciously. Brandon felt his heart sink as he thought of baby Alice and how sick she'd been when all of this shit had happened.

"She did. When the army stormed into the hospital killing everyone, they turned off the power. She lost her after three days," he admitted, subdued but trying not to appear weak in front of his commander.

Pope nodded, seemingly satisfied as he looked at the younger man.

"Bring her to the shed then, Carver. We'll assess her loyalty. If she's loyal, then I promise we won't hurt her. But if she isn't, well...you saw what happened to Bossie," he said meaningfully, with a sinister smile. Brandon felt his hair stand on end.

"I understand," Brandon said quietly, feeling his stomach roll uneasily. He couldn't help but dread what kind of test Pope had in store for Suzanne.

Never Agree

Chapter Summary

Daryl and Suzanne talk about the ones they've lost, since the world ended. Suzanne struggles with a secret. Beth and Lydia discuss the Commonwealth supply runners.

Suzanne had been brought to a wooden shed, and she saw Brandon enter the room as Boone and another man joked about her. One of them was making sexual jokes about her as they got ready to leave.

"I wouldn't mind touching those tits of hers, you know? Shit, Carver you never said that your three younger sisters were this hot," one of them said, impressed as he promptly squeezed her left breast harshly, causing her to cringe in pain.

"Get the fuck away from her, Austin! Or I'll snap your neck" Brandon snapped angrily, disgusted. The man quickly let Suzanne go. He glared at Brandon as they left the room. Brandon was about to leave as well when he suddenly noticed the lighter fluid on the wooden flooring.

Then the whole shed was set on fire.

"What the fuck?!" Brandon yells out, trying to break down the door, but there was no point. It was locked shut. Suzanne instantly brings her hand to her mouth, trying to cover it from the smoke. She looks around frantically, trying to see if there was a way out, some way to escape from this hell.

And soon enough, she finds it. A little slit in the boarded-up windows. She quickly goes towards it, pulling it off the best she could. The fire burnt her fingers but there was nothing she could do. However, her arms were still not strong enough to pry it off herself.

"Here!" Brandon yells, throwing her a crowbar from the corner, somehow still not catching heat yet. Thankfully they were quick enough. Suzanne nods and uses it, prying the wood off the window as fast as she could. One board, two boards, three, until there was a large hole large enough for her and Brandon to call through.

She heads to the other side first, coughing up smoke. Brandon comes out after, pushing her far away from the burning cabin.

Brandon helps her stand, dusting the ash off her. In the corner of her eye, she could see Daryl standing with the other, Leah at his side, watching her quietly.

To be honest, they all knew this would happen.

They had said that the best way to get out would be to get Pope's trust through this weird test that he always did, and then that would make her life a hell of a lot easier. Brandon would help her through it. Daryl had been extremely defensive of not letting her go through the fire, since he had done it and he hated it, but Leah said there was no other way to prove her trust.

So, she had agreed.

Pope had then gone and said some stupid shit about God, something that made her want to roll her eyes, but she keeps her head on straight and nods at Pope, happy to see that he, at the very least, was not shoving her back into a cell.

He had taken her aside after that, all by herself. She had spared a glance back at her brother and Daryl before they had disappeared beyond the complex, and he took her to where his office was. There, he gave her the whole story that Brandon had already told her, about his supposed miracle of not burning and everything else involved with that.

She personally thought the guy was a bit of a sociopath, but considering he was their only way out, she'd put up with it for now.

"Your brother says you were a nurse," Pope states, his brow raised. "That must have been tough, what you did."

Suzanne bites her lip but nods. "It was, yeah...around constant death."

"He said you worked in the NICU?"

"I did. I was trained to work in that. But newborns died a lot more often than you would think...and seeing a mother's heart break, holding her dead baby...it does something to you. Toughens you up."

Pope was silent for a moment. "Brandon told me you experienced that." She nods sullenly. She didn't like to think about that time. "Tell me, Suzie...do you believe in God?"

Suzanne looks at him long and hard for a moment, pondering the question. Did she or did she not? That was a hard one to answer in this world, where the dead literally walk the earth.

What kind of God would allow that?

But in the end, she had her answer.

"I did...for a time." She leans back in her chair. "Prior to losing my daughter...I believed in someone above us. Someone who protected us. Someone who, despite all odds, would be our salvation at the end of the world. But then I lost my daughter...and I kept asking why. Every day, over and over and over again, to the point where I almost sounded insane whispering to myself in the middle of the night. What God allows innocent children to die? Just like that? When their life has barely begun? Now, I believe in people having the right to their bodies but...I always knew I wanted kids. I always wanted to have a family. And now, God gives me the chance and then he just takes it away? Just like that? I know God in the bible is cruel but...I didn't think he'd do it to me." She glances away. "Then the world up and fell to shit, and I know we're all in hell now...doomed to damnation. So, for a time, I believed in God, yeah...but now? I'm not so sure anymore."

Pope was silent for a moment after that as well, his hands intertwined together. "Fair," he states quietly, standing. "After a tragedy like that, I can see why someone would stop." Wow, maybe he was a sound mind sometimes. He was still fucking crazy most of the time now. "Either way...you deserve something to eat after that. Come with me."

Suzanne nods softly, standing up and following after him. He was right. She was starving.

Later on, that night, Suzanne had stayed out by the fire, nibbling on the last of the meat they had given her, talking to Daryl. Both Leah and Brandon had turned in for the night, as did most of the others, so now it was just the two of them. And she had forgotten how easy it was to talk to him. It had been so long since what happened between them, she didn't even think she'd remember how to converse.

But talking to Daryl was easy. Just like riding a bike, you could never forget once you learned how to.

"So," she states softly, looking up at him. "Tell me."

His brow furrows. "Tell ya what?"

"Tell me everything from the beginning," she states, sitting up to see him in the light of the fire. It was strange. The long hair actually looked nice on him. She had never pictured him with it, but it worked. "How did you first survive the outbreak? What was your group like? Or were you and Merle solo? Where...where is Merle, by the way?"

Daryl felt a lump in his throat when she mentioned Merle. He swallowed thickly. He regretted not saying goodbye to his brother or stopping him from going after the Governor.

Finding him as a walker haunted his nightmares, and would often end with him stabbing Merle, or letting him bite him.

"I was with Merle when all of this started, Suzy. We were tryin' to get to a supposed safe zone in Atlanta when the army napalmed the city. We met up with a group and settled in a quarry. Me and Merle did the huntin' and kept to ourselves. But the assholes left Merle on a roof, and when I went to get him, he'd cut off his left hand to get away from the walkers," he explained quietly. Suzanne was horrified.

How could they do that to him? Yes, Merle was an asshole, but he didn't deserve to be left on a rooftop with no food or water or a weapon while handcuffed.

"What a bunch of selfish, damn assholes," she said disgustedly, her southern accent coming out as she spoke. Daryl could hear the Georgian twang in her voice.

He'd missed her voice. Hell, he'd missed for all those years. It was all because he was terrified of hurting her like his old man had hurt his and Merle's momma.

"We lost a lot of people, and eventually ended up on a farm. We met a man called Hershel Greene, and his two daughters, Maggie, and Beth. They're still with us, but Hershel.... he was killed," Daryl said quietly. Suzanne squeezed his hand gently.

She could see how upset he was when he mentioned the Greene family. They must be really close.

"Merle...he got killed trying to stop the Governor from killing us, but died, and the bastard let him turn into a walker. I had to put him down, and I buried him at the prison. No one aside from a couple of close ones in my group wanted him buried there," he admitted quietly, and she felt her heart ache.

"He's your brother, Daryl. You loved him very much, and that's all that matters. You're a good man. I can see that you've grown. Out of everyone, you were always meant for this world," she assured him softly, and paused as she looked at him.

She wanted to confess her secret so badly to him, but she was terrified that he would never forgive her. At the end of the day though, it had to come out.

'God does not forgive those who harm people,' Father Thomas O'Flaherty had told her, when she confessed to him about Gavin hitting her. It hadn't surprised her that the priest disliked her husband. She sighed sadly.

"You've lost a lot of people, haven't you?" she asked quietly. Daryl nodded silently. She gently stroked his right hand, her fingertips gently tracing the skull tattoo on his hand. He was quiet as he watched her, noticing how the campfire illuminated her features in the darkness.

She had a scar over her right eyebrow, and bruises all over her face from Boone's beating earlier. She was a tough little lady, that was for sure.

"I have...they're like my family." He glances away. "I'm sorry about yer friends, Suzie. I didn't wanna hurt any of them," he admitted quietly. She gave him a soft, sad smile in understanding, and he spoke up again. "How's yer gran?" he asked curiously, genuinely wanting to know how the matriarch of the Giroux family was doing. He'd heard from Brandon that Josette had survived, but had been separated from her grandson when a herd had torn through their camp.

"She's alright, still working as a midwife even at the age of seventy-three years old. Gran's not the biggest fan of the Commonwealth and their rules, Daryl. But she likes the people in your group though," she explained. Daryl looked stunned at her words.

"Ya met them? Are they ok?" he asked worriedly. Suzanne smiled at the genuine concern Daryl had for his friends. Despite his gruff nature, he cared deeply about the ones he loved.

"They're fine, but Eugene got into trouble for punching the leader's son, Sebastian. Ezekiel is getting treatment for throat cancer, but he won't be getting it for long," she explained softly, and Daryl nodded as they both stood up and started heading back into the building.

"Thank ya for tellin' me this...was drivin' me crazy...I'm glad yer gran's alright. Ah...how's yer youngest sister, Melinda?" he asked cautiously. He knew Suzanne and Melinda didn't have the best relationship.

If he and Merle had a turbulent relationship, then Suzanne and Melinda's relationship was more aggressive and emotionally abusive. He remembered the first time he had met Suzanne. She had been a couple years younger than him, and they both lived in the same neighborhood. And it had all been because Melinda sent her friends on Suzanne.

Flashback, Northern Georgia, Hartwell

Ten-year-old Daryl had been keeping to himself when he saw three older boys, the same age as him, bullying the new girl, who was reading a book on the wooden bench.

She had long, dark wavy blonde hair and dark brown eyes. She reminded him of the fragile, china dolls that his grandma had in her glass cabinets, and he was only allowed to see them under close supervision.

"Look, it's goofy tin-face Suzanne! You're already looking like a retarded spastic, just like Melinda told us!" River taunted cruelly. The girl, apparently named Suzanne, tried to move away from them.

"Please, I don't want any trouble. I'm just trying to finish my English homework," she said quietly, trying to avoid looking at them. She was starting to get anxious. One of the girls, Phoebe, grabbed her by the hair.

"You're a freak, Suzanne. Melinda told me that the reason your dad left was because he couldn't handle the fact that you're a retarded spastic who doesn't know how to add two plus two," she said spitefully. Ashley, Emily, and Jessica laughed at her cruelly.

Before he could stop them, Ashley shoved Suzanne over on the ground, cutting her right knee. Her books fell on the muddy, wet grass and the three girls picked them up.

Daryl had enough. He stalked towards them and loomed over the group dangerously. Alvin paled at seeing him, and started backing away fearfully, as did many of the others.

"Give her books back right now or yer gonna be wishin' it was Merle and his friends standin' here rather than me," he said menacingly, seeing all of them pale.

"You don't scare me, Dixon!" Alvin said bravely, but failing miserably in front of everyone. A few of the other kids were watching, Dylan Noakes, Teddy Nimmo and their girlfriends were watching them with curiosity.

"Give the books back to Suzanne, now, ya dumb idiot. Otherwise, yer gonna have a broken nose," he threatened dangerously. Alvin sneered and tried to punch him.

He failed miserably. His aim was off balance. Daryl took that opportunity and punched him hard on the nose. The young boy cried out in pain, as he grabbed the books from him and the girls, before turning to Suzanne.

She was standing up, staring at him in shock. He quietly gave her the books, which she took gratefully. He noticed that she had Wind in the Willows among the books, and her face was

tear stained.

"C'mon, I'll take ya home," he said quietly. She nodded mutely and they both walked back, as Alvin and the others called them names.

"My brothers will kick your ass, Dixon!" Alvin shouted angrily, humiliation on his face. They both ignored him.

After that day, a friendship had blossomed between the two of them, and they became best friends. Both of them had shitty childhoods with only their grandparents, siblings and on the odd occasions, their mothers, giving a damn.

"Melinda's fine. She loves it in the Commonwealth. She was a plastic surgeon before all of this, so she gets a lot of privileges. Me, on the other hand, I'm just a nurse to them. They have so many doctors and others here that a nurse really doesn't hold that much weight anymore...even in this world. I'm not someone who's really important. I'm a nobody," Suzanne answered quietly. Daryl looked at her then silently and swallowed.

How could he tell her that she wasn't a damn nobody? He'd seen the way she was with kids and babies. She loved them more than anything. The amount of times he'd seen her in the trailer park babysitting the kids and working at the hospital proved that.

He knew something terrible had happened to her. Brandon had told him that her husband was a piece of shit, and he didn't treat Suzanne well.

"Ya ain't a nobody, Suzanne. Ya ain't, I always knew yer were gonna do good things. Just like yer brother, Jaime told me." He said firmly, his mind drifting towards the second eldest son of the Giroux family.

Jaime hadn't liked him, thought he wasn't good enough for his little sister and made his opinions clear. Brandon and Matilda had liked him, but Melinda had constantly tried to flirt with him.

He had always turned her away, out of the sake that A) he cared far more for Suzanne than he ever could for that skank and B) Melinda was never the type of person he would even go for. It was also awkward when it happened, but later Suzanne and him would make fun of it.

God...all those memories felt so long ago.

Suzanne smiles softly and looks up at him, nudging at his side. "Leave it to you to make me feel a little better," she responds quietly before biting her lip. "I wished you were there, you know." Daryl looks down at her as they stop at the door to the complex. "During my studies...I wished every day you were there. You could have come...so easily."

Daryl lets out a long, slow sigh, leaning against the wall. He knew this would come up at some point. "Ya know why I did it," he mutters, glancing away.

"I know...I'll never agree with it." He looks back over at her as she crosses her arms against her chest. "But whatever the case, we're here now...and it's better to just move on." As she does to head inside, however, she pauses when she realizes there was banging against the walls around the area. "Wait...do you hear that?"

Daryl follows where she's pointing and the two head over to one of the towers, moving up together. They get about halfway until Daryl sees what she was referring to.

There were walkers, already attacking the fences.

"We have to tell the others," she says quickly to Daryl, who nods and follows after her towards the inside.

"Nope." Lydia had come over to Beth's house later that night to have some dinner, and afterwards, the two of them had gone for a nice long walk. "I just don't like them. I don't like them one bit. Maybe Lindsey and Carlos are okay but those two? Jesus. I already hate them."

Beth rolls her eyes a bit. "I don't blame you. They don't seem like nice people." The two of them move towards an alley. "But it's what we need to do for our people. They have supplies and we are in desperate need of it. They can help."

"Did you hear what she called little RJ?" she whispers fiercely to Beth. "I wanted to slap her into next week."

"I know," Beth sighs. "But it's what we need to deal with. We-" She stops dead in her tracks. Lydia looks at her, confused.

"What's going-"

Beth slaps a hand onto the girl's mouth, bringing a finger to her own, and then points in the corner. Lydia peaks around and brings another hand to her mouth at what they were witnessing.

Gavin, who was apparently Suzanne's husband, the woman who was stuck with the Reapers, was making out with her little sister. Melinda.

They were both making out and it was like something out of a porn film. It was disgusting. Beth shook her head, grossed out, as they heard thunder clapping in the distance. A storm was going to hit Alexandria.

Maggie and Gabriel had gone to an underground tunnel that she had built before the Reapers took over. As they walked, they could hear the Reapers above them talking about the herd that was closing around Meridian, and making it difficult for them to leave.

Sure enough, they heard Daryl talking to someone about getting more arrows when he instead killed the man by slitting his throat and stabbing him in the head. He then saw them both and helped them up from the trapdoor.

"Are you ok?" Maggie asked quietly. Daryl nodded. He made sure that no one was listening before he decided to tell them about Suzanne, and Brandon. "When ya do the signal, I'm gonna be bringing four people with me and Dog. Three of them are Reapers but they ain't like the others. One of them had a sister and she was raped by Pope and got pregnant. She died givin' birth, and the other one is bisexual. If Pope finds out then he's dead," Daryl explained gruffly. Maggie and Gabriel looked at him carefully.

"Who's the other one that wants to join us?" Gabriel asked cautiously. Daryl moved aside to show a young man with black wavy hair, that just reached his neck. He had Native-American ancestry and the darkest eyes that Maggie had ever seen.

This had to be the Reaper that Emil had said was the brother of one of his friends that the Reapers had kidnapped. She hoped for the young woman's sake that she was alive.

"This is Brandon Giroux Carver. I knew from before the world went to shit, him and his family. His sister's a nurse. She's with the Commonwealth supply team," he explained honestly. Both Maggie and Gabriel accepted his explanation.

"Fair enough. You two and the others need to be ready when the truck crashes into the gate. Make sure your friend gets all the medical supplies," Maggie advised. Daryl nodded and showed her the way while Brandon gave Gabriel some flares for help with his aim.

"Be careful out there. Pope put a landmine out there and he's got RPGs. I've tampered with some of them, so be careful," Brandon advised, as he walked back to the ladder that led to the roof. Daryl busted the door where the food storage was before going back to join Leah and Pope.

Maggie prayed to whoever was up there to watch over everyone and not let them get killed. She didn't want anyone she cared about to die.

If Only You Knew

Chapter Summary

Daryl and the others escape the Reapers, and make the journey back to Alexandria. Suzanne reveals a traumatic secret to Daryl.

Chapter Notes

Daryl is thirty-five, Suzanne is twenty-six, Beth is twenty-three, Brandon is thirty-one.

Suzanne had been directed to the medical wing of the building by Ozzy, who would keep Austin and Boone distracted while she grabbed all the medical supplies. She wrenched the cabinet door open, shoving the penicillin, oxytocin, acriflex cream for burns, bandages, surgical sutures, gauze, a pulse oximeter, and other equipment that she could fit into her backpack.

She even found a portable iron and shoved it into her backpack, as well as tweezers and clamps. She shoved it all into the backpack, making sure she had everything, and found a pack of syringes to take as well.

She let out a deep breath as she heard the sound of a truck in the distance. She looked through the window to see a young woman around Matilda's age crashing the truck into the gate/wall, allowing thousands of walkers to swarm into the courtyard.

Knowing that was the signal, she snuck around the back to get the livestock out. She prayed that Daryl and Brandon were alright, as she found the stables.

"Please God, if you can hear me at this very moment. Please don't take away anyone else I love. Please God," she prayed silently, as she saw a Reaper sneaking up behind the woman.

Without any hesitation, she slit the man's throat and locked him inside the building. She quickly unlocked the back door that led to the rendezvous point that Daryl had told her about and freed the animals.

Daryl had gone to join Brandon, Leah, Powell or as he had revealed his name, Milo. were standing with the rest of the Reapers, as they observed the walkers. He walked over quietly to where Leah was standing by herself. She had a strange look on her face. She looked at him

silently for a moment.

"Do you ever wonder what would have happened if we had never left the cabin all those years ago?" she asked finally, no emotion in her voice. He looked at her quietly.

He'd loved her. He really had, but not the woman she was now.

"Yeah, I do. But that ain't now...it's a different world now. A different life, even here...and I gotta tell ya somethin', Leah," he admitted quietly, but seriously. She turned to look at him. Her face was hard, showing no weakness.

"What is it?" she asked wearily, but there was a tone in her voice that wasn't there before, something menacing. Daryl continued though. He wanted to help her.

"There are people among the walkers...my people, the ones from before. They're roaming among the dead," he explained truthfully. Leah looked pissed as she glared at him angrily.

"You lied to me, Daryl...you fucking told me you wouldn't do that, and yet here you are. I'm such an idiot. I should never have trusted you, just like they warned me not to," she said betrayed, looking like she genuinely wanted to kill him.

"I did it to protect my family, Leah. Ya would've understood that. I know ya would," Daryl said fiercely, as he saw Pope coming along. He noticed that they were in the middle of something that seemed serious.

"What are you two talking about?" he asked curiously. Daryl braced himself for Leah telling Pope that he was a traitor. From the corner of his eye, he saw Brandon watching them along with Milo.

"Family," Leah said simply. Pope nodded as he ordered everyone to get the hwacha, so they could fire them at the walkers.

Daryl watched as the walkers started pushing at the Meridian gate. He could see the wooden gate buckling under the weight of so many walkers piling on top of it.

Pope had made it clear that he didn't care if Reapers got caught in the crossfire, and this was causing issues between him and Leah. He watched as the two argued intently, before Pope glared at her with a dangerous, menacing glare.

"I am god!" He announced defiantly, much to everyone's disbelief. "You're not allowed to question me, Leah," he said coldly, and left to speak with one of the Reapers. As he looked on in silent disgust, the man started groping her by cupping her breasts. She squirmed in his hold, as she tried to get away from him.

Daryl stalked behind him silently, before slitting his throat, feeling blood spray on his face. The man choked on his own blood, as Daryl shoved him over the wall, into the waiting arms of the walkers that begun feasting on his flesh.

Pope had ordered Austin to light the hwacha, not noticing that Daryl was coming towards him with his knives. Dog was standing beside Suzanne and Brandon, who was standing in front of his sister protectively as she had arrived, and Milo had freed Edward from his cell. Just as Pope turned to face him, Leah crept up behind him and stabbed him in the throat, viciously. The man fell forward on the floor, as Daryl threw a knife at Austin, to stop him from lighting the hwacha.

He quickly cut the line, as Brandon helped get Dog down over the wall so he wouldn't be caught in the crossfire. Edward waited with him nervously as he saw the walkers paying no attention to him or the dog.

Daryl watched as Leah slammed her boot on the back of Pope's back and stabbed him through the back of the skull. Suzanne pulled the knife from Austin's forehead and gave it back to Daryl.

"We can go now, Leah. Ya don't have to this anymore. Yer free," he told her quietly, as Brandon watched their backs. He didn't like the way she was looking at all of them, especially Brandon and Milo.

Before she could respond, one of the Reapers ask for Pope and wondering what they should do. Leah was silent, as she looked at the body of the man, who she thought of as father for so many years.

"Pope's dead. Dixon killed him," she answered coldly, glaring at them. Brandon and Suzanne stared at her in disbelief, along with pissed Milo glared at her. Daryl felt betrayed. That fucking bitch.

"Why'd ya do that?" He asked betrayed, hurt in his voice as he watched Leah stroke Pope's face with a tenderness that he never saw her act with before.

"For family," she answered simply, as she saw them jump down off the wall, as the rest of the Reapers joined them.

Daryl kept his gun close, as he, Brandon, Suzanne, Dog, Milo, Ozzy, and Edward tried to reach, Maggie, Elijah, and Emil. RPGs were being fired at them, as they all tried to avoid stepping on the small minefield that Brandon had warned them about. As he ran, he saw more walkers swarming against the fences, causing the fences to buckle under the pressure.

He heard barking, and saw Dog cornered by ten walkers now, aware of the animal's presence. The dog pushed one of them down but got bitten on his left hind leg. Dog yelped in pain, causing Daryl to run to help his four-legged friend.

"S'alright boy, I got ya. Easy now," he said soothingly Suzanne and the others ran over. They took cover behind one of the buildings, as they saw Leah and the others turn their attention to the walkers.

"Oh god, is he alright?" Suzanne asked worriedly. She knew how much Dog meant to Daryl, and how much the man loved him. Daryl shook his head, trying not to cry.

"He's bleedin' pretty bad. We need to get the hell outta of here," he said urgently Maggie nodded as she pointed to the underground tunnel, as Gabriel joined them.

"We can get away by going under that tunnel, but we need to be quick and take the supplies with us," she explained gravely. Daryl nodded and they started moving. Daryl made sure that Suzanne was near him as they heard the explosions above them. He was still pissed that Leah had sold them out. Dog whined in his arms.

"How's he doing, Daryl?" Suzanne asked quietly. She loved animals but had a special place in her for dogs and cars.

"Doin' alright, but he's in a hell of pain. Beth's gonna need to get him on antibiotics when we get to Alexandria," he admitted quietly, as they reached the door.

Brandon cautiously opened it, going outside to check if the coast was clear. He came back a few minutes later, his olive skin looking slightly grey.

"A few walkers, but the wagon's still there along with Merle's motorcycle. They're going towards Meridian," he explained quietly, as they cautiously started walking through the woods.

Beth had been informed by Lindsay, and Carlos that Josette Giroux who was a midwife, would be arriving at the safe zone to help Nabila with her fourth child. She was still getting over the fact that she'd witnessed Gavin and Melinda making out. Carlos had told her that Gavin was not a nice guy, but a lot of the upper-class people in the Commonwealth respected and liked him.

It was weird, to think of someone just blatantly cheating on their spouse like that. And with their sister, none the less. Like what the fuck? How does someone do that Regardless, now they were waiting for hopefully survivors and other people to come through. And maybe they could restart from there.

Getting through the Meridian was terrifying, and Suzanne was honest to God scared about what might happen. But they needed to do it. As they ran through the walkers, there was a sudden explosion from above that started to rain down on them. Daryl instantly comes over and pulls Suzanne under him while still keeping Dog close.

"What the fuck was that?!" Suzanne yells. Daryl looks up and feels his eyes narrow.

Leah had fired an RPG at them.

"Fucking hell," Daryl growls. Another explosion rings out. Daryl drags Suzanne into a clearing, avoiding the gunfire.

"Some old flame you have there, Daryl," Suzanne quips. Daryl rolls his eyes.

"She wasn't like this years ago," he bites back before his eyes turn to worry, looking down at Dog. Suzanne digs through her backpack, grabbing some sort of cream and bandages.

"Here," she says quickly, rubbing some along the bite wound and wrapping it in bandages. "Luckily, the bites don't effect animals, but we need to manage the blood until we get to safety - wrap it up." Daryl pulls it hard, the dog whimpering in response. His heart broke.

"I know, boy, just hang on," Daryl says quickly, picking Dog back up. He looks at Suzanne. "We're almost done with this - let's get on. Stay with me - don't need ya getting exploded."

"Yeah, that wouldn't be a pretty sight," Suzanne said grimly. They made their way outside Meridian slowly. More walkers had stumbled towards the area, lured in by the noise as the RPGs were still being fired at the walkers. As they ran, she saw some of the Reapers trying to shoot at them, and she fired her bow back. The arrow hit him in the chest as they made their way to the wagon.

Daryl helped get Dog settled on the wagon, his tail wagging weakly as he made sure he was comfortable. Brandon, Milo, and Ozzy watched their backs as they helped Eli lay down. He'd gotten hit by shrapnel in his left shoulder, while Negan had been hit in the arms with tiny pieces of the metal.

"Let's get the hell outta here!" Brandon said quickly, making sure that all the food, water, and medicine was secured. Daryl nodded and shook the reins, as the two horses began riding away.

In the distance, a wolf howled as the wagon drove down the road away from Meridian. The dead slowly began overrunning the town.

Suzanne had used the surgical tweezers to remove the shards of shrapnel that were impaled in Elijah's left forearm. After cleaning the wound, she wrapped a bandage around his arm, and then treated Negan, who was surprisingly a good patient.

"So, you and Daryl know each other?" Negan asked curiously. The archer was notoriously private about his life before the world had gone to shit. Everyone knew that he'd lost his brother to a hostile group, but other than that, he was very private.

"We were good friends before this. Best friends. We lived in the same trailer park, and he used to work for my grandparents at their farm. He was a few years older than me, though. I used to follow him and my older siblings around constantly," Suzanne said softly, fondness in her voice as she reflected on happier memories.

She'd been so happy to have a friend in Daryl as a child. She wasn't popular or considered as pretty as Matilda and Melinda. The only friend she'd had was Brandon, her brother, and then she had been left alone when he had enlisted in the army.

Daryl had never treated her badly. He'd teased her when she would refuse to hunt baby deers but had understood. Everyone said the Dixons were lowlifes, dregs of society, but she had never thought Daryl was anywhere near that. He was the kindest, compassionate, and bravest man that she'd ever met in her life. She was proud to see that he had become everything that she knew he would. A part of her felt her heart break as she looked at her locket silently.

She would have to tell him the truth soon. She couldn't keep her secret from him any longer. He had a right to know. She just hoped that he didn't blame her grandmother when the truth was revealed.

At that moment, he comes over, running a hand through his messy hair. "It's too dangerous to stop for the night, so we'll be riding through the night. Just stay alert," Daryl said wearily. They nodded and Suzanne stroked one of the horses with a soft smile.

Beth had gone to greet Josette Giroux, who had arrived with Pamela, and a wagon filled with fresh food and repair tools. Daryl and Maggie had contacted them earlier, letting them know that they were five hours away from arriving at Alexandria.

"I'm Beth Greene. It's really nice to meet you both," she said softly, praying that neither of them reacted like Gavin and Melinda had at seeing the damage the storm had done to the houses

Josette was a petite woman that appeared to be in her early-mid seventies. She had dark blonde wavy hair. Her eyes were kind, but a sharp dark brown, and she had laugh lines around her mouth.

Pamela had light blonde hair that was in a stylish pixie crop, and looked to be in her late forties, to early fifties. She looked kind, but Eugene had told her that she was naive about the realities of the world outside the Commonwealth.

They both smiled at her kindly, with Pamela looking in awe at seeing the windmill and gristmills. She showed them around, seeing Josette smile at seeing Melinda, but her eyes turned cold at seeing her grandson-in-law.

"Beth, this is Josette Giroux. She's a midwife and has helped deliver many babies in the old world and this world. She'd like to stay here permanently along with her grandson and two granddaughters who are with three of your supply runners," Pamela explained seriously. Beth nodded in understanding.

"I'll have to discuss this with the council, but I'm sure they'll agree. We could always use new alliances," Beth said calmly. Pamela nodded in thanks as she showed them to the clinic that served as their hospital.

Daryl was happy beyond words when he saw Merle's bike in the back of the wagon on a cart. It was still standing, even after all these years. He looked at Suzanne, who was sitting in the

front with him, while Maggie and Brandon took a break.

"What's it like, Alexandria?" Suzanne asked quietly as she looked at him curiously. He smiled as he thought of the community that considered his home.

"It's a good place. Got plenty of houses and solar panel energy along with a windmill, and gristmill. The zone's powered by solar panel energy so we got a supply of electricity, hot water and plumbing for the zone...it's a good place," Daryl explained quietly, pride in his voice. "Lotta good people." Suzanne smiled.

She could tell that Daryl missed Alexandria. It was his home, and it made her happy that he had people who loved him. She knew that she needed to tell him her secret, but she was frightened about his reaction.

Would he hate her for not telling him sooner? She wouldn't blame him if he did. She sighed quietly, as she looked at her locket and stared at the photo of a baby girl in the fourth photo frame.

Daryl glances over at where she was, seeing her looking down, and saw the picture of a baby in an incubator. She looked tiny as hell, and he felt his mouth go dry. Did Suzanne have a daughter by Gavin?

"Do ya have kids?" He asked quietly. He saw a brief flash of pain in her dark, brown eyes. She shook her head, giving him a sad smile.

"I had a daughter, but she.... died when all of this happened, Daryl. It was in the hospital where I worked, and she was in the NICU unit," she explained sadly, telling him half of the truth.

She hadn't been able to save her baby girl, when the soldiers had stormed into the room, shooting everyone, and turning off the power, just so they could save themselves.

Daryl's shoulders drop. "Jesus," he mutters quietly, looking away. "I'm sorry that happened...what went wrong? If ya don't mind me askin'...ya don't have to say anythin' if ya don't want to."

Suzanne swallows and shakes her head. "No... it's okay." She looks back up, her eyes lost in distant memories. "She was early, that one...a combination of the stress of everything going on and other things that were going on...but somehow, I made it to the hospital right before the world went to shit. When she was born, she had to go into the NICU because she was tinier than others, but then..." She takes a deep breath, willing herself not to cry. "The military stormed the hospital. There were so many infected people they didn't know what to do. They came in and started shooting everyone. Miraculously, I survived it, but because of what they did, the power was shut off everywhere...and soon after that, my little girl died in that incubator. I took that picture with a camera they had in the gift shop."

Daryl was silent for a moment, her story processing in his head. "Where was Gavin in all this?" he asks a second later, his voice still quiet.

Suzanne snorts and shakes her head, looking down. "Who knows?" she whispers to herself.

Yellow

Chapter Summary

Daryl introduces Suzanne to his family and around Alexandria, and Suzanne learns about Gavin's affair.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: This chapter has a scene of domestic violence.

It was again silent between the two of them before Daryl leans forward, using the reins of the horse and whistling for them to keep moving forward. Once that was done, he leans back and looks over at her, taking her hand in his. His hands were even tougher now than they were back then, and yet it was a touch she embraced. "I'm so fuckin' sorry this happened to ya, Suze," he says softly, holding her hand tightly in his own. "If I had known...I never woulda gone with Merle. I woulda come to ya."

Suzanne shakes her head. "No, no, he's family. I wouldn't want you to come for me."

"Ya were my family, too."

Suzanne feels herself sadly smile at his words. It brought a flutter to her heart that she hadn't experienced in years. "You were mine too," she answers back, squeezing his hand. Long lost memories came back when looking at him.

She and Daryl had really grown up together, matured together...she even remembered when he had first kissed her. She had been lamenting about some stupid dance at school and how no one had asked her, and Daryl, who didn't even like that shit that much, had told her she didn't need a dance to tell her how beautiful she was.

That in turn had led to her telling him that he was just trying to make her feel better. And then he kissed her, starting a whole new chapter in their relationship. But now here they were, plenty of years later.

Daryl glances down at the picture, holding the locket gently in his other hand. "What was her name?"

Suzanne sighs softly. "Alice."

Daryl lets out a light, sad ghost of a laugh. "Like 'Alice in Wonderland?'" That had been one of her favourite books as a child, and he knew it. She smiles and nods. "'S a beautiful name...for a beautiful girl." He looks down at the photo quietly before closing the locket in his hands. "I'm sorry for yer loss...really. I promise that shit ain't ever gonna happen to ya again."

Suzanne bites her lip a bit as he lets go, taking care of the horses once more. "You can't promise that we'll always be safe, Daryl."

"Nah, I can't, but I can sure as hell try for ya, Suze."

And to that, she smiles. God...she didn't want to lose him.

It didn't take long for them soon to arrive in Alexandria, and everyone that was new was staring at all of the homes and the windmills in the distance. Daryl had said that he would get Suzanne all settled while Maggie talked with Brandon and the others. It made sense - he was the one who was the Reaper before all this. They were just trying to be safe.

That and Maggie could tell that Daryl had a soft spot for Suzanne, so there was no way she would be interrogating her today. She looked sweet regardless, though.

She had taken them to her home, having them sit down on the couch. "You know," she points out quietly, coming over to him, handing him a cup of water. He takes it gratefully. "I'll always trust Daryl with my heart. I've known him since forever. And you guys did well getting us outta there...but I have to ask." She crosses her arms across her chest. "Why the Reapers? Your group destroyed most of mine. Killed innocent people...how can I let that go?"

Brandon said nothing when she said that. He sighed heavily and ran a hand through his hair. He looked tired, and swallowed, before deciding to come clean.

Ozzy and Milo didn't look much better. They were looking ashamed of the things they had done under Pope's orders.

"We weren't always like this, killing and raiding communities. We were a squad in Afghanistan and went through a lot out there. Hell, I carried Ozzy down Death Valley when his truck got blown up by an IED. We were a family. We always survived together, but never did stuff like this," he explained quietly, his expression distant as he thought back on his life before the dead had started walking.

"So, what changed?" Maggie asked intently. Daryl had told her that the Reapers had been a squad who had fought in Afghanistan. It made sense as to why they were all so close and considered each other family.

"We didn't agree with Pope hunting down families and taking their stuff, but we had no choice. Daryl will tell you - the man is crazy. And there were enough people there that they agreed with what he did. When we attacked Meridian, we didn't know that there were

children there, or that Pope was going to let Austin and Paul rape Elijah's sister. We've done bad shit, but the three of us aren't rapists. If we had the choice, we would have stopped them, but we were outnumbered," Brandon said quietly. Maggie pressed her lips together as she looked at the three men. They'd been stripped of their weapons and were regarded cautiously by everyone.

"You can stay, but you'll be under supervision, and the three of you will be given jobs. Everyone earns their keep here," she finally decided, and they nodded in agreement.

Daryl had taken Suzanne to the house that she would be sharing with Josette, Brandon, Gavin, and Melinda. Gavin had gone to speak with Pamela, not even bothering to speak to his wife. Melinda, however, came into the kitchen.

She was taller than what Daryl remembered, but she had the same heart shaped face as Matilda and Suzanne. Her eyes were a sapphire blue, and she had dimples in her cheeks.

It was what she was wearing that caught everyone's attention. She was wearing a dress with high heels and an expensive jacket - something far too expensive for Daryl even in the other world. She wrinkled her nose when she saw Brandon wearing his Reaper clothes.

"Grandmama, there's a lesbian woman living next door to us, and two deaf women. It's unacceptable!" she complained angrily, not noticing that Daryl was standing next to Suzanne.

Josette sighed heavily at her youngest granddaughter's insensitive attitude towards Connie, Kelly, Yumiko and Magna. She had no idea where Melinda got her racist and extreme views from. Her daughter was never racist, but her fourth husband, and Melinda's father, William had not been very kind to other people.

"We are guests here, Melinda Jane-Anne Giroux! I will not tolerate that language or behaviour from you, young lady! You're already in trouble after what you and Gavin called RJ Grimes and the Tuigamala children yesterday. Your mother would be ashamed of you if she knew what you had said!" Josette said sternly, glaring at Melinda.

She shrugged off her grandmother's words, and spotted Daryl who had come into the kitchen with Brandon and Suzanne. She completely ignored her two older siblings, much to the disgust of Daryl, and gave him a flirtatious smile.

"Daryl, it's so good to see you. I heard that you've become a member of the Alexandria council, and have become quite the legend around here," she said flirtatiously, sliding her hands up his chest. He gently but firmly pushed her hands away.

"It's good to see ya too, Melinda. But I ain't lettin' ya sayin' that shit about RJ. Beth already told me - he's not a half breed. He's a good kid. He's my nephew and Judith's my niece. Those people are my family," he said firmly. Melinda scoffs, stepping away.

"This world's turned you soft."

"Think this world turned yer more into a bitch," Daryl mutters before turning to look at Suzanne who was standing quietly by the fridge. "C'mon Suzie, Brandon and Josette. I'll show ya'll around. Ya can come with us, if ya want," he told Melinda. She scoffed and sneered at him spitefully.

"No, thank you Daryl. I'm not walking around this shithole. I'm having a nice hot, bubble bath and then a nap!" she said smugly and stalked upstairs. They all looked on in annoyance.

Daryl whistles low before glancing at the rest. "She ain't changed a bit, huh?" Brandon shook his head.

No, she'd just gotten worse if that were damn possible.

Daryl showed Suzanne around Alexandria while Josette had taken Brandon to get checked over by Beth. Dog was resting at his house. In the meantime, he wanted to introduce Suzanne to Lydia, Judith and RJ, Carol, and Beth.

"This is a really good set up you've got, Daryl. It's slightly crowded at the Commonwealth...and I'm not really fond of their class system that they have," Suzanne admitted quietly as she looked around in awe at the village.

"Don't think I would've liked livin' there then, I was a drifter. They'd probably give me a shit job," he admits. "Better to be in a place like this. Here." He helps her up the stairs, seeing her struggle slightly with the wound in her leg. A part of him knew it was his fault for letting Leah hurt her so badly, but he hadn't had the slightest idea that the woman they'd chase had been her. "This is my house. We try and share with a lot of people so the people with families can have their own homes."

"Ah, so these are the bachelor and bachelorette pads," Suzanne teases lightly.

Daryl snorts and rolls his eyes. "Hardly. We got kids here that we're looking after - Judith and R.J. I share with Beth and Carol - two close friends. Come on." He gently took her hand, bringing her inside, and showed her into the house.

Framed photographs hung on the walls. She noticed a wooden frame, showing two blue handprints. There was a framed photo of Daryl with two young women, a young girl that appeared to be in her late teenage years, and a little boy.

She smiled at the photograph, noticing the one next to it. Almost instantly, she felt her heart melt. It was a photo of Daryl holding a baby girl. She was dressed in a pink onesie, and looked cute.

"That's Judith," Daryl states, coming over to her, answering her question before she could even ask. "Her mama died givin' birth to her. Maggie had to do a C-section to save Judith. Her current mom, Michonne, ain't here right now, so we all look after her and her brother," Daryl explained quietly. He showed her into the living room, where she saw a middle-aged woman with grey hair that was tied into a bun, a young woman around her age that had long

blonde hair pulled into a braid, and she had a scar on the left side of her face.

The young teenager had long dark brown hair that was pulled into a ponytail, and shy brown eyes. The little girl looked to be around ten years old. She had her hair pulled into a braid and wore a sheriff's hat.

The little boy looked up at hearing them approach, and ran at Daryl excitedly. Daryl picked him up effortlessly. He giggled as he looked at Suzanne with dark, mesmerizing brown eyes. She didn't know who Michonne was, but she had a feeling she and her husband were gorgeous to make a little kid like this.

"Uncle Daryl, am I a dirty little half-breed like Mr. Gavin and Miss Melinda said I am?" He asked ashamed. Suzanne ran a hand through her hair embarrassingly. God damn it. Those fucking two.

Daryl glances over at Suzanne and subtly shakes his head at her, seeing her cheeks red with embarrassment. It wasn't her fault those two were the worst - but he could tell why she would feel that way.

"No, ya ain't. Yer a badass lili man. Yer gonna be like yer old man when ya older. You don't gotta listen to anything those two say." He steps aside, showing Suzanne next to him. "RJ, this is Suzanne Giroux. She's gonna be livin' in Alexandria with us and look after all the pregnant women and babies with her grandma," Daryl explained softly.

RJ waves his hand. "It's nice to meet you, Suzanne."

Suzanne smiles brightly. "It's nice to meet you too, RJ." One of the women stepped over to greet her.

"I'm Beth Greene. It's nice to meet you. Your grandmother's told us a lot about you. I hope you like Alexandria, Suzanne," Beth said softly. Daryl saw Suzanne smile.

"The same here. It's nice to meet you all," she said softly as she sat down, and saw all of them look at her.

"So your grandmother and Pamela said that you worked as a NICU Nurse before this all happened? And you worked at the hospital in the Commonwealth?" Carol asked curiously. She nodded as she saw them all looking at her curiously.

"Yes. I'm a Neonatal Intensive Care Nurse. I graduated from the University of Maryland School of Nursing and started working at the Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Neonatal Intensive Care Unit," she explained quietly. Daryl looked on silently once RJ had jumped down, rejoining his sister on the couch.

He was still taking in the news that she had a little girl who had died because of the fucking army. His heart ached for her and the pain she was going through. He wished he had been there to help.

"She could help us look after Nabila, Carol?" Lydia suggested quietly. Nabila was six months pregnant with her and Jerry's fourth child.

"Would you mind helping us look after the pregnant women? One of them is having a rough time," Carol asked cautiously. Suzanne nodded in understanding.

"Of course, that's what I'm here for," she says softly. "To be honest, I never get used that often in the Commonwealth, so it'll be great to actually be of use here."

Beth's brow furrows. "What do you mean you're never used? You were part of the medical community...I thought out of everyone someone would be used for that?"

Suzanne rubs the back of her neck, almost embarrassingly. "I mean...you'd expect that, but...there were a lot of other doctors and nurses who had many more years of experience than I did, so they were given better treatment. I was always called in when absolutely necessary. That's why, ah...Gavin always got the best privileges, because there aren't that many lawyers there. Plenty of nurses, though."

Daryl rolls his eyes from where he stood. "The Commonwealth is full of idiots then," he states quietly, nudging her shoulder, to which she smiles. "You'll be happy 'ere. We use everyone."

"I'm glad to hear that."

At that moment, the young girl stands up. "A lot of the kids get hurt too when they train - I've been trying to train them. Are you good at doing stitches and everything?"

"The best I know," Suzanne answers.

"Good." She holds out her hand. "My name is Judith, by the way."

"Oh, you're the little girl in the photo," Suzanne chuckles lightly.

Judith smiles as she shakes her hand, and then pulls it back. "Yeah, Uncle Daryl and the others took care of me when I was younger. He calls me lil' asskicker - even if it's a bad word."

Suzanne laughs as she looks at Daryl. She could see him roll his eyes again, but the tips of his ears were red. He was embarrassed. "Alright, Judith, don't go exposin' all our secrets. And watch yer mouth."

"I'm just sayin'," she states, and as soon as she says that, Suzanne's stomach starts to growl. Judith's brow raises. "Are you hungry? Carol made cookies."

Suzanne's cheeks turn blush. "I, uh...wouldn't mind some. I'm so hungry...they didn't feed us much."

Carol chuckles and stands, walking over. "Of course. Here." She hands her a cookie, one that

tasted strangely familiar. "These are pretty popular here. Kids love them and they're easy to cook."

"Snickerdoodles." Suzanne looks to her with a wide smile filled with cookie, before swallowing. "God, I used to love these. But you know who loved them even more?" She glances over at Daryl. "That guy."

Carol looks at Daryl in surprise, who looked back into a corner. "You never eat my cookies! And they're your favourite? I thought we were best friends."

"That seems suspicious," Beth giggles lightly from where she stood.

"Why ya comin' here and already causin' trouble?" Daryl asks Suzanne, playfully glaring at her, but she only giggles. "Look, I can explain - I do like those types a cookies - forgot that was what they were called, to be honest. But I... ya see, Suzanne...she always had a certain way of makin' 'em. No other cookie ever came close. I just always...wanted hers, I guess."

Carol chuckles a bit. "I'll have to challenge you to bake-off then," she states, looking to Suzanne with a raised brow. "Old friend vs new friend: Daryl edition."

Suzanne laughs. For the first time in forever, she truly felt happy. "You're on."

Later on in the night, when Suzanne had started to head back to the home that she would be staying at with the rest of her family, she was surprised when Beth pulled her aside. For the last couple of hours, she had spent talking with everyone, trying to catch up on what was going on before heading to bed for a good night's rest.

Beth was one of the ones she really connected with, over their shared love of Georgia and animals. Beth also seemed like she had a good head on her shoulders. Carol as well. But later on, at night, when Suzanne was about to leave, Beth had pulled her over to the kitchen.

"Hey," she whispers, pulling her away from the door so the others wouldn't hear. "I know this isn't my place...but I have to tell you something."

Suzanne's brow furrows. "What is it? Am I in trouble?"

"No... but someone's about to be," she mutters, before turning to look at her. "Your husband is Gavin, right?" Suzanne nods once. "I... don't know how you're going to take this, but I... I saw him locking lips with your younger sister. When they first got here...I don't know what they are, but I know that you needed to know."

Suzanne was still for a moment, the news processing through her. Gavin was cheating on her with her little sister. Huh. It didn't make her upset - not in the ways that really mattered. If anything, she was just more upset he didn't break it off with her before doing that shit. Their love - or whatever it had been - had died long ago. It wasn't surprising that he did that.

But now that she knew, she didn't think she could just go back and pretend it wasn't real.

"I... thank you, Beth." She lets out a long breath and nods to her. "Thank you for telling me."

Beth looks at her in surprise. "You don't...seem angry?"

"No... I'm not." She sighs before glancing back at the door. "But at least now I know."

At that moment, the door to the kitchen opens, and in walks Daryl. "Hey, the kids and Carol wanted to play a board game- is everything alright?" he asks, noticing the strange air in the room.

Suzanne clears her throat and nods, forcing a smile on her lips. "We're okay, Daryl. Don't worry." She reaches over and squeezes his hand. "I think I'm just gonna head home, though. Pretty tired. I'll see you tomorrow, though. Goodnight to you too, Beth."

She let's go after that, leaving through the door before saying another goodnight to the others outside. Once she was gone, Daryl looks over at Beth, eyes slightly narrowed. "What's goin' on, Bethie?"

"Daryl, that is for her to know. It's not my story to tell." She steps back and into the room, leaving him in the kitchen. Daryl glances at where Suzanne had gone, crossing his arms against his chest.

For Beth to keep a secret, it had to be something big.

Suzanne had arrived at their home not that long after. She had found out that Brandon and the others were still talking with everyone else, but Gavin and Melinda were still in the home. As Suzanne walked in, she could see Gavin glancing down at the kitchen, his nose upturned. He hears the door open and snorts.

"About time you came home. I'm starving - and I refuse to eat this muck everyone else is having." He heads over to the couch. "This place is quite disgusting. I can't imagine how they've put up with this for that long. Pieces of garbage."

"Don't call my family that," she snaps back. Her attitude instantly gets his attention. "I happen to like this place - far more than the Commonwealth. All they do is treat me like trash and you like a king. It's awful in every way."

Gavin sneers at her words. "Are you joking? You live in a mansion! You have the life of a queen there-"

"With a husband who cheats on me and abuses me?!" she snarls.

Gavin's eyes narrowed. "What was that first part?"

"That's right," she whispers darkly. "I know your little secret, Gavin. You and her weren't discreet enough and Beth saw. She told me what you did. I have to say, you aren't that clever."

Doing it with my sister of all people? Really pathetic - but you two deserve each other. You're both selfish, the most selfish I've ever met, and I can't wait to finally be free from your goddamn reigns if you want to go and fuck her."

He slaps her. The sound echoes across the room. The ring he had on his hand cuts her cheek. She falls to the ground, holding her face.

"You fucking little bitch!" he yells, before slamming his leg into her side. She cringes in pain, trying to get up, but Gavin was quicker, climbing on top of her, hands at her side and one knee digging into her gun wound. "You want to be smart with me? I'll show you who's smarter," he growls, taking a hand and punching her hard across the face.

She sees stars for a second, and could distinctly hear him start to unbuckle his belt. She cries out, trying to get away, but he slams her hands down.

"You're not fucking getting away from me!" He snarls.

Daryl had been pacing for a bit, moving back and forth across the living room floor, and eventually, the girls had told him that if he was really worried about Suzanne that much, he should just see her. So, he did what they said and left the house, heading directly for her home.

The door was slammed shut, but as soon as he walked closer, he could hear cries of pain coming from inside. There was no one outside - most of them in the meeting house so they could talk with each other. No wonder no one had come to her aid.

"Suzanne?!" he yells out, to no avail. Another cry of pain. Worry seeps through him and he instantly goes towards the door, jiggling the handle realizing it was locked. He puts his full body into the door, trying to break it down. It only took four hits before it crumbles against the hinges. "Suze, are ya-"

Daryl freezes upon what he sees. Suzanne was lying on the ground, her shirt and bra off, with lash marks along her back from what looked like a belt, her arms and legs tied together to prevent her from escaping. Above her was Gavin, standing, with said belt, a deranged look in his eyes.

And from that moment onwards, Daryl didn't see anything else. All he saw was red, and all he felt was the urge to kill him.

Pieces

Chapter Summary

Daryl has a violent confrontation with Gavin, after witnessing his treatment of Suzanne. Suzanne confesses a secret that she has been keeping, that devastates Daryl.

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter has mentions of child death, and domestic abuse. If any of that triggers you, please do not read.

He stalked towards him. Before Gavin even knew what was happening, Daryl was beating him bloody. Gavin yelped in pain, trying to get away from him.

"Jesus Christ, get the hell away from me! Somebody get this fucking hick away from me!" Gavin yelled frantically, terrified that Daryl was going to kill him for beating Suzanne.

No one came though, as he continued punching Gavin until his face was bloody, and his nose was broken. His designer Hugo Boss suit was stained in blood.

"If ya ever come near Suzanne again, I'll fuckin' kill ya! Do ya hear me?!" Daryl growled dangerously. Gavin nodded looking terrified, as he watched the man gently but tenderly pick up Suzanne.

She hardly weighed anything in his arms. Daryl rushed her to his house, where Beth and Carol could look after her.

Gavin watched him leave the house, feeling partly terrified but on the other hand infuriated that the redneck had interfered. Who the fuck did this bastard think he was interfering in his marriage with Suzanne?

Daryl had rushed Suzanne to Beth and Carol, who brought her to the clinic that served as their hospital until Alden, Joel and Tommy could finish building a proper hospital.

"What the hell happened, Daryl?" Brandon asked horrified. He averted his eyes as Beth and Carol started tending to the injuries on her back.

"I got worried about Suzanne, so I went to check on her. I heard voices yelling in the house, so I went to check on her, and the front door was locked. I tried to get in, but I busted it open," he explained as Josette hurried into the room, and froze at seeing her granddaughter lying on the hospital bed.

"What else happened, Daryl?" Beth asked quickly. She started putting antiseptic cream on the lashes. The wounds were deep and would scar in time.

"Gavin had her hands and feet tied up. He'd ripped her shirt off and taken her bra off. He was whipping her with his belt until she was unconscious and had a crazy look on his face. I went at him and beat him," he said grimly. Carol entered the room with medical supplies that Beth and Josette needed,

"I'm guessing her bastard husband did this to her. Fucking Gavin. It's wrong that Pamela turns a blind eye to what he's doing to Suzanne just because she's scared of him," she said angrily, her grey curls coming loose from her bun.

Daryl said nothing to that as he watched them treat Suzanne. Beth stitched up the cut on the left side of Suzanne's cheek. It would leave a scar.

"We've stitched up the cuts and hooked her up to an IV, but she needs time to rest. You should stay with her in case she wakes up," Beth said softly. Daryl nodded and quietly sat in the chair by her bed.

She looked so small in the bed, almost as if a gust of wind could blow her over in a storm. She'd always been petite, but he noticed that she was thinner than Lindsey, Edward, Tony, Pamela and Gavin.

"I'm here, Suzanne. I ain't leavin' ya," he promised quietly, gently stroking her soft hands. Her hands were delicate and slender but calloused from hard work.

He wouldn't leave her again, not after finding her after thinking for so many years that she was dead.

Suzanne woke up to see she was in a house and the lights were all off. She looked around worriedly. Where the hell was, she? There were toys and blood sprayed on the walls along with bullet holes.

She then heard the sound of a baby crying, and started running down the hallway frantically. Her baby was crying and needed her. Alice needed her.

She ran up the stairs, looking desperately around for her baby girl, and saw a bedroom. It had a sign on the door, saying, 'Alice'. She cautiously entered the nursery, seeing toys, books and teddy bears on the shelves.

There was an Alice in Wonderland theme on the walls, with the Cheshire Cat, the Queen of Hearts, the rabbit. The Mad Hatter was even painted carefully on the walls.

"It's alright little butterfly, mama's here now. See, I'm here," she said softly, and froze at seeing Daryl holding Alice. His back was turned to her. "Daryl, are you alright?" she asked quietly.

He didn't answer, and he turned then, causing her to scream in horror and disbelief. Daryl's once piercing blue eyes were now dull and lifeless, and she looked to see that he had been shot at least two times. Alice had turned as well.

She collapsed against the wall, unable to comprehend what she was seeing in front of her. The man she cared about more than anything and her daughter were both walkers.

"I'm sorry, so sorry. Oh god, I'm so sorry Daryl and Alice!" She sobbed distraught, not even pushing the walker that had once been Daryl away from her, as he grabbed her by the hair.

Daryl woke up to hear Suzanne crying hysterically. He rushed over from his chair, stroking her hair. She sobbed into his chest, tears staining his shirt as she sobbed.

"I'm sorry, Daryl, I'm so sorry," she sobbed brokenly. He shook his head as he brushed her tears away. She must have had a really bad nightmare. He waited until she had calmed down, still holding her close.

"Ya ain't got anythin' to be sorry about, Suzanne. None of this is yer fault," he said quietly, trying to comfort her. She swallowed thickly, before looking at him, hands shaking.

She couldn't keep the truth from him anymore. It wasn't fair to Daryl. He deserved to know.

"I...I have something to tell you," she whispers, and to that, he nods quietly. "Remember when we had that night together? Before I married Gavin?" she asked quietly. Daryl looked at her silently before nodding.

"Yeah, I remember. It was my second cousin, Leanne Dolly's wedding...shit show that it was. And ya came with Josette, Melinda, and Jaime. Why are ya talking about this?" Daryl asked wearily. He'd hated himself for leaving her the morning after at the motel.

"Afterwards, when you didn't call back, I... I married Gavin and moved on but I... I found out I was pregnant shortly afterwards. I didn't...want to think about it but...things started to line up. Jaime found out and confronted me when I kept on trying to call you, and even went to see your dad. He was angry when he found out I was pregnant...and so was Matilda," Suzanne explained quietly, as Daryl looked at her and remembered that night.

(Flashback, Northern Georgia, Hartwell)

Daryl had never thought he'd come back to Hartwell again, but his second cousin Leanne Dolly was getting married to Leland Dixon, who was ironically enough his first cousin.

Who he hadn't been planning on seeing was none other than Suzanne Giroux. She was wearing an all too familiar black maxi dress that had lace on the front and sandals. Her long blonde hair was pulled in a partial braid. She saw him and gave him a faint smile. He quietly came over to join her, as he lit up a cigarette and saw Merle flirting with Wendy Case, his on and off girlfriend.

"Ain't ya a sight for sore eyes," he says, seeing her blush and chuckle. "Been forever."

"I know," she responds back, rubbing the back of her neck. "Truth be told, I was hoping to see you tonight. Feels like an eternity's gone by."

That made him smile a bit, but he couldn't let himself get too hopeful into that. "So, how have ya been? I hear ya gettin' married to someone," he asked quietly, feeling like his heart was being ripped to shreds. She looked at him quietly and nodded.

"Yes, but nothing really official. Gavin...he comes from a very old and wealthy southern family. His mom wants to make sure that all the wedding stuff is just perfect. They thought after meeting me I'd be a good match," she said quietly. "But, ah...I don't wanna talk about it." She looks over at him. "How have you been? Your cousin, Lee, told me that you got your GED and work as a mechanic," she asked softly. He nodded to that.

"Yeah, I got my GED and work in the local garage. How bout ya? Brandon said that ya completed yer trainin' to be a nurse and are in the hospital now with med school and all that?" he asked quietly. A smile graced Suzanne's face. He loved that smile of hers.

"Yes, I am. I'm training to be a NICU nurse to look after sick premature babies. You know I've always loved children," she said softly, as they saw Leland and Leanne getting to go on their honeymoon, which was a week in New Orleans.

"I do. Ya we're always good with the little ones. Ya used to babysit Leanne's six brothers and younger sisters," he said gruffly. "Took a strong mind to handle that amount of kids."

Suzanne chuckles. "Yeah, it's crazy. But I loved every second of it." He looked at her quietly, feeling his shoulders drop.

He'd missed her so much. He hated what he'd done to her four years ago, but he'd done it for her own good.

She wouldn't have been happy with him, and he was terrified of becoming like his old man. Will Dixon's blood ran through him. Jaime had begged him not to drag Suzanne down on that path like their mama and his momma.

So in the end, he'd broken things off with her, and said things that he hated saying to her. He hated himself for it.

"Well...I'm happy yer gettin' everythin' ya want," he says quietly, rubbing the back of his neck.

Suzanne was silent for a moment. "Not everything."

Daryl's brow furrows. "What ya mean?"

She glances out towards the entrance, seeing the newlyweds ride off. "Um...you wanna head out somewhere? Catch up over a drink a bit more? Think they're starting to turn down a bit."

While Daryl was curious to hear what her answer was to his question, he nods. He'd take any opportunity to speak with her. "Yeah, 'course."

She smiles a bit and nods towards the exit. And he follows after her.

They had gone to a local bar that wasn't too far from where he lived. One drink had turned to two, which turned to three, and a couple of others. They would go on and talk for three hours about the past, about what they had been doing, about everything else going on. Suzanne would tell him about her time working in the hospitals and he would give her some crazy tales about Merle or his life.

It was easy, slipping back into talking together. And with each drink, they moved closer and closer.

At the end of the night, the two of them had walked out together. Suzanne was laughing at something Daryl had said, when she suddenly stops in her tracks. Daryl turns to look at her, brow furrowed. "What's wrong?"

She looks up at him, before suddenly, she wraps her arms around his neck, and pulls him down, landing her lips softly on his. The moment surprises him, but he doesn't pull back. If he was being honest, he had been wanting to kiss her since he left her but had held off contacting her. However, doing this, felt like waking up in heaven.

When she pulls away, just barely to breathe, she rests her forehead against his own. "I... I don't want to marry Gavin." It was a soft confession. "I don't want him...I want you. I always have."

Daryl didn't know what to say in that moment. He was silent, still, barely even able to comprehend her words. So instead, he says what he wants to with his actions, cupping her face in his hands, and pulling her in for a passionate kiss. It seemed that was all he needed to do, because she responded instantly, pulling her up into his arms and against the wall of an alley, kissing her like there was no tomorrow.

However, he does realize that if they were going to do this, the last thing he wanted was to do it in a fucking alley. Luckily, she says that where she was staying was not that far, so she took him to her motel. As soon as they were in her room, they tumbled into one another, pulling him onto the bed, the two of them reuniting like they hadn't been apart for years.

Their clothes came off almost as quickly as one could put them on, thrown into a pile on the floor. They don't mess around with time or anything. The both of them get straight to it. With his lips on hers, he wastes nothing and pushes himself deep into her, his cock aching and

hard and wanting her in every way possible, deep into her soaking core.

They let out a simultaneous groan of relief, the two of them blissfully happy to be together. It doesn't take long for either to reach their peak. Daryl had gone fast and hard, making sure that he knew exactly where to hit that spot before his fingers would come down and rub her clit. Her orgasm set off his, and he came deep into her, breathing heavily.

He had collapsed next to her not that long after, breathing heavily. He brought a hand up to her face, stroking her cheek, the moonlight bouncing into the motel room.

"I missed ya." It was a tired response, but one that brought a flutter to his heart, as she looked at him with those beautiful eyes, something he had wanted to say forever.

"I missed you too," she murmurs.

They hadn't talked that much more after that. She had started kissing him again, and they fucked again. And again. And again, that night. Over and over until they were absolutely spent, and the room smelt of sweat and cum. Something Suzanne would feel bad for with the maids at this place.

But when Daryl woke up the next morning with Suzanne next to him, all he felt was guilt.

Then when Suzanne woke up, she saw that Daryl was gone. And all he left was a note, saying, "This shouldn't have happened. I'm sorry."

She had been furious at first, angry at herself for letting her get tangled up in this, but then she went to his home, where he worked, everywhere, and she couldn't find him. He had completely left not only the city but everywhere around it. And now here she was, alone.

But on the opposite end of the state, Daryl had gone to a lake, by himself, smoking cigarettes and drinking a pack of beer. And while he did, there were no sobs that escaped him, not even a cry, but tears streaked down his cheeks.

"I... I don't get it," Daryl states quietly, blinking himself back to the present. "Why are ya tellin' me this?"

"That...that night. That was the night I conceived Alice." Daryl froze completely. "It wasn't when I married Gavin. If it was, then Alice would have been even earlier but she...she was there. I found out right as the world was ending. I got a paternity test because I just had a feeling as soon as Alice was born and...and it's true. You were her father, Daryl...Alice was yours."

Daryl doesn't even know where to begin. He doesn't speak. He stands up and runs his hands through his hair shakily, stepping away. Suzanne instantly feels tears come to her eyes.

"Daryl...please say something."

"I-" He stops himself, taking a shaky breath. "She...she was mine?" Suzanne nods quietly. "I... fuck..." He nearly collapses against the wall, if not for himself holding him up, before he forces himself to take a seat for just a moment, head in his hands. "She...she was mine..."

Suzanne tries to stand, to do something, to help him but the pain was unbearable in her back. "Daryl-"

"Please." He raises a hand to her, trying to stop her from talking. "I..." He stands up, looking away. "I gotta be alone for a second, just...just stay. I'll be back."

He leaves without another word. The moment the door closes, Suzanne lets her tears fall, a part of her terrified she just made the worst mistake of her life.

Beth had been helping a few of the others trying to move food into the pantry when she had passed her home, and spotted Daryl on the steps. However, she could see that his head was down, and his hands were on his face. Curiously and out of concern, she heads over to him, telling the others she'd be back in a second. "Daryl?"

Her voice seemed to knock him out of his head for a moment, and he glances up at her. The moment she sees his face, she instantly realizes that something was wrong. Very wrong. Daryl rarely ever cried. The only time she had ever seen him cry was when Merle died, and Rick vanished. That was it.

But here, his eyes were red, and there were tear streaks along his cheeks. "Hey, Bethie," he mutters.

"Daryl, what's wrong?" she asks, her voice filled with worry as she sits down next to him.

Daryl takes a shaky breath, his shoulders dropping. "Suzanne...had a little baby girl before the world went to shit," he says, looking at the ground. "The military caused the little one to die...I thought the girl was Gavin's but...she and I, we...we had a one-night stand and I... I left in the morning...Suzanne found out that the baby was mine..."

Beth brings a hand to her mouth in shock. Daryl felt more tears start to come out. Beth could see them fall to the gravel below.

"She was the one person I cared for more than anyone else...and I fucked that up...if I had just stayed...I maybe coulda saved Alice. We could have...she could BE here...I'm a fucking failure, Beth. I fucked up everythin'."

Beth's heart broke for Daryl in that minute. She couldn't imagine what he was going through. A parent losing their child in any manner was horrific but losing your child in this world was heart-breaking.

"You listen to me, Daryl Dixon. You are not a failure in any of that sense. All you can do is be there for Suzanne now, and the two of you grieve for your baby girl. This wasn't your fault, Daryl. I know if everything were reversed you would have done everything to protect

Suzanne and Alice," she said comfortingly. Daryl nodded shakily and she helped him stand up on unsteady legs.

Beth was right. He needed to be there for Suzanne. He hugged her tightly, feeling tears burn his eyes.

"Thank ya, Beth. If anyone asks, just tell them I'm with Suzanne," he said roughly, trying to hide the grief in his voice. She nodded and watched him go, feeling her eyes burn with tears for his and Suzanne's grief.

She hoped they helped each other through it.

Daryl went back to the clinic and found Suzanne curled up in the bed. Her eyes were red from crying. He wordlessly got into the bed behind her, gently holding her so he wouldn't hurt her back.

"Daryl-"

"Nah," he starts out, interrupting her before she could speak. "I just...I'm so sorry, Suzanne. I should've been there," he whispered thickly, noticing that Dog had come into the room. His left hip wrapped in clean bandages, and he was quietly watching over them.

"It's my fault, Daryl. I should have tried harder to find you. I was just so upset when you left and wrote that stupid note. But a part of me knew that she was yours when she started kicking...I called her little butterfly," Suzanne whispered quietly, turning around to face him and he gently thumbed her tears away.

He hated seeing her cry. He wrapped his arms around her as she curled into him, kissing her hair gently. Why hadn't he stayed with her instead of running away?

"I like that nickname, little butterfly. She's our butterfly, Suzie...we can't see her but she's here with us," he said shakily, liking the nickname that Suzanne had picked for their little girl.

Suzanne listened to the steady beat of Daryl's heart as he held her tightly in his arms. He stroked her hair, wishing that he could take her pain away.

"I should've protected her more, Daryl. I begged that woman not to turn off the generators, told her that there were babies, but she told me that the Civic Republic Military needed it. No exceptions," she whispered tearfully. It was like all her grief was coming out like a tsunami wave.

Daryl held her tightly, feeling rage burn through him like a forest fire in his veins. If he ever saw that woman, he'd kill her for killing their baby girl.

"It ain't yer fault, darlin'. Ya loved Alice more than anythin'. She knew it...I just wish I coulda helped ya both instead of runnin' away," he admitted ashamed. Suzanne stroked his hair gently, feeling the softness.

"I never blamed you for Alice's death. I know you would've done everything that you could to save her and me. I shouldn't have let my guard down," she said quietly, curling into Daryl and he held her tightly in his arms.

He was never going to let Gavin or anyone else hurt her.

By Your Side Again

Chapter Summary

Daryl talks to Carol about his relationship with Suzanne. Judith, Beth, Lydia and RJ play Monopoly with Suzanne. Melinda gets turned down by an unlikely person.

Daryl had come back from a hunt, dragging a large buck over his right shoulder. He saw Suzanne there and she was holding a crate with supplies for the house, smiling at him as came inside, heading into the home, while he went to go field dress the deer.

Each house was given supplies to last the week that included vegetables, meat, ten bottles of water, a pack of toilet paper and hygiene products. That must have been for them.

"That's one hell of a deer you caught Dixon," Ozzy said impressed. He'd changed out of his Reaper clothes and was now wearing jeans, a flannel shirt and jacket. He looked more laid back and relaxed.

"Took me three hours to catch it. The animals are slowly comin' back here, but not gonna over hunt them. That's the last thing we need," he said gruffly. Ozzy nodded as he left to go fishing with Cyndie.

He gave it to Andy after he field dressed the deer, and it was taken to the smokehouse. The smokehouse was gradually being filled up, but they needed more meat before winter came in full force.

He quietly entered the house after, and the smell made his mouth water in hunger. He could smell herbs and spices in the air, as he saw Carol, Suzanne, and Beth cooking.

Lydia, RJ and Judith were helping. He saw Suzanne cutting up habanero peppers on the kitchen side. She smiled at seeing him come in and offered him one.

He bit the pepper, feeling his mouth burn like hell. Holy shit, these peppers were hot as hell.

"How the hell did ya eat these when we were little?" he asked, astonished, remembering how he and Suzanne would eat jalapeño cheese poppers.

Suzanne chuckled at his expression, pouring him a glass of milk. He drank it quickly.

"That would be the Cajun in my blood, from my gran and momma. Brandon, Jaime, and Matilda always said I was strange for liking spicy chicken but not liking curry," she said amused, and he looked at what was cooking in the oven.

"Suzanne, Aunt Beth and Aunt Carol are making beef stroganoff with jalapeño cornbread, Uncle Daryl. We're making elephant ears for dessert," Judith said excitedly, as the women finished making the cornbread and placed it in the oven.

Daryl smiled at Judith's excitement. She'd only ever had cookies and never had a cake. When the Commonwealth traders had arrived with freshly baked goods, and baking supplies to trade with them in exchange for tobacco, Judith and Gracie had been overjoyed.

"Is that so? Ya better brush yer teeth the three of ya. Otherwise, yer teeth are gonna fall out," Daryl said playfully, causing them to giggle at him.

They left to go play in the living room, while Carol and Beth smiled fondly at seeing Daryl going to talk with Suzanne.

While the food cooked, Suzanne decided to play Monopoly with the kids, while Carol went on watch with Daryl. She and Beth played against Judith, Lydia, and RJ.

"What board games did you play when you were little, Suzanne?" RJ asked curiously. Suzanne smiled at him as she thought of her childhood.

"Ah, so many. Clue, Monopoly, and Who Wants to be A Millionaire were the big ones though. I was a queen at Monopoly - so watch out," Suzanne said fondly, causing the kids to giggle. A moment later, Beth saw Suzanne looking longingly at the horse stables.

"Do you ride?" she asked curiously. Suzanne smiled sadly and nodded but looked lost in thought.

"I used to ride a lot, but I've forgotten how...I haven't been able to do it in years. I don't know if it's like riding a bike. When they came here, they brought a lot of the horses we took care of in the Commonwealth, including the one I visited. I still see Eowyn, but I'd love to ride her," she said regretfully. Beth smiled.

"I can teach you."

Suzanne's face brightens up at the thought. "Really?"

Beth chuckles and nods. "Really. I go riding all the time. It's one of the ways we really use to get around. The only person that ever uses something seriously car-wise is Daryl, and even then, he doesn't use it too often."

Suzanne smiles. "I'd love that, then...maybe just need to hop on one to jog my memory."

"Good," Beth responds before rolling the dice in Monopoly.

Daryl and Carol had been on watch for a little bit, looking out into the walkers that would stray along the path occasionally. They had been trying to build back up the walls as best as possible, bit by bit. But the emergence of new people was making it hard.

Specifically Melinda. It seemed now that Gavin was forced to go somewhere else, she was acting out just in this one day. Daryl and Carol had already spotted her trying to steal clothes from the community area and sent her back without reprimanding her. She'd nearly had a fit, but honestly, that was the last thing either of them wanted to deal with.

Now, they were back on patrol, quietly walking together. "Suzanne seems nice," she says to him with a raised brow. An owl hoots in the distance. "You two get along well. It's like time never passed."

Daryl glances back at the ground, but he feels a slight smile pull at the edge of his lips. "Yeah...didn't think she was still around. But here she is." Daryl sighs and looks up, brow furrowed. "Wish I had found her earlier."

"Don't blame yourself for that. This world is big, especially now. What matters is that you found her now."

Daryl nods, stopping at another checkpoint, firing an arrow at a walker, before moving on. "She...she and I used to be a thing."

"Yeah, I gathered." Daryl's brow raises in surprise and Carol snorts. "Daryl, you act like a teenager around her. I don't think I've EVER seen you more awkward than you are with her - but I also see you act sweet as well. Sweeter than anyone. I mean, who would just want one specific girl's cookie unless they were with them?"

"Shaddup," Daryl mutters, but Carol shoves his shoulder playfully. He knew she meant all the best.

"I only kid," she chuckles, before using her own bow and arrow to kill another walker. "You two are nice. Definitely a pair. Thank God, you saved her from that fucking husband of hers."

"Yeah..." Daryl glances over at Carol and bites his lip, before deciding to let out his secret. "I, uh...she and I, before she got married, we had a one-night stand. Turns out...she got pregnant from it." Carol turns to him in surprised silence. "The baby that she had was mine. The baby that...died. Her...her name was Alice."

"Jesus," Carol says slowly after a moment, the news lingering in the air. "That must have been a bomb drop...how are you feeling? How is she feeling?"

Daryl rubs the back of his neck and glances out into the forest. "We're...doin' alright. I hate thinkin' about...what I coulda done, ya know? What might have happened if I didn't run away the morning after...if I coulda saved Alice..."

A hand comes onto his shoulder, and Daryl looks over to see Carol looking at him with a reassuring glance. "Don't blame yourself for something like that. Seriously. That was so long

ago, and the world was so different. None of us could have predicted what came when the world fell to shit. All we can do now is move on and hope we can make a difference now. And that little girl is up there, knowing you both love her, even if you never met her."

Daryl feels his shoulders drop slightly, but doesn't question what she said, glancing at the ground. "I still can't believe she went with Gavin" he mutters, shaking his head. "I mean...I didn't expect her to chase me. She didn't know where I was. I made sure of that, and I regret it but I... why would she go back to him when she said she didn't want to marry him?"

"Sometimes, women have no choice but to go along with it. In my case, I had to protect Sophia from her biological father," Carol states softly. "In Suzanne's case, from what I'm hearing, it sounds like the odds were against her. Brandon was off in Afghanistan, her younger sister was bitchy and probably forced her into the marriage, her grandmother most likely needed the money so she thought it would be a good fit for the family for their financial needs, and she thought she lost you forever. Her other two siblings didn't seem to mind that much either...it's all a mentality, and it seems hers was at her lowest then."

Daryl rests against a wall as they climb down, sighing to himself. "I feel like shit about it every day."

"Don't, Dixon. You two are together now. That's what matters." She grabs her jacket, throwing it over her shoulders. "And who knows? You two might have a second chance."

Daryl snorts a bit and shakes his head. "Suzanne's been through enough...I don't want to cause her any more drama. All I can do is be there for her. Not end up fucking us up again."

"Daryl." She hands him his jacket as well. "The only way you can ever fuck this up again is if you leave again. Other than that, I'm quite sure you'll be fine." She puts their weapons back in the armoury as the two of them walk back. "Look, all I'm saying is that you live on the top floor, the walls are thick, and you're sharing a bed. I won't mind. I can stay with someone else."

"Jesus Christ, woman," Daryl responds, rolling his eyes. "Stop jumpin' to conclusions, for God's sake."

Carol snickers. "Sorry, pookie."

When Daryl and Carol returned back to the house, they saw that everyone had gone up to their rooms. He had said goodnight to Carol, watching her head into her own room that she had, before climbing the two flights of stairs to where his and Suzanne's room was.

As he walks in, he glances at the bed and saw Suzanne asleep. Dog was at the edge, sleeping peacefully, his tail wagging from a dream.

Daryl quietly takes off his jacket, and for a moment, contemplates his clothing. He glances over at Suzanne, but as he does, he sees her gently wake up, her eyes opening slowly. "Daryl?" she mutters.

"Didn't wanna wake ya," he says softly, coming over.

"What're you doin' standing there?" Her southern accent always became more pronounced when she was sleepy. "Come to bed."

"I... didn't know what to do with my clothes. I didn't wanna be...rude, I guess."

Suzanne rolls her eyes sleepily. "Daryl, I'm in loose t-shirt and sweatpants. You can wear whatever you want to bed. You're the last person I'm going to feel uncomfortable around." She closes her eyes again, snuggling against the sheets. Daryl takes that as a yes to change and quickly does so, getting into a loose t-shirt and sweatpants himself, before crawling under the covers with her.

The moment he does so, she pulls her body close to him and lets out a soft sigh. He takes a moment to remember this feeling, of her snuggled against him. He had missed it so much. Even if nothing came out of this, he was so happy to have her back in his life.

"We missed you during Monopoly," she murmurs.

Daryl chuckles lightly. "Ya can have me on yer team next time."

"Nah... I'll let Judith kick your ass. She can be my teammate. Live up to that nickname."

And to that he laughs.

Melinda sat on her family's porch, smoking a cigarette late in the winter night. Fucking place was shit. She hated it here. A part of her almost wanted to go with Gavin wherever he went because the people here she already hated. All of them had no idea of who they were back at the Commonwealth.

As she lets out a drag, someone speaks to her. "Those'll kill ya."

She glances over to see an older man come out, with a scruffy beard and a leather jacket on. Instantly, she puts on her sweet smile, and sits up straight. "I like the danger," she flirts a bit before crossing her legs, holding out her hand. "The name is Melinda."

The man, however, doesn't return her gesture. "Negan, but uh...prefer not to fuck around with women'll who cheat with their sister's husband."

Melinda felt insulted by his comment, and before Negan knew what was happening, she slapped him hard across the face. He narrowed his eyes at her before she stormed off down the street in frustration.

This place was a joke.

Suzanne woke up early this morning to see it was seven. She saw Daryl was fast asleep next to her. She kissed him gently on the forehead, brushing away some of his hair that was in his eyes, before getting dressed and decided to cook breakfast.

She cooked Belgian waffles, with bacon, sliced hash brown, and pancakes with maple syrup. When she started serving it up on the table, Daryl came down. He smiled quietly at her, which she returned, before they were joined by Carol, Beth, and the rest of the kids.

"This smells so good, Suzanne. Did you used to cook when you were with Uncle Daryl?" Judith asked curiously. She loved having pancakes and waffles when Aunt Beth and Aunt Carol could make it.

Suzanne shared a smile with Daryl, as both of them thought back to the time when they were happy with each other.

"I did, but my grandmama taught me and my siblings how to cook a lot of different food. Uncle Daryl did teach me how to hunt and how to track different animals," Suzanne said softly, as they all tucked into the hearty breakfast.

Judith smiled. She could see that Daryl and Suzanne cared deeply for each other and wondered if the feelings went deeper than that. Once breakfast was finished, Beth and Suzanne left to go horse riding, with Lydia going with Daryl to hunt.

Judith and RJ were going to help Carol with the pantry. She was making an inventory of everything, with Maggie Greene and Joel Miller.

Daryl took Lydia with him as they checked the snare traps and found two fat rabbits. He killed them quickly, not wanting them to suffer, as Lydia walked quietly next to him.

"So, you and Suzanne knew each other in the old world before all of this happened?" Lydia asked curiously. He nodded quietly as he noticed footprints in the snow.

"Yeah, knew her since I was ten years old. Scared the bullies away from her," he said distantly, remembering that day that had changed his life.

Lydia saw the sadness in his eyes. She was about to apologize for making him upset, but he shook his head. His voice was quiet, as he spoke again.

"Suzanne...she had a similar childhood to me and ya. Her daddy left when she was seven years old, and Melinda was five. Her momma, she didn't like bein' alone, so she used to leave them alone a lot, and Josette looked after them. She was the one who gave me my first job," he revealed, causing Lydia to stare at him in surprise.

Daryl very rarely spoke about his life before the world had ended, only saying that he'd been a drifter. She knew that his father had abused him, and that he'd lost his older brother to a man called the Governor.

"What was the job she gave you?" she asked curiously, as they saw a large herd of buffalo drinking by a lake. He didn't answer for a moment, as he aimed his crossbow at the male buffalo that was lagging behind and fired an arrow at the animal.

The animal slumped to the ground lifelessly, as they walked towards the large buffalo. They both picked it up, as they took it back to Alexandria to be butchered and placed in the smokehouse.

"Fixin' up the barn for Suzanne's grandmother. Her two older brothers would help out as well. Suzie loved horse ridin', and would ride her horse, Eowyn, every chance she got," he said quietly, as his mind took a trip down memory lane.

(Flashback, Giroux family farm, Hartwell, Northern Georgia)

Daryl had ridden up to the Giroux family, which was outside of town, but near the trailer park. The farm was well cared for, and had healthy animals, from cows, chickens and four horses that were grazing in the fields.

He saw Suzanne was already there, she was wearing a pair of well-worn mahogany brown cowboy boots, jeans, and a blue tank top. She smiled once she saw him, and Josette came out onto the porch and grins at him as well.

"I'm glad you could come, Daryl. Brandon's away in Afghanistan, and Jamie's at college. It's just me, Matilda and Melinda," she said softly. He nodded at her as he walked to where Josette was now feeding the chickens.

"Ain't no problem, ya know I'd do anythin' to get away from my old man," Daryl said gruffly. She smiled as Josette showed him the barn that needed repainting.

"How long do you think it will take, Daryl?" Josette inquired concerned.

"It'll take a week to do, don't worry," he reassured her quietly. She smiled in thanks as she went to cook dinner for all of them. Suzanne turned to look at Daryl, who was starting to repaint the outside of the barn already.

"Not just gonna let you stand there and do it alone," she comments, causing him to roll his eyes as he picked up a brush.

"Nah, stubborn ass ya are."

Suzanne laughs before turning to him. "Will you stay for lunch, Daryl?" He nodded, and she smiled at him, before the two of them started painting the barn.

Josette had taken a liking to Daryl. He didn't know why but she treated him kindly and never judged him. Although all of her church going friends thought he was bad news, and so did Suzanne's momma, Michelle Giroux.

The woman was infamous around town for her constant marriages, and having her first child, Brandon when she was sixteen. Much like his family, the Giroux family were Catholic and Southern Baptist.

"You two are very close," Lydia offered softly. He nodded as he thought of the scars on Suzanne's back. He hated that bastard Gavin had hurt her and caused her so much heartache.

Not that he was much better. He'd run off and left her after having a one-night stand with her. He hated himself for not being there to help her when Alice had been born. He could've protected them.

All he could do now was be there for Suzanne.

Remember When

Chapter Summary

Daryl invites Suzanne to move in with him, to keep her safe from Gavin.

Brandon had been asked by Aaron and Rosita to put Gavin in a cell while the council and Pamela discussed what punishment he should be given for attacking Suzanne. If anyone asked for his opinion, he would've suggested feeding the bastard to the walkers. If there was one thing he knew, it was that his brother-in-law was terrified of walkers.

That would be fun to watch.

Regardless, he'd put the bastard in a cell where he was watched by two fucking scary women, who Maggie had told him were from a community called Oceanside. They were mainly women and children, but there were a few men now among them.

They carried spears, bows, machetes and some of them even carried sickles, like Suzanne did. He made a mental note to not piss her off, before going to check on the horses in the stables.

There were ten horses currently, and all of them had names on their stalls. Some of the names he liked, saying hello to them quietly.

One horse that caught his eye was quietly eating some hay and whinnied at seeing him. He smiled, as he saw his name was Brego, named after the horse, that Aragorn rode in Lord of the Rings.

"That's Aragorn. He's lived here for the last six years. I've raised him since he was a foal," a voice said softly behind him. He turned around to see a young woman a bit younger than Suzanne's age. She had long blonde hair that was in a braid and scars on the left side of her face, and one in her hairline. "I liked that franchise a lot when I was younger - decided to nerd out a bit."

"It's a good franchise to nerd out on. He's a good horse, very friendly," he said quietly. The young woman smiled as they both watched Aragorn get settled for the night. The stables had indoor heating, so they would be warm for the winter.

"I'm Beth Greene," the young woman said softly. He realized with a start that this was Maggie's younger sister. She looked kind, but there was a toughness about her, an inner strength.

"Think I saw you earlier takin' care of my sister but barely spoke. My name's Brandon Giroux Carver. I'm Suzanne and Melinda's older brother, and Josette's grandson," Brandon said quietly, not quite sure how she would react to seeing him.

Instead, Beth smiled at him as they left the stables and saw a group was being arranged to go hunting in the morning. Daryl was going, and so were quite a few others.

"It's good to meet you. I honestly just came to check up on the horses but if you wanted to see them, go ahead. See you around, Brandon," Beth said softly. He nodded and watched her walk down the street.

Melinda was furious. She'd been told by some woman called Rosita that she was being questioned by the council and Pamela in the morning regarding her relationship with Gavin. Who the hell did these people think they were?

If it wasn't for her and Gavin, the people of Alexandria would still be slowly starving to death. She was so angry, and it was all Suzanne's fault, the fucking bitch.

Growing up, she'd hated how poor their family was and how their mother could never get them decent presents. Her father on the other hand gave her many presents, including the latest iPads and even gave her an allowance.

She fucking hated Suzanne. It was embarrassing being the younger sister of a woman who had high-functioning autism. Her sister was smart, but had struggled with math, and didn't have any friends aside from Merle Dixon and Leanne Dolly.

She angrily threw an empty bottle of beer at the goats, causing them to run away in fright. She hated this place, it was nothing like the Commonwealth or her brownstone townhouse that she'd been given due to being a plastic surgeon.

This place was awful, all around. She prayed they didn't do shit to Gavin. If they did, they'd have her to talk to.

Suzanne woke up to see it was still dark outside, and saw that Daryl was still fast asleep. She gently stroked his cheek, noticing the scars that marred his skin, and the one over his left eye.

She was sure that there was a story behind each of them. She felt the urge to go to the bathroom but didn't want to wake up Daryl. They'd both been up all night talking about Alice.

She'd never seen Daryl in so much pain. It broke her heart to see him in that way. She'd never blamed him for Alice's death.

She carefully climbed off the bed, being very careful as to not wake up Daryl in the process. Her back wasn't in agony like it used to be, but it ached slightly. Quickly, she went and used the toilet, trying to be as quiet as possible.

After washing her hands, she went back to the room and got back into bed with Daryl. She smiled quietly at seeing him fast asleep,

"Ya alright?"

Suzanne looks up in surprise. "I thought I was being quiet?"

Daryl chuckles a bit, letting her settle against him to get comfortable. "I have the ears of a hunter, darlin'. Ain't hard to wake me up. Don't gotta worry."

Suzanne rolls her own before sighing. "Still...I wanted you to sleep." The two of them were quiet for a moment, letting a comfortable silence bask over them before she looks back at him. "Can I say something a little silly?"

"Go for it."

"I missed the way you cuddled me." Her cheeks turn red a bit. "I always fell asleep so easily with you...on nights where it seemed impossible, I always wished you were there."

"I feel the same," he admits, causing her to smile a bit. "Especially..." He sighs and glances away. "Especially when I was alone. Or with the Savivors...there were a lot of dark moments. So many."

Suzanne holds his hand in hers gently. "There's a lot to catch up on. But you've survived everything. Just like I always knew you would." Daryl smiles a bit the moment she says that, letting his head rest against the pillow. His hand gently comes up and touches the scar that was forming alongside her cheek. He thinks back to Gavin.

"Is yer back hurtin'?" he asks softly.

"A little...it's as bad as it as before. Just achy."

Daryl sees that she was trying to be tough, so he lets his hand gently fall to her side. She instantly snuggles into his chest. He didn't want to admit how amazing it felt for her to be there. "Gavin..." he starts out quietly, dreading hearing the answer. "How long has he...?"

It seemed she didn't need to hear the rest of the question. "He...started doing it later on. He was always an asshole...treated me like garbage, but I put up with it because...because I had nothing else to lose." She glances away. "But he started getting physical when I... when we got to the Commonwealth. I felt safe there for the first time and I... I wanted to try and restart whatever type of relationship we had maybe, and try for...for having a child. Moment I said that, he got all defensive...he's been doing it ever since. I don't think he ever wants children. But this...this was the worst."

Daryl feels his arms instinctively wrap around her, trying not to harm the wounds on her back. God, he should have murdered that asshole. "Does he know about Alice?"

Suzanne was quiet for a moment before shaking her head. "No...no he doesn't know Alice was yours." She looks up at him. "But...to be honest, a part of me doesn't want to tell him. I just want her to be ours...I don't want some crazy secret or whatever to cause any more drama here than it already has...I just want this to be...over with." She glances away. "The reason I went home was to confront him. Beth told me she saw him and Melinda kissing."

Daryl's nose screws up in disgust. "Fucking hell."

"I know, it's like the devil and his wife," she mutters. "I did that exact thing and he...well, you saw what he did." She bites her lip and looks back at him. "I... I don't know how I feel going back to that house, Daryl."

Daryl looks at her quietly before bringing up his hand to her cheek. "Then ya don't have to go back."

"Where else am I going to go?"

"Stay here." Suzanne's brow raises slightly. "I mean - not in the infirmary, but at my place. Beth and Carol could always use the help and the kids - they gotta be watched, and Lydia - you'll love her, she's a sweet kid. Reminds me of ya when we were younger, and I can always help ya out and-"

"I'll come." He stops in his rambling, seeing a soft smile on her lips. "I'll gladly come...more room for my siblings to have the home. And to get away from Gavin if he ends up going back there." Daryl smiles a bit at that. "But...are you sure you'll have room?"

"Oh, I'll make room," he mutters, before pulling the covers over them again. "Go back to sleep, darlin'. Yer safe here."

Suzanne lets out a soft sigh before slowly letting her guard down, sleep coming not that long after. Daryl was close behind.

The next morning, everyone had gathered into the council house to discuss what was going to happen to Gavin. Daryl had come in with Suzanne, helping her sit due to her back, with his eyes glaring dangerously at Gavin, who stood at the front, with two of the Oceanside women behind him.

"Since this is a manner with the Commonwealth residents," Maggie begins once everyone was seated. "I asked Pamela to help me decide what to do with Gavin. You're being charge of domestic abuse and potential fatal harm to your wife, Suzanne. If not for the heroics of Daryl Dixon, who knows what would have happened to her. We might have not only been down a nurse that was going to aid us in everything we needed, but a good woman who risked her neck for a bunch of strangers while at Meridian to save the food there for us and the medical supplies." She turns to Pamela. "These are your citizens - what do you believe should be done?"

"I believe Gavin should be stripped of his position as the person to represent the Commonwealth to trade with Alexandria. I believe that honour should be given to Suzanne, Lindsey, Edward, and Carlos," Pamela announced calmly, but firmly as she glared at Gavin with an expression of disgust.

"Is he going to stay here? Because he's not safe to be around considering that he nearly killed his wife last night for simply confronting him about cheating with Melinda," Magna asked cautiously, as some people turned to look at the woman that Magna had mentioned.

Melinda was sitting next to Brandon and Josette, who both had deliberately sat in the middle so they could keep an eye on her. The woman glared at Magna with an expression of contempt. Someone must've told her to dress properly, because she wasn't wearing a dress or high heels anymore.

"Gavin will be going to one of the Commonwealth communities in Yellow Springs, Ohio for the foreseeable future. As for Melinda, she will be staying here," Pamela explained patiently, causing Gavin to glare at the Governor of the Commonwealth.

He couldn't believe what he was hearing. He was being sent to fucking Yellow Springs, for fucking putting Suzanne in her place. He was infuriated.

"After everything I've done for you and Lance, this is how you fucking repay me?! By sending to that shithole that's Yellow Creek, which is running alive with faggots, redskins, rednecks, wetbacks and swamp yankees?!" Gavin shouted furiously.

"You went too far when you started attacking Suzanne in Alexandria for no reason aside from her confronting you over your affair. I think that's a fair trade," Pamela said sternly, as everyone watched the man being taken out of the room.

Daryl glanced at Suzanne to see how she was feeling about this, and she looked relieved that Gavin was gone. Brandon, Carlos Josette, and Lindsey looked simply glad that Gavin wasn't around to cause trouble anymore.

Tony and Melinda looked furious. Melinda looked like she was gonna throw a temper tantrum, but instead stormed out of the room.

"You'll regret this, Pamela. Who gives a shit if Gavin was beating up Suzanne? She needed to be put in her place! She's a fucking retard who couldn't even keep her baby safe!" Tony said snidely. Daryl stalked over to where he was sitting, and the man paled at seeing the murderous expression on his face.

Before he could react, Daryl punched him hard across the face, breaking his nose. No one stopped him - in fact, Brandon joined in, and added on a second punch to the dumbass as well. The man yelped in pain, clutching his now bruised and bleeding face.

"Say that again and it ain't gonna be just yer nose that's broken," Daryl warns, before heading back to the bench with Brandon.

Tony raises his hand that wasn't holding his nose to Maggie. "That can't fucking be okay!"

But instead, Maggie just smirks. "I'll allow it."

After the meeting had finished, Brandon and Josette were helping Daryl and Suzanne bring her things to Daryl's house. It surprised and saddened Daryl that she didn't have much to bring aside from a few books, some clothes and photo albums. He hoped that maybe staying here she could get more.

Lydia had come along to help, meeting Suzanne officially with a smile for the first time, while helping the woman move over her boxes. It was decided that Suzanne would be sharing a room with Daryl for the time being, just because rooms were limited - and Daryl didn't mind at all. Josette had gone to help one of the women, Amber, who was nine months pregnant, give birth to her third child with Mark.

"You know, even if Gavin wasn't doing what he did, I'd be happier to stay here. It's so homey. I really like your house, Daryl," Suzanne said softly, smiling at the welcoming vibe in the house. She noticed that Daryl had added a photo of her and him on the mantelpiece. She wondered where he had gotten it.

"I wasn't too keen on it at first, but then they let me decorate the place how I wanted it. Beth and Carol helped a ton - but I got my say in a couple things," Daryl said quietly, his cheeks flushing at Suzanne's praise of him.

She smiled at him as she went to put her clothes upstairs, and Daryl saw Josette smile at him when she had come back, once everything was moved in.

"Was it a boy or girl?" He asked curiously. She smiled at him and nodded. He knew Mark and Amber had two boys, and they had been born five years ago, Adrian and Matthew.

"They have two little girls, and they've named them, Madeleine and Amy. They're all healthy. No complications. Glad that everything went well. Mother is trying to rest up now," she said pleased. Daryl smiled in relief, while Josette looked at him carefully. "I'm glad you're here for my granddaughter, Daryl. There wasn't a day that went by when she didn't miss you and worried about you all these years," she said softly, kissing his cheek in a motherly manner.

Daryl felt a lump in his throat. He nodded and watched her head to the clinic, where she would clean the surgical tools.

He'd missed Suzanne too.

Suzanne sighed in silent relief as she stood under the shower. She loved having a bath, but showers were the best. She made sure not to take too long, as she washed her tangled curls with the Wild Rose shampoo and conditioner that Lydia had given her. It didn't help that the hot water sorta hurt her scars - just made them sting - but it would also help with cleaning them out as much as possible.

After untangling the knots and combing through her hair, she rinsed the conditioner off, before washing her face with a bar of lavender soap. After doing that, she rinsed her body off with cold water, before turning off the shower. She put on her floral blue cotton bathrobe, as she went to get dressed.

She put on clean underwear and clean clothes, sighing in relief when she put on her mahogany brown cowgirl boots. She put her hair in a ponytail and decided to cook lunch for everyone.

She felt incredibly grateful for Daryl, Carol, Beth, and everyone helping her. She noticed Emil and Lindsey had decided to stay at Alexandria as well.

The Commonwealth never felt like home. Maybe this could be.

Land of The Dead

Chapter Summary

Daryl and Lydia find something that belongs to a missing family member. A team go on a supply run to a hospital to help save Nabila, and her unborn child. Daryl learns more about Alice's death.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay everyone, I've been having a rough time lately.

Beth had shown Suzanne to the horse-riding area, where everyone learnt how to ride a horse if they hadn't before. She mounted Eowyn easily enough and was now gently riding her around the riding area, so she could get used to her.

"See, she knows you, Suzanne. Eowyn didn't forget you," she said pleased. Suzanne smiled happily. After some time to get used to it again, she dismounted and cuddled Eowyn, who whinnied and nuzzled her affectionately.

"Thank you, Beth." she said gratefully, kissing Eowyn on the nose. She carefully led her back to the stables, and began washing her down, as well as cleaning out her stable and giving her hay and clean drinking water.

"No problem. It's the least I could do," Beth said softly, as they heard the sound of a helicopter in the distance. People looked up at the sky to see if it was nearby, but it sounded far away.

"What the hell is that?" Suzanne asks, trying to see if there was an actual helicopter in the sky, but to no avail.

Beth sighs and shakes her head. "To be honest, I have no idea. We've been regularly hearing shit like that, but we have no clue where it might be coming from." The sounds start to disappear, and the two of them exit the stables. "All I hope is that they're not coming for us. Go to literally anyone else."

Suzanne chuckles a bit and nods. "Yeah...would rather not let myself get dragged into another war." She pulls her jacket over herself and sighs. "You know, now that I think about it, there are still Reapers out there...and Leah."

Beth looks over at her and lets her hand rest against her shoulder. "Don't worry about them. We're safe inside these walls for now."

"I know, I just...wonder." She chuckles to herself a moment later. "Maybe they got the helicopter and decided to fly off into the sunset."

"Wouldn't that be a dream?" Beth asks her, and the two women snicker, heading back towards the house to warm up.

Daryl and Lydia had been traveling back for a good amount of time when they stumbled across a roadblock that looked like a tree had fallen. Daryl had backed up from the road and decided to take a detour through a dirt path, moving the car slow so it didn't get troubled by the bumps. They rarely used cars, only when absolutely necessary for trips like these where they were going out to bring back a lot of food.

However on this detour, Daryl had suddenly stopped the truck when he noticed something next to the lake they were riding against. Lydia looks at him in surprise. "What's going on?"

"Hold on," he mutters, before stepping out, heading towards the water.

Lydia quietly steps out as well, waiting towards the truck. Daryl approaches the objects near the water that he had seen, and slowly picks them up into his hands, before looking at the large vehicle that had drifted ashore in front of him.

There was a decrepit boat, covered in what looked like dirt and seaweed, and on the sand in front of him was a katana engraved with the initials, M.G. And a machete that had the initials R.G.

Daryl swallows as he stands, turning to Lydia. She seemed to recognize the katana at least, since she had known Michonne, and her brow raises in surprise. "That's...that can't be-"

"I think it is, Lyd." He comes over to her, gently handing the katana to the teenager. "Which doesn't bode well for us at all." He takes a shaky breath and glances back at the boat. "Not at all."

"Help!"

Daryl's hands instantly go towards his knife, but as he turns, he sees a man holding a woman who looked passed out, with a bleeding head wound. The man looked terrified, and was sweating bullets, clearly carrying the woman a long distance. Lydia takes a step behind Daryl, her hand on her weapon just in case.

"What's going on?" Daryl asks, brow furrowed.

"Please, my...my wife," the man breathes out desperately, stopping in front of Daryl. "Our community, it...it was attacked. We were part of the Campus Colony and they...the CRM

they...my wife is close to dying. Please."

Daryl looks down at the woman, seeing her just barely breathing. A part of him instantly thinks back to Suzanne, and everything he would do for her if she were hurt or in this same position. And without a doubt, he'd be doing the same thing this stranger was doing. He only hoped this wasn't a ruse.

"We got a place a few miles back. Get in and we'll take ya there," Daryl reassures the man. "Lydia, help him with her in the truck. I'll start it up." Lydia nods and comes to the man's aid, taking some of the weight.

"Oh, bless you," the man says, a tiredly thankful smile on his face. "Thank you so much."

Daryl nods, starting up the truck. The quicker they got back to Alexandria, the better.

Suzanne was outside helping out with some of the fence work around Alexandria when she saw Melinda come out of her home with her siblings. Within moments, she spots Suzanne with her jeans covered in dirt, and her hands working on the fence, and storms over to her.

"You," she growls, stopping right in front of her. "I wouldn't expect anyone less to do the work of the fence in this shithole."

Suzanne rolls her eyes. "What do you want, Melinda?"

"You got Gavin kicked out!" she whispers fiercely to her. "The one person who fucking understood me in this place - and you're asking me what I want?"

Suzanne stares at her younger sister with a raised brow, before crossing her arms against her chest. "You know...I know we never got along well, Melinda. But I know that if you were in the same position I was, where your husband nearly beat you to death, I'd want the man gone as well. Not even for the fact that you're still my baby sister and I still love you, despite all the shit you put me through, but that it's the human thing to do. I expected you to be angry, but not this. And I have to say, I'm really disappointed in you."

Melinda was silent for a moment, taking a step back. It seemed she didn't have a retort for that.

"But do you know what? Whatever." Suzanne turns back to the fence. "In a way, I should thank you. If it weren't for your shitty behavior from an early age, telling your friends to torture me, I wouldn't have met Daryl, and here I am, back with my closest friend. So, do you know what? If you want to go and join Gavin in a colony, be my guest - you two deserve each other."

Melinda stared at her in shock, not used to her older sister who was always shy and a bit of an introvert talking to her like this. Suzanne glared at her as she finished reinforcing the fence.

"You're my baby sister, Melinda and I will always love you. I made a promise to our momma and grandmama that I would look after you and I do want what's best for you. But Gavin isn't good for you. Trust me on that," Suzanne said quietly, as she went to wash up and left an angry Melinda to think about what she had said.

She just wished that her younger sister wouldn't be fooled by Gavin. It was pretty clear that she was naive about Gavin's true intentions.

Daryl and Lydia had led the survivors to Alexandria, and they had introduced themselves as Tommy Miller, and his wife, Maria. They had also picked up a couple of other survivors along the way that were also from the colony.

According to Tommy, they had been separated from his older brother Joel, his daughter Ellie, and her two friends, Dina and Jesse, when a herd had swarmed through their camp.

"We were taken to a community called the Campus Colony, in Omaha, Nebraska. Things were fine for at least three years until two weeks ago. We were attacked by an organization called the Civic Republic," Tommy explained grimly as they reached the gates of Alexandria.

Daryl and Lydia exchanged an uneasy glance with each at hearing this. Who the hell was this group?

"Did ya know any of them? The people who attacked yer group?" Daryl asked cautiously. Tommy nodded and grimaced.

"Yeah, their names were Lieutenant Colonel Elizabeth Kublek, her daughter Jennifer Mallick who is a spy and soldier. Plus, there's Frank Newton," Tommy explained seriously. Daryl nodded as he drove the truck into Alexandria and people rushed over to help.

Tommy's wife, Maria, was rushed into the clinic to have her head wound treated while Tommy was taken to be with her. He watched them leave feeling sorry for them, while a group was organized to go rescue the rest of Tommy and Maria's people.

He hoped they found them.

Suzanne had been helping Amelia Shepherd and her husband, Atticus, Lincoln or Link as he liked to be called, help tend to Maria and the other injured survivors.

"Luckily, she just has a concussion, but I've done an x-ray just to be sure. There's no hemorrhaging or signs of intracranial bleeding but I'll keep her overnight to be kept for observation," Amelia explained to Tommy as Suzanne stitched up the cut on Maria's left hand.

She finished and left to go check to see if anyone else needed medical attention. Fortunately, there were no grave injuries, but someone did have second degree burns on their left hand.

She placed a wet, but cool towel on the young woman's hand and winced at the burns. Seeing those burns reminded her of the burns that were on her chest from pouring hot lemon tea over herself when she had been two.

The burn on the left side of her cheek was gone, but on her chest, it was still visible. She carefully checked the burn, seeing it was healing, and noticed the young woman was pregnant.

"How far along is your wife, Sam?" she asked kindly. The man looked worried as he sat by his wife's side, along with his sister. The three of them looked exhausted and traumatized.

"Eight months along. She's due any day now. We were lucky to get all the baby stuff, but mine and Amelie's mom didn't get out," he said quietly.

"If you like, I can check on your baby with the Doppler if you'd like?" she offered kindly, and they nodded in thanks. She helped Sam get Lucy comfortable, while Amelie turned off the lights. Suzanne turned on the machine, and everyone soon heard the swoosh of the baby kicking. The baby, which was a healthy little girl on the screen, kicked happily.

"See, Lucy? That's our Lou kicking like hell," Sam said encouragingly. Lucy was beaming and Amelie looked like she would break down in tears of joy.

"Considering the fact that you're close to giving birth, I'll recommend that you stay at the clinic tonight. Little Lou might make an early entrance tonight," Suzanne said reassuringly. She couldn't see any abnormalities on the baby, but she was no obstetrician or foetal surgeon.

It did make her feel good, though, seeing that the baby looked healthy.

Daryl and Lydia updated the council about what they had found on their hunt, and that they had found Michonne's katana and boat. The boat looked like something, or someone had attacked whoever had been inside of it. When Daryl had gone to look for Suzanne, they had said she was still at the clinic, helping a pregnant woman giving birth to her baby.

He'd come along with Beth and Josette due to Suzanne asking for an incubator, and as they arrived, they heard the healthy cry of a newborn baby being born and cheering heard in the clinic. Josette checks over Lucy Strand Bridges Porter, while she holds her newborn baby daughter along with Sam. Daryl had stayed out near the end, glancing in to make sure that everything was going all right. Suzanne was there, gently holding the baby and wrapping her in a warm blanket while she cried.

"She's a healthy baby girl. She weighs 7.5 lb." Her cries got louder, and Suzanne chuckles a bit. "And has got a healthy set of lungs." The family smiles as she gives Lucy her baby, who immediately starts rooting for her breast and happily starts breastfeeding.

Daryl couldn't help but be proud of Suzanne at that moment. She'd successfully helped Sam and Lucy with their newborn baby.

Later on, Suzanne had brought in Nabila and checked her blood pressure, noticing that it was higher than normal. Her hands and feet were swollen since the last time she was here, according to Beth. She had a sense of dread in her stomach.

'Please don't let it be pre-eclampsia,' she prayed silently, as she listened to the baby's heartbeat. The little one's heartbeat was slower than it had been last night, and that worried her a great deal.

"Nabila, I don't want to worry you, but did you have pre-eclampsia with any of your previous three pregnancies?" she asked gently. Nabila shook her head, looking slightly pale.

"Is my baby alright?" Nabila asked anxiously.

"Your baby is fine Nabila, but we'll have to deliver this baby tonight or tomorrow. You're showing signs of preeclampsia, and it can be extremely dangerous for you and the little one," she explained gently to the worried woman.

"What can be done to help her and the baby? They're gonna be two months premature," Jerry asked worried. Suzanne let out a deep breath as she looked at the worried couple.

"Magnesium Sulfate therapy will help Nabila and the baby. Magnesium sulfate therapy can be used to prevent seizures in women with preeclampsia. It can also help prolong a pregnancy for up to two days. This allows drugs that speed up your baby's lung development to be administered," she explained gently, and they both nodded in understanding, but they looked at her worriedly. "If I can get that, we'd have a good chance that you and your family is going to be alright."

She knew there was a hospital that wasn't raided by the Commonwealth, but it was probably swarming with walkers.

The council had agreed that Daryl, Rachel, Melinda, and Carol along with Suzanne would go to Chippenham Hospital in Richmond. It would be quite a journey, but it was more than likely the only hospital that hadn't been raided. If the worst came to the worst, then Jerry and Nabila's baby would have to be in an incubator for the next four weeks. Daryl had complete faith in Suzanne and Josette.

Both women had helped deliver babies in difficult scenarios. Josette had told him that Suzanne had helped deliver a breeched baby once. It had been touch and go, but Suzanne had saved the little one's life.

"Nabila shouldn't have gotten pregnant at her age, for god's sake. Women who are older are more at risk for having disabled babies that have cleft lip palate, Down syndrome and Cerebral Palsy," Melinda said disapprovingly as they rode the wagon.

Daryl and Suzanne exchanged a glance of exasperation.

Daryl couldn't help but notice that Melinda had worsened since Gavin had been sent to one of

the Commonwealth communities. She was a complete bitch towards Suzanne and wouldn't even talk to her most of the time.

"They'll love the baby regardless, Melinda. They're both wonderful parents. I've seen it with how they care for their children," Suzanne said quietly, looking at her warningly. The woman sneered. It was silent the rest of the ride, until they had reached the hospital.

After making sure the horses and the wagon were safe, they entered the area cautiously. There were bodies in the hallway, wrapped in sheets, all showing a gunshot wound to the head.

They reached the maternity ward, and Daryl busted the medicine cabinet, where the medicine was kept. To their surprise, it was still untouched. And there was what they needed right in front of them. Suzanne smiles as she puts the magnesium sulfate into their backpacks, along with the other bottles of pills as quickly as possible.

Carol and Rachel helped Daryl and Suzanne carry the incubators and IV drips to the wagon. They even found an Extracorporeal membrane oxygenation machine and an Anesthetic machine that could be used if anyone suffered serious illness or injury. Suzanne never thought she'd be thankful for a hospital out in the middle of nowhere, but here she was, thanking God.

Pamela had been more than happy to supply Alexandria and Oceanside with medical equipment. The Commonwealth traded medical supplies, and food in exchange for tobacco, and ammunition that Eugene made. It seemed things were finally starting to come together slowly.

As they passed the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Daryl saw Suzanne still. Comfortably, he quietly slipped his fingers through hers. She gave him a grateful smile, knowing there might be items in there they could use, and cautiously opened the doors.

There were decaying bodies in the room, as he cautiously stepped inside, with Suzanne and Carol behind him. He checked the incubators, freezing when he saw two dead babies in the incubators.

Instantly, his mind thought to Alice and Suzanne.

Suzanne comes over to where he stood and glances inside the incubators, her heart dropping. There were two gunshots to the babies' heads, so it was clear they had turned long ago.

"No child should have to suffer through that," Suzanne says softly. Daryl was silent. She brings her hand up to his shoulder, resting it gently. "Are you alright?"

"Did she turn?"

The question surprised Suzanne. She glances over at Carol, who had just finished packing up some the medicine. She seemed to sense the tension in the room and nods to them, heading out a moment later to give them some privacy. "What do you mean?" she asks him.

"Alice." He finally forces his eyes away from the incubators and back at her. "Did she turn when she died?"

Suzanne was quiet for a moment, her eyes drifting off into another world of memories before she forces herself to answer. "She...she did." It seems the moment she said that, Daryl turns away from her. She sees him bring a hand up towards his mouth, his back facing her. "It was before we all knew everyone would get infected no matter what. I was so confused, but...but I had to do it. I killed her before she could bite anyone."

"Jesus fuckin' Christ..."

It seemed that those were the only words that could escape him. Suzanne watched Daryl go over to a chair, heavily sitting down his head in his hands. She comes over to him, pulling the chair next to it. The moment she does, she saw that his eyes were wet with unshed tears.

"Daryl, it's alright," she whispers.

"It fuckin' ain't, Suzanne," he instantly responds back, his voice shaky, broken. "God, I... I fucked up fuckin' everythin'..."

"Daryl, stop," she says, taking his hands in hers and away from his face. "You didn't fuck up anything. We're here now, right? Both of us are here. We're alive. Everything is okay...Alice is gone and yeah, that fucking sucks, but there's nothing we can do but move on and try to live another day. If she were here, she'd want us to do that...you can't stay stuck in the past, Daryl. Please..." She holds his hands tightly in hers. "The last thing I want is for you to be stuck back there...look at me." She tilts his head up, wiping away the tear that has escaped from his eyes. "You did nothing wrong, Daryl. You're still just as brave as I know you are."

"I woulda been braver if I just stayed with you," he mumbles.

"It doesn't matter anymore." She leans in and presses a gentle kiss to his forehead. "You're here now, and that's what matters to me." The two of them sit in silence for a moment before she stands, holding his hand. "However, what you can do is help us get back so we can prevent someone else from losing her baby."

That seems to switch something in his head, and he stands up, taking a deep breath. "Alright...then let's get to it." She goes to leave but he holds onto her hand. "Don't go too far, ya hear?"

"You'll be right behind me," she says softly, before letting go of his hand. "Now come on."

I Never Stopped Lovin' Ya

Chapter Summary

Daryl and Suzanne discuss their past, while Beth and Brandon bond.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay in posting, I've had a rough time.

While one group was off at the hospital trying to find supplies to make sure that Nabila could deliver her baby safely, Brandon had suggested heading out to find some more livestock. Maggie's sister, Beth, had offered to go with them, and together, they took two horses out and rode deep, trying to see what they could find.

Along the way, Beth and he talked about everything they could to pass time. His time with the Reapers, in Afghanistan, with his family, and he found out that she was extremely easy to speak to. There was a certain relaxing quality about her that he liked. It also helped that she had the kindest blue eyes he thinks he had ever seen on anyone. He doubted she'd judge anything.

As they had moved deeper into the woods, she had started to ask questions out of curiosity, quietly riding up on her horse next to him. "So... Daryl and Suzanne, huh?"

Brandon sighs and rolls his eyes. "Yeah...those two were in love, that was for sure." He glances over at her.

"When did that start?"

"Ah...when Daryl was in high school, he dropped out for some reason - think it had something to do with his pa beating the shit outta him. She was still in high school. It just sorta...happened between the two of them. I always had a feeling it would, at least when she got older. I saw how he looked at her...like she was the only girl in the world." Brandon shakes his head. "He was her first. I think she was his, too."

"Wow," Beth says softly. "So, they go way back then?"

"Way back."

"Then what happened?"

Brandon snorts. "I'll tell you what happened - my fucking brother." Brandon turns to Beth once they stop in a clearing, jumping off their horses. "Jaime was a fucking asshole to Daryl. Ain't like we're that different. We were both bred in the same fuckin' trailer world. But he always said that Daryl never deserved her. That Suzanne could do so much better. I may give Daryl a hard time, but I never said that he didn't deserve my sister. He cared about her more than anyone in the world. I'd trust that man with my sister's life more than I'd trust myself. But it got to him...and Daryl ended things." He sighs and glances away. "I was off in Afghanistan at the time so not like I could fuckin' do anythin' about it, but I still feel like shit to it all this time later...specially with Alice."

Beth was quiet for a moment as the two sat on a log together near a spring. "Well...it seems that Suzanne's moved on."

"She's had no choice but to," Brandon states, looking to Beth. "Poor woman has been through hell and back...I only hope being in Alexandria will give her that second chance she was looking for, especially with Gavin...God, if I knew he was hurting her like that, would have hunted him down myself."

"Yeah...it's really good he's out now. Kinda sketched me out the moment he came in - he stared at my breasts rather than my face."

Brandon groans. "Jesus Christ, that fucking pervert." He looks over at her and offers her a slight apologetic smile. "I'm sorry for that. That ain't no way to treat a Southern belle."

Beth chuckles, her cheeks turning a light red. "Thank you," she responds, shaking her head. "But I ain't no Southern belle."

Brandon nods, smirking a bit. "Yeah, you seem to get a little dirtier than most Southern belles. I've seen you in the stables." He nods at her. "That's a great thing you do, by the way - taking care of all these animals. Gotta know a lot of shit to be on top of your game, just like Suzanne with babies and kids."

Beth sighs softly but nods, a sad smile on her cheeks. "Yeah...my daddy was a veterinarian. Wanted to continue the legacy in a way."

"Well, you're doing a stand-up job," he compliments with a smile. "Ain't seen these many animals in years."

"They've all become wild. I've seen lions that have acclimated to the climate and settled down, along with tigers," she said softly. Suddenly, they felt the ground vibrate, and stilled.

Before either of them could realize what was going on, a herd of at least twenty elephants were walking in front of them. Beth stared at them in shock as she saw them walking to a nearby lake to drink the fresh water, looking completely at ease.

"Holy shit," Brandon said amazed. None of these elephants looked on the skinny side either.

They all looked healthy. There were even five baby elephants standing near their mothers.

Beth couldn't resist. She took a photo of the amazing scene with her camera, admiring the photo. They carefully moved the horses away, as they saw a large farmhouse up ahead.

"They must've come from a local zoo or sanctuary. It's nice knowing that the wildlife is thriving in this world," Beth said softly. Brandon smiled at her words, as they cautiously made their way towards a farmhouse that they had spotted in the distance.

There were at least seven horses, four donkeys, two goats and four cows. There were plenty of tools, wire, animal feed and they checked the inside of the house.

Brandon stopped dead in his tracks at what was in the dining room. Beth froze as well, her heart sinking. A family of seven were slumped in their chairs, the bodies still fresh and not turned.

"Was it suicide?" she asked quietly. Brandon shook his head as he checked the bodies. There was no GSR on any of the bodies, which made him think an outsider had done this.

"No, someone killed this whole family and made it look like a suicide. There's no gunshot residue on their hands," Brandon answered gravely. Beth nodded, and they started digging graves for the family.

It made her sad to think that someone had killed these people for no reason. The cupboards and pantry were untouched. Whatever had happened, the person wasn't interested in taking the supplies.

Once the bodies were buried and makeshift crosses were put over the graves, they began taking anything that could be used. Beth found a working sewing machine and sewing basket that she placed in the wagon, while Brandon found three trailers to place the animals inside safely and to keep the walkers away.

He looked at the graves remorsefully, thinking of the people that he'd killed while with Pope and his squad. The ones who he'd considered brothers and sisters. The blood that stained his hands.

'Can I ever make amends for what I've done?' he thought regretfully. The wind blew on him as if to answer his question. He sighed and left to go help Beth.

The fact that the hospital was an untouched goldmine was a godsend, but everyone was careful to get everything. Suzanne had found forceps that would come in handy, along with clean but dusty towels.

"Got everythin'?" Daryl asked quietly. She nodded and went outside to re-join the others. They had cleared out everything, until the wagons were filled to the brim with medical equipment.

They started riding back to Alexandria, with Suzanne reading a medical book that gave advice on how to deliver babies whose mothers had preeclampsia. In every scenario, it was recommended the baby was delivered by c-section to save the baby and the mother.

Nabila was thirty-seven weeks pregnant, so the baby would be premature. The last thing to develop in the baby were the lungs. She hoped that with the medication that had been found in the neonatal ward, it would help her.

Antenatal betamethasone would be used to help the baby's lungs develop. As they rode to Alexandria, she noticed that there were more walkers than usual. She and Carol used their bows to get rid of them, while Daryl used his crossbow. Once most of the path was clear, they would sit back down, with Suzanne anxiously tapping her leg.

"Don't worry. Ya ain't gonna hurt Nabila or her baby, Suzie," Daryl said firmly, as he sat next to her on the wagon. She attempted to smile but sighed heavily.

"But Tony's right, Daryl. I'm just an NICU nurse, not an actual doctor or surgeon. And the people in the Commonwealth, at the least the upper class believe the same. Every time I tried to help or offer advice, they'd remind me of exactly that," Suzanne said dejectedly, thinking of the negative things that people had said to her about her job.

A job that she happened to like and was immensely proud of doing as it happened.

Daryl looked at her silently. She seemed so worried and nervous about what she was going to do. He took her right hand in his left hand gently, but firmly.

"Remember our next-door neighbour's daughter in the trailer park, Dorothy Knowles?" he asked softly. She nodded as she remembered the young teenage girl who had been eighteen.

"Yeah, she was pregnant and tried to hide it from her parents, older brothers, and sisters," she answered quietly, thinking of the kind but religious family. The Knowles family had been Southern Baptist and were firmly against abortion unless the mother was in danger, or the baby was born from rape.

"And ya were the one who saved her when she tried to perform a botched abortion. Ya saved both of them, Suzie. Ya didn't judge her for what she tried to do," he told her gently. A lone tear trailed down her cheek.

"I just wanted to help her...even though I was only fifteen years old, and she was older than me. All of us wanted to help her," she said quietly. He squeezed her hand reassuringly.

"I know ya did. Hell, I did and so did even Merle. She was scared of what folks would think if they found out she was having a baby at eighteen years old. But ya helped her and called that helpline and she was doing all right after it. Thanks to ya," he said softly. Suzanne smiled.

His words comforted her in more than one way, and the fact that he had so much trust in her touched her deeply.

"Thank you," she said quietly. He nodded and stroked her right cheek gently, a tenderness in his eyes. She leaned her head against his shoulder as they reached the bridge that would get them to Alexandria by early afternoon.

Nabila was on strict bed rest by the time the supply run team returned. Suzanne checked her blood pressure. It was higher, but the baby was stable.

"Nabila, we're going to deliver your baby in the next hour. But we've got medication that will help your baby's lungs develop. Don't worry...everything's going to be fine," she said reassuringly. Nabila nodded as Beth, Carol and Josette arrived to help her.

Eleanor gave Nabila a spinal block, so she would be awake but wouldn't be in pain during the c-section. Jerry was allowed in the room and sat by his wife's side, holding her hand.

The surgical tools had been sterilized with boiling hot water, as Josette began performing the c-section not that long after with surprising wit for her old age. She was still as sharp as a pencil. Suzanne had been in an operating room that did c-sections, but this was calmer. More relaxed, the two women working together in coordination to make sure that everything went as smoothly as possible.

She stood by the incubator as the first baby came out, and a quiet but sharp wail was heard in the room. She saw her grandmother smile, as the baby was wiped down.

"Congratulations you two, he's a healthy baby boy!" Josette said pleased. Nabila and Jerry beamed widely. Josette placed the baby boy on Nabila's chest so she could hold him, while Josette tended to her.

Suzanne was given the baby afterwards and she cleaned him up and placed him in one of the seven incubators. The incubator would keep him warm. As soon as he was settled, she gave him the medication through an IV that would help his lungs develop. She smiled at the baby boy, who was kicking his legs out contently, oblivious to the danger. He was a fighter.

Soon after, Jerry and Nabila name their son, Benjamin Jerry Tuigamala in honour of Jerry's late brother, who died at the start of the Outbreak. He weighs five pounds but is gradually thriving. And later, when it was alright for them to see him through the incubator, Suzanne had stepped out of the room for a moment.

Suzanne slumps down into a chair, as she watches Jerry and Nabila bond with their son. Aside from needing oxygen, Benjamin is a healthy baby boy.

She leaves so they can have privacy and checks on the Porter-Bridges family. They're happily fussing over Baby Louise or Lou, as they've taken to calling her.

Suzanne smiled as she checked the baby over and she was perfectly healthy. She had tufts of dark blonde hair like Lucy, but Sam's dark blue eyes.

She quietly leaves the clinic, wanting to be alone. As she walked by, a sudden sense of grief overwhelmed her. She walks towards a weeping willow tree, as it starts to rain heavily. Then, leaning against the bark, she crosses her arms against her chest, closes her eyes, looks up, and allows herself to cry.

"I wish you were here, Alice. Mommy and daddy miss you so much. I'm so sorry that I couldn't save you," she says quietly, knowing no one can hear her, but she thinks of what could've been if Alice had lived.

Her daughter would've been Judith's age, growing up with Daryl as her dad. Tears stream down her cheeks, before she takes a deep breath and wipes them away. After a moment, she silently began walking back to the house.

Daryl had just tucked Judith and RJ into bed and said goodnight to Lydia when Suzanne came inside. She was soaking wet from being out in the rain. As soon as she closed the door and saw him, she gave him a quiet smile.

"I'm sorry for worrying you...I just needed a minute," she said quietly. He said nothing, but quietly pulled her into his arms and held her.

He felt her tremble in his arms, feeling her tears stain his shirt before he wiped her tears from her pale face.

"I missed you, you know?" she said quietly. He rested his forehead on hers, trying to convey what he wanted to say but couldn't.

"I missed ya too...I'm so sorry Suzanne. For hurtin' ya, for makin' ya feel like I used ya for sex when I didn't, for makin' ya think I didn't care about ya...I wouldn't even be surprised if ya hated me," he apologized quietly, stroking her tears away.

"I could never hate you, Daryl."

Daryl snorts and shakes his head. "Ain't no way ya feel that."

Suzanne brings her hand up to touch his own, resting on her cheek. "I'm serious. I could never hate you. Even when I was in the hospital, all I wished was that you were there. That's it. I could never hate you for what you've done." She shrugs her shoulders a bit. "Maybe I was angry, but hate never was a question."

Daryl swallows a bit before taking her hand in his. "Come on...let's get ya into some warm clothes."

Suzanne nods quietly, following after him as he led them upstairs.

When they reached their room, he reached into his dresser and pulled out some clothes for her, some that were going to be far too big but would keep her warm for the time being. He quietly turns as he hears her undress, before glancing behind him, seeing her in the baggy

clothing with her wet hair. She looked so small.

He walks over to the bed, taking off his vest as he does so. "Ya know...I still think about it." Suzanne's brow furrows as he sits next to her, before pulling her against him lightly. "That day...when I ended things."

Suzanne was quiet, looking at the ground. "I mean...it was so long ago."

Daryl bites his lip before turning to her. "Can I tell ya somethin'?" She nods. He had the urge now; he had the sudden burst of confidence. If he didn't tell her now, he never would. "I didn't want to break up with ya, Suzanne."

She stilled for a moment, brow furrowed. "I... you didn't?"

"No... if anything, I kept thinkin' about everything I wanted to do with ya." His hands covered hers lightly. "I thought about all the places ya wanted to go, the things ya wanted to see, and I wanted to give that all to ya but...but yer family had other words."

Suzanne's eyes narrow slightly. "My family? Who?"

"Jaime." He sighs and glances away. "He...he pulled me aside one day and said that he wanted me to end things. And of course, at first, I told him no, but he...all he said was that he wanted the best for ya. That he wanted ya to have a good education and get out of the trailer park and not become like yer mama and mine...and if I stayed with ya it would just be a cycle...the same cycle from before, two people in poverty just...barely survivin'...and I realized I wanted that for ya, too. So, I... I listened to him. As much as it fuckin' hurt, I listened."

Suzanne was quiet for a moment, seemingly letting his words process through her head. After a second, she lets out a long sigh and nods. "It makes sense," she mutters. "Jaime never liked you for who you were...but Daryl, I... you could have come with me. We could have made it out together...I didn't want to do anything if I didn't have you and... you broke my heart."

"I know." His voice was strained. "I know, and it's one of the worst fucking days of my life. But...but ya got everythin' ya wanted. Ya got the job, ya made money, even now you're survivin' in this world and I-"

"Daryl, I didn't get everything I wanted because I didn't have you by my side," she whispers fiercely. Daryl looks over at her, seeing her look of partial anger soften into one of sadness. "I wanted to take on the world with you...while I get why you kept that from me for so long... I wish you had told me sooner. I would have kicked Jamie in the balls."

Daryl lets out a snort, shaking his head. "I have no doubt ya would've."

"But Jamie doesn't matter right now." She holds his hands in hers before getting on her knees, turning to face him. "You're such a light in my life, Daryl...a light I never want to leave again. I don't care what Jamie ever said - you were good for me. You were the best for me. Even if that's the past, I know that no matter what, you're staying by my side. I finally got you back -

and you're not going anywhere."

Daryl smiles a bit, and before he knows it, she's pulling him into a tight hug. He hugs her back just as tightly. He'd had no idea the effect releasing all of these secrets would have on him but now, he felt as high as a feather. She knew the truth. She knew it all. And she didn't hate him.

Her wet hair tickles his nose. He pulls away and grabs a towel from the nightstand. "Put yer hair up...don't need ya gettin' the bed soakin'."

Suzanne chuckles a bit but nods. "Yeah...the rain kinda did that, didn't it?" She puts her hair up and glances outside. "Just...sometimes wonder if I'll get another chance like that, you know? I see these families so happy and sometimes I just..." She shakes her head, stopping herself. "It's selfish, but I sometimes wish it was me. Or that...Alice was here."

Daryl was quiet for a moment before pulling her into his arms. "She's here in our hearts," he says softly to her, to which she nods. "It ain't selfish to want that. I'm sure one day you'll get it." Suzanne snorts and shakes her head. "I'm serious...one day, ya will. I have faith."

"I think you're just livin' in a fantasy world and need sleep." She grabs the light and turns it off, before turning to him, snuggling under the covers into his body. "Regardless, goodnight, Daryl."

Daryl smiles a bit, his hand rubbing slow circles along her clothed backside. "Goodnight, Suzanne."

When Beth and Brandon had returned back from the trip and put all the animals in the farmhouse, he had invited her into his house to escape the rain. And as they went in, with Beth making him a cup of coffee for a great trip, he had put up a fire in his fireplace to keep warm.

Staring into it, he looked inside, his brow furrowed in contemplation. Beth, seeing this, comes over to his side with her mug. "Everything alright?"

"I hate living with this...guilt." He stands up and runs a hand through his hair. "I know I made my bed. And I'll lie in it, but I just...I ain't got a clue how to restart Beth." He looks over at her. "I wish I could just let go of everything from the past but...how the hell do I move on from what I've done?"

Beth bites her lip before coming over to where he sat. "Everyone's done horrible things, Brandon...but I think it all starts with the small acts that show we want to move on. Even Negan, who killed so many of our people, had to start somewhere, and now he's accepted here...you can be too."

Brandon lets her words sink in before nodding, and then suddenly stands, rummaging through a bag that was in the corner. After a moment, he pulls out what used to be his Reaper mask, and then, in one foul throw, he unleashes it into the fireplace. Within seconds, it begins

to burn.

He watches it go up in flames, surprisingly cathartic. He looks over at Beth, who had a slight smile on her face. "That a good start?" he asks her.

Beth snickers and nods, before coming over to his side, nudging his shoulder. "That's a great start - I think you're well on your way to becoming a better man." She nods towards the kitchen. "Your next step is to sit down and have a cup of coffee with me."

Brandon chuckles but nods, following her into the kitchen. "Yes, ma'am."

Daryl had woken up the next morning bright and early, glancing at the clock and seeing that it was six. The sun was just barely over the horizon. He looked at Suzanne's sleeping face, seeing her peacefully asleep with not a care in the world. The scar alongside her cheek was still there.

He still couldn't believe he had told her about what had happened. And she had accepted it. She had been a bit angry, but had accepted it. He had been worried about nothing. All these years.

Daryl sighs softly before gently kissing the top of her head, and then gets up, heading over to the bathroom. He quietly closes the door, glancing at himself in the mirror, before spotting something at the edge of the sink. His brow furrows as he picks up a box and glances inside. He snorts once he sees it.

It was a box of surely expired condoms, with the note, *"Just for fun - don't actually use. Think they might be dangerous at this point,"* from Carol. Daryl rolls his eyes and puts the box under the sink, shaking his head. That damn woman. Her jokes were going to kill him, but at least she was happier now than before. He was glad they had settled things the way they did.

When he glances back in the bedroom, he sees Suzanne spread out along the sheets, holding the blanket close to her. He found himself snickering. She still slept the same way she did when she was younger. Ain't a damn thing changed.

Looking at her like that, he was reminded of their first time. She had been his first, and he had been hers. Merle had forced him early on to learn the basics from shitty porno, but he had been so fucking nervous. The last thing he wanted was to fuck it up. He wanted to make her feel as comfortable as possible.

He remembered it too. They had gone out to a carnival the night before. He had set up this big mattress that Merle had gotten (where, he didn't want to know, but it worked for the night), and turned it into a picnic area near a cliff where they liked to go stargazing. He had candles and shit. He had gone full romantic - something Merle held over his head for years.

But that night had been worth it. In so many ways.

"Oh my god," Suzanne laughs as he takes her through the clearing. The light from the candles bounces across her face in the moonlight. "You did all this for me?"

"I'd do anythin' for ya," he says, a bit shyly but trying to be confident at the same time. "Same spot every time, right?" Suzanne quietly sits down at the edge of the mattress, shaking her head, before she pulls him down next to her gently. "Even got all your favourite treats - hard to get some all the way up here but wanted to make it special."

Suzanne's eyes sparkle against the light of the moon. "I don't know what I did to deserve you, Daryl," she says softly.

Under The Weeping Willow

Chapter Summary

Daryl and Suzanne stumble across a newborn, premature baby in a destroyed safe-zone.

Chapter Notes

I apologize for the delay, I've been busy with family issues. I hope everyone has a wonderful Christmas, and stay safe :)

"Other way round, darlin'. I don't know what I did to deserve ya, Suzanne. Ya too good for me," Daryl said quietly, an air of vulnerability in his voice, as she leaned into him. He'd won a black cowboy hat from one of the games, and he was wearing it. It suited him. He opened a bottle of the cheap, sweet wine they had swiped from the carnival tonight, and they began sharing it.

Suzanne took a sip of wine and passed the bottle back to Daryl who was watching her intently. She watched him take a swig.

"This is perfect ya know," Suzanne said softly, taking in everything around them. The full moon illuminated Daryl's face as he brought the bottle back down.

"You're perfect," Daryl murmured.

Suzanne closed her eyes instinctively as he leaned in close. She awaited the moment when their lips would touch. She felt his rough hand tilting her chin a second before his warm lips touched hers. She tasted the sweet wine on his lips as she parted hers, allowing his tongue to take charge.

He pulled away, leaving her breathless and wanting more. She licked her lips, savouring the taste of his still lingering on hers. She couldn't help but think of how different he was than everyone said. He wasn't just using her to get what he wanted. He actually loved her.

Suzanne crawled closer to him, leaning in to press her lips back to his. Her hands moved to his neck as her fingers toyed with his hair. Their tongues danced as their bodies moved closer.

Suzanne pulled away instinctively when she felt him hard against her bare leg through his

jeans.

"Shit, I'm sorry," he said as he let out a deep breath.

Suzanne's eyes met his, pausing briefly, before crashing her lips back against his, desperately.

"Hold up, Suzanne," Daryl said throatily as he pulled his lips away, pushing her away gently.

"What is it?" Suzanne asked nervously, making him look her in the eyes. "Don't you want to, Daryl?"

"Uh, of course, but ya drank a lot of wine. I don't want ya to make a mistake."

"It's not a mistake," she said softly. She knew that he was being cautious because of her virginal status, and it made her want him to be the one to take it from her even more. As the darkness fell even more around them, she stared into his face, trying to read his expression. "Please," Suzanne begged. "I love you."

Daryl crashed his lips against hers, taking her by surprise. They trailed down her face, stopping at her neck as he sucked on her soft skin. Suzanne shuddered with anticipation when he breathed out.

"Tell me if I hurt ya," Daryl whispered, his lips still touching the sensitive skin of her neck.

Suzanne felt her heartbeat skip in her chest.

"I want you," she whispered, sending Daryl's kisses to a more frantic nature. As their tongues danced together, she let her shaky hands drop down to the buttons on his shirt. He pulled away from her when she undid the last button and tugged on her t-shirt. Suzanne raised her arms, allowing him to pull it off of her head. Daryl tossed it to the side, taking the chance to pull his unbuttoned flannel off of him, and tossing it beside her crumpled t-shirt.

Daryl's eyes trailed down to her chest, and Suzanne's did the same to him. The darkness kept her from really seeing, but the thrill was still there. She laid back against the soft quilt and mattress, surprised at how quickly Daryl followed her lead. He leaned over her, ravishing her neck and chest with his lips as his hands attempted to unclasp her bra from underneath her. Suzanne leaned up in an attempt to speed the process. Every time he touched her, it sent shivers of anticipation up her spine. She wanted him to take her.

"Daryl," she murmured, surprised at the sound of her own voice, filled with want.

"Do ya want me to stop?" Daryl's voice came out husky.

"No," Suzanne blurted out quickly, feeling her bra slipping off her shoulders as soon as she said it.

She pushed all of her worries out of her mind and unbuttoned his jeans as he showered her

breasts with kisses. Suzanne unbuttoned her blue jean shorts when Daryl eased his weight off her to get his own jeans off. He turned his attention back to her, slipping his fingers underneath the waist of her jeans, slowly sliding them off of her outstretched legs.

"I don't wanna hurt ya," he murmured as he propped his body up with his hands, inches away from hers. Suzanne felt herself growing restless, and Daryl's breathing turned laboured.

"You won't," Suzanne assured him as she trailed her fingers down his bare chest. She felt the scars that were caused by his father's abuse, and gently kissed the one that was above his heart.

Another rush of emotions flooded through her as his hand gripped her wrist, quickly pulling her away.

"What's wrong?" Suzanne asked breathlessly as she sat up. He gently pushed her back to the quilt. She looked up at the full moon as his lips touched her neck again while he gently pulled her panties off. Both were now as naked as their birthdays.

Her breath caught in her throat as she tried to make her feelings of vulnerability vanish from her mind. How long had she wanted and waited for this?

When his lips left hers, she slowly felt him enter her. Her sharp intake of breath made him stop before he was fully in.

He looked back at her; his face barely visible from the dark shadows. Suzanne steadied her breathing as she listened to his quicken.

"Are ya okay?" His voice was husky.

"Yes," Suzanne said quickly, unclenching her fistfuls of quilt that she hadn't even noticed she'd latched on too.

Daryl moved slowly, easing his way into her as his hands roamed underneath her, stopping underneath the small of her back. Suzanne wrapped her arms around him, pulling him closer as he filled her completely. He became still, laying his face softly against her neck as she tilted her head back, moving a little to accommodate his size.

She felt his warm, quick breaths hit her skin, sending her body into another whirlwind of emotions, and making her forget about the dulling pain. When he moved again, she found herself clinging to him as tightly as she could. An unfamiliar whimper escaped her lips, surprising her when he picked up his pace. Her body shuddered against him with each thrust.

"Daryl," Suzanne panted as she felt herself losing complete control of her body. She felt as though she was completely at his mercy, feeling her hips moving to meet his. And suddenly, his fingers had come down between them, stroking her clit. Soft gasps escaped her lips until his mouth silenced them.

She pulled her mouth away, unable to focus on anything but the building intensity that was

driving her crazy. She moaned his name and dug her nails into his back as she completely lost herself in her own orgasm.

"Oh Suzanne. Oh shit," he groaned her name as she felt herself tightening around him.

As she came down from her high, she felt him pulsing inside her. He filled her with his warmth as he laid his face back against her neck. Suzanne listened to their laboured breathing as it mixed with the soft trickling creek water.

She was speechless, enjoying the afterglow and his warm breath on her neck when he finally pulled out of her.

"God, I fuckin' love ya," Daryl's still husky voice murmured as he lowered his body beside hers on the quilt.

Suzanne shivered, just beginning to feel the dampness of sweat on her skin as it met the night air.

"I love you too," Suzanne murmured as she rolled over to face him, feeling his arms wrap around her. She listened to the steady beat of his heart. They heard the sound of crickets in the distance.

"I didn't hurt ya, did I?" he asked quietly, worried that he might've been too rough with her. She shook her head as he buried his face into her neck, and she listened to his heartbeat.

Daryl held her tightly in his arms, savouring the moment for as long as he could. He kissed her gently on the lips, hugging her close, before he fell into a peaceful sleep.

Daryl woke up to see it was still dark and the candles had blown out, as he looked at Suzanne who was fast asleep on his chest. That had been their first time with each other.

He leaned into her as he saw her waking up, and she smiled at him shyly. He smiled back at her. They sat together in a peaceful silence, as they watched the moon shine over them.

"I don't regret what we did last night, Daryl. I love you," she said softly. He was silent as he absorbed her words. He was relieved that she felt the same way about him, as he did about her.

"I don't regret it either, ya know. I love ya too, Suzanne," he said quietly, a hint of vulnerability in his voice. He leaned down and kissed her gently but firmly on the lips.

The kiss was full emotion. As they pulled away to catch their breath, he held her tightly in his arms. She smiled softly, and stroked his calloused hands, which were rough from working hard.

Daryl smiled to himself softly, as he looked at Suzanne who was fast asleep next to him. He kissed her cheek gently, before closing his eyes and allowing sleep to overtake him.

As he slept, he grasped her hand gently in his, and neither of them were haunted by any nightmares.

A supply run was arranged to gather more quilts, mattresses, pillows, and furniture. Quite a few people needed new shoes, socks, and clothes, so it was better to go out now rather than the dead of winter.

Suzanne went with Daryl, who rode his motorcycle, and she drove the wagon with Eowyn and Faramir leading it. As they kept on the road, she noticed smoke in the distance, and exchanged a look of concern with Daryl.

They cautiously rode to the area where the smoke was coming from, stopping dead in their tracks at the devastation. An entire community had clearly been attacked. Judging from the numbers, it was everyone that was dead.

Hundreds of people had been killed in this community. Her heart sank as she and Daryl made sure the horses and his bike were safe. They then cautiously started searching through the houses for any survivors but couldn't find any.

All of them had either been shot or burned by an explosion that had occurred. The only people who Daryl knew had that sort of weaponry were the military.

"What the hell happened here, Daryl? It's like a massacre happened here," she asked disturbed. Daryl shook his head grimly as they searched the houses for any survivors.

She felt her heart sink when she found a couple in the living room. They had been shot and been allowed to turn. She stabbed them both in the head with her knife before she went upstairs to see if there was anything that could be useful.

She found men's boots, cowgirl boots, bedding, and Daryl helped her carry down the mattresses. None of them were stained, and luckily, the pillows weren't missing any feathers.

As they packed up the rest of the wagon, suddenly, they heard the sound of a baby crying from the woods. They both froze as they stared at each other in shock.

"You heard that too, right?" she asked quietly. Daryl nodded as they went to investigate the noise.

The noise was coming from the outskirts of the safe zone, and they had to put down a small herd that had gathered to get there. Daryl moved in front of Suzanne, as they reached the spot where the cries were coming from.

Daryl's brow furrows as he gently pushes away branches and leaves that were covering the source of the crying, right underneath what seemed to be a weeping willow tree. When everything looked like it was clear, he felt his heart drop at what he saw. There on the ground was what looked like a dead mother, but in her arms was a baby. A baby that looked

premature.

"Jesus Christ," Suzanne says, horrified, coming over. "Did she just die?"

"I think so," Daryl mutters, glancing around before leaning down. As soon as he does, however, it seemed that activated the woman's dead body. She turned into a walker, her eyes going towards the baby. Daryl acts quickly and stabs her in the head before she could get to the child. That seemed to make it cry harder.

Suzanne steps in front of him and leans down, taking the baby into her arms. "It's alright, sweet one," she whispers softly, trying to urge the baby to calm down. "You're safe now..." Her look of softness changes to one of worry when she turns to Daryl. "We can't just leave it here."

"I know," Daryl says, looking around. "Baby was the only survivor here." He looks back at Suzanne and then nods towards the wagon. "I'll drive us back. Wrap the lil' one in a blanket, keep it warm. Hopefully, we can keep it alive until we get back."

Suzanne nods, moving as quickly as they could towards the wagon. She wraps the baby tightly in the blanket, trying to hold it close to her chest. The cries were getting softer, weaker. They needed to get back now.

She glances back at the body of the walker. She wished she'd be able to bury the poor woman, but the baby's life mattered more now. So, she climbed onto the wagon, and Daryl was on his bike, traveling back as quickly as possible.

They had tried to get back to Alexandria as quickly as possible, and as soon as they did, Suzanne brought the little baby right over to the infirmary, getting it into an incubator and feeding it medicine through an IV, trying to clean it up from the dirt and grim that was around it. It had been scary for a moment when the baby wasn't crying as much. But now, he was in the incubator, sleeping, its little chest rising and falling.

Suzanne had also taken it upon herself to check the baby's sex, seeing that it was a girl. She had just lost her mom. What a horrible way to come into this world.

After she had been resting, Suzanne had slumped into the chair. Josette and the rest of her family was most likely either eating or resting, and Brandon she was fairly sure was out on a run with Beth. It was just her looking over this little girl.

There was a slight knock on the door, and Suzanne looks up to see Daryl come in. "They doin' alright?" he asks, a hint of worry in his voice.

Suzanne sighs lightly but nods, coming to stand. "She is. We got here just in time." She gestures to the IV's. "Hopefully, the solution will stabilize her enough. In a little bit we'll be able to feed her some sort of formula while that magnesium sulphate helps her lungs develop a little more." She walks over to the incubator, looking down at the sleeping infant. "She's a fighter."

"Think they have to be to be born into this world," Daryl comments lightly before looking at Suzanne. "She's a girl?"

"Checked when I was cleaning her."

Daryl nods quietly. "Wonder what her name was."

Suzanne snorts a bit. Daryl looks at her in surprise. "I don't mean that in a bad way. I'm just saying...that mother looked long gone. I don't even think she had time to name the child before she died. What probably happened is that the whole entire town collapsed, and her body probably forced her to go into labor because of the stress...it was too much for her to manage."

Daryl's shoulders drop slightly. "Born without a name."

Suzanne looks back at him and nudges his shoulder slightly. "Have any ideas?" she asks him softly.

Daryl was quiet for a moment. "Don't know what right I got naming 'er," he answers back quietly.

"Daryl, she doesn't have anyone. At this point, a dog could name her, and it would be alright. She just needs a name." She bites her lip, brow furrowed. "Can't call her lil' asskicker," she jokes lightly.

Daryl snorts and shakes his head. "Nah... can't do that." He leans against the wall and sighs a bit before a look of realization comes over his features. "Ah...how 'bout Willow?" Suzanne looked thoughtful about the name for a minute, looking down at the sleeping girl. "We found 'er under a weeping willow tree."

"I love that name, Daryl," Suzanne said softly, stroking the girl's soft right cheek. "Willow...it's perfect." She looks jaundiced, so Suzanne turns on the lights above the incubator, which turn blue, while the rest of the room is dark.

Daryl washes his hands quickly, before gently touching her hand through the incubator. Willow grasps his finger, and he feels a lump in his throat.

"Hey there, Willow. Ya gonna get better alright. We're all gonna look after ya," Daryl said quietly. Suzanne looked on with emotional eyes.

She checked Willow's blood pressure, noticing that it was stable, but her lungs were slightly underdeveloped, and she had neonatal jaundice. Hopefully, the phototherapy will take care of that in the next few days.

Willow's chest was rising and falling steadily, so her lungs were getting better. It would be at least two weeks before she would be released from the clinic to ensure she made a full recovery.

Melinda didn't give a shit about the premature baby that Daryl and Suzanne had found. She was more interested in the clothes that had been brought back.

Granted, she was only wearing jeans and sweaters, due to it being freezing cold. She watched as the clothes were taken to a house, so they could be distributed among everyone fairly.

She stalked towards the crowd, shoving past some people as she grabbed a few shirts, jeans, underwear, and a coat. Some of the Alexandrian residents were travelling to the Commonwealth to make a trade agreement with Pamela and her council. She would happily stay right here.

Suzanne stayed by Willow's side throughout the night, with Daryl putting a blanket over her so she would be warm. Willow was stable, but still on the small side.

She weighed five pounds, due to being two weeks premature. Eleanor, who was one of their doctors, assured them that Willow would make a recovery.

"Skin to skin contact will help. It's also known as kangaroo care. I think since you two found her, Willow will think that you're her parents," Eleanor suggested softly. Suzanne looked at Daryl who nodded at her encouragingly.

She'd done this with Alice before she had passed away and wanted to kick herself for not thinking of doing this. She carefully took off her sweater, leaving her in a black tank top as she carefully held Willow against her warm chest.

Almost immediately, she felt a deep bond with the baby girl. She kissed Willow's soft forehead, glancing up at Daryl who smiled, sitting down next to her.

"I know she's not mine, Daryl...but I feel a bond with her. I don't want someone else to adopt her," Suzanne confided quietly, as Eleanor helped her readjust the feeding tube.

Daryl privately felt the same way. Willow grasped his right pinkie finger in her tiny left hand. She was so small but mighty. She was a fighter. There was no doubt about it.

"Then she ain't goin' anywhere," he promises to her, resting a hand on her shoulder. She smiles at that, before he sighs a second later. "I ain't gonna be away long. Just gonna go with Rosita and Carol to settle this trade agreement. Pamela wants this all to be in writing," he explained quietly. Suzanne nodded as they both looked at Willow who seemed to be more active. She gently gave her to Daryl.

He seemed almost hesitant at first, as if touching her would cause her to break, but he took her into his arms, holding her close. Suzanne watched with a deep intense emotion as Daryl rocked Willow in his arms gently but with a tenderness.

She didn't know why, but she felt like Alice was with them at that moment.

A couple of days had passed. Daryl had tried to delay leaving Suzanne, Willow, and the others until he was sure Willow was better. The little girl was now out of the worst and now under observation. It had been the most nerve-wracking two days of his life. But now, the nervous part was over.

When he had gone to see Suzanne and Willow in the infirmary, she hugged him tightly and he hugged her back just as tight, before carefully held Willow. The baby cooed softly, her light blue eyes shining with curiosity.

"I'm gonna be back before ya know it, I promise. Ya be good for yer mama," he said softly. Willow cooed and he smiled, before gently handing Willow back to Suzanne. "She gotta stay warm...and make sure she'd fed, and-"

"Daryl," Suzanne says softly, smiling at him. "Don't worry. I got this."

Daryl lets out a slight sigh of relief, nodding. He knew she would, but he couldn't help it. A part of him wanted to somehow make up for Alice in a way. He didn't want anything to happen to this little girl, not after everything Suzanne had gone through.

Lydia gave him a tight hug along with Judith and RJ, before he got on his motorcycle. He rode out of the gates carefully, as Carol and Rosita followed after him in the wagon with the tobacco and ammunition that was ready to be traded with the Commonwealth.

Gavin hated the shithole of a town that he'd been sent to oversee by Pamela and Lance as part of his punishment. But as he thought about it, his perplexes were suddenly interrupted when he heard the sound of an explosion in the distance and ran up to the watchtower to see what was going on.

There was a whole fucking army attacking the community. One of them, a woman dressed in military clothing, fired a rocket launcher at one of the watchtowers.

He quickly ran down the ladder, seeing other residents screaming in terror as walkers breached the gates. Families were fleeing into cars, taking their pets with them as the army or whoever the fuck they were began slaughtering people in the streets.

From the corner of his eye, he saw a man with a beard and a Colt python ordering the soldiers to leave no survivors.

Gavin didn't want to die. He didn't give a shit about any of these people. He quickly got into a car, and started driving away, as the families screamed at him to stop.

Sweet Child O' Mine

Chapter Summary

Daryl and Suzanne adopt Willow. Gavin returns with unsettling news.

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone had a lovely Christmas, and I wish everyone a Happy New Year.

Daryl knew from Suzanne and Josette that the Commonwealth wasn't everything it was made out to be as they were welcomed by Pamela and Lance. It reminded him of Woodbury, and how the people at Alexandria had been when they'd arrived. They had no damn clue about the reality outside the walls.

"People of Alexandria, welcome to the Commonwealth. I am pleased to announce that we will be in alliance to trade food, weapons and other essentials!" Pamela announced confidently. But before she could continue, they suddenly heard a car crashing to a halt in front of them all.

The driver got out shakily, and Daryl realized with a start that it was Gavin. He was covered in blood and looked at Pamela blankly.

"Yellow Creek has fallen, Governor Milton."

Her brow furrowed in surprise before she looks at Gavin in shock. "I - what happened?"

"Come crazy fuckin' people came and started gunning everyone down!" Gavin says, shaking his head and coming in. "They're...I have no idea who was killed. I just..."

Daryl's eyes narrow. "Ya ran?"

Gavin turns his gaze to him and sneers. "No," he answers back angrily. "I fought back as best I could until they started to overrun us. I had no choice but to go." He walks up to him, waving his finger in front of Daryl's face. He wanted to bite it off. "Not like you would have done anything better."

"Ya really wanna bet that shit?" Daryl growls, stepping forward. "I could easily snap that neck of yers again like I did in Alexandria."

That seemed to cause Gavin to step back, but that sneer doesn't leave his face. "You know, fine, at least I don't have to deal with that retarded bitch anymore," Gavin snorts. "She's your problem now."

For a moment, he steps forward, aiming to punch the man in the face, but Carol holds him back. "It's not worth it, Daryl. Stop."

Daryl shakes his head before stepping back. "Yer right...don't want my time with pure trash."

Gavin snorts and shakes his head. "Whatever, pussy."

Daryl glares at him as he walks away but holds himself together. He didn't want to get in trouble. All he wanted was to be home with Suzanne and Willow.

"Well," Pamela says, glad that the fight simmered down. "That is something we'll...figure out together. Somehow." She swallows and shakes her head. "Regardless...here we are. A new alliance."

Daryl could see that she was trying to keep it together. But honestly, in his mind, she was failing miserably.

When they had returned to Alexandria, Daryl had gone straight to the infirmary, shaking his head from the chaos that they had endured. When he went in, he saw that Suzanne was still there, with a blanket over her shoulders, watching over Willow. The moment she sees him, she looks up and smiles.

"Hey," she says softly. "That was a quick trip."

Daryl sighs and nods. "I know. Apparently, the colony that Gavin was at got attacked." Suzanne's brow raises in response. "I know. Place was burned down, apparently...think where we found Willow might be the same people that hurt them. We might have to keep our eyes out for them."

Suzanne bites her lip and nods. "Good to know." Daryl comes over to where she stood, resting a hand on her shoulder. "Are ya alright? Ya looked like you haven't slept."

Suzanne chuckles tiredly. "I haven't...I've been keeping an eye on her."

"Suzanne, rest. Seriously," he says gently, pulling her over into a chair. "Yer gonna be okay. She's gonna be okay." Suzanne sighs and smiles a bit before nodding, sitting down next to him, looking over at where Willow was sleeping.

"I've been thinking," she says softly, before turning to him. "I really want to adopt Willow...I want her to be my daughter."

Daryl nods a second later quietly. "Ain't no one stoppin' ya."

"And I want you to be her dad."

Daryl stilled the moment she said that, not even finding the power to look away. "I... yer...what?" He has trouble finding his words. "Suzanne, I... I don't know, I-"

"Daryl, when I saw you hold Willow, I saw something. I saw that connection instantly." She holds her hands in his. "Look, I... I don't know what we are. I don't care if it ever becomes more. But what I do know is that the moment you held Willow, there was something that went off in you. And I want you to be around for her." She brings a hand up to his cheek. "Alice may be gone...but I know deep down you are always meant to be a daddy. You've always been a good man. And I know that Willow is meant to be ours."

He said nothing as his eyes stayed on hers for a moment, and then looked at where Willow was sleeping. Her skin had a healthy glow as she cooed softly.

It didn't even take that long to think about it. He realized at that moment that he wanted to be Willow's dad and be there for Suzanne. To be quite honest, he still loved her. Would always love her. But was terrified like hell that she didn't feel the same way towards him. Even so, there was no denying that he did want this. More than he had wanted anything for a while.

"I wanna give 'er a fightin' chance...and yer right. I do want be 'er dad. I wanna help you," he said hoarsely, his voice thick with emotion. She nodded, tears shining in her smoky dark brown eyes.

He grasped her hand in his, as they both sat by their daughter who was recovering. Josette had said that by next Tuesday she could go home with them.

He was gonna be a pa. He was terrified of fucking it up, but the other side of him was excited, hopeful. He stroked Willow's tiny right hand tenderly, as he pulled out the photo that he had of Suzanne that he carried everywhere with him.

It was worn, with the corners creased, but it was one of his favourite photos that was of him and Suzanne. He gently stroked Willow's hand, hearing her cooing at him softly.

"Thank you...I know you'll be an amazing father to her. She knows it too," Suzanne said gratefully, as she kissed Willow's dainty hand tenderly.

Daryl gently held Suzanne's hand as they both walked to the house that hosted council meetings to be interviewed over adopting Willow and becoming her official guardians. Everyone who wanted to bring a child into their family when they're found or lost had to go through the same process.

He could tell that Suzanne was nervous. She was rubbing her right arm anxiously. He gently stroked her hand reassuringly, remembering that he had done that for her when she had come running out of the trailer, crying after her mom had died.

She smiled at him gratefully before they were called in by Gabriel, and entered the room. They both sat down, seeing that Aaron, Carol, Maggie, Beth, Bertie, Gabriel, and Rosita were all seated.

"So, officially you both want to adopt Willow?" Gabriel asked calmly. They both nodded nervously. Suzanne discreetly slipped her fingers through Daryl's calloused ones, and he held them reassuringly.

"Yes, we want to be her adoptive parents," Suzanne answered softly. Gabriel nodded as he wrote something down. Daryl had told her that the council kept a book of records for births, marriages, deaths, divorces, alliances, and wars. They tried to keep their lives here as organized as possible.

"Did either of you have any children before wishing to adopt Willow?" Bertie questioned suspiciously. She didn't trust outsiders.

Daryl and Suzanne were both quiet, before Daryl spoke up and answered the question. He didn't want Suzanne to be forced to remember how their daughter had died and that he hadn't been able to save them or be there with them.

His girls had needed him.

"We had a daughter, but she was born prematurely at the start of all this shit.... her name was Alice. She died when these soldiers from a group called the Civic Republic Military started indiscriminately shooting everyone in the hospital. Suzanne tried to stop a woman from turning off the generators, but she got stabbed and...all of the babies died," Daryl said roughly, squeezing Suzanne's left hand in his as he looked at the others.

They all looked shocked at what they were hearing. Beth already knew what had happened, but offered a look of remorse to the two of them.

"But now, we have this second chance," Suzanne says softly, looking at them. "And we don't want to screw it up."

"Have you got enough space so that Willow can have her own nursery?" Aaron asked softly. They nodded, and he wrote something on a sheet of paper.

"Yes, we have plenty of room. We have everything that Willow needs. Baby clothes, milk and toys - with all the runs we do we always make sure to keep some by the side just in case for emergency purposes," Suzanne said honestly, her stomach twisting in nerves.

What if the council didn't let them adopt Willow because she hadn't been able to protect Alice? Her heart sank as the questions continued and asked who would be looking after Willow if she and Daryl worked.

"Suzanne's grandmother, Josette, has offered to watch over Willow, and so has Lydia as well," Daryl said gruffly, but she knew it was his way of hiding his nerves.

"That's fine, Daryl and Suzanne. What are your views on corporal punishment?" Bertie asked abruptly. Both of them weren't surprised by this punishment.

"We ain't gonna hit her, if that's what ya implyin'. We're gonna give her boundaries and when she crosses them, we'll discipline her, but neither of us believe in hitting kids," Daryl said firmly. They nodded, and soon were told to wait outside for a final decision.

The two of them waited almost ten minutes, stalking nervously, trying to pass the annoyingly long time, before they were called back into the room. The group of people smiled at them encouragingly.

"Congratulations, Daryl and Suzanne. You two are officially Willow's parents and she's your daughter," Aaron said softly, happy for the two of them.

Daryl felt very tempted to hug Suzanne then, but restrained himself and thanked them, before they went to get Willow from the clinic. Suzanne was shining, her lips spread so wide into a smile that it could break her face. They had been worried for nothing.

The nursery that would eventually be Willow's bedroom had been prepared for her arrival out of a surprise. Apparently, Carol, before she was even on the council, said that it would go through to the kids. And they had taken it upon themselves to start prepping everything. Suzanne carefully sat down in the rocking chair, as she held the baby girl that was her daughter in everything but blood.

"Hi there, Willow. I'm your mommy and Daryl...he's your daddy. We both love you so much," she said softly, cuddling her close as Willow played with her braid.

"We made something for Willow, Aunt Suzanne," Judith said shyly, appearing from behind the door with RJ and Lydia. Suzanne smiled as she saw it was a patchwork quilt and had a square of clothing on the blanket. "Aunt Carol helped us sew it while Aunt Beth and Aunt Maggie helped us find everyone's clothes that they didn't mind being used," she said softly.

Suzanne felt tears stream down her face as she crouched down, being careful and hugged Judith, Lydia, and RJ. "This is beautiful, thank you. Willow will love it, and so will Daryl," she said softly, as Willow cooed softly at them.

Judith, Lydia and RJ smiled at her. She was growing to love these people so much.

Daryl had been out all afternoon, tracking a deer that he'd managed to catch, and carried it back to Alexandria. But as he walked, he couldn't help but think of everyone back home, and specifically, the people that lived in his home. How much had changed in such a short amount of time.

He was a dad and an uncle, but he wouldn't change it for the world. He hated what he had done to Suzanne. She was the best thing that had happened to him until he'd listened to Jamie's bullshit. But maybe he could finally turn that part of his life around in a way.

He was let inside by Milo, and started field dressing the deer and skinning it. He hung it in the smokehouse, wiping the sweat from his brow before he saw Josette walking towards him quietly.

"Could I talk to you, Daryl just for a moment? It won't take too long. I just need to ask you something," she said softly. He nodded, and they went into her house.

Already the house had a welcoming vibe. There were framed photos on the walls and above the fireplace. There were even a few of him with Suzanne, Merle and Brandon from long ago.

"What's wrong, Josette?" he asked quietly. She reminded him of Hershel in a lot of ways. They were both devoutly religious, both were medics and cared about people.

"I'll get straight to the point. I want to know if you still love my granddaughter, Daryl. I'm not blind. I've seen the way you look at her, and I know she never forgave herself for not telling you the truth sooner," Josette asked softly. Daryl sighed heavily.

"I ain't good enough for her, Josette. Jaime...as much as I hate to think about it, he was right. What if I do end up repeatin' the cycle that started with my pa?" he asked fearfully. Josette smiled as she grasped his hand in her weathered ones.

"You could never do that, Daryl. I might be old, but I know you would never hurt Suzanne and Willow, or any of those young children in your home. They all love you and you love them," she said softly, and he swallowed thickly. She spoke again. "You're better for my granddaughter than that awful, estranged husband of hers. Gavin never respected Suzanne the way you did. I have never seen her happier than she is with you. Trust me...this world we live in is so short. Go for what you want, even if you're scared," she said softly. Daryl nodded.

He couldn't let Suzanne go again, not after seeing her again and seeing her being a mother to Willow, who was their little girl. He smiled to himself, letting out a soft sigh before he looked at Josette, and noticed how tired she looked then.

"Ya need anythin'?" he asked quietly. She shook her head. Without asking, he made her cup of chamomile tea and gave it to her, knowing that was one of the things Suzanne used to make for her back then. She thanked him quietly, before he wrapped a blanket around her and stayed until Brandon got home.

Josette had given him some helpful advice.

It had started snowing lightly at first, but then came down heavier before Daryl made it home. When he did, he checked on Suzanne and Willow, and found Suzanne fast asleep in one of the two rocking chairs that he'd made. He carefully but gently picked up Willow when she started getting hungry.

He warmed up a bottle of formula, before placing it on his wrist, remembering that's what Suzanne taught him to do way back when, to make sure it wasn't too hot. They had used to

babysit younger kids together super long ago, but after taking care of Judith and some other kids, it stuck around in his head.

He fed her lovingly, as she cooed at him softly, soft tufts of dark blonde curls on her head.

She was a beautiful little girl.

Daryl gently burped her after she finishes feeding and changes her diaper. He put talcum powder on her bottom, and made sure she was clean before putting her into her onesie again. After they had taken care of Judith at the prison, Daryl had never thought he'd do this again. But here he was.

"Yer a cutie, ain't ya little robin?" he asks her as she slowly falls asleep. "Yer gonna be so loved by us. I promise, we ain't gonna let anyone hurt ya," he promised softly, kissing her soft forehead. "Yer gonna be safe in our hands."

He rocked her gently as he reached her nursery, and got her settled into the crib. She was lying on her side, looking content.

He turned on the baby monitor, before getting ready for bed. Luckily, Willow's nursery was in the smaller room that was right next to theirs, on the top floor. It would work perfectly for the time that they needed it for. He looks over at the rocking chair, seeing that Suzanne was still asleep, so he gently lifts her up into his arms, carrying her towards their room. The last thing he wanted was for her back to get all fucked up sleeping in a rocking chair.

Daryl lays her down on the bed, pulling the covers over her, before taking off his vest and getting into something a little more comfortable. He got in behind her a moment later, before wrapping his arm around her, drifting off into a peaceful sleep.

Suzanne woke up early to see it was still dark outside. For a second, she was confused as all heck, because she didn't remember coming to this bed. However, when she saw Daryl next to her, she realized he must have brought her here while she was sleeping, and that brought a light smile to her face.

Daryl was fast asleep next to her on the bed. She gently brushed some of the hair away from his forehead. From the baby monitor, Willow let out a soft cry, letting her know that she wanted to be fed. Quietly, she got out of bed and headed over to the nursery, picking up Willow, who stopped crying when she felt Suzanne pick her up. She held her gently but firmly, changing her diaper and then went downstairs to warm up a bottle of formula.

As she sat down at the table with Willow, feeding the little girl quietly, she thought back to everything that had been happening, from the moment she had seen Daryl and her brother again at the Reapers.

They had slipped back into that routine of theirs like it was nothing. Daryl had been the person who had been there for her so many times now. He even accepted to be Willow's father. He wanted to do it. Everything she had always thought about Daryl was true.

And...and to be honest, she wanted more.

And in that moment, she realized with a start that she still loved Daryl.

It shouldn't have been that much of a surprise to her. A part of her had always loved him even when she was upset with him for what happened back then. But being with him now, seeing that this world only made him a better man, seeing everything he had done...it brought on new feelings that she didn't even know were still there deep inside her. This wasn't how they were back then.

No... this felt new. This felt real. This felt like a deeper sort of connection, after all the pain, all the remorse, everything they had been through so far. She told herself long ago that she would never let herself fall so fast again but here she was, falling in love with Daryl all over again like a fucking teenager.

Suzanne sighs and shakes her head, closing her eyes. She was insane. If anything, Daryl was doing this to help her. To be her best friend. It's not like he wasn't with other people while they were apart. He had Leah - who knows who else he was with. He probably felt bad for Alice - which he shouldn't - and was helping her though this since they found Willow together.

Then again...what best friend just volunteers so easily to be someone's father?

Before she could keep asking herself questions, Willow pushes away her body, clearly done. Suzanne chuckles a bit, coming back to earth. "All done now, are we?" she asks the little girl. Before she could start burping her, she hears the stairs creak and looks up to see Daryl come down. His brow was furrowed.

"What ya doin' up this early?"

Suzanne stands a bit. "Just feeding her - go back to bed."

Daryl shakes his head and gently takes the infant into his arms. "I got this, Suze. Ya rest."

"But-"

"Suzanne." His voice was firm. "I found ya in the rockin' chair. You've done a good job. Don't stress yerself out. Rest a bit."

Suzanne feels herself smile at Daryl before nodding. "O... okay," she responds, before heading towards the stairs. As she was climbing, however, she pauses and turns around. "Daryl?" He turns to face her, his hand gently patting against Willow's back to burp her. There was a slight hint of confidence in Suzanne, but the moment she saw Daryl, it seemed the vanished into the early morning. She bites her lip and nods. "Thank you...for all this."

"Ya don't gotta thank me," he responds quietly. "Ya can show yer gratefulness by goin' up and sleepin'."

Suzanne chuckles lightly before nodding. "Alright, alright."

Hours had passed. Suzanne had gone to work at the clinic while Daryl had gone on patrol, and Lydia was now keeping an eye on Willow, staying in her nursery while reading a book. As she did, Judith and R.J. came in, both curiously looking into the crib.

"How is she so small?" RJ asks.

Lydia smiles lightly. "Well, one time you were that small. And so was Judith." She stands up and walks over. "Soon, she'll be just as big as you - probably beat you up."

"I'm a strong man - no one's gonna beat me up," RJ states, his hands on his hips.

Lydia snickers as Judith rolls her eyes. "Okay, macho." She looks up at Lydia. "Do you think Uncle Daryl and Aunt Suzanne are together again?"

Lydia bites her lip as she looks down at Willow. The baby fusses a bit in her sleep, but her eyes remain closed. "I'm not sure...if they're taking care of a kid together, they might be. But...I haven't seen them kiss."

"Don't they sleep together?" Judith asks.

Lydia sighs. "Their relationship is...complicated. That's all I know," she states lightly, looking over at them. "Best if we just let them work it out themselves. But clearly they're in a good place if they brought this little bundle of joy home." She looks down at Willow and smiles a bit. "I think Willow will like it here a lot."

Beth and Brandon had gone out together a little while ago to try and find some more food for the animals at the barn, even if it was snowing a bit while they walked. However, as they headed out, Brandon felt their light conversation still when they stumbled across bodies in the snow.

Namely, the bodies of Reapers.

Heart Song

Chapter Summary

Brandon, Suzanne, Melinda and Josette reunite with two lost family members. Melinda lashes out, and Suzanne struggles with her depression.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: This chapter has mentions of past and attempted self-harm. I hope everyone has a Happy New Year better than the last two.

There were at least four of them, and he knew all of them as he stared at the bodies. Deaver, Washington, Fisher, and Mancea were all lying on the floor, and none of them had bites.

"All of them were shot. They must've run into another group and gotten killed," he said quietly. Beth looked at him sadly as they started digging graves for them, trying to move quickly so they could get back to the zone before running into anyone else unfortunate.

Once the four were buried, they continued searching and found a feed store up ahead. As they started grabbing everything they could, Brandon heard the familiar sound of a helicopter in the distance and saw a body near the shelves.

The body was that of a young African-American man. Beth froze in shock at seeing him. He frowned as he checked his pulse and saw it was stable, but he was hurt pretty badly.

He must've crashed the helicopter and barely made it out of there before it had exploded.

"Do you know this guy, Beth?" Brandon asked cautiously. Beth nodded as they helped carry him to the wagon where the horses were grazing grass.

"Yeah, I know him. His name is Heath, and he went missing ten years ago. No one knew what happened to him. Scott looked for him for almost seven years," she said quietly. Brandon frowned.

Where the hell had he been then?

Daryl had come from a hunt and had come back to check on the rabbits that were being bred for food and being pets, adding in a couple more he had trapped. But when he was done, he walked past Melinda and a few of the women from the Commonwealth who were her friends, hearing them mention Suzanne.

"I honestly don't believe those things about Gavin, Melinda. He loves you. Suzanne clearly was simply hard work and didn't give Gavin a chance. She's such a slut," one of the women said disdainfully, and the others nodded in agreement.

"I know, right? It's pretty clear she's lying about Gavin beating her just so she can get Daryl to sleep with her," Cynthia said in disgust. Yeah, he didn't let that shit fly.

He stalked towards them silently, seeing the women and Melinda smile at seeing him, but their smiles faded once they saw the expression along his face. He kept his tone controlled, but there was anger in his voice.

"If ya think for one damn minute that Suzanne would lie about shit like that, then ya need fuckin' help. I saw her piece of shit for a husband beatin' and whippin' her with a goddamn belt! Get the fuck outta of my sight, all of ya!" he snarled menacingly. The other women quickly hurried away as Melinda glared at him furiously.

"You don't know what she's done, Daryl! She's the reason that our dad left and why momma killed herself! Hell, she's lost three damn babies, even though I don't know WHY she'd want kids in a world like this! You fucking dumped her, for Christ's sake!" Melinda said spitefully, getting up in his face. "Maybe for someone else like me!"

He pushed her away, making sure not to hurt her even though a part of him wanted to shake some damn sense into her. She was being a selfish bitch and he hated seeing her treat Suzanne like shit.

"Ya need to take a damn good look at yerself in the mirror, Melinda," he said disgustedly, and left her alone in the street. She glared at his retreating form, wanting to do nothing more than destroy this joke of a town.

When Brandon and Beth returned with not only food for the animals, but also an injured and exhausted Heath, people were shocked at seeing him again. He was looked after by Suzanne, who gave him an IV to get him hydrated, as he was dehydrated. He hadn't eaten for almost two weeks, and had come all the way from Ithaca, New York.

"There was a community there, run by an organization called the Civic Republic Military. It was more like a research base run by these four scientists, Lyla Belshaw, Leopold Bennett and Samuel Abbott, and another scientist. They were trying to find a cure by kidnapping people who had been bitten by walkers," Heath explained quietly. Many in the group exchanged grim glances.

"There ain't a cure. Everyone knows that," Daryl said gruffly, wondering why the hell these people were kidnapping people who had been bitten.

"I know there isn't. Pretty soon, the two other scientists realized that there would never be a cure. So, Belshaw killed the two doctors, but didn't put them in cages. She had a breakdown, and pretty soon the research base fell to the walkers. I took my chance and got the hell out. But listen, they destroy communities that pose a threat to them, even if they've done nothing to them," Heath said gravely, causing them all to stare at him in shock.

"Do you know how many people they have and who's the leader?" Maggie asked quietly. Heath nodded with a grimace. He started eating the bowl of chicken soup that had been made for him, trying to speak at the same time.

"Yeah, and you're not gonna like it, any of you. The Civic Republic Military is a mysterious, advanced, and authoritarian civilization with more than 200,000 survivors' total. They are part of the Alliance of the Three, along with the city of Portland, the city of Omaha, and its former satellite, the Campus Colony. They also have their own highly-advanced military," he explained grimly, seeing them pale. "They're dangerous. They have a spy who is called Jennifer Mallick. Her mother is the leader of the organization and she's called Elizabeth Kublek. Before I escaped, they were talking about a place called the Commonwealth and how the community posed a threat to them because it was run by a senator called Pamela," he revealed grimly,

Maggie exchanged a grim look with the others. "Warn Pamela and Mercer. Tell them that they might be coming under attack," she instructed. Rosita nodded and left to radio Eugene.

Daryl noticed that something was wrong with the residents of the Commonwealth. There was a sense of tension in the air. People were sending dirty looks at the Commonwealth soldiers, especially the lower-class people who were glaring at Pamela resentfully.

"What is it you wanted to warn us about, Mr. Dixon and Miss Espinosa?" Pamela asked pleasantly as they walked to her office, which had a lot of expensive furniture.

"We received information from a survivor who lived in our community that a hostile group might be planning on attacking the Commonwealth. The survivor says that the group is called the Civic Republic Military, and they have a highly advanced army and are technologically advanced," Rosita warned seriously. Daryl didn't miss the look of concern on Mercer's face and anxiety on Lance's face, or the look of disdain on Sebastian's face.

"They'll be outnumbered by us, Dixon. We have the Commonwealth soldiers to protect us!" Sebastian said confidently. Daryl doubted that the idiot knew what was outside the walls.

"Tell that to the Campus Colony and the Hillside Community. They both had heavy weapons, but it didn't save them. All of them were wiped out and buried in mass graves or killed by walkers. Ya need to face reality, Pamela!" Daryl warned forebodingly, and walked out of the office, feeling angry.

Negan had been on patrol with Alden and Melinda when they heard voices in the distance. He exchanged a weary glance with them before they investigated the noise. A young man

around the same age as Brandon was sitting next to a young woman who resembled Melinda, but she had hazel eyes. There were others next to them, along with three dogs.

"Who the hell are you people?" a woman asked suspiciously. Melinda, however, had run towards the man, armed with a spear.

"Jaime, I'm so happy to see you and Matilda! Grandmama's alive, and so is Brandon, but Suzanne's dead. She died a few months ago," she said, pleased to see her two older siblings, but being dismissive about her other older sister.

Negan and Alden stared at her in a mix of shock and disgust at her blatant lie.

"Uh, that ain't right," Negan calls out. Melinda glares at him from where she stood, but he only shrugs. He wasn't about to stand there and let her just lie about her sister like that.

"So, she's not dead?" Jaime asks. There was a hint of surprise in his voice.

"She's in here," Alden continues. "With Daryl, if you remember."

Jaime's brow raises even more. "Daryl? As in Daryl fucking Dixon?" he asks, before shaking his head. "Just can't seem to escape that man, huh?"

"They gotta kid, too," Negan adds on, to which Alden nudges him in the side. "What? They gonna come in, they might as well know the whole story."

Melinda rolls her eyes but sighs. "Fine, she's not dead - at least she's dead to me." She nods towards the gates. "Come on, I'll bring you all inside. They're gonna be so happy to see you - except Suzanne, knowing her."

Negan and Alden watch with uneasy eyes. Both of them had a feeling that somehow, somehow, this was not going to work out well for Suzanne.

"She doin' alright now?" Daryl asks Suzanne in the infirmary later on, after returning from the Commonwealth. She had brought Willow back down to do a check-up with the medical devices, and it seemed that now she was looking stable. He still wanted some sort of confirmation from her, though.

Even so, Suzanne smiles and nods a bit. "She's stable, yeah. Think we did a good job keeping her happy and fed." She holds Willow tightly, disconnecting her from the machines gently. "Really all there is to it now is just keeping her stable."

Daryl nods, smiling a bit as she brings Willow over to him, gently putting her in his arms while she cleaned up. "I'll bring 'er back to the house to sleep a bit, alright?"

Suzanne nods, but as she turns around to look at him, she feels herself still. Daryl looks at her in quiet surprise, brow furrowed.

"What's wrong?" he asks, before he turns around to see what she was looking at.

There, in the doorway of the infirmary, stood Jaime and Matilda. Suzanne's siblings.

"Jesus aged Christ," Jaime states, coming inside while Suzanne still stood there in shock. "I can't believe you're alive." He glances at Daryl. "I can definitely believe he would live, but you? God...Matilda and I thought you were gone ages ago."

Suzanne snaps out of her shock and narrows her eyes slightly... "Don't call Daryl that, and y... you...thought I was dead? You didn't bother to look?"

Jaime glances at Matilda, who sighs and shakes her head. "I mean, we didn't but we're here now. It's like the family's all reunited!" she says, glancing around. "Where's, uh, Gavin?"

"Yeah, I wanted to ask that too," Jaime states, looking to Daryl with crossed arms. "One of the guards said you had a baby with Daryl? Of all people? How the fuck did you two even find each other again?"

"I guess ya could say it was fate. Maybe me and Suzanne were meant to find each other again. And keep yer damn voice down. Our daughter's sleeping," Daryl answered coldly, not giving a shit what Jaime thought of him anymore.

Jaime glowered at him, his jaw clenched as he took in the news that his sister was alive and had rekindled her friendship with Daryl. He wasn't thrilled in the slightest.'

Daryl ignored him as Suzanne hugged Matilda, but Melinda began talking to their older sister, taking her completely away from the conversation. "We tried to look for Josette, Brandon and you - you guys completely slipped under the radar. Have no idea how it's been so long since we've seen you."

He saw Suzanne's face fall, the brief flicker of pain that flashed in her tawny dark brown eyes, and she squared her shoulders calmly.

"It's, uh...it's great to see you all again but...we can catch up later. We better get Willow settled, Daryl. She needs to be in a sleep routine, otherwise she won't sleep properly," she said with false cheeriness that only he could see through.

He nodded in understanding, and said goodbye to Brandon, Josette, Matilda and Beth. Melinda ignored him, and so did Jaime, who wouldn't even look at him. Suzanne was the first one out, but Daryl felt himself sigh quietly.

He had a feeling this wasn't going to be good.

Once Willow was settled in bed, Suzanne took a much-needed shower, leaning against the wall. She didn't want to cry, but the fact that Jaime and Matilda had both given up on her being alive and instead focused on finding Josette, Brandon and Melinda broke something inside of her.

Most of her family doesn't want her around. That shouldn't come as any surprise to her, but it does. She finishes washing up, not bothering with braiding her hair as she gets ready for bed and checks on Willow. She was fast asleep with her mahogany brown teddy bear next to her, two blankets over her so that she would be warm. Suzanne wiped her eyes as she sat on the floor next to the crib and slid her fingers through the bars of Willow's cot, feeling her daughter grasp her middle finger.

"I will never let you or your dad feel like no one gives a damn about you, Willow. I promise," she whispered quietly but softly to her sleeping daughter.

She sees Dog come into the room, his tail wagging as he sits next to Suzanne, causing her to smile, cuddling him affectionately. She's always loved animals, and Dog is a loyal but affectionate dog.

Maybe it was something that could keep her happy during this time.

The next morning, Daryl cooks breakfast for everyone, as they all try to stay warm in the wintry weather. He wasn't the best cook, but he did at least know how to make pancakes - simplest shit in the world and had them with the good maple syrup Beth gets. Suzanne needed a break from it all, so this was the least he could do.

Dog has his dog food but is given a large venison bone that he happily chews on. His bandages have been taken off, and the fur is growing back but the scars are faintly visible on his left hind leg.

Suzanne had come down silently, holding Willow. "Pamela's sending all of mine and Josette's things here, so I'll have all my clothes back," Suzanne said quietly, as she fed Willow and kissed the baby girl's forehead tenderly. Willow began babbling happily, as she brought her to the living room to play with some toys. Lydia had promised to watch her.

Daryl was worried about Suzanne. He knew that she was really hurt over how quickly Jaime and Matilda assumed she was dead. They hadn't even asked her if she was alright, and Jamie's attitude pissed him off.

He hated seeing Suzanne so sad. She'd been through enough. He knew she was stronger than what everyone thought and still remained caring, and compassionate.

Going to the clinic proved to be the biggest mistake that Suzanne had made, as she saw Matilda was there with another woman who had been in her group.

"Suzanne, you didn't need to come in today. Me, Teddy, Addison, and Carina have got everything under control. You've done a good job, even though you're only a nurse and not a surgeon," Matilda said. There was no venom in her voice, but with a bluntness that felt like a stab in the back.

Suzanne tried to keep her emotions under control, resisting the urge to cry right there and then. It was almost as if Matilda didn't think she was capable of acting quickly in stressful and life or death situations.

Without saying a word, she left and heard one of the expectant mothers talking about her. She kept her head up high, trying to stay confident, but deep down she felt all of her self-doubts and insecurities take hold again.

'You're a dreamer. A useless, worthless dreamer, Suzanne,' the voice of her mother whispered coldly, as she walked back home, and saw it was snowing heavily.

She was a useless, worthless dreamer for actually believing that some of her family cared about her. Jaime didn't care, neither did Matilda and Melinda. Was her grandmother and Brandon the only ones left? And who knew how long her grandmother had left in this world...

Tears burned her eyes, as she reached the house and quietly let herself inside. She wiped her boots on the rug, before going into the living room, smiling quietly at seeing Lydia, Gracie, Judith, and RJ playing with Willow. It was the best thing she had seen all day at this point.

Daryl went on watch for two hours, trying not to slip over on the icy ground, as he saw Jaime and Matilda going for their interviews with the council. A dark part of him hoped they were turned away, but he knew that wouldn't happen. They were too valuable with the skills they had before the turn.

Suzanne had been quiet since last night. He was worried about her. He'd noticed that she hardly said anything at breakfast and was keeping to herself.

He was just about to come down after his watch, wanting to head back home to the warmth, when he saw Melinda screaming at Suzanne, who had come out of the house to let Dog do his business.

The two were arguing. Suzanne was trying to calm Melinda down, as he heard Melinda calling her a fucking cunt. But then all hell broke fucking loose.

Suzanne had gone to let Dog go outside to do his business when she saw Melinda storming towards her angrily. Her cheeks were flushed dark pink with anger, and she gripped something tightly in her gloved hands.

"You stupid, fucking bitch! You ruin everything, Suzanne. I can't go back to the Commonwealth because of you fucking saying shit about Gavin hitting you since the two of you were married. And now Pamela's saying that she can't let him go because he's under arrest - because of you!" Melinda shrieked infuriated, causing Suzanne to swallow at Melinda's words.

The knowledge that her baby sister didn't believe her when she said that Gavin abused her,

shattered her.

"I'm not lying, Melinda. Gavin's been hitting and beating me since we were married. He pushed me down the stairs when we were on our honeymoon in Miami, Florida. Why would I lie?" She asked, hurt by her sister's accusation.

Melinda smiled cruelly at her, as if she had figured out the reason why her older sister would lie about being domestically abused and raped by her husband.

"Isn't it obvious, Suzanne? Because Daryl wouldn't let a woman be abused by a man, so you lied just so that you could be with him again, but we both know you just want to fuck him. But really, Suzanne, why would he want you?" she asked with false sweetness, causing Suzanne's insecurities to rise up even more.

Melinda didn't know Daryl like she did. He was her best friend.

"Just go away, Melinda. I'm really not in the mood for your poisonous words today," Suzanne said flatly, putting an end to the conversation, but Melinda edged her on.

"I mean, just think about it. You aren't the prettiest. You've always had a slight fat belly, but it's finally gone due to the world going to shit. You caused our mom to commit suicide because our dad left, due to you being an autistic, spastic retard with no future. And you can't have babies - you've miscarried three with Gavin and you couldn't even keep your own daughter safe," Melinda said casually. Suzanne glared at her dangerously.

"Don't you dare talk about Alice or the babies I've lost like that, Melinda. I mean it," she warned quietly. She swallowed and looked at her younger sister in the eyes. "Gavin doesn't care about anyone except himself, Melinda. He's an expert manipulator, and he's got Pamela fooled because he's more popular than her among the upper-class and elite. He's using you and he'll hurt you like he's hurt me for the last ten years," she said quietly, her voice sad and honest as she saw Melinda stare at her in visible anger and resentment.

Before Suzanne could react or move away, Melinda was smashing her on the back of the head with her old smart phone, the one she kept because most safety zones had some sort of power now. She tried to move away, but Melinda had grabbed her right wrist, almost crushing it.

"You cunt! It's your fault we lost mom, why dad walked out on all of us, you stupid, fucking retarded bitch! Gavin loves me and I love him!" Melinda screamed furiously, whacking her in the back of her hairline with the grooves of her phone.

Suzanne felt tears of pain sting her eyes, and before she could react, Melinda was scratching at her face.

Her nails were edging against her skin, drawing blood almost instantly. Suzanne instinctively pushed Melinda as hard as she could, her small body falling to the ground with a thump. Suzanne shakily brought a hand to where her hairline was, pulling it back to see that blood was on her fingers.

Melinda lunges at her again, but two strong arms suddenly pull her back and throw her off to the side. Suzanne looks up shakily as a crowd starts to form. Matilda and Jaime had emerged from the infirmary. "What the fuck is wrong with ya?" Daryl yells at Melinda as she staggers upwards. "Piece of shit sister!"

Melinda snorts as Matilda and Jaime come to her side. "She knows I'm right...I'm always right..." It seemed she had cut open her head when she fell down. "And now, she can fucking suffer for what she's done..."

Matilda sighs. "I mean...she's not wrong."

Daryl looks at Matilda in shock. "Ya just got here - what the fuck do ya have to say about her?"

"I'm only saying that Suzanne isn't as smart as everyone. Do I think that Melinda took it too far with the scratching and hitting? Yes. But she's not wrong. Suzanne shouldn't be operating in the circumstances she's in. She's only going to get more people killed like she's done before."

Josette stares at her granddaughter. "What is wrong with you?"

"I'm only being honest."

Suzanne hastily shakes her head. "I'm...I'm gonna go."

Before Daryl could stop her, Suzanne had raced inside, closing the door behind her. Daryl glances over at the crowd, his eyes narrowing at them. "Fuck off, all of ya!" And indeed, they did. He looks back at the three of them, his eyes on Melinda specifically. "I don't care if ya are her family - ya ain't allowed around here."

Jaime snorts. "You can't dictate us, Dixon."

"Oh, can I?" Daryl walks right up to him, right in his face. "I'm one of the leaders 'round here, and if I see you in fuckin' sniffin' distance of this house, I will feed ya to the walkers," he snarls at him. "Got it?!"

Jaime doesn't answer back instantly, but lets out a slow, "Got it," in response to his.

Daryl turns without another word, heading inside.

Lydia had said she saw Suzanne head up the stairs without speaking, and Daryl had gone up to their room, seeing that she was nowhere to be seen. He starts to grow worried, looking at the bathroom and seeing the light was on. He has flashbacks to Beth on the farm.

"Suzanne?!" He yells out. No response. "Suzanne, come on, answer me."

There was a meek response. "I'm in here."

He goes for the knob. When he stepped inside the bathroom, he saw that Suzanne was standing by the sink, gripping it for dear life, her knuckles white. She was looking down below, tears falling to the drain at the ground.

Shakily, she looks up at him. "Why don't they want me?"

The question broke his heart. Daryl takes her hands in his and gently pulls her out, feeling her collapse against him. God, if he could, he'd throw those fuckers out the moment they said anything to her.

He brings her over to the bed, gently covering her in a blanket as she cries. "I haven't seen them in years," she sobs. "And they thought I was dead and now...now I prove I can survive and they...Melinda wants to fucking kill me and Jaime and Matilda they...they don't think I'm worthy enough of my work or to live or..."

She can't get the rest of her words out, simply sobbing. Daryl pulls her into his arms, rubbing her back, trying to let her get it all out. He hadn't heard her cry this much since they were teenagers, since before they were together. All he wanted was to make her feel better, but he had no idea how.

Suzanne starts to calm down a moment later, her sobs turning into broken hiccups. He looks at the scratches along Suzanne's face and stands up, heading over to the bathroom to wet a towel before coming over, gently wiping at them to remove any dirt or blood from them.

"Ya listen to me," Daryl says, gently but firmly. His other hand grips her chin lightly, trying to keep her eyes on him as he wipes the scratches. "What they said doesn't fuckin' mean anythin'. Ya are worth so much more than what they say. Ya've saved so many lives, and mean the world to so many people. Fuck anythin' they say."

Suzanne shakes her head, turning away. "They're right," she whispers.

"What are ya talkin' 'bout?"

"That I'm just...I'm not worth all this. I'm not...worth any of this." She looks over at Daryl, her tears falling from her eyes. "I know what I've done and I'm proud of it but I'll...I'll never be as beautiful as Melinda or as smart as Matilda or as brave as my brothers - I'm just...me."

Daryl lets the towel go to the bed, before he brings both his hands up to cup her face, stroking her cheek. "I'm 'bout to prove all of that wrong - ya have saved so many babies here. People too. Through stitches, through runs, through medicine, through yer pure smarts. Yer one of the smartest people we got here, and ain't nothin' they say gonna turn that down. In terms of bravery, yer even braver than Brandon and Jaime combined - I mean, ya fuckin' got captured by the Reapers, tortured, and still didn't bend to anyone - ya bit off the finger of one of those fuckers! That's fuckin' brave."

Suzanne had calmed down slightly, but tear stains still stained her cheeks.

"And to me, Melinda doesn't even hold a candle - nah, a fucking lighter - to how beautiful ya are," he says softly, toning his voice down. "Yer the most gorgeous woman here."

Suzanne snorts and shakes her head. "I'm scarred as shit now, Daryl."

He brings her gaze back to him. "The scars make ya even more beautiful, Suze," he responds back to her. "Each of 'em got a story. Each of 'em sayin' yer a survivor. Fuck anyone who thinks differently - yer beautiful, it's time ya fuckin' knew it. Fuck Melinda - she's a whore anyways."

Suzanne snorts lightly, the small sound making Daryl smile a bit. At least he could get something out of her. "Thank you..." she whispers, her eyes shining with tears still. He knew his words couldn't be the only way to get her to calm down, but they could at the very least be a start. "I... Daryl..."

It seems the moment she says his name, she starts to quietly cry again. It was all too much. All too real. He brings her into his arms again, trying to whisper to her, anything to try and make the pain go away. But nothing could quite work.

She cried herself to sleep that night in her arms. Daryl doesn't fall asleep.

Instead, he tries to think of anything, something, to try and make her feel better. And he finally does.

When Suzanne had woken up the next morning, she saw that Daryl was out of bed, most likely off on some hunt. The last thing she wanted to do was keep him all locked up in here while she had a mental breakdown.

She gets up and goes to the nursery, seeing that Willow was awake. Quietly, she picks up her daughter, managing a weak smile at her.

"Good morning, little one," she says softly.

As she brings her downstairs, Suzanne's mind flashes back to the first time she and Daryl had talked about kids, way back when.

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