Sticks and Stones

by JenKristo

Summary

Evil Morty has experienced a lifetime of suffering under the hands of Ricks. But when he's assigned to a pure and gentle ‘Doofus’ Rick, he begins to question his purpose in life.
Rick turned around where he stood, marveling at the New Citadel of Ricks. The Ricks who had survived the destruction of the original Citadel had done a marvelous job of recruiting new Ricks and duplicating the facility. The New Citadel had the same buildings with tall, curved architecture and gold and teal accents. Plants hung along the edge of fountains, and a new golden Rick statue adorned the center.

Ricks and Mortys walked around casually, exploring the shops, restaurants and endless bars and liquor shops. Some wore their normal attire while other Ricks wore badges and carried standard COR weapons.

Rick pulled the folded letter out of his pocket and re-read it.

'Dear Former Member of the COR,

We are proud to invite you to the grand opening of the New Citadel of Ricks.

Since the destruction of the original Citadel, we have rebuilt and signed a treaty agreement with the Rick from C-137. Rest assured, this guarantees that there will not be a repeat of the events from three years ago. As part of the treaty, all members of the New Citadel are restricted from entering C-137. Also, as part of the agreement, C-137 Rick has demanded that all members of the New Citadel be restricted from using certain catchphrases and dance moves. What a dick, am I right? Details can be found on the attached document.

Our purpose in reforming is to ensure that the Galactic Federation does not resurface in the future. Along with the Federation, we intend to prevent the formation of any other new assemblages that could pose a threat to the New Citadel.

As a former member, we ask you to rejoin the Citadel for the benefit of all Rick kind. You will receive a variety of perks including the assignment of a Morty if you are not currently in possession of one.'

He read over the last line twice. How nice it would be to have a Morty again.

Rick was pulled out of his reverie when a hand dropped onto his shoulder. “Thirsty? We’ve got fantastic smoothies just over there, and you can get your drink-BURP spiked with anything you can imagine!”

He looked at the other Rick, who was waving a 15% Off coupon at him.

“N-No thanks, I’m looking for the Morty Assignment Department.”

Smoothie-Rick rolled his eyes, dropping the act. “Oh MAD’s upstairs. J-J-Just that way.”

Rick followed his direction to a series of escalators and managed to find the department. The room was similar to a DMV, with a long line of miserable Ricks, checking their watches and sipping their flasks and generally feeling too important to be waiting on a line.

Rick happily took his place in line, and watched with interest as Ricks at the front of the line approached the counter. After some paperwork and signatures, they approached a set of swinging doors where a Morty would appear and leave with them. Most of the typical Mortys these days were eighteen, tall and gangly, taking after the typical Ricks. Rick wondered what kind of activities his
Morty would enjoy.

Eventually he reached the front, and approached one of the Ricks behind the counter.

“Location?”

“Uh, hello! I-I’m from J19-Zeta-7.”

The unimpressed counter-Rick looked over his computer screen. “A-A-And what kind of Morty do you want?”

“Oh gosh! Well any kind of Morty is fine by me.”

The counter-Rick looked up at him, staring incredulously. “You really don’t give a shit?”

Rick smiled, lacing his fingers together. “Any Morty is welcome in my home. I’m just glad I can be of service, what with h-h-how many Mortys were left without Ricks since the Citadel expl-”

“Alright, cool,” the counter-Rick said, cutting him off. “I just vomited in my mouth a little. But hey, I can finally dump one of these undesirable Mortys.”

Rick blinked. “Undesirable? What do you mean?”

“You know, ugly Mortys, cocky Mortys, genius Mortys, Mortys with halitosis, Mortys with a bad record… you sure you don’t care?”

Rick thought about it. A Morty with a bad record sounded a little intimidating, but Rick was sure that there was a reasonable explanation for whatever was on their file. If anything, a Morty with a bad record was probably the Morty who needed help the most.

Straightening up, Rick said, “A-Actually, I really would like a Morty with a bad record.”

Counter-Rick scoffed, and scrolled down his screen. “Alright, I’ll-URP give youuuuuuu… haha… I’ll give you this one. Morty #1679.”

“1679? Th-That’s a dimension?”

“No, his dimensional source code was damaged so we assigned him a number. Want to know what his record says?”

“N-No thank you-”

“It says he’s been through over a dozen Ricks in the last three years, either from being returned to us or because his Ricks died in accidents. Clearly he’s a pretty shit shield. His previous record was destroyed with the first Citadel. So we don’t have anything from earlier.”

“That’s fine,” Rick insisted, heart feeling heavy. What a poor Morty, having lost so many grandfathers, and being returned! How terribly cruel. Rick finished the paperwork and went to the swinging doors to wait.

A moment later Rick came face-to-face with his new Morty.

Other than an eyepatch over one eye, this Morty looked like most Mortys did. He was brown-haired and lean, wearing a yellow shirt and blue jeans. He did seem a little taller than usual, but it may just have been the way he carried himself. And there was something bigger about him, but Rick wasn’t sure what it was, or if it was his imagination.
“Well gosh,” Rick blurted out before he could stop himself. The Morty raised his brow and Rick laughed nervously. “Y-You’re just so grown up! I guess it’s been awhile since I spent much time with a Morty.”

The Morty’s eye narrowed, clearly not sure what to make of him.

“A-Anyway, it’s good to meet you.” Rick reached out and shook his Morty’s hand, surprised at just how firm his handshake was. He noticed a black duffel bag in Morty’s other hand and pointed to it. “C-Could I give you a hand with that?”

“I’ve got it.” Morty lifted the bag over his shoulder.

“Right, of course.”

The two of them headed out together, riding the escalator to the main floor. “Would you like anything before we leave, Morty? I-I hear there are good smoothies here. Or a cheeseburger? Are you hungry?”

“I’m fine.”

“Of course, of course,” Rick said, upbeat. “Well I guess we can be on our way-”

“Holy shit, l-l-look who it is! It’s Doofus Rick!”

Rick froze, a pit forming in his stomach. He and Morty turned to see a cluster of Ricks approaching from behind. “Jesus, I thought you were dead,” the Rick laughed. “W-W-Where the hell have you been hiding all this time?”

“J-J-Just working on a project.”

“Ooh, Doofus Rick has a project!” said the nasty Rick to the others. “Building a new fort out of your own shit?”

“No! I-I-It’s something else! Something important! A-A-A-And stop calling me Doofus Rick! I’m Rick from J19-Zeta-7.”

“What could you possibly be doing that’s important, Doofus?”

Rick tensed. “I-It’s private.”

“Hah! Private? You mean like-”

Morty cut in, his voice soft but clear. “Like the fact that you’re on your second Morty because you left your first Morty for dead on D-230? You thought he could handle it. But he couldn’t, because he was only nine years old.” The Rick who’d been harassing them turned white, the Rick’s behind him looking at one another in confusion. Morty took a step closer to him. “I wonder if you’re the kind of Rick who could shrug that off, or if it still keeps you up at night.”

J19ζ7 Rick couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Without thinking he reached out to his new Morty and touched his wrist. “M-M-Maybe we should go.”

Morty looked at him with his single visible eye, which reflected like he was staring into a fire. He pulled his arm away from Rick’s grasp and backed away from the group of offending Ricks.

“Fine.”
The middle level of the New Citadel was where the parking garage was located. It was packed with identical UFO-shaped crafts, and Rick used his placement card to find it. They sat in the ship for a moment before Rick finally spoke.

“You should probably know, I’m not the most popular Rick. I-I’m not very exciting, Morty. I don’t usually charge head first into danger, and I don’t travel as much as other Ricks do. I don’t know if you could feel any pride to be assigned to a Rick like me. But I promise I’m going to do my best. A-And if you’re not happy, y-y-y-you just tell me, Morty. My feelings won’t be hurt if you want to go back.”

When Rick finally worked up the courage to glance over at his Morty, he found his expression unreadable. “Okay.”

Rick nodded. “O-okay.”

“You’re not curious about what happened up there?”

Rick’s brow rose. “W-Well of course, but you don’t have to tell me unless you want to. Do you want to?”

“...Not really.”

Rick nodded again, smiling. “Okay. Let’s go home.”

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From the outside, J19ζ7 Rick’s house appeared similar to the Smith family home, which was why Morty #1679 was surprised upon following Rick inside. The usually low ceiling in the living room had been remodeled, opened up into a vaulted ceiling that utilized the attic space.

The TV was still in the same place, but the entire wall around it was filled with shelves of books, floor to ceiling. Morty walked along them, sliding his fingers over the bindings. Jules Verne’s 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, Eckhart Tolle’s A New Earth, Stephen Hawking’s A Brief History of Time, Chicken Soup for the Soul. It was a vast motley.

The rest of the room was wallpapered in old maps; some of the Earth, but most of worlds beyond. Potted plants and hanging ferns crowded around the sliding glass door to the backyard, where a lush garden grew in the sun.

“S-Sorry I know it’s a little cluttered,” Rick said. “But I dusted everything just yesterday. I know Mortys are prone to allergies. Do you have any allergies?”

Morty walked over to a glass cabinet filled with rough crystals, animal skeletons and an array of beetles and butterflies. “I’m not sure.”

“Oh.. okay. W-Well… would you like to see your room?”

Morty followed Rick upstairs, past a closed door that Morty assumed led to Rick’s own bedroom. At the end of the hall, Morty stepped into his room and looked around. The room looked and smelled freshly painted, the walls blue and the curtains pale grey. His bed was perfectly made with a comforter and pillows patterned with the periodic table of elements. There was a large desk with an empty bookshelf above it, plenty of room for someone to fill with their own belongings.

“A-A-And feel free to change anything you want. I wasn’t sure what you’d like.”
“It’s fine,” Morty said, sounding tired as he set down his duffel bag. “Do you mind if I rest?”

“O-Of course not! P-Please do! Is there anything else you need?” Morty glared at him and he smiled nervously. “I-I’ll just leave you to rest.”

Rick backed up and closed the door, and Morty turned the lock. Once he was alone, Morty unzipped his duffel bag as quickly as he could. He took out a small, handheld machine and began to walk around, scanning various items and even the wall itself. He scanned the lamps, the framed posters, the bedding and bed frame, and the hinges on the closet door. He scanned the outlets and the air conditioning vents. He scanned everything, and the machine beeped softly as he went.

When he finally finished, he sat on the edge of the bed and pulled out his recorder, speaking under his breath.


Morty looked around the bedroom. “Personal quarters have been checked for recording devices. Results are negative.”

He looked up at a framed poster on the wall that read, ‘Never trust an atom. They make up everything!’ He sighed and spoke into the recorder. “Intent to please is above average. This may indicate incestual interest. I anticipate an 80% chance of success using sexual manipulation on j19-Zeta-7. Further investigation will continue.”

TBC
It was late in the afternoon when Morty #1679 emerged from his room. Down the stairs he could smell something undeniably divine, along with the sound of clinking pots and pans and classic rock. He went downstairs slowly, with every intention of catching the new Rick candidly doing whatever he was doing.

J19ζ7 Rick was busy in the kitchen. He was wrapped in an apron and was moving his hips to the sound of Boston’s ‘More Than a Feeling’. Rick put on a pair of mitts and opened the oven, releasing a heated gust of that mouthwatering smell. He pulled out a pan with a roasted chicken and rustic cut vegetables, carrots, green beans, red potato wedges and slices of lemon. Rosemary and other herbs and spices covered the chicken. When Rick finally noticed Morty, he stopped nodding to the music and grinned.

“M-Morty! I hope you’re hungry! Please come sit.”

Morty came over and took one of the stools at the island bar.

“Everything is grown here... except for the chicken. I can eat them but I can't even kill them. Hypocritical, isn’t it?”

“I guess,” Morty said. It had been a long time since he’d had any trouble with that.

Rick served them and scooted onto the bar stool beside Morty. Morty looked down at his plate, awestruck. There wasn’t anything like this back at the Citadel, and of course none of his past Ricks had cooked. Morty sliced into the chicken breast and took a bite, and momentarily forgot his big plan of seduction. It was so juicy. He stuffed a sea-salted potato wedge into his mouth before he’d swallowed the bite of chicken.

When he opened his eyes, which he hadn’t even remembered closing, J19ζ7 Rick was beaming at him. Morty glared and Rick looked away, still smiling.

“Honestly I j-j-just took a guess at what you’d like,” Rick said, “B-But if there’s anything you don’t, let me know and I’ll make sure it doesn’t end up on your plate.”

Morty was almost finished with said plate when Rick reached over to the pan and served him seconds. A heavy feeling came over Morty as he thought about this Rick. He was too nice. Ricks were only this nice when they wanted something. And there weren’t too many things for a Morty to give.

Morty finished all but a few carrots and pushed them around his plate. He leaned back, brows pulled together.

“Hey Morty, a-are you okay?”

“Yeah.” He sighed. “I just... Back at the Citadel, all the Mortys sleep in the same room. I have a hard time the first night. You know, being alone.”

‘Pour Some Sugar On Me’ began to play in the background. It didn’t exactly fit Morty’s attempt at capturing sympathy. At all. He glanced over at Rick, who seemed to be deep in thought. And then
he snapped his fingers, eyes wide.

“Oh gosh, Morty, I-I-I just thought of the greatest plan! You won’t be alone, a-a-a-and it’ll be so much fun! Oh Morty, this’ll be great!”

Rick spun around on his stool and hopped off, hurrying into the living room and disappearing out the back door. Morty went to the door and watched as Rick went through the garden and disappeared into a small shed. The sun was going down, an orange glow settling on the plants and flowers. Crickets sang.

Morty went to the kitchen to clean up. He wrapped the leftovers in plastic and tucked them into the fridge, with every intention of having more the next chance he could. Possibly tonight while Rick was sleeping. He loaded the dishwasher and then washed his hands.

“It’s so nice outside, Morty!” Rick said upon entering the house. He kept going right past, disappearing upstairs and reappearing with a large bag. Then he was out the door again. Morty’s stomach grew heavier, and the delicious food started to make him feel sick.

He didn’t want to have sex with this Rick, or any Rick for that matter. They were all disgusting. He tried not to think about it. He went upstairs to the bathroom and splashed water on his face. He looked in the mirror at his reflection, one eye concealed in the black eyepatch, the other reflecting a startling amount of fear. He frowned, took a breath and calmed himself down, until his expression turned neutral.

Morty walked down the stairs and across the living room, his back rigid. He walked through the opened glass door and along the path through the garden. Solar-powered lights lined the grass at his feet. A moth flew past his face.

The grassy yard was small, surrounded by the garden of taller plants. There was Rick in the middle, backing out of an A-frame tent.

“I-I-It’s a lot smaller than I remember, but I think it’ll do. It’s great, isn’t it, Morty?”

“Yeah,” Morty said coolly.

He climbed down beside Rick and went inside. There were two sleeping bags with pillows and he laid down on one of them, looking at the steep ceiling above. Rick climbed in beside him, and turned on a small, futuristic looking lamp that emitted a soft golden glow.

“I invented this lantern,” Rick said proudly, hanging it in the upper corner of the tent. “I-I-I-It’s not much different from a regular lantern, but it has the coolest after-effect.”

“Huh,” Morty murmured, distracted.

Rick sighed peacefully, arms folded behind his head. “I l-love that sound,” Rick said, and Morty glanced over at him.

“What sound?”

“You know, th-the bugs and things. Crickets and cicadas. A-A-After a good rain, the frogs show up too, and gee whiz is that a real chorus!”
Morty raised a brow. “I’ve never met a Rick who had any interest in Earth science.”

For a fraction of a moment, Rick stopped smiling. He looked hurt, although Morty didn’t understand why. Rick brought his arms down and began to fidget with the hem of his shirt. “Th-This is a little silly, isn’t it? I-I didn’t even stop to think, but y-y-y-y-you’re probably too old for camping in the yard, aren’t you?”

Morty rolled his eyes. “No, it’s fine. Really.”

After a moment of hesitation, Morty leaned over and wrapped his arm around Rick’s chest, cuddling up to his side. The motion was awkwardly timed, and felt even more stiff and awkward once they were in it.

“M-Morty?” Rick questioned.

“I just… is this okay?” Morty spoke with rehearsed words. “I really… I just need…”

Rick turned onto his side to face Morty, smiling warmly. “Of course it’s okay, Morty. Sometimes all we need is a big ol hug to get by, isn’t that true?”

“Yeah,” Morty said, moving closer. His face pressed lightly against Rick’s neck, and they laid there for a moment. Rick’s arms held him loosely, his hand rubbing Morty’s shoulder.

“It’s okay, kiddo,” Rick assured him.

Morty felt bile rise in his throat, but this was just another day. He leaned in, lips lightly touching Rick’s neck. He felt Rick swallow. He pressed closer, kissing his skin. Rick’s body became stiff, betraying his confusion. Morty lifted his head and licked the side of his neck and began to suck.

Rick bolted upright so fast that Morty jumped back in surprise. “M-Morty, wh-wh-wh-wh-what were you just… what was that?!?”

They stared at one another across the small distance in the tent. Morty's eyes were wide, not having anticipated a rejection. Still, he didn't think he was wrong. Maybe Rick was just surprised at Morty's initiative. Morty crawled close, climbing over Rick’s lap.

“I just wanted to,” Morty said, touching Rick’s chest.

“M-M-Morty, no…”

“It’s okay,” Morty said as he wrapped his arms around Rick’s waist. He kissed his unresponsive lips and returned to his neck, sucking at flushed skin. Rick gasped, hands trembling against Morty’s shoulders.

“I-I-I-It’s not okay!” Rick finally managed to say, using all his strength to push Morty off of him. Morty fell back against his sleeping bag. Rick wrapped his arms around himself. “I-I-I never said that was okay! Wh-What are you doing?”

Morty gaped, the cogs in his brain overheating, working overtime. Anger flared in him and he shouted. “What am I doing? What are YOU doing?!”

“Me?” Rick squeaked.

“Yeah, you! What is all of this shit? Dinner? My own room? Camping, for God’s sake! If you don’t want to fuck me, what is all of this for? What do you want from me?”
Rick looked genuinely lost. He blinked, his stupid eyes unable to come together on Morty’s face. Morty wanted to walk into the kitchen and get the knife out of the dish washer and bury it in his neck. Nobody was going to fuck with him like this. Not anymore. He was done with these mind games. This Rick was weak, and he could take him out without even trying. He could probably skip the knife and just strangle him right here.

Morty sat up with every intention to kill the Rick.

“Did someone... take advantage of you?”

Morty froze.

J19ζ7 Rick looked heartbroken. “I-It was a Rick, wasn’t it? Oh Morty. I’m so sorry.”

Morty couldn’t move. He knelt in place, still half ready to end the Rick.

“Please, i-if you can, tell me who it was. I’ll make sure the COR authorities find them-”

“They won’t,” Morty said quietly, because the abusive Rick, the many abusive Ricks, were all dead. That’s when he realized what he’d just admitted. Yes, Morty had been ‘taken advantage of’, as J19ζ7 had said. Although ‘taken advantage of’ didn’t exactly cut it. It didn’t remotely cover the vast extent his suffering.

Morty blinked as Rick grabbed his hands and held onto them tightly. “L- Look at me.” He looked up at Rick, who watched him with determination. “I would n-never take advantage of you, Morty, not in any way. I-I’m gonna take care of you, treat you the way you deserve to be treated, and that’s never going to come with a price.”

For a while, Morty didn’t speak. They sat there, and Rick never let go of his hands. Finally Morty spoke. “If you’re fucking with me, I’ll make you pay for it.”

Rick laughed lightly, curiously studying Morty #1679. “If I ever... uh... messed with you, y-you’re more than welcome to make me pay.” Letting go of Morty, Rick laced his fingers together. “Well anyway, I understand if you don’t want to stay out here any more. I-I think things may have gotten a little weird.”

Morty chuckled, despite how he felt. He deliberated over remaining in the tent with J19ζ7, and thought about how he’d be able to closely monitor him as he drifted off. Then, once asleep, Morty could return to the house to continue collecting data. Then again, he had means of keeping Ricks asleep in their beds. So he nodded, and Rick nodded back.

“Alrighty, but I j-j-just have to show you one more thing before we go.”

He reached up toward the futuristic lantern and twisted the knob. They fell into darkness, but Morty’s sight barely had to adjust before he saw it. Hundreds, maybe thousands of fireflies had settled on the outside of the canvas tent, having been drawn to the lantern. Their small bodies glowed through the material, so much that Morty could still make out the shape of Rick.

TBC

Chapter End Notes
Please let me know what you think! Your encouragement is seriously what gets me from one chapter to the next. <3
J19ζ7 Rick woke the next morning at the same time he usually did. Without an alarm he opened his eyes at 7:30am and slowly followed his morning routine. He brushed his teeth, showered and combed his hair without using the mirror. Rick rarely bothered looking at himself. A little before 8am he headed down the stairs. That was where he found Morty in shorts and a yellow tank top, doing situps in the living room.

“Good morning Morty!”

Morty was quiet, his breathing controlled as he sat up and eased backward. Between puffs he said, “Hey.”

Rick stood behind him so that when Morty laid back they could look at one another up side down. Rick smiled when Morty looked up at him. “W-Would you like some pancakes?”

“No thank you.”

Rick tilted his head, thinking. “I’ll bet you’d like something healthier, huh? H-How about some eggs and bacon? Or turkey bacon?”

For a moment Morty looked interested, but then he shut down. “Thanks but I’m fine.”

Rick nodded and headed for the kitchen, pausing in the doorway. Morty was already continuing his sit ups. “Okay!” Rick called out loudly. “I-I-I-I guess I’ll just have to eat all by myself!”

He went into the kitchen and started taking out what he needed for breakfast. Rick took out the brown eggs with ham, swiss cheese, sweet peppers and an array of spices. He took out the turkey bacon and decided he might as well make some whole grain toast with avocado.

The turkey bacon was already sizzling when Morty slinked into the kitchen and sat on one of the bar stools. He was sweaty, and gratefully accepted a dish towel when Rick passed it to him. Rick flashed him a grin and Morty looked away. They ate breakfast to the sound of Jackson 5, with Rick humming along.

Morty looked over at Rick as he hummed and ate, and it was then that he noticed the bruises on Rick’s neck. More accurately, he was looking at the hickeys that Morty had inflicted on Rick in the tent last night. The first was over his larynx, the other over his jugular.

A memory flashed through Morty’s mind from when he was sixteen and an especially sadistic Rick was trying to fuck him without lube. He’d lunged upward at the Rick, right where J19ζ7’s bruise was. He’d bitten the Rick, not just bitten him but sunk his teeth in with all the strength in his body. He remembered the blood spilling into his mouth and spraying down over his face. He remembered the Rick’s indignant expression as he died. How dare a lowly Morty refuse him anything?

Morty, who had been staring at the hickeys on Rick’s neck, looked up. J19ζ7 was smiling at him sweetly. It made Morty strangely afraid of himself. “Wh-What would you like to do today, Morty?”

“What do you mean?”
“Well it’s your first day here s-s-so I thought we could go do something fun. There’s a lake across the neighborhood where we could go swimming, o-o-or there’s this pizza shop where you can put the toppings on yourself, and there’s over a hundred toppings to choose from! Or there’s this cool Mystery Shack in the next town—”

“I’d rather just… would you mind if I just took it easy today?”

“Oh, of course! S-S-S-Sorry I always get ahead of myself.”

“It’s fine. And… thank you. You’ve been very hospitable.”

Morty was aware of the way Rick looked at him then, like he thought Morty was the best thing since sliced bread.

“I’m going to go take a shower,” Morty announced, and left the kitchen.

After his shower, he couldn’t find Rick. Not that he needed him for anything, but keeping tabs on each Rick he lived with was pivotal to his self-preservation and ability to collect data. Eventually he noticed a key-coded metal door under the stairs, which he could only assume lead to the basement. He knocked. After a while he heard the sound of footsteps and the door opened.

As Morty anticipated, Rick stood at the top of a long set of stairs leading to an underground level. He could hear faint, cheery classic rock from below.

“H-Hi there, Morty! Did… uh… did you have a nice shower?”

Morty gave him a judgmental face which effectively turned the older man red. “I was looking for you.”

“Y-You were? I was just going to get some work done if you wanted time to yourself. But it’s nothing important. Would you like to do something? We could watch a movie or—”

“No, no…” Morty cut in, exasperated. Being left alone had never been a problem with his past Ricks, unless they needed him as a human shield or wanted to get their rocks off. “I wanted to see where you were, that’s all.” But when he glanced behind Rick, he started to wonder what he could find down there. He pulled a fake smile onto his face. “Now that I think about it, I would like to see your workshop.”

Rick’s smile twisted strangely. “Gosh, Morty I would love to but… some of my projects aren’t ready to be shared.”

Morty bit his lip, faking a playful smirk. “Please, Rick?”

J19ζ7 looked pained, so eager to please and equally conflicted.

“They’re… ah Morty… I-I’m really sorry… I-I-I would love to show you… s-some time down the road, maybe? Would that be alright?”

Morty couldn’t have been more surprised that this boneless Rick could say ‘no’ to him. But he nodded and agreed to Rick’s request to meet up later for lunch. It was disappointing. He knew where Rick was now, but he was in the same place that most of the interesting things were probably hidden. After they parted ways, Morty wandered around the living room and then made his way upstairs.

At the top of the stairs was the door to Rick’s bedroom, which, as before, was closed. But upon trying the knob, Morty found that it wasn’t locked. He opened it and went inside, shutting it closed.
behind him. Morty’s mouth fell open when he looked around the room.

The room was painted white with a slanted ceiling. And it was possible that there were more plants in Rick’s bedroom than there were in the garden. Rick’s bed was large, pushed into the corner beneath a skylight. On the other side of the room was a wrought iron staircase that spiralled up into a hole in the ceiling. Morty stared at the staircase curiously, but decided it could wait.

He went to the bed, white bedding strewn around and unmade, one of the pillows left on the floor. He turned and flopped down on the bed. He sighed, taken off guard by how soft it was. From this perspective, he was in a jungle. Fronds from the tall potted plants hung toward him, and hanging plants from the ceiling created a canopy around the skylight. The skylight itself, directly over the bed, allowed him to look straight up at the blue sky.

He’d once been with a Rick who had a mirror over the bed. Morty closed his eyes, trying not to think about it.

Instead he glanced over at the dresser beside the bed. This was where all of his past Ricks kept their printed porn. He reached over and pulled open the first drawer. Inside he found a clutter of mundane items; an allergy inhaler, Aspirin, mints, eye drops, a pack of tissues, chapstick, a sleep mask and a sudoku puzzle book.

He also pulled out an opened letter, the invitation to rejoin the Citadel of Ricks. The letter was worn, folded and unfolded, and looked as if it had been read many times. There was one line that was underlined with a pen, circled with a pencil and surrounded by question marks.

‘You will receive a variety of perks including the assignment of a Morty...’

Whether J19ζ7’s intentions were good or not, having a Morty in his life was clearly important. And really, Morty didn’t need the letter to know that much. The meals, the attention to detail in his bedroom, the attention in general, was more than he needed to know this Rick was desperate for him to stay. And yet, he’d turned down his advances in the tent. Sex wasn’t what he wanted. For just a moment, the idea flitted through his mind that maybe Rick really didn’t want anything from him. But then he dismissed the thought. Every Rick had an agenda, and he just didn’t know what J19ζ7’s was yet.

Morty moved on to the bottom drawer. He smirked when he found a pile of cheesy looking romance novels, the soft cover kind with flowers and attractive couples on the covers. He picked up one with a broken spine and opened to a random page.

“Give me back my spyglass!” Burnadette cried.

The soldier grinned, easily holding it out of her reach. She hopped up and strained for it, and watched as he spun the precious piece between his fingers.

“Be careful, Edgar! I’ll be in such trouble if you drop it!”

She lunged for it and fell forward against him. He wrapped his hand around her waist, holding her steady. It was so contrived, and she knew it. But as he handed her the spy glass, she couldn’t help but to forgive him.

That was, until Burnadette felt a pop. The tightness around her waist grew loose, and she looked down to find that Edgar had pulled free the strings binding her corset.

“Edgar, you bastard,” Morty murmured. He shut the book and dropped it back into the drawer. He almost didn’t bother to look any further. But when he pushed the books around a bit, something
underneath caught his eye.

He reached down and pulled out a silicone dick. Well, well, well. He turned it over in his hands. The toy was simple, with no vibration or any kind of power to it. It wasn’t very big either. Morty reached into the drawer again, pushed the books around, and was surprised to find nothing else at all.

No condoms, no lube. Wait… no lube? He checked again. No, and not even a bottle of lotion. Even as modestly sized as it was, nobody could comfortably enjoy anal without any lube. He looked at the toy again, trying to figure out what the hell it was for. Had it been a gag gift from someone, and Rick hadn't thrown it away?

It was a mystery he couldn't solve right now. So he finally forced himself to leave the very comfortable bed and continue his exploration. He ascended the spiral staircase, surprised that it didn't squeak at all. The house in general was very easy to sneak around in.

The staircase led to a very small reading area. The walls were entirely made of bookshelves and two windows looked out over the front yard and the back garden. It was too small for someone to lay down flat inside of. But there were about 20 huge pillows on top of a comfortable cushion, and in no time Morty had himself nestled into the pile.

Once he thought he was comfortable he found something hard wedged under the cushion. He shifted and pulled out a leather bound book with a clasp on the side.

Morty’s eye widened as he realized what this was. He opened the clasp and read the front page.

‘ Rick’s Journal ’

Jackpot. The first page was dated from a little over a year ago.

‘ My therapist is very nice! He’s new to the area, and said he was previously working on a college campus. Isn’t that neat? It’s so nice to meet someone who cares about our youth. I guess I’m a big change for him! Anyway, the Doc wants me to keep a journal to help me focus my thoughts and see how things change as I start treatment for my depression.

I know it started with [Eric Stoltz Mask] Morty leaving. I’m so happy he was accepted to the academic program but I still miss him. I used to check up on him once in awhile, but he was always so busy. I understand, of course. I want him to succeed! I guess I started feeling down when his letters stopped coming. But like I said, I understand he’s busy. I know I’m being selfish.

I love my life. Honestly. I love taking care of the plants and the garden, and my frog. But something’s missing. Things I used to love are the same things that make me the saddest now. I just can’t cook for one. I’ve been giving the garden vegetables to the neighbors and eating out instead.

I’ve been channelling my feelings into my work, and I don’t know if it’s a good thing or if it’s bad. I have an idea for an invention and I know that it’s wrong. I haven’t decided whether or not I’m going to try and build it.’

Morty flipped to the next entry, curious about the invention. After so long, Rick would have either moved on or completed it. The next entry was a week later.

‘ I checked the calendar. It’s officially been six months since I’ve heard from my Morty. I went to see him today to see if he was alright. He looks happy at school. I decided not to bother him.

I’ve decided to stop seeing my therapist and stop taking the medication. I called in and told the office not to expect me.
I’m going to do an experiment. I know it’s not scientific and I know it’s selfish, but I keep thinking about what the Ricks at the Citadel would say to me back before it was destroyed. They said the universes would be better off if I were dead.

So for one year I’m going to confine myself to the house and the back garden. I have enough supplies stored for the duration, and I paid my bills in advance. If I don’t hear from anyone, then I think that’s enough proof that the Citadel was right, and I’m going to kill myself.

Morty shut the journal, vision trained on the entrance leading down the spiral staircase. He waited, strangely unnerved by the idea of being caught with this. Could this journal really belong to the playful, doofus-of-a-Rick downstairs? He flipped forward and started to skim through the entries.

‘The gardener I hired to mow the front lawn has stopped coming, despite having been paid in advance. The grass is long and I’m tempted to go outside and mow it. I’ll try to resist. I may be able to find a replacement gardener online.’

The journal became bland. Rick talked about cleaning the house and restocking, processing vegetables from the garden. He catalogued items in the inventory. The most emotion he expressed was when his pet frog died, and the devastation almost made him leave the house. Morty flipped forward, close to the end of the book.

‘It’s been one year and no one came.’

Morty read the line over twice. How could someone disappear for a year and remain unnoticed? He knew how. He knew because that was life. Life is cruel, and existence is pain. Morty continued to read.

‘...But I received a letter in the mail today, and was so surprised to find it was from the Citadel of Ricks. There’s a New Citadel, it seems. Normally it’s the last company I would want to keep again, but the letter mentions the assignment of Mortys. I’m going to hold off on my personal experiment and see how this goes.’

The journal held two or three more blank pages, and that was it. It was finished. Morty slipped it under the cushion where he’d found it. He went down the spiral staircase, crossed the floor and left the bedroom.

Rick, busy in the underground lab, stopped what he was doing when he heard a knock. He pulled off his goggles, set down his equipment and listened. There was another knock. Morty!

“I-I-I’ll be right there!” Rick called out, pulling off his gloves. He took the stairs two at a time and opened the door. Morty looked… apprehensive. “H-Hey Morty, are you... is everything alright?”

Morty had his eye on the floor before he finally looked up. “Rick... I was… I was wondering if you would still take me to the lake today.”

Rick lit up, and then tried to control his enthusiasm. “Y-Y-You really want to go?”

Morty smiled strangely. “I do, yeah.”

TBC
Let me know what you think!
The Lake

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Morty #1679 had never seen water so still. He stood on the edge of the lake, toes pressing into the damp sand, and carefully surveyed the area. Pine trees grew tall around the edge of the lake, casting a perfect mirror on the water’s surface in the distance. Close to Morty, the mirror faded into crystal clear transparency, where small fish darted past.

There was no one else around that day. The sun was out and the sky was blue, but in the far distance Morty could see a blanket of grey clouds rolling in. Depending on the wind, there could be a good reason why they were the only ones there.

“Look out!” Rick yelled. Morty swung around, crouching, ready for the worst. Rick, pulling off his shirt and flinging it away, ran past and threw himself into the lake with a painful-looking flop. The crystal clarity devolved into waves and ripples as Rick surfaced, running his fingers through his hair.

“Oh M-M-M-Morty it’s s-so cold!”

“Is it?” he said, stepping in. The water felt warm around his feet, and he looked at Rick curiously. “Doesn’t feel cold to me.”

“W-Well it’s always warmer where it’s shallow!”

Morty pulled off his shirt and tossed it over near Rick’s. He waded in, and quickly realized how right Rick was. As soon as the water reached his knees it became colder, and his body was covered in goose flesh when he reached his shoulders.

“Shit,” Morty said through gritted teeth. But Rick was under the water again. When he surfaced, he had a handful of stones and soggy sand, and began picking through the stones and tossing them back into the water. Eventually he grew bored and dropped the handful, instead swimming farther out.

“Let’s reach that rock out there,” Rick said, swimming for it.

Morty began to follow and then froze. His eyepatch. His fucking eyepatch, holy shit. How had he forgotten about it? If he had remembered it earlier he would have suggested the hundred-topping pizza shop instead. Sure it was waterproof on the outside, safe enough from a little rain, but he couldn’t submerge it.

Rick glanced back at him and stopped swimming, looking concerned. “Morty? You okay?”

Morty’s eye was wide as he thought. Rick watched him, quietly treading water. Morty turned and swam to shore. He had to make a decision right now. Trust him? Don’t trust him? If he took it off he’d have to do some explaining. If he didn’t swim he’d still have to explain himself. He turned when he heard Rick climb out of the water.

“H-Hey Morty, do you want to walk along the edge instead?” Rick was smiling like nothing had happened.

Morty felt the tightness in his chest loosen up over not having to make the decision. They walked along the short beach, Rick with a towel hanging around his neck. At the end the beach became narrow, the trees getting close to the water. They walked single file here. Rick’s eyes were on the
ground, bare feet exploring rocks and branches as they went. Morty switched between looking around for signs of trouble and watching Rick.

Rick was fairly Rick-typical in appearance, save for the abnormality of his teeth and eyes, and his haircut. Speaking of hair, Morty noticed then that J19 wasn’t balding in the back the way most Ricks were. It was probably related to all those books he owned about trying to live stress-free. Still, there was something else different. It wasn’t tangible as much as… what was it? Morty watched Rick’s hips move for a moment as he walked, and then it clicked. J19 had a different gait than the other Ricks, which was most definitely because he was sober.

“Rick?”

“Hm?”

“Can I ask you a personal question?”

“S-Sure,” Rick said, not looking back at him. And Morty was grateful. It was easier to talk when he didn’t have to look at him straight on.

“You don’t… drink much, do you?”

Rick chuckled. “Not often. N-Not like the other Ricks, if that’s what you mean.”

“How come?”

“Hmm… I don’t know. I-I-I-I guess I just don’t feel like it.” He glanced backward, a playful smile on his face. “Morty, a-are you asking me to buy you alcohol?”

“No.”

Rick turned around, walking backward. “Why do you ask?”

“It’s just Rick-atypical.”

Rick’s brow rose. “Rick-atypical ?”

Morty hesitated, surprised at himself for having voiced the phrase out loud. “Well uh… I um…” He took a breath. “I categorize Ricks according to their typical and atypical behaviors. For instance, most Ricks wear a white lab coat and are alcoholics. The fact that you wear a lab coat is a Rick-typical trait. Your sobriety is a Rick-atypical trait.”

Rick was beaming. “Wow Morty, that’s s-s-so interesting! You’re clever, coming up with that!”

Morty’s face turned red, caught off guard by the complement.

“So is it better to be Rick-typical or Rick-atypical?”

Morty shook his head. “It’s not about being better or worse. Determining how typical a Rick is helps me figure out how to handle them. If they’re predictable, I don’t have to worry as much as if they’re unpredictable.”

They exchanged looks, and Rick knew better than to voice what they were thinking. Morty had been abused. He was careful now. That much was obvious.

Rick’s expression changed as he tried to lighten the subject. “Hey Morty, are you- URP!”
Rick, still walking backward, caught his heel on a jutting rock and began to stumble. Morty reacted quickly, grabbing his wrists and pulling him upright, causing them to crash together. Rick let out a surprised breath. “Oh good grief! Gosh I… thank you, Morty.”

“It’s fine.”

Morty held onto his wrists for a fraction longer than was necessary. Then he let him go and Rick stepped around the rock. He chuckled nervously. “I shouldn’t have been walking backward.”

“Maybe not,” Morty agreed.

“Was that poor judgment Rick-atypical?”

Morty rolled his eyes. “I’m going to regret telling you about that if you start overanalyzing yourself.”

“Okay, okay,” Rick murmured, walking straight forward. He limped and sighed. “Morty, c-could you please see if it’s scratched?”

He twisted his leg for Morty to look, and Morty nodded. “Yeah you cut it.”

“Badly?”

“Kind of, yeah. It’s bleeding all over the sand.”

Rick looked back and saw that he wasn’t kidding. There was a steady flow of blood staining the sand under his heel. “Jeez Louise!” He stepped into the water and then out again. The blood, momentarily washed away, began to bleed out again.

“We should go back,” Morty said.

Rick huffed, clearly disappointed. “Yeah I-I guess you’re right. The sky isn’t looking great either.”

Morty looked up at the clouds, which were close to straight overhead.

“Alright, come on.” They turned around and walked for a while, Rick falling behind every so often. Finally Morty came up to him and put an arm around his side to help him along.

The heavens opened up and the rain began to fall. They hurried to grab their belongings from the beach and pack up the car. In the car Rick pulled a med kit from the dashboard and manoeuvred around enough to bandage his foot.

“W-W-W-What a bust,” Rick grumbled, looking out at the weather. “We still have half the afternoon ahead of us.”

Morty busied himself with putting on his shirt and toweling off his arms and legs. “What about that mystery place you were talking about? Did you say it’s a museum?”

“Oh, the Mystery Shack. I-It’s this cool little novelty shop with strange things to look at. Most of them are hoaxes but they’re still fun. Do you want to go?”

“Why not.”

And so they went. The next town was about thirty minutes away, and Rick drove slowly along the winding woodland road, minding the rain. There wasn’t much town to see as they passed through and again entered the woods. A little A-frame house called the ‘Mystery Shack’ sat nestled among the trees.
The tour of the house was not terribly exhilarating for Morty, although he hadn’t expected it to be. A round man in his twenties told stories about the different exhibits, from a taxidermy cross between a monkey and a mermaid, to an unnerving mechanical coin machine shaped like a settler. J19 Rick listened with enthusiasm, laughing at all the little jokes. Morty enjoyed that aspect of the tour more than anything else. Once it was over they returned to the gift shop, and Rick made a beeline for a display of rolled-up maps.

“There’s a new one in there,” said the woman behind the register. “It’s of the Bermuda Triangle!” Rick found it and started excitedly chatting with the cashier, and Morty realized that this was where all of the maps came from, the ones that wallpapered half of his living room.

“Ahoy, Matey, ye be sailing for some buried treasure?”

Confused, Morty turned around to find himself face to face with a teenage girl. The girl wore a glaringly colorful sweater, and an eyepatch over one eye. She tapped on the eyepatch, grinning. “Arr?”

Morty gaped. How did someone even respond to this? “I think you’re confused. This is mine.”

After a moment of the cogs turning, the girl’s face turned white as a sheet. She pulled off her eyepatch with a sharp snap. “Oh my God. Oh my God I’m so so sorry! I thought you’d got it from over there!” She pointed to a wall of novelties for sale, and there Morty saw a hanging rack of pirate eyepatches.

“No. I wear this every day.”

The girl turned even whiter. “Oh my God, I want to die. I am such an idiot.”

“It’s fine,” Morty said, distracted as Rick joined them.

“Are you ready to go?” Rick asked. “Oh h-hey there, Mabel.”

“Hi Mr. Sanchez,” the girl said sullenly.

Morty walked away. He headed for the door, and Rick followed after him. They went to the car and got in. Just as Rick started the engine, the teenager threw herself against Morty’s window. He rolled it down and she forced a piece of paper into his hands.

“Our town celebrates Summerween soon. It’s like, Halloween but in the Summer. We’re having a costume party at the Mystery Shack and you two should seriously come. My Grunkles will be in town too. It’ll be a blast.”

“That sounds great!” Rick said, looking at the flyer.

Morty looked at her straight. “Is this because you feel guilty about calling me a pirate?”

The girl cringed. “No! It’s really not. Honestly. The pirate thing was actually my segway into inviting you in the first place.”

Morty didn’t know what to say, and thankfully Rick answered for him. He thanked the girl and they parted ways.

“D-Did you say she called you a pirate?”

Morty sighed. “To be fair, I was standing next to a rack of pirate eyepatches.”
“Gosh. What a mix up. I hope you’re alright.”

Morty nodded.

They drove in silence for a while before Rick handed Morty his phone. “Y-Y-Y-You want to see if you can find us some cool costumes? The Citadel has this great website of clothes and costumes.”

Morty found the site and scrolled through the costume page. All of the models were Ricks and Mortys, which was both convenient and disconcerting. There was a Mermaid Morty costume and a Miami Morty costume, both of which made him shudder. But most unsettling was the Pirate-Morty costume, which due to the eyepatch, almost made Morty feel like he was looking at a photo of himself.

Mostly, Morty didn’t want any part of this event, or any part of dressing up in a costume. But he had a feeling that his new Rick would love something like this, and so he would go along with it. He looked at a few more costumes and scrolled back to the pirate. He had to be the pirate. He wanted to take today’s underwhelming mix-up and own it.

“What sort of thing are you looking for?” Morty asked Rick.

“Ooh, hmm… how about something with science. Einstein?”

Morty searched. “The Einstein costume just looks like a Rick with a moustache.”

Rick glanced at the phone and nodded in agreement. He put on his blinker and pulled over on the side of the road. Morty passed back the phone and Rick scrolled through it. He gasped suddenly, the most enormous grin spreading across his face.

“Would y-y-y-y-you look at that, Morty? There’s a Flesh Curtains Rick costume!” He handed Morty the phone as he began to babble. “Flesh Curtains Rick i-i-i-i-i-is my favorite Rick ever! He’s so cool and talented, and The Flesh Curtains, oh I love their music! It has this classic vibe with this modern twist and, oh it’s just…” Rick sighed dramatically, fingers laced together.

“Alright, I placed an order for our costumes.”

Rick blinked. “You what?”

“I placed the order. You were already logged in.”

Rick’s expression was blank. “The Einstein costume?”

“No, I ordered the Flesh Curtains Rick costume that you just lost your mind over.” He watched Rick begin to sweat. “That’s not what you wanted?”

Rick seemed to collapse in on himself. “I just thought it was cool! M-Morty I could never a-a-a-actually wear that costume.”

Morty looked at the photo of the rugged-looking Rick wearing a whole lot of spikes and leather, and a lot more visible skin. He looked at the meek, underweight Rick sitting in the passenger seat, fidgeting with the hem of his shirt. A fluffy lamb onesie would be more fitting.

“I’m a-a-a lot more atypical than you think, Morty. I’m not a good Rick at all.”

Morty felt that old twinge of anger well up inside him again. “You seriously need to tell those Ricks at the Citadel to go fuck themselves. What the hell does it even mean to be a Rick? An alcoholic
loser who’s going to drink himself to death? A genius who wastes his abilities and ruins his family? Or how about a coward who leaves his grandson for dead? Is that what you’re aspiring to?”

Eyes watering, J19ζ7 Rick turned and looked out the window. Morty sighed. “You know, the Rickest Rick that ever was is undoubtedly c-137, and they don’t like him either.”

Rick blinked, glancing back at Morty. “I… I never thought of that.”

Morty shrugged. It was strange for him to give someone else advice. He’d never felt like that was something he could offer. But here they were.

Rick seemed to be studying Morty’s face. He was quiet for a moment before speaking softly. “You’re… you’re really different.”

Morty thought he was being funny. “Are you saying I’m Morty-atypical?”

“No,” Rick said, sounding perfectly sure of himself. “No. Not different for a Morty, just… different. I feel like… l-l-like the world would be better with more people like you.”

“It wouldn’t. Trust me on that.”

But Rick didn’t look swayed. He watched Morty for a moment longer before turning on the left blinker and pulling back onto the rainy street.

TBC

Chapter End Notes

Readers: Hey it's a Beach Episode-
Me: SHHHHHHHHHHHHH... Just let it happen.
With the coffee table pushed out of the way, Morty completed his exercise routine in the living room. He was aware of Rick as the older man wandered around the house, watering plants and humming classic rock tunes.

There was something about Zeta-7’s humming that lowered Morty’s blood pressure. He was like a canary in a mine. If Zeta was alright, the world was alright. Morty couldn’t make sense of it, but that didn’t make it any less true.

“Don’t Mortys prefer to sit on the couch and eat chips all day?”

Morty looked up from where he’d been doing push ups. Rick stood over him, arms crossed, watching him in amusement. It seemed that he’d finished watering for the day.

“Those Mortys are asking for trouble,” Morty said before doing another push up. “I don’t know how half of them have lasted so long.”

“Their Ricks m-m-must be protecting them,” Rick mused.

Morty didn’t answer. They’d had this discussion before, in the week that they’d been living together. They’d talked a lot more than Morty could have ever expected. But in the end, they understood a little more of one another. Morty understood that Rick was more forgiving than he should be, kinder than anyone deserved, and unaware of the real world from where he hid in the sanctuary of his home. And Rick understood that he was becoming some kind of an exception to Morty. To what extent, he didn’t know.

Rick didn’t push the topic. Instead he shifted his weight to the other leg, uncrossing his arms and resting them on his hips. Morty stared at the worn hems of Rick’s gardening pants.

“W-Would y-y-you like some water?”

“No thanks.”

“Would you like anything?”

Morty grunted. “Nope.”

“Would you still be able to do push ups if I sat on you?”

Morty paused and looked up at him, eyes narrowed. “Try it and see what happens.”

Rick chuckled at the threat, stepping away from him. Morty had the sudden urge to grab one of his ankles and pull Rick to the ground. Pull him closer. The thought was fleeting, and he was back to his routine.

Out of nowhere, a glowing green portal opened up in front of them. Morty sprung to his feet and shoved Rick behind him, shielding him from it. “W-Wha, Morty, what are you doing?” he heard Rick protest. A single envelope dropped out of the portal, and then it closed. Rick came around Morty, giving him a funny look before he went to pick up the letter. “That’s how the Citadel delivers fast mail. Y-You should see what their post office looks like. The postal-Ricks wear sunglasses b- because of the near constant portal glow.” He opened the letter and unfolded it, quiet as he read.
Rick’s expression turned to one of exhaustion and displeasure. “I have to report for duty, effective immediately.”

“What’s the job description?”

“N-Not sure, it’s unlisted.”

Morty took the letter and read it over. The dimension he was to report to wasn’t the Citadel, nor was it anywhere else he recognized. He sighed. “If you chose not to comply, to split from the COR, would they make you return me?”

Rick looked at him. “You’re not a car, Morty. I’m not leasing you. Having your Morty taken away is only a punishment for major crimes.” He shrugged. “They would revoke my portal gun insurance, and maybe egg my house.”

Morty nodded. “Well, let’s go.”

Rick looked surprised. “Oh Morty, you don’t have to come with me. J-J-Just stay here and I’ll be back as soon as I’m finished. It could just be a few hours, or a couple days at the very most.”

“No, I’d like to come with you.”

“Well I’d r-r-r-really prefer if you stay. I need someone to water the plants.”

Morty looked at him suspiciously. “You’re hiding something. Why don’t you want me to go?”

Rick looked away. “I-I-It’s nothing. It’s just… y-you know how the Ricks are over there. If any of them recognize me, well y-you know how they like to tease.”

Yeah, Morty knew how they liked to ‘tease’. “How does that have anything to do with whether or not I go with you?”

Zeta-7 Rick looked frustrated, more frustrated than Morty had ever seen him. But Morty didn’t understand what the big deal was. Of course he would prefer to stay here, but there was nothing comfortable about waiting alone while his Rick got pushed around by Citadel scum.

“I’m the senior here, Morty. I-I-I-I should be able to put my foot down when I really mean it.”

“The senior, huh?” Morty repeated, brows pulled together. “You know, that reminds me, I meant to ask you exactly what the nature of our relationship is now. Having the right to tell me what to do means you think you have some kind of authority over me. Does that mean you’re my new grandfather?”

Rick looked like he’d never thought about it before, but he answered with confidence. “O-O-Of course, Morty!”

“NO,” Morty bellowed, frightening Rick. “No you’re not! You were never anyone’s grandfather and you’re not mine either. You took an adult Morty into your home, not some lost little kid. I’m not your fucking grandson.”

Morty stepped closer to Rick, up into his space. They were the same height, eye to eye, but Morty’s energy made him twice as large. Rick shrank back under his scrutiny.

“What are we, Rick? What do you think is going on here?”

Rick’s breaths were short and frantic, eyes wide. “Morty, y-y-y-y-you’re my friend…”
Morty laughed cruelly. “That’s bullshit! Mortys can’t be friends with Ricks!”

“Stop, j-j-just stop it!” Rick cried. “Y-You sound just like them!” Morty’s eyes went wide as Rick continued. “You sound just like those awful Ricks!”

Morty felt like he’d been shot. He stood there, stunned. J19ζ backed away from him, opened a portal and stepped through it.

He stood alone in the living room, wondering what the hell had just happened. He couldn’t block out the cruel things he’d said, and for what reason? It sure hadn’t been about wanting to go with Rick on this assignment. Maybe it had started out that way, but… why? What the hell was wrong with Morty that he had to ruin everything good that came his way? No. Who was he kidding? Zeta-7 was the only good thing that had ever come his way. And he was sure that he’d just ruined it.

Morty went to his bedroom and grabbed his recorder. “Log 7743. Verbal confrontation took place with current Rick, j19-Zeta-7. Aggression level remained below-average, despite duress. Zeta-7 used avoidance tactics, an atypical trait.” He felt a lump in his throat as he continued. “Chances of being returned to the Citadel are high, so I’ll be moving forward with data collecting before the opportunity is missed.”

Pocketing the recorder, Morty went downstairs to the coded basement door. Rick had not used a high-powered lock, and in a few minutes Morty was in. He went down the stairs, with Rick’s voice echoing in his brain. ‘You sound just like those awful Ricks.’ It made the hair on his arms rise, because Zeta-7 wasn’t wrong.

The basement was a comforting mix of technology and casual personal items. A radio sat balanced on a stool in the corner of the room. There was a lounge chair set in the space under the stairs. The walls had posters of Aerosmith, Flesh Curtains, Guns n Roses, and several pictures of gardens that had been clipped out of magazines. And where there weren’t posters, there were various portal gun prototypes mounted to the wall. Every typical Rick had prototypes of portal guns. It was an innate part of their identity.

A counter bordered the entire basement, where tools were chaotically spread around. Devices both complete-looking and partial were splayed out. Morty walked along the counter, looking for something of use.

And he finally found it when he stopped in front of a metallic, pyramid-shaped device. The top point had been removed and replaced with the glass dome one would find on a portal gun. Morty studied the buttons and controls on one of the slanted sides, trying to figure it out. What he did recognize was an ‘on-off’ switch. He flicked the switch and the glass dome lit up, the machine whirring to life. But instead of the standard green, the dome glowed a deep red. What the hell?

He needed more information. Frantically, Morty searched through the cabinets and drawers, rifling through paperwork and binders until he found… a journal. It was almost identical to the one he’d found in Rick’s secret reading nook, except that it was red. There was a clasp, which he undid. The front inside page read, ‘anti-portal device’. Morty’s stomach turned. He flipped through the pages, where he found dozens of sketches of the pyramid. The writing was extensive, Rick’s handwriting more precise than it had been in his personal journal. His whole state of mind was different as he wrote this.

Morty went to the lounge chair and sat on the edge, flipping through the journal. Rick went on and on about his conflicted feelings on building the device to begin with. He wrote about the benefits of the device, how infected or hostile dimensions could be permanently isolated through the use of this device.
Finally Morty found instructions.

' Using a standard portal gun, enter the dimension one desires to isolate. Engage the anti-portal device, allow three minutes to load.

‘If the user intends to leave the dimension before isolation, set the countdown clock for the time necessary to escape. Start the countdown. Exit the dimension using a standard portal gun. When the allotted countdown time has run out, the anti-portal device will detonate, releasing a red anti-dimensional wave throughout the dimension. As an unavoidable side-effect, this will cause the device to self-destruct, causing a minor blast.

‘If one desires to remain inside the isolated dimension, a portal gun is unnecessary after initiating the device. It is necessary to move at least five yards away from the device to avoid the minor blast.

‘Once the anti-dimensional wave has been released, attempts to enter or exit that dimension will be unsuccessful by both standard and specialized portal guns. The desired dimension will remain isolated indefinitely.’

After that, the rest of the pages were torn out.

Morty stared at the last sentence, re-reading it until his eye hurt. He looked up at the pyramid, still glowing red on the counter. He stood slowly and walked up to it, carefully turning the switch to the ‘off’ position. The whirring slowed to a stop, and the red glow faded out. Morty took a careful breath.

“What the fuck…” he whispered.

He was staring at what was undoubtedly the most powerful, most anti-Rick piece of technology that he’d ever seen or heard of. Carefully he picked it up and held it, and found it no heavier than a small toaster. Even so, holding the anti-portal device made Morty feel like a God. For just one moment, every Rick who had beaten him or touched him or forced him to kill was... small. They were nothing.

Holding it securely in one hand, he reached for the wall and selected a newer looking portal gun prototype. He opened a trembling, flickering portal to the New Citadel of Ricks and stepped through.

On the other side he found himself in a crowd of Ricks and Mortys. He was in the center of the city, among shops and restaurants and stores and skyscrapers, all protected under a dome in space. Morty moved through the crowd, down a pathway until he reached a large fountain. He stood up on the edge, looking out into the crowd. No one was watching him.

He flipped the switch, feeling the machine whir to life in his hands. And then he looked out again, at the thousands of Ricks who would be trapped in this one dimension forever, cut off from their home worlds. Thousands upon thousands of dimensions would be saved, liberated from this disease.

And then a memory quietly stepped in.

Three days ago, Morty had come home from jogging to find the kitchen counter covered in dark soil. Zeta-7 Rick stood clad in an apron and gloves, holding a large, deep glass bowl.

“Oh h-h-hey there Morty,” he said, happy to see him.

Morty came closer. “What’s this?”

“It’s a terrarium. See? We s-start with a layer of gravel, and then a layer of sand, and then soil. Next
we put the plants in.”

Rick did so, placing flowered plants down into the large bowl. Around the plants he added moss and small ferns until the soil was covered. He sprayed the contents with water until it looked like a lush rainforest.

“A-A-And then you put on the lid, and you’re finished.”

Morty looked at the terrarium, lovingly made by a Rick.

“It seems s-s-so safe inside. Doesn’t it? Isolated from the outside world?”

Morty thought about Rick, trapping himself inside of his home for twelve long months. He thought about Rick’s plan to take his own life. Morty knew that the terrarium would eventually grow until there was no room. Mold would take over and the leaves would shrivel up and turn brown. The moss would lift from the dirt and curl in on itself. The terrarium would thrive for a while, but eventually it would die. It couldn’t live isolated forever.

But if the terrarium had Rick looking after it, he would open the lid from time to time and trim the leaves. He would take out what was growing old and let in the fresh air.

Morty switched off the anti-portal device and went home.

He rearranged the basement as best he could to make it look the way it had before. The anti-portal device was placed right where he found it, and all of the papers he’d rifled through were back where they belonged. The red journal was tucked away where it had been hidden. Morty went upstairs, code-locking the door behind him.

Morty spent several long hours in his room before he heard movement downstairs. He hurried out of his bedroom, through the hall and down the stairs to the living room. Rick had returned. Morty’s heart pounded, and then dropped when he saw him.

J19ζ7 Rick was covered in blood. His clothes were soaked, the dried blood splatter stuck to his face and hair, cracking in the creases of his fingers. He looked like Carrie.

“Rick,” he breathed. “What happened to you?”

Rick’s gaze slid down to the floor. He walked around Morty and started up the stairs.

“Are you okay? Rick!”

“I’m okay,” Rick answered, almost inaudibly, before disappearing into the bathroom.

Morty followed him up, standing in front of the closed bathroom door. “Rick, tell me what happened! What did they do to you?”

“Nothing,” Rick said softly, further muffled through the door. “I’m fine.”

He heard the shower turn on. Morty gritted his teeth, hands balling into fists. He stepped back, staring daggers at the door. For a moment he was ready to kick it in. But he knew he couldn’t do that. It was… it was a Rick thing to do, not to respect a closed door. But he was so worried, so desperate to know. He put his hands on the door, blunt nails digging into the paint.

“Rick, please, please let me in. Please let me see you. I’m so sorry about what I said.”

After a moment of silence, Rick spoke up. “Y-Y-You were so mean to me, Morty!”
Morty could only smile, because Rick was speaking to him. “I know! I know, Rick, I was the biggest asshole and you were right. I swear that I never meant what I said. I said it because I… I wanted to say whatever would hurt you the most.”

The door opened. Rick had taken his shirt off in preparation for the shower, and now held the bloody garment up to his chest. “Why would you do that? Why would you try to hurt me?”

Morty shook his head. “I don’t know. You’ve been so good to me, I just…” He ran his fingers through his hair. “I feel like I’ve been… like I’ve been waiting for something to happen. Something bad.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I know, I don’t know either. But I’m sorry, Rick. There’s a reason I’ve been returned so many times. I’m a shit of a Morty.”

Rick laughed, surprising Morty. He laughed in the way someone would do when they had been ready to cry. He wiped his eyes with a small patch of un-bloodied shirt. “Y-Y-You know, I bet the Mortiest Morty is out there with the Rickest Rick. And you said it yourself. N-N-Nobody likes those guys.”

Without thinking, Morty reached out and wrapped his arms around Rick. Rick’s tense posture slowly softened against him. “What happened to you?”

He felt Rick sigh. “S-Some kind of gang fight broke out in a nightclub. It was a bloodbath, a-a-and COR wanted me to clean it up. There were some Citadel soldiers at the scene, and one of them… well they tripped me into it.”

Rick pulled back so that he could look Morty in the face. Rick still held his shirt in front of himself, while Morty held Rick’s bare shoulders. “I-I just knew something like that would happen to me. It always does. But I didn’t want you to have to see it, Morty. I know you’ve been hurt, but I know there are good Ricks out there. I didn’t want you to see any more of the bad.”

Morty gave him a deadpan look. “You won’t be able to avoid asshole Ricks unless you make me stay indoors forever.”

“I can try,” Rick murmured.

Morty grinned, pulling Rick closer to him. Rick was smiling too, that silly gap in his teeth doing something to his smile that had Morty losing his good sense. He reached up and touched Rick’s lips, feeling how soft they were. Startled, Rick jerked back and Morty dropped his hand.

“There was blood on your mouth,” he lied, to both Rick and himself.

“Oh,” Rick mumbled. “I-I guess it’s everywhere.”

Morty let out a breath. “Give me your clothes. I’m good at washing out blood stains.”

Morty stepped into the hall and waited for Rick to finish undressing. he went downstairs with the bloody clothes in hand, heading for the laundry room. On his way he passed the door to the basement lab, not sparing it a moment’s thought.
The Sweet Tomato

The tense air cleared over the next few days. Morty spent time building gadgets in his room, as Rick had been perceptive enough to decide he could use his own equipment. It was the first time Morty had free access to resources he wanted. He sometimes found himself stealing tools out of the basement, forgetting that he could simply ask for what he wanted. And beyond the tools, it was the first time in his life he felt comfortable letting a Rick know that he was smart. Every time he said something a little more clever than he should, Rick would perk up and want to know more.

This morning had been especially brisk for summer. It was just the kind of weather Morty liked to exercise in, so he’d gone on a long run into town and back. By the time he reached home, the sun had warmed the air and he was sweating.

There was a package resting against the front door. Morty picked it up, studying the label. ‘COR Retailers Inc.’ He smirked. After bringing the package in and setting it on the bar counter, he poured himself a glass of water. Taking a sip, he stared out into the back garden.

Rick was already out gardening. He wore loose work clothes and a green apron, rubber boots and gardening gloves. Kneeling beside the tomatoes, he pulled weeds and threw them into a pile. Morty noticed a spot of dirt on his face, and the green stains on his clothes. But Rick adored that garden. All of the work he put into it was nothing to him.

Morty finished his water and held the empty glass. He watched as Rick took a break, pulling off his gloves and drinking from his water bottle. Rick paused, looking at the tomatoes. He reached in and plucked one, smelled it and took a bite. He closed his eyes, blissfully smiling like it was the best thing he’d ever tasted.

J19ζ7 lied back on the grass, warmed by the sun as he ate the tomato. One leg stretched out while the other was bent at the knee, swaying to the beat of a song in his head.

There had been no defining moment when Morty realized he was falling for Rick. Rather, it was a steady process over the short time that they’d been together. Less often did he find himself thinking about his mission, and more often he wondered what J19 was thinking.

Rick caught sight of Morty and sat up, grinning. Morty waved and went outside. “G-G-Good morning, Morty!” Rick said. “Did you have a good run? Would y-y-y-you like me to make you breakfast?”

“No,” Morty said, “don’t get up.” He came up beside Rick and joined him in the grass. “What are you doing?”

“Oh j-j-just doing some weeding. And I found the most delicious tomato, Morty. I had a feeling when I saw it, and it is just... Can I cut you a piece from the other side of it? I’ll get a knife.”

“No, it’s... you don’t have to get a knife. Can I?”

Rick handed him the tomato and Morty took a bite, right off the same place Rick had bitten. He glanced at Rick, who blushed and looked away. And then he was distracted, because the tomato really was amazing.

“Whoa,” he said, mouth full. “It’s like a tomato had sex with an orange. It’s weird, but amazing.”

Rick beamed. “I m-may have played with the genes a little, added some kumquat to the mix. Most of
my vegetables are pure, but it’s hard to resist getting creative once in awhile.”

They sat there, passing the tomato back and forth until it was gone. That’s when Morty remembered. “Oh hey, there’s something inside you should see.”

“What is it?”

“Go look. It’s on the counter.”

Rick gave him a questioning glance before going inside. Morty waited for it, and then heard the excited hollering as Rick called out to him from the door. “Morty, the costumes came! W-We should try them on! The Summerween thing is coming up soon, isn’t it?”

Morty shrugged.

Rick disappeared into the house and returned holding the flyer. “Oh gosh. Morty, it’s tonight. We almost missed it.”

“What a shame that would have been,” Morty said flatly.

“Yeah!” Rick agreed, the sarcasm going over his head. “Are you going to try yours on?”

“No, I’m sure it fits.” After all, it was standard Morty-size. It might end up being a little tight because Morty worked out so rigorously, but he didn’t think it would be that big of a deal.

He watched Rick bite his lip as he thought. “Y-Y-You’re right, there’s no point if they already fit.”

Rick returned to the garden. He put on his gloves and continued weeding. Morty stood up, grabbed the pile of pulled weeds and carried them over to the compost. As he started toward the house, Rick called out to him.

“Morty?” Rick looked hesitant, and then started pulling the weeds more vigorously as he continued. “I know about…” He sighed. “Uh, you know, nevermind. It’s nothing.”

“What?”

“N-N-Nothing, really. It’s just something silly, i-i-i-it doesn’t matter.”

“Rick, come on. What is it?”

Rick looked down at his gloves. “I know that you read my journal.” Morty’s skin suddenly felt cold. “Yesterday I found you sleeping in my room, upstairs in the reading nook. Y-Y-You had my journal in your lap.”

Oh shit. Morty’s throat felt like it had closed. He tried to speak but couldn’t.

Since he didn’t speak, Rick continued. “I was upset at first. B-B-But then I thought about what you’ve been through, and with your record I figure you’ve had to endure even more that I don’t know about. I just… I-I-If I were you I’d want to look at my Rick’s journal too. It would make me feel safer to know his secrets.”

Morty just stood there. If it had been some other Rick analyzing him this way, he would have cut their throat for knowing too much. But now he was just afraid. How could anyone have ever called Zeta-7 a doofus?

“Morty, I want to tell you why I won’t let you go downstairs in the lab. I’m telling you because…”
because I want you to trust me. I don’t want to keep any more secrets from you. I’m-


After a moment of shock, Rick just rolled his eyes. “O-Okay I should have expected that. But... you’re not worried? You don’t think I’m a terrorist?”


Rick nodded. He shifted toward the tomatoes, pulling a few more weeds. Morty came closer and sat down beside him. Getting the hint, Rick stopped weeding and sat beside Morty, shoulder to shoulder.

Rick looked up and Morty glanced away uncomfortably. “Rick, I’m sorry about the journal, and for breaking into your lab. I know you think it’s justified because of my record, but I’m still sorry.”

“Well, thank you.” Rick rubbed his dirty knees, but his gloves only made it worse. “A-A-And to be honest, I’m s-so embarrassed.” Rick’s eyes began to water, his voice trembling. “I n-n-never intended for anyone to read that journal. I don’t want you feeling sorry for me. It’s all so pathetic.”

“It’s not pathetic,” Morty said firmly, his chest hurting from the sound of Rick’s voice. “Your feelings show that you’re not soulless like the rest of the Ricks out there.”

“Thank you, Morty. But y-you know they’re not all soulless.”

“So you admit that some of them are?”

Rick chuckled, wiping his eyes. “Sometimes it feels that way.”

Morty studied his Rick, and realized that he liked everything about him. He liked his comfortable clothes, and the straight line of his hair. He liked the kindness in his face and the irresistible way that he smiled.

Morty reached behind Rick, brushing through the short hair on the base of his skull. When Rick’s face changed color, he couldn’t take it anymore. Morty leaned in and kissed him.

Unlike the night when Morty had kissed him in the tent, Rick wasn’t pulling away. He didn’t move closer, however. He stayed completely still, gloved hands tightly gripping his knees as Morty’s mouth pressed against his.

Morty felt the moment when the tension released from Rick’s body. He felt it against his hand where he touched Rick’s neck. He felt it as Rick’s lips softened, his head tilting just the smallest fraction. And oh God what a difference it made; it was like Rick had switched on the power inside of Morty, and suddenly he was illuminated.

It was so much, and Morty was too eager. He brought his other hand up to Rick’s face, and pressed his tongue in between Rick’s lips, dying to taste him. Rick gasped, and like a bubble bursting, the spell broke. Rick pulled back, eyes wide as he covered his mouth. “I’m s-so sorry!”

And then he was on his feet and bolting into the house. Morty sat there with his mouth hanging open, his skin still tingling.

xxxx
Two hours passed and Rick didn’t come out of his room. Morty didn’t dare to knock. He lied on his unmade bed, staring at the poster about atoms. He couldn’t understand how he was feeling. No one, not a Rick or otherwise, had ever turned him on before. Sure his body had been forced into reacting by sheer unwanted physical friction, but that didn’t count. All that Zeta-7 had done was allow Morty to kiss him and now his whole body was on fire.

He thought about their trip to the lake, with Rick walking in front of him along the edge of the beach. He thought about the way Rick’s body had moved, and what it would have felt like to touch his bare skin. Morty audibly groaned.

Morty’s experience with sex could be divided into two categories. There were the times he’d been forced, and the times he’d performed an act in order to gain the upper hand in a situation. Sex simply hadn’t been something he had interest in. Then again, he’d never been in love with anyone.

He rolled over, burying his face in his pillow. “What the fuck,” he said, voice muffled by the fabric. He was so turned on. Morty tried thinking about a few different things, all of which he didn’t like to do. But imagining them with his Rick had his brain screaming, ‘yesss.’ He thought about his least favorite thing, performing oral sex.

It was difficult to even imagine Rick allowing something like that. But assuming he could talk him into it… he could picture Rick’s flushed face, picture him biting his lip and being almost too embarrassed to look. Morty thought about taking him in his mouth and hearing the gasp from above, feeling his gentle fingers threading through Morty’s hair. God, he wanted to make Rick come. And he knew he could do it.

TBC
“Rick, you’ve been in there all day,” Morty called out to the closed bedroom door. He’d taken a shower, had lunch and recalibrated his eyepatch and Rick was still shut in. “Rick?” Couldn’t they just forget what had happened?

Morty wandered around the house, explored Rick’s bookshelf again, and flopped down on the couch. He was almost ready to turn on the TV, something which neither of them ever did. That’s when he noticed the opened package with their costumes, sitting on the coffee table. He checked the time on his phone. It was pretty close to when they should be leaving.

Morty put on his pirate costume. Preferring not to draw attention, he appreciated how generic it was. Nobody would look at him twice. With striped pants and a shirt with criss cross laces in the front, it was A+ tacky. He pulled on the pleather boots and wrapped the black bandana over his head. The fake eyepatch, he left in the box.

The costume came with a plastic dagger in a sheath. Morty replaced the prop dagger with a real knife, always preferring to be prepared. He wondered if it would be overkill to bring a piano wire too, and decide that yes, it would be.

Now, about getting Rick out of his room. Morty stood in front of his door, donned in the pirate costume with Rick’s costume in hand. And as loud as he could he yelled, “OH GOD, NO! RICK, HELP!” Morty listened blankly as something crashed in Rick’s room, and he swung the door open.

“M-Morty, what’s wro-” He stopped, gaping at the costume.

“We’re going to be late, that’s what’s wrong,” Morty said calmly.

Rick’s shocked expression slowly turned into a smile, and he momentarily covered his mouth. “Y-You look…”

“Swashbuckling, I know,” Morty finished, embarrassed. He handed Rick the plastic package with his costume. “Hurry up.”

Rick seemed unsure, but after a moment he seemed to accept Morty’s silent request to forget about what happened that morning. At least, for the meantime. He closed the door again and Morty waited in the hallway. After a few minutes he checked the time and then heard an unhappy whine.

“Oh Morty, the costume doesn’t fit! I-I-I-It’s too tight.”

Morty was not amused as he spoke at the door. “How is that possible? It’s a standard Rick size.” And if anything, Zeta-7 was a shade underweight, not over.

Red-faced, Rick opened the door again. And Lord, Morty had forgotten just what it looked like.
Rick donned a blue tank top with a collar that plunged down his chest, and a black leather vest over top. It was the tight leather pants that Rick had been complaining about, that much was clear. Along with the clothes he wore spiked bracelets and a thick black choker with a loop, and a smaller loop in his ear. Fuck.

“Aw jeez, Morty, p-please say something. This is really embarrassing, you know!”

Morty blinked, flustered. “It-It’s fine. It’s not too tight.”

“You think so?”

Morty swallowed hard and nodded. “Come on, let’s go.”

Since Rick hadn’t eaten for most of the day, Morty insisted they stop at a deli on the way so he could pick up a sandwich. Morty drove while Rick ate in the passenger seat. Morty was glad to have to keep his eyes on the road. When they passed into the next town, the local radio station was playing Halloween music in celebration of Summerween.

The sun was down by the time they reached the long driveway to the Mystery Shack. Along the side of the driveway, cars were packed one after the next. They pulled into a tight spot at the end, near the mailbox, knowing they’d have to walk.

The trees were lit with strings of orange lights. Morty glanced at Rick to find him grinning. Music boomed ahead of them, and Morty felt a twinge of uncertainty when he saw the mass of people. It wasn’t a quaint party like he’d expected, but an outdoor dance party with at least a hundred people. Lights flashed, and the owner of the mystery shack stood behind a DJ table, blasting a remix of ‘Thriller’.

“Wow, this is so exciting!” Rick beamed as they stood on the outskirts of the group.

“Morty! Mr. Sanchez!” a voice called out. And a moment later the teenager who’d invited them pushed through the crowd. She had a boy in tow. “Hey, welcome to the partyyyy!”

Morty forced a smile on his face and Rick gleefully accepted her hug. She introduced her new long haired-boyfriend, Mermando, and disappeared to get drinks. Rick was starry-eyed as he looked around at everything, and Morty couldn’t help feeling warm from it. He wanted this to be Rick’s best night ever.

“W-W-We should dance!” Rick cheered.

Morty looked out at the crowd of drunk jumping people, flailing their arms and knocking into one another and cringed.

“Come on, Morty!” Rick whined, and grabbed Morty’s hand. Startled, Morty couldn’t react as Rick pulled him deeper into the crowd. His skin prickled despite the heat from the bodies around them. Rick was nodding and moving a little, while Morty stood stock still. Still, Rick seemed happy as a lark, and Morty was... okay.

He was okay, until a familiar green light flashed in the distance. He and Rick both turned to look, and saw a portal open across the party. One Rick and Morty after the next stepped through, all of them wearing costumes. What. The. Fuck. Had that girl Mabel invited Ricks from the Citadel? It very well could be possible, with the amount of supernatural things this town was known for. Who
knew how many Ricks had visited and walked away with invitations, and how many of those had invited their friends?

“I-I want to go,” Rick said. Morty looked at him, and the expression on Rick’s face broke his heart. All of the joy had left him. He looked at Morty. “L-Let’s go home, Morty.”

“Wooooo!” howled an entirely bald Rick. “Let’s get f-BURP-fucked up! Who want’s some K-Lax?!”

As for the rest of the Ricks, they were beginning to infiltrate the group of dancers. A trio dressed as bikers seemed to have spotted Zeta-7 and were coming to join them. Zeta-7 Rick turned away from them, looking at Morty with terror.

“If they s-s-s-see me in this costume they’re gonna make fun of me so badly! I-I-I’m not cool enough for this kind of thing!”

“How do you know they’ll even recognize you?” Morty asked.

The question seemed to upset him, as if it were obvious. “You know why. I-I-It’s because of my hair and my teeth, a-and especially because of my stupid, messed up eyes.”

Morty gritted his teeth. He’d been living under the illusion that these things didn’t bother his Rick. And maybe they didn’t, until he was faced with situations like this, faced with petty people who did care. Behind Zeta-7, the other Ricks were closing in. It was too late to run. How could this happen? How could the fates let this happen to his sweet Rick?

Morty wasn’t going to let it happen. With a quick decision, he pulled off the strap to his eyepatch. Rick was watching in shock as his other, normal eye was revealed. He carefully undid the wires that connected the patch, and let them hang freely against his cheek.

“Here,” he said, putting his eyepatch over one of Rick’s eyes. “They won’t notice your eyes with one of them covered.”

Rick continued to stare at him in shock. And he didn’t even know how much the patch had really been doing. Now Morty couldn’t detect which dimensions the different Ricks were from. Without the patch connected, he couldn’t record data or scan them for concealed weapons. But he didn’t care right now.

Morty smiled warmly. “You can ask questions later. Are you ready?”

A moment later the trio of Biker Ricks had joined them. “Hey, f-fuckin’ rad! Flesh Curtains Rick!”

Morty glanced at Zeta-7, praying that the patch would keep him from being recognized. But Zeta-7 could clearly only act like himself, costume or not. He seemed to shrink, head bowed and fingers fidgeting in front of him.

“T-T-T-Thanks,” he said meekly. “But i-i-it’s just a costume.”

One of the Ricks spoke to the other. “Y-Yeah, Flesh Curtains Rick doesn’t have an eyepatch. And his hair is different, isn’t it?” He turned to Zeta-7, looking him up and down. “Still, that costume is on f-BURRP-fire, man!”

“Gee, th-thanks,” Zeta-7 laughed nervously, scratching the short hair on the back of his head. Morty wished he wouldn’t do that. It was intolerably cute. The other Ricks seemed to think so too.
The one in center tilted his head, eyes narrowed. “I gotta say, y-you’re a pretty cute Rick. Where are you from?”

Zeta-7 hesitated and Morty spoke up. “We’re from the next dimension over. J19-Zeta-6.”

The center Rick didn’t bother looking at Morty. He just nodded, smiled and slung an arm over Zeta-7. “Well-URP Zeta-6, you should come party with us. Yeah?”

“S-Sure!” He twisted around to look at Morty. “You coming?”

One of the other Ricks intervened. “Hey, don’t worry about your Morty. He’s going to play with the other Mortys.”

“B-But I want him to come,” Rick protested. But the trio of Ricks were already separating them. And as much as Morty didn't like this, he didn't want to make a scene and ruin it for Rick. So he let the third biker lead him away. He found himself standing by the snacks with two other Mortys, fuming. He couldn’t see Rick anymore, and he didn’t like it at all.

The party continued, and Morty left his doubles and walked around the outskirts looking for signs of trouble. A group of Ricks, including the bald Rick, were sitting on the porch of the Mystery Shack, snorting K-Lax like it was the end of the world. The whites of their eyes had turned blue. When he stood in front of them, they stared at him owlishly. Morty moved on.

There was beer at the party, and Morty accepted a solo cup when it was offered to him. Like a Rick, he had very high tolerance. He leaned against the porch post, subtly listening to the Ricks behind him. The bald Rick was asking a mohawk Rick if he knew of anyone who could get him into the Black Market.

The Citadel of Ricks’ Black Market... Morty didn't even want to think about it. Destroying it would be his final mission. It would be his boss fight, the fight he’d be willing to give up his life to win. Knowing there were Ricks here who had even heard of it was unsettling. He walked away, not wanting to hear any more.

A while passed before Morty finally saw Rick again. He was returning from the bathroom when he spotted Zeta-7 Rick among the dancers, sandwiched between two of the Biker Ricks. Morty almost blew a fuse as he watched them grind up against him from the front and back. Morty needed to take deep breaths to keep himself from committing double homicide right there. Zeta-7, clearly drunk as a skunk, didn’t seem to even notice as he danced. As if he knew he was being watched, Rick turned and spotted Morty in the crowd.

“Morty!” he hollered, pulling himself out of the Rick sandwich. He stumbled as he walked, and Morty met him halfway. Rick threw his arms around him, laughing. “Morty, I’m having so much fun!” He pulled back, enough to look at Morty, who held him loosely around the waist. Rick swayed in his hold. “Morty, I-I-I’m making friends! It’s sssss so great.”

“You know, that’s not the way friends dance with each other.”

Rick shrugged. He pulled up the eyepatch and rubbed his concealed eye. “I missed you though.”

Morty blinked. “Yeah?”

Rick nodded. “Y-Y-Y-You’re my favorite person in the whole world. You know that, right?” Morty nodded. The words were spoken like those of a true drunk. “And I promised I'll n-never ever take advantage of you. Y-You don't have to kiss me to be my favorite.”
Oh boy. Morty let out a breath. “Rick, when I kissed you this morning, I didn't... I didn't do that to get you to like me more.”

“I just have to be strong, that's all,” Rick said to the trees above them, clearly not paying attention.

Morty paused. Strong? Did that mean what he thought it did? Was Rick... resisting temptation? Oh fuck, he hoped so. As much as Morty appreciated Rick’s promise in the tent, it was becoming the bane of his existence.

“Rick?”

“Mm hmm?”

“Zeta-6?” one of the Ricks called out from the crowd. “You coming back?”

Rick turned to look and then faced Morty. “I-I-Is it okay if I go back a little longer?”

“Just be safe.” Morty flipped the eyepatch back down over Rick’s eye. He watched Rick join the others and made his way out of the crowd of dancers. He went over to a bench and sat with a few Mortys who had been dumped off there.

“N-Nice pirate costume,” one of the Mortys said to him.

Morty ignored him, taking a sip of his beer. He didn’t even like beer, but he tipped the cup back anyway.

“What’s that coming out of your eye?” the Morty asked, indicating to the wires.

Morty continued to ignore him.

“Is it like, part of your costume? Or is your Rick doing an experiment on you?”

Another Morty, one with a Summer-like fixation on his phone, said, “W-W-Would you shut up already? Nobody wants to talk to you.”

“Ugh, well jeez!” the first Morty whined, skulking off to the snack table.

The Morty typing on his phone sighed, and Morty spared him a glance. He looked up and then did a double take. The Morty with the phone had no fingernails. They weren’t smooth and empty as if he’d never had them, but small, scarred patches where the nail beds had been destroyed. It was most likely a chemical removal, from what Morty knew about scars. He’d only ever seen this in one place.

“It keeps me from scratching people,” the Phone Morty said.

“I know.”

Phone Morty looked up from his device, studying Morty's face. “You’re from the Market too?”

He nodded.

“But your nails are...” Phone Morty stared. “No, they had you in the pits, didn’t they? How did you get out?”

“I escaped.”

“They didn’t track you?”
“I damaged my dimensional source code so I couldn’t be tracked. What about you?”

Phone Morty looked envious. “I was bought out.”

Morty frowned. If he’d been on his own, he’d kill whatever Rick had purchased this Morty. But he couldn’t risk Zeta-7. He wanted to ask what Phone Morty’s Rick was like, but he knew better. No good Rick knows about the Black Market, much less purchases a pleasure Morty from it.

“I guess I’m lucky,” Phone Morty said. “My Rick isn’t very interested in me these days, so I just hang around. And I get unlimited data.”

“Your Rick isn’t interested in you?”

“No,” Phone Morty said. “He’s been more into other Ricks lately.” They stared at one another, and Phone Morty’s brows rose. “Your Rick isn’t the cute one with the eyepatch, is he?”

Morty’s pulse began to quicken.

Phone Morty chuckled. “I hope you didn’t like him too much.”

Morty stood, his throat tight. He searched the crowd frantically.

“What’s the big deal? He’s just a Rick.”

Without a second glance, Morty hurried into the crowd. He looked around, desperate. He pushed through to the other side, searching around the perimeter of the party. He looked inside each car parked alongside of the driveway, all the way to the road. He could barely breathe, overwhelmed with panic. If they’d taken Rick through a portal, he’d never see him again. From the end of the driveway he ran back. He retraced his steps, running out of places to look.

And then he saw J19ζ7 Rick in the crowd. People danced around him, arms in the air, jumping, screaming, singing with the music. Rick stood there, unmoving, with a vacant expression on his face.

“Rick!” Morty shouted. He shoved people out of his way, pushing toward him. He grabbed Rick’s shoulders, and Rick swayed. “Rick, are you okay? What happened?”

Rick didn’t answer. He was out of it, zonked. Morty’s eyes narrowed as he looked at Rick’s eye. He pulled up the eyepatch, looking at both of them. The whites of Rick’s eyes were now a pale purple.

“No, no, no…” Morty whimpered.

The purple in Rick’s eyes was indicative of the presence of an off-planet date-rape drug. Although it worked on humans, it wasn’t made for them, and the side-effects were sometimes deadly. Morty had been lucky to have survived it himself.

“Rick, look at me.”

Rick blinked, but his eyes remained unfocused.

“I’m gonna get you out of here, okay?”

He grabbed Rick’s hand and pulled him, and Rick stumbled along behind.

“I can’t…” Rick mumbled when they reached the edge of the party. Before Morty could pull him farther, Rick dug in his heels. He took a few steps and sat down on the ground, leaning against a parked car. “I can’t… too far.”
“Get up, Rick! Get up or I’m going to carry you.”

Morty grabbed Rick and started to pull, but Rick whined and pushed at him. He leaned to the side and threw up. It was dark purple and smelled like beer and blood.

“Fuck, FUCK!” Morty roared. “Rick, I need you to stay here. Okay? Just two seconds. Stay here, and don’t get up. Don’t get up!”

Morty ran back into the party. He went to the Morty who was on his phone and grabbed his wrist. “Come with me!”

“Wha! What are you doing?”

“I need you to watch my Rick.”

They reached J19ζ7 again. He was leaning back against the car, staring out blankly with purple eyes. Phone Morty gaped. “Holy shit. He looks really bad.”

“Just watch him for me. I need to get the car but I can’t get him up. If I shake him too much I’m afraid I’ll… I don’t want him to start…”

Phone Morty nodded. They both knew what the drug would do.

Morty ran for the car. He ran, and it felt like an eternity. How long was this driveway? Finally reaching the car, he sped through the gravel back toward the party. He was going to get his Rick, and carefully get him into the back of the car. He knew the basement lab at home would have everything he’d need to get him better.

He’d take the Phone Morty with him too, get him the hell away from whatever fucked up Rick had bought him. He’d destroy Phone Morty’s dimensional source code the way he did on himself, and he’d be untraceable. He knew Zeta-7 would be happy to have another Morty in the house. They’d take care of him and then get him in with a Beth and Jerry somewhere.

Morty’s adrenaline surged as he thought about his Rick. But he was done asking why the universe could be so unfair. All he could do was act. So he would. He’d get Rick out of here, and then everything would be okay. Everything was going to be fine.

TBC
Morty pulled up and looked around frantically, but didn’t see either of them where they’d been before. He jumped out of the car and looked around again. They were definitely gone. What the fuck? Morty hurried through the dancers to the bench where he found Phone Morty sitting there alone... texting.

“What happened?!” Morty shouted, “Where’s my Rick?! You were going to watch him!”

The Morty with the phone continued to text with his nail-less fingers, not bothering to look up at him. “If you think I would betray my Rick, you’re an idiot. I’ve got a good thing going right now-hey!”

Morty snapped. He snatched the phone out of the other Morty’s hands. He swung at him, breaking the phone’s glass screen against the side of his face. Phone Morty screamed. Morty grabbed him by the throat, lifting him and slamming him down on top of the table.

“WHERE’S MY RICK?!”

Phone Morty’s face was bleeding, his eyes watering. “F-Fuck you!”

Morty felt a hand on his shoulder, some random guy shouting for him to let the other go. He swung his elbow back into the man’s face without looking up. He pulled the knife out of his sheath and pressed it into Phone Morty’s mouth.

“You’re going to tell me exactly where your Rick took mine, or you’re going to have to tell everyone what happened to your face for the rest of your life.”

Morty held the knife in his mouth for a moment before pulling it out, intentionally cutting the corner of his mouth as he went. Phone Morty gasped and blubbered, “The Sh-Shack! They’re out behind the Shack!”

He glared down at the sniveling Morty. “I’ll break a lot more than your phone if I find out that you’re lying.”

“No! Th-That’s where they went, I saw them go that way!”

Morty released him and Phone Morty stumbled and ran off. He stood up and looked around. A few people were staring, some were recording on their phones while others were calling the police. Morty knew he’d have plenty of time before any cops would reach the secluded Mystery Shack. And when they did arrive… it would just be an inconvenience.

He headed through the crowd, most of which partied on, oblivious. Music blared in his ears and strobe lights flashed, but all he could see was red. He went around the side of the Mystery Shack where a lone Biker Rick leaned against the wall, smoking a cigarette. A lookout.
The Biker Rick glanced at him with disinterest. “Wrong way kiddo. Go back and play with the other Mortys.”

Morty slammed his head against the wall with a crack. Still conscious, the Rick started to yell. Morty slapped his hand over the Rick’s mouth. Before Rick could pull out his gun, Morty sunk the knife into his throat. He pulled it out and blood spurted onto him, the Rick gurgling and clawing fruitlessly at the wound on his neck.

Morty walked on as the Rick slid to the ground behind him. On the ground he saw his eyepatch and picked it up. He plugged it into the wires hanging from his eye and put it on his face. When he stepped around the corner he saw the other two Biker Ricks kneeling on the ground with J19ζ7 Rick between them. Zeta-7 was out cold, his head being supported by the Rick behind him. The one in front was in the process of undoing his leather pants.

“Who would’ve thought this was Doofus Rick?”

The other laughed. “Who woulda thought he’d turn up l-l-looking like-BURRP like such a hot piece of ass? Am I right?”

They both laughed the way that Ricks did. Morty’s eyepatch automatically scanned them and documented their dimensions. It did a weapons scan, coming up positive for two laser guns.

One of them finally noticed Morty and alerted the other. They stood up, letting J19ζ7 fall to the ground like a limp doll. One of the Biker Ricks spoke into his watch, alerting the others. Morty had to act fast.

He ran forward, dodging to the left in anticipation of their weapon fire. And they both drew, firing laser guns where he’d just been. He jumped right, lunging at one of the Ricks. The Rick dodged. He grabbed him, throwing Morty to the ground. The wind was knocked out of his lungs and he dropped the knife, which the other Rick kicked a few feet away.

A shoe landed on Morty’s neck. But Morty knew the limit to his own neck from strength training and twisted around, kicking the Biker Rick in the side of the knee with an awful crack. He screamed as he went down. Morty leapt to his feet just as the second Rick fired at him. The laser blew a hole in the side of his shirt, scorching his skin. He swung around, jumped and kicked the gun out of the other Rick’s hand. In the same motion he grabbed him by the throat and threw him to the ground.

Morty took the moment he had and lunged for his knife. The second Biker Rick was already up, looking around the dark grass for his laser gun. Morty went for him. The Rick gave up his search and threw himself at Morty. He swung his fist and Morty dodged. In a quick motion he buried his knife into the Rick’s lower gut. The Rick looked at him, wide-eyed. Morty stared back as he pulled the knife upward, slicing open his abdomen. Warm blood poured out over his hands and clothes.

Suddenly the back of the Mystery Shack was illuminated with blinding white lights. Morty looked around to see a dozen Ricks aiming laser guns at him. The Rick in front of him stood there for a moment before his guts fell out and he dropped to the ground, dead.

One of the Ricks, the bald Rick, stepped forward. Morty locked eyes with him. Bald Rick lifted his gun, aiming at Morty. Morty could see his eyes, still vibrantly blue with K-Lax. The man swayed where he stood. “The fuck happened here?”

“He attacked me!” the other Biker Rick cried from the ground. “That f-f-fucker just came out of nowhere! I-I-I think he broke my fucking knee!”
A noise caught their attention. Morty turned his head to see J19ζ7 Rick still lying on the ground, his body trembling. Morty ran to him.

“Don’t move!” one of the Ricks shouted.

But Morty ignored them. He pulled Zeta-7’s head into his lap, holding it off the ground. Rick’s body jerked as he seized, limbs going rigid. If Rick died here, Morty knew he wouldn’t have the strength to seek revenge. He wouldn’t have it in him to carry the pain for a single moment longer. He felt all of the resolve breaking down in him. He bent forward, a choked sob escaping his throat.

Lavender-colored foam began to drip from the side of Rick’s mouth. The sound of crunching gravel was close, and Morty looked up to see the bald Rick standing over him, still pointing the gun at his face.

“Is this your Rick?”

“Yes… P-Please help him,” Morty said, “He didn’t do anything wrong, i-it was all me.”

“I told you,” shouted the Biker Rick, “That f-fucking Morty is unhinged! Just shoot him already!”

The Bald Rick stared at Zeta-7, his blue-tinted eyes shifting to Morty, livid. He cocked his gun, which whined to life, charge ready. Morty looked down at his Rick, whose seizure had ended. He bent forward and kissed his forehead, ready for this to be over. In his young life, Rick had brought him a small measure of peace, and it was all that he needed.

He heard the laser gun fire, and heard a Rick scream. His eyes opened and he saw the last Biker Rick holding a wound on his shoulder, and watched as the Bald Rick shot again, blowing a hole through the Biker Rick’s head.

“He’s a narc!” One of the Rick’s shouted.

Morty ducked as the area blazed with gunfire. It was not all against one, but Ricks shooting Ricks every which way. Green light illuminated the trees as portals opened and endless COR soldier Ricks came through. Morty grabbed Rick under his arms and pulled, dragging him around the corner of the Mystery Shack.

“Hey!” he heard someone shout from the mass. Morty pulled the knife, pointing it as a Rick and Morty turned the corner. The Rick was dressed like a COR surgeon, and his Morty dressed like a nurse. When the surgeon Rick saw Morty’s knife he put up his hands. “Hey dipshit, y-you said he needed help, didn’t you?”

Morty stared. He’d been sure they were in costume, but maybe not? He set down the knife and they hurried over, falling to their knees. Nurse Morty held up a light while Surgeon Rick opened his bag and rifled through it. Morty watched numbly as they worked, giving Zeta-7 Rick a shot in the neck and forcing a tube down his throat. Morty held Rick’s hand as they worked.

He thought about the home that his Rick had made, the plants in every corner, the lovingly tended garden. He thought about the taste of the tomatoes and the smell of the soil on Rick’s sun-warmed skin. He thought about the bedroom that Rick had set up for him. He thought about the meals Rick cooked. He thought about Rick’s forgiveness for having read his journal. There were infinite Ricks, but only one like this. He was irreplaceable.

Morty was jolted out of his reverie by a hand on his side. Nurse Morty jumped when he did, pulling his hand back.
“Don’t touch me,” Morty growled.

“Y-You’ve been shot,” Nurse Morty said, “It’s j-just a graze burn but still… I-It has to hurt awfully. Let me give you s-something for the pain-”

“I said don’t touch me. I’m fine.”

Nurse Morty looked him over. “Wh-What about your other injuries?”

Morty looked away, realizing what he must look like. “It’s not my blood.”

The Nurse Morty offered him a cold pack, which he finally took and held to his injured side. He watched the Surgeon Rick attend to Zeta-7. Gunfire continued around the corner, but it was less than it had been before.

The fighting ended. Morty struggled to his feet and stepped around the corner, still keeping Rick in his sights. The ground was littered with corpses of Ricks. Citadel soldiers were dragging them through portals, writing notes, taking pictures. Some Ricks were arresting others. One Reporter Rick was speaking into a microphone, describing the scene while his assistant Morty recorded.

Morty noticed the bald Rick across the way. He was talking quickly, two soldier Ricks copying down what he said. He was interrupted as the Reporter Rick came up to him, trying to catch an interview. The Bald Rick’s soldiers escorted them away, and Bald Rick walked off in aggravation.

That’s when he noticed Morty watching. Morty’s knife was now in its sheath, but he kept his hand ready if he needed to pull it. Bald Rick approached him and stopped a good two yards away.

“What happened here?” he asked Morty.

“They crossed my Rick,” Morty said. “I had to intervene. And I could ask you the same question.”

The Rick rolled his eyes. “I’m-BURP a COR agent. Head of an undercover investigation. There’s been a series of sexual assaults on Ricks recently, and you helped us find the culprits.”

“What about the Black Market?” Morty asked.

Bald Rick chuckled. “Y-You heard that, did you? Tell me you don’t know about that shit.” Morty didn’t bother answering, and the smile fell from the older man’s face. “Well,” Agent Rick continued, “The serial-assault case was a recent project, but bringing down the Black Market is my end game.”

A nearby portal reflected green light in Morty’s one exposed eye. Bald Rick’s eyes were still a little blue from K-Lax, but he was handling it exceptionally well. They watched one another and Morty had a sense that this Rick was going to be hard to shake off. “Good luck,” Morty said, turning to leave.

“Seriously? Y-Y-You’re just going to walk away? You’re don’t want to… you’re not going to tell me anything?”

“I need to take care of my Rick.”

The Bald Rick was following him now, and it was making the hairs on his arms rise. He reached Zeta-7 Rick, who was still being tended to by the surgeon and nurse.

“Doc,” Bald Rick barked. The surgeon glanced up at him. “How’s he doing?”

“I would say he needs to be watched closely for… shit, maybe another twelve hours or so?”
Morty intervened. “I’ve dealt with this drug before. I can take care of him. I want to take him home now.”

“Nonsense,” Bald Rick said, slapping his hand onto Morty’s shoulder. Morty grabbed his knife, holding it in its sheath in case he needed to pull it. Bald Rick didn’t notice as he continued, a smirk on his face. “Your Rick is a member of the Citadel, and is entitled to medical treatment from people with actual medical licenses. I take it you don’t have a license?” Morty opened his mouth to speak but Rick cut him off. “Good, it’s decided.”

Morty pulled out of his grip. “I said I can take care of him,” he growled.

“But the Citadel Hospital can do it better,” Rick said sharply. “Which means… Oh! You have nothing to do for twelve hours except help me. Now that I know you’re aware of the existence of the Black Market, I can charge you with obstruction of justice for not cooperating with my investigation. And I can-BURP promise you this, if you get charged, I have every right to deny your return to your assigned Rick.”

Morty’s jaw clenched. COR laws were as full of shit as Ricks were themselves. He knew this guy wasn’t kidding around.

“And,” Bald Rick continued, coming closer to Morty so the medics couldn’t hear. “I could turn a blind eye to the blatant overkill I just witnessed you commit.”

“I was defending my Rick,” Morty said calmly.

“Hey, I’m not minimizing what they did to your Rick, and yeah I did shoot one of them myself. But I’m a licensed COR agent. And you, you’re just a Morty, and you gutted one of them. I can make this go away, or I can make this very hard for you.”

Morty’s knuckles were white around the knife, but he knew he couldn’t do anything. They would have to go to the Citadel.

TBC
When it came to Ricks, there was never much travel time involved. Within half an hour Zeta-7 had been transferred to a Citadel hospital and Morty had been escorted to a COR police station. Here he sat in an interrogation room, across the table from Bald Rick. The Rick agent had since come down from his K-lax high, and had gained an even more intense level of focus.

“Alright kid, spill it. What do you know about the Black Market?”

Morty glared at him. “What do you know about it?”

Bald Rick smiled unpleasantly. “I know that it's not a-BURP myth like half the Citadel is saying. I know Mortys are disappearing from medical centers and daycares and nobody is answering my goddamn questions about it. I know the machine in the COR cremation center has been used thirty-two undocumented times in the last three months and nobody can give me any information as to whose bodies were destroyed.”

Bald Rick waited, but Morty just glared. “So you don't know anything.”

“I don't have to prove what I know to a-a-a-a Morty! This is sensitive information and I don't know anything about you. Since you somehow figured out how to wipe your dimensional code, your file is useless shit. You don't have any credit. Anyway, don't you want to help? As much as you seem like a psychotic little asshole, you also seem like you want to take these guys down. What are you so tight-lipped about?”

Morty took a moment to answer. “When I take them down, it'll be my way. I'm not about to team up with some Citadel scum who has his shaved head stuck up his ass.”

Bald Rick was beyond pissed. Morty could see the vein popping out of his forehead. But then something changed. He went from angry to tired. He looked away from Morty, studying the mirrored glass window on the wall behind them. Under his breath he asked, “What's the longest a Morty could last in there?”

Morty blinked. “How long has he been missing?”

Bald Rick looked hollow. “Five years.”

They looked at one another and Bald Rick looked away again. “I figured. I just thought, maybe, you know. If he was good at whatever they had him doing in there… maybe there was a chance.”

“Nobody’s that good.”

The Rick took a flask out of his coat and drank. Then he looked at him. “How did you end up in there? What ever happened to your-BURP your original Rick?”
“He was just a piece of shit like every other Rick.”

“Except that one you’re with now?”

Morty glared. “He’s not… he’s barely even a Rick.”

Bald Rick shook his head. “And you’re barely even a Morty, then? Quit that shit, kid. We’re just people. All of us. When you compare us to what’s out there in the infinite universes, you’re avoiding the blame, putting it on the fact that you’re too much like a Rick or not enough like a Morty or whatever it is you aspire to. Forget your name, and forget about the face you see in the mirror. That’s why I shave my head. I don’t want to think about being a Rick. I’ve got one life to do what I want with.”

“And what exactly do you want to do?”

“What, it’s not obvious enough? I want justice for my grandson.”

Morty looked down at the table, at his hands. Clean clothes and a wet rag hadn’t done enough. There was still blood encrusted under his fingernails. He thought about what he had done. All of the Mortys he had killed to stay alive, all of the Ricks he had killed in an attempt to cleanse the infinite universe. But Zeta-7 Rick was his infinite universe now, and he hadn’t done a single thing in his whole life that he would want Rick to find out about.

“You’re going to want to take notes,” Morty muttered.

The Rick’s eyes widened, back straightening. “R-Right.” He stood and hurried from the room, returning with a laptop with the cord dragging behind. He opened it and looked up at Morty.

Morty sighed. “Alright, I’m going to tell you everything I know that could help. Firstly, the general concept is similar to what you would probably imagine. The Black Market is a group of Ricks that organize illegal activities involving Mortys, for the pleasure of Ricks.

“The Mortys who end up there are divided into two categories. If they think they’re attractive or they have the right personality, they go straight to the brothels. Visiting Ricks can pay for anything from a Morty who is kicking and screaming, to one who’s unconscious. They can also pay extra to beat them or kill them, depending on what the Rick can afford.

“And then there’s the Morty Pits. They’re similar to the Morty Games, except those involved have to fight to the death. They call these Mortys ‘gladiators’. When a popular gladiator is injured, they’re sent to the brothel where fans of the Pits can pay to have sex with their favorite fighters. Gladiators in the brothel are always bound and usually given a sedative to keep paying Ricks from getting attacked in bed.”

“Were you a gladiator?” Bald Rick asked, his furious typing paused for a moment.

Morty felt the hairs rise on his skin as his concentration was broken. His stream of thoughts, which he’d been effectively distancing himself from, suddenly were made personal through the question.

“That’s irrelevant.”

Bald Rick looked down at his laptop. “Just thought, because of your combat skills.”

Morty hesitated before continuing. “Yeah… Yes. I was a successful gladiator. I… broke my wrist while delivering the final blow in one of the rounds. After they put a cast on my arm they brought me to the brothel. I talked my second patron into untying me, which is how I escaped.”
Bald Rick wasn’t typing as Morty told this part of the story, which he was grateful for.

“I’m going to tell you about the facilities now. The Black Market moves every two months, or more frequently if they think there’s a mole or if anything questionable happens. The pits, everything gets packed up and moved. The pits are usually set up in storage buildings, unused factory areas, or they’ll rent parking garages and use those. For the brothels, they’ll book two or three floors of a hotel and get a discount for the large scale booking. They cut deals with the hotel owners to keep everything under the radar.”

“How do they move all of the Mortys without being seen?”

“They don’t have to hide them. Five Mortys go to each Rick and they look like Pocket Morty teams. They usually hire desperate Ricks who are in debt or drug-addicted to pose as the trainers. But the important thing is that as random as their movements seem, they have a system and they can be predicted. I can give you a list of locations that are frequently used. Certain television advertisements are also codes to tell customers where they’re going to be next.”

Morty talked while the agent typed. It continued well into the late hours of the morning. Around noon the secretary Morty entered.

“Excuse me, I-I-I-I just received a call from the clinic. J19-Zeta-7 is awake.”

xxx

When Morty reached the clinic he found his Rick standing at the counter, wearing a hospital gown. He was arguing with the nurse Morty behind the counter, shrugging away from another nurse Morty who was pulling him from behind.

“Sir, you have to go back to bed!” The nurse Morty behind him insisted.

Zeta-7 turned and saw Morty, and hurried toward him. Morty came closer and Rick wrapped his arms around him. “Morty! Th-They wouldn’t tell me where you were. I was s-s-so worried.”

They pulled away enough to look at one another, and Morty soaked in the sight of him, his straight-cut hair, his kind eyes, the gap in his teeth that made his smile all the more charming. Morty wanted to kiss him right here in front of everyone, but he didn’t.

“I was making a statement at the precinct. Shouldn’t you be in bed?”

“I’m fine.”

“He’s not fine!” cried the nurse, who had pushed a wheelchair up behind him. “He should be in bed!”

“Rick, you should listen to the medics.”

Rick sighed, sitting slowly into the wheelchair. “I’m f-fine, really.”

Morty followed as the nurse pushed him back to his room and helped him into bed. Rick was shaky, but not as much as Morty would expect.

“You do seem to be recovering well,” Morty commented as the nurse left them.

“W-Well I do eat mostly organic,” Rick said as he made himself comfortable.

“Morty smiled and sat on the edge of the bed. “How are you- um… what do you…”
“What do I remember?”

Neither of them were smiling anymore.

“I remember dancing, I remember drinking, a-and then I remember… I couldn’t move right. I-It was like I couldn’t steer my body the right way.” He took a breath. “They put something in my drink, didn’t they?”

Morty nodded.

Rick stared at his hands, thin fingers fidgeting. “I-I-I was trying so hard to ignore the warning signs. I wanted things to be different, I wanted to feel like one of them.”

“You’re better than they are, Rick. And when I say that, I don’t want you to dismiss it. I’m not just saying it to make you feel better.”

Rick looked at him with glassy eyes. “Morty… I should have stayed with you. I’m s-s-so sorry.”

Morty sighed. “It’s fine. And someday I’ll recover and I’ll be able to forgive you.”

Rick burst into tears and Morty’s mouth fell open.

“Rick, I was joking! I was just teasing you! Rick!” Morty grabbed his hands, and Rick pulled one away to wipe his eyes. “I’m so sorry, that was in poor taste. I just wanted to, I don’t know. I’m not good at making people feel better.”

That’s when Morty saw that he was smiling. “I know you’re joking, I’m just… I love you, Morty. I don’t know if I’ve told you, but you’re my favorite person.”

Morty smiled at him. “You told me last night, actually.”

“I did?”

He nodded. “It’s okay. I could get used to hearing it.”

Rick blushed and looked away. And Morty wasn’t fooled, he knew that Rick loved him and that it wasn’t the same as being ‘in love with’. That was still something to be determined.

xxx

Morty stayed until Rick fell asleep, and found Bald Rick waiting for him in the hall. They cleared out a small waiting room in the hospital and continued for a while.

“I think… I think I’m going to need to be there when you infiltrate. There’s too much that I can’t just explain to you. There are a thousand scenarios more than I could ever coach you through.”

Bald Rick wasn’t typing. “What do you want to do then?”

Morty thought about it. “Sometimes Ricks who want a membership bring a Morty in offering. You bring a Morty, you get admittance to the Morty Pits for a season. They call those Mortys ‘tips’. If I filled that role it would dispel most of the usual suspicion they have for new people. You’d be able to skip a lot of their membership trials. And if something unexpected happens inside, something I haven’t coached you on, I’d be there to help handle it.”

Bald Rick tilted his head. “I know you already know it’s-BURP going to be dangerous. And you’re-you’re gonna have to leave your precious Rick for a while.”
“I know. But… if we succeed at this, if he sees what I’ve done would be worth it.”

xxx

As the trip to the Citadel was brief, so was the return home. Bald Rick had one of his men return Zeta-7’s car from the Mystery Shack, so it was waiting in the driveway when Morty helped Rick through the portal.

They entered the house and Rick walked to the back door and looked out at the garden. Morty watched as he turned to the kitchen and looked in the fridge. “What should I make for dinner?”

“Nothing,” Morty said. “You’re supposed to be resting. I’ll make dinner.”

Rick sat at the counter as Morty went around grabbing what he needed. Rick had already made jars of marinara sauce from the tomatoes and herbs he’d grown, and Morty figured spaghetti would be easy enough for him to figure out.

He watched Rick fidgeting and went to the radio, wondering if a little music would help relax him. Rick’s usual rock station was playing something that had Morty on edge, so he tuned it to something else. The pop station was playing an especially obnoxious song, and a few other local stations were playing ads. Finally he reached a station with a calmer tune. Normally Morty didn’t like country music at all, but something about John Denver’s ‘Country Roads’ was making him feel alright. He could use a song about home. So he left it there and returned to the stove, where the water was boiling. As he stirred in the pasta, he felt arms wrap around his waist from behind.

“Rick?” he said. “Why are you up? You’re supposed to be resting.”

Morty turned to face Rick, who laced his fingers with Morty’s. “I don’t want to rest.”

What?

Morty’s mouth fell open. He started to speak but Rick cut him off. “In the clinic, one of the nurses told me- he told me wh-what you did at the party. How you… h-how you handled those Ricks.”

Morty’s stomach turned. “Rick, I’m sorry-”

He shook his head. “Morty, I-I-I know that you only do what you have to, a-and that you were keeping me safe. I’m not afraid of what you did. I trust you.”

Morty’s heart pounded. “Thank you.”

Rick looked away, his hands still tightly laced with Morty’s. His lips were parted, words clearly caught on his tongue. Morty watched Rick’s chest rise and fall as he struggled with something. And then he spoke, desperately. “I-I-I haven’t done this before, Morty. I need help.”

Morty felt his heart in his throat. “What do you need help with?”

Rick flushed. He pulled Morty’s hands up to his waist and Morty held him carefully. Rick put his own hands on Morty’s chest, lightly, hardly touching. Morty could barely breathe. He lifted one of his hands to Rick’s face, running his fingers through his soft hair. Rick closed his eyes, leaning into the touch. Morty bent forward, his forehead pressing against Rick’s.

When Morty kissed Rick, it felt like home. Rick leaned against him, kissing back, mouth warm and soft. Suddenly Rick pulled away and asked, “I-I-Is this okay? Do you like it?”
Morty laughed breathlessly. “Yeah, I like it.”

Morty kissed him again before he could say anything else. He turned them around, pressing Rick against the counter. Rick’s lips parted and Morty pressed his tongue inside. Rick let out a small moan, and like a match dropping into gasoline, Morty lost himself. He grabbed Rick and lifted him onto the counter. Utensils clattered to the floor. He pulled them flush together. Rick wrapped his legs around Morty and God help him, he responded. He moved to kiss Rick’s neck, biting gently and sucking hard. He left marks on Rick’s delicate skin, claiming him.

Morty could feel Rick getting hard through his pants. Morty kissed him on the mouth and rocked against him, grinding and soaking in the soft whimpers escaping Rick’s lips.

“Is that good?” Morty whispered. Rick nodded.

With a hiss, the boiling water began to spill over the edge of the pot. Morty didn’t look away from Rick as he turned off the stove.

Rick bit his lip. “Morty… d-d-do you want to go upstairs?”

Morty watched him. “Do you want to?”

“Y-Yes.”

“Okay.”

Rick slid off the counter and held Morty’s hand, leading him upstairs.

The soft light of dusk illuminated Rick’s bedroom through the skylight. He switched on a small lamp on the dresser. Morty came up behind him and pulled the lab coat off his shoulders. Rick was smiling as Morty pulled up his shirt and tossed it along with the coat. He kissed Rick’s shoulder, hands running up his sides. God, Rick’s skin was so fucking soft.

Rick leaned back into him, and Morty rocked his hips forward, unable to resist. He heard Rick gasp but he couldn’t stop himself, grabbing Rick’s hips and grinding up against his ass. Rick’s hands were pressed to the dresser, fingernails digging into the wood grain as he rocked back.

Morty let go quickly, turning Rick around and crushing their mouths together. He ground against Rick until he could feel Rick’s whimpers against his mouth. “I’m going to make it good for you. You trust me?”

“Yeah.”

Morty undid Rick’s pants, sliding them down with his underwear. Rick stepped out of his clothes, face flushed as Morty backed him over to the bed. They went down, Rick crawling backward and Morty over top.

But Morty stopped from the sudden, stricken look on Rick’s face. “What’s wrong?”

“I uh… I just remembered, I don’t um… I don’t have any lube.”

Morty blinked. And then he glanced at the bedside table, remembering the contents he had rifled through ages ago, and the fact that there was in fact no lube.

“Oh, hold on.” Morty stood up and headed for the bathroom. He looked around, and in the shower he found a bottle of cocoa oil. Well, they could try it. He returned to the bedroom, where Rick was
sitting on the bed. When Rick spotted him he looked away shyly.

Morty joined him. “Hey, cutie.”

Rick broke out into a silly smile. “Y-You’re not talking to me, are you?”

“No, just this other cute guy I want to get with.”

Rick rubbed his face, happy and embarrassed. Morty moved his hand so he could kiss him. “Can you lie back for me?”

Rick did what he was told. Morty moved in front of him, and Rick had to look away when he opened his legs. Morty slid down and got comfortable, kissing Rick’s thigh. Zeta-7 was hard, his cock leaking precum onto his stomach. Morty took it gently, listening to Rick gasp as he held the warm length in his hand.

He waited until Rick glanced down, and then licked it slowly from base to tip. Rick let out a soft whimper, covering his eyes with a hand. “Oh, g-gosh!”

“Come on,” Morty said playfully, “I want you to watch.”

Rick took a breath and dropped his hand. Morty took the head of his cock in his lips, tongue licking at the velvety skin. And then he slid downward, taking the length into his mouth. Morty bobbed his head and glanced up. Rick watched as long as he could, breaths shaky. Morty lifted his head, smiling wickedly around the end of his cock.

“Oh g-geez, Morty,” Rick whimpered, too embarrassed to look any further.

Morty chuckled and continued, closing his eyes and listening to Rick’s gasps and whimpers. When he could feel the muscles in Rick’s legs relax, he pulled back. Rick watched quietly as Morty poured oil onto his fingers.

“Does this hurt a lot?”

Morty hesitated. “I guess it depends. Just tell me if it hurts and I’ll stop, okay?”

Rick nodded. Morty pressed a slick finger against his hole and then pushed inside. Rick was so tight. Morty pulled out slowly and pressed in, feeling him tighten up and relax. Morty added a finger.

“Mmm,” Rick murmured, eyes falling shut, “Th-This is nice.”

“Have you ever done it to yourself?” he asked. Rick shook his head. Morty had thought as much. “What about, a toy or anything?” He thought about the toy Rick had hidden in his drawer.

“N-No, nothing.”

Morty believed him. He moved closer and Rick slid his hands over Morty’s shoulders. That’s when Rick’s body began to move, hips tilting up into the thrust. Morty added a third finger, watching Rick’s lips part silently. He continued to move himself against Morty’s hand, his gasps and whines growing as Morty began to work more forcefully.

He was surprised when Rick grabbed his wrist. “W-Wait. Do you… do you think I’m ready?”

Morty had no idea. “Do you want to try?”

Rick wanted to. He settled back. Morty slicked oil over his length and shifted himself between
Rick’s legs. He began to press inside, watching Rick’s face for signs of pain. But Morty lost himself for a moment, because Rick just felt so, so good.

“Jesus,” he murmured. He pressed in further, groaning as the tight heat enveloped him. “You okay? Does it hurt?”

“Yeah but I like it,” Rick said.

Morty pulled out and slid in again, a little deeper than before. Rick’s brow drew together, eyes shut and mouth open. He continued this way, slow motions that went just a little further each time.

“Morty,” Rick whined, “W-Would it be possible for you to- could you maybe-”

“Yeah, Rick? Are you okay?”

“Yes but, c-could you… Oh Morty! Could you please do it harder? It’s s-so good and I just need more!”

Morty let out a breath, trying to keep himself from coming just from Rick’s words alone. He was so fucking cute. Morty grabbed his hips and thrust hard, eliciting a sharp gasp. He did it again and Rick’s face broke into sheer bliss.

“Yes ,” Rick breathed.

Morty pushed one of Rick’s knees further forward for a better angle and began to thrust in earnest. Rick cried out as Morty fucked him.

“God, you’re good,” Morty groaned, “and you look so fucking good.”

Rick was too consumed to be embarrassed. And then his eyes widened. “M-Morty,” he whimpered, “Morty don’t stop.”

Morty didn’t. He grabbed Rick’s thigh, gripping him as he pumped into his tight hole. He moved his hand, wrapping his fingers around Rick’s cock and working him with his thrusts. Rick cried out.

“Ahh, Morty, please! P-Please don’t s-stop!”

And then he came undone, his body arching off the bedding, legs trembling around Morty’s waist as he came onto his chest.

“Oh fuck,” Morty gasped as Rick’s body clenched around him. His head fell forward and with another thrust he came, nails digging into Rick’s skin.

They remained there for a moment, the room quiet except for their heavy breaths. Finally Morty pulled out and they shifted to lie beside one another. Rick reached down and pulled up the sheet, covering them both. They turned on their sides, foreheads together. They were sweaty, sticky, and beyond the reaches of happiness. Morty loved Rick more than anything. And it was humbling to know that his perfect Rick loved him back.

“Damn it,” Morty mumbled.

“What?”

“You were supposed to be resting tonight.”

Rick laughed, pulling at Morty until he held him closer. “S-Sorry Morty. I just didn’t want to.”
T1nk3r-t0y, thank you so much for being a listening ear!
Hi friends, I would be so happy to hear from you, to hear any specific things you've liked so far. Also, if you would, please share my story with anyone else you think might enjoy it. That would make me so happy! Thank you again, kind Sinners!
Morty woke up alone in Rick’s bed. He rolled onto his back and listened to the shower running down the hall. The sound of Rick’s distant presence comforted him, and he eased back against the soft bedding, legs still tangled in the sheets. He stared up at the hanging plants, aglow with beams cast from the morning sun.

He thought about all that had happened over the last few days. The disastrous party, the fighting, the killing, and almost losing Rick. And then there was the inconceivable bliss that came after. He wanted this to last forever.

That was the moment when Morty decided his schemes were over. After he helped Bald Rick take down the Black Market, he would be done. He was out. After that, he wanted to come home to J19-zeta-7 and never leave again. Morty wanted to watch through the glass door as Rick gardened, and help wash the dishes after dinner. He wanted to strip off Rick’s clothes and watch him come undone. He wanted to make sure that his Rick never heard another unkind word from anyone.

He broke from his reverie as the door opened, and Rick came into the bedroom with a towel around his waist. Morty sat up, propped on his elbows.

“Good m-morning,” Rick said, his face flushing as he caught sight of Morty. He opened a dresser drawer and began to rifle through it. He pulled out a shirt and hung it over his arm, going to the next drawer for something else.

Morty frowned. “What are you doing?”

“I-I was going to get dressed.”

Morty’s frown deepened, and Rick looked down at the underwear he’d picked up. He put it back in the drawer. “O-On second thought, I was going to- I was going to come back to bed?”

Morty smiled.

Rick set down the clothes and went to the bed, climbing under the sheet before he removed his towel. Morty was amused by his sudden shyness, but he wasn’t surprised. He pulled Rick closer, enjoying the scents of soap and deodorant on his damp skin.

“You’re so soft,” Morty murmured playfully, pressing his face to Rick’s chest. Rick chuckled, warming up to the touches. They settled close together, nose to nose on the pillows.

Rick watched him, a look of curiosity crossing his features.

“H-Hey Morty, w-w-would you mind if I- i-i-i-if I asked you something personal?”

Morty tensed, because there were so many places this could go. But he knew he’d have to be honest with Rick. He wanted this to last, but not at the price of lying. Not anymore. “I don’t mind. Ask me anything.”

Rick swallowed. “Th-That night at the party, I remember when you took off your eyepatch for me. I wanted to… I was hoping you m-might tell me about it.”

Morty sighed. He sat up, rubbing his hands over the sheets where they covered his knees. Rick sat up as well, a panicked look on his face.
“I overstepped my bounds, didn’t I? Y-Y-You don’t have to tell me-”

“No, it’s… you’re fine, Rick. It’s just… the answer to that question opens a can of worms, other questions that would need answering.”

Rick watched him patiently.

Morty took a breath. “The eyepatch is a piece of technology I invented a few years back. It allows me to scan any Ricks I can see, and determine their dimensional code, which the eyepatch wirelessly looks up in the Citadel’s system, which I hacked. A summary comes up, and so I can find out things about any Rick I come into contact with, almost immediately.”

“Why… why would you need that?”

“It’s a safety measure. But… that’s not all that it does. It’s main purpose is something I don’t use anymore. I… I once had a Rick whom I performed experiments on. I implanted a device in his brain so that I could remotely control him. He became my puppet. I used him to hunt down and kill the different Ricks that had wronged me in the past.”

Rick pulled the sheet up closer to himself. “Wronged you?”

Morty felt like he couldn’t stop. “Wronged me. Tortured, abused me, made bets that I would kill other Mortys, did things to me that I didn’t want done…” He glanced at Rick, whose eyes were wide and glassy. “I’ve been to some very dangerous places, Rick. I’ve been in deep, and I’ve done a lot of bad things to protect myself. And then… and then I did bad things for vengeance. After that I did even more because I thought the ends would justify the means. I’m a bad person, Rick. I’m evil.”

Morty watched the emotions cross over Rick’s face, one after the next. Morty felt his heart in his throat as Rick opened his mouth to speak.

“Y-You’ve never hurt anyone for the fun of it.”

It wasn’t a question, but Morty answered anyway. “No.”

Rick watched him with an odd mix of sadness and determination. Morty was caught off guard when Rick reached for his hand and held it tightly.

“As… as Ricks and Mortys, we don’t live in the kind of world where y-y-you can just live a normal life. Bad things happen. Ricks come for us and they always have demands. Morty, I’m not going to try to justify the things that you’ve done, because th-th-they don’t need to be justified. I know you. I know you would never hurt anyone for pleasure. I believe that you have a gentle soul no matter what you’ve had to do in the past.” Rick looked down at their hands, his eyes brimming with tears. He spoke with a broken voice. “And I know that you’re a good person because of h-how you treat me. See, i-i-i-it’s easy to be mean to me. I have a hard time standing up for myself and I’ve let… I’ve let a lot of people hurt me in the past. If you’re going to be mean to me, there aren’t going to be any consequences. You could have… you could have come here and done anything you wanted, and I would have taken it. But you made my life so much better. You made me feel like I’m not worthless, like I’m not a doofus.”

Rick covered his face. Morty wrapped his arms around him.

“You’re not a doofus.”

Rick raised his head enough to look at Morty’s face. “And you’re not a bad person, no matter what you tell me. Y-Y-You’re not evil, Morty!”
Morty kissed him, hands on his tear-streaked face. He pulled back and removed his eyepatch, letting the wires hang from his eye. Rick did not look repulsed by the sight of them, but curious at Morty’s face in general.


Morty pulled and Rick followed, climbing into Morty’s lap. Morty slid his hands up Rick’s thin body and slid them down again, squeezing his thighs. Rick was starting to get hard before he covered himself with his hands.

“I’m s-sorry Morty, I don’t mean to get… to get like this after we had an important talk.”

Morty couldn’t help laughing a little. “Don’t apologize.”

He moved Rick’s hands, wrapping his fingers around Rick’s length and thumbing the end. He loved the way it made Rick bite his lip, and made him too embarrassed to look Morty in the eye.

“You can move your hips,” Morty said.

“Wha.. O-Okay.”

Morty watched him move, small, hesitant motions. Rick put his hands on Morty’s shoulders, eyes closed as he began a slow rhythm. Morty couldn’t take his eyes off of him, mouth parting.

“Hold on,” Morty said, retrieving the oil from the bed stand. He slicked his fingers on his free hand, and then took Rick’s length again.

“Oh,” Rick said, realizing what Morty was going to do.

“Is this okay?”

“Y-Yeah,” he said, blushing.

Morty reached between Rick’s legs, sliding a finger inside of him. He urged Rick to begin moving again. Rick nodded and rocked his hips, gently thrusting into Morty’s hand, while Morty fingered him underneath.

“Ahh.. oh gosh,” Rick gasped.

“Want another?”

“Yes p-please.”

Morty pulled out his finger and pressed two in together, slowly pumping inside of him. He smiled as he felt Rick’s hands tighten on his shoulders.

“You like that?”

“Mm,” Rick murmured, unable to speak.

It was almost too much for Morty to watch. His sweet, gentle Rick, riding his hand like it was the best thing he’d ever felt.

“Fuck,” Morty breathed, pulling out his fingers.

Rick looked startled. “What’s wrong?”
“Nothing, I just, fuck. I’ve got to have you. I want you to ride me. Can you do that?”

“Oh, uh… s-sure. I think so.”

Morty was already achingly hard. He slicked himself liberally and helped Rick angle his hips. His heart pounded as he felt his dick press against Rick’s hole, and saw the look on Rick’s face. And then he was sinking down, eliciting a groan from Morty.

“Jesus you feel so-” he let out a breath, unable to finish.

“It h-hurts a little,” Rick said quietly.

Morty grabbed his thighs to keep him from moving any more. “Do you want to stop?”

“No! No..”

“Okay. How about, don’t go down any farther, not until you’re comfortable.”

Rick nodded, lifting up and pressing down again. Morty tried not to move as Rick acclimated himself to the stretch, rocking up and down over the end of Morty’s dick. With each motion he moved himself lower, pausing at times to get used to it before continuing.

Morty could tell when Rick had finally had enough, letting himself sink down onto him all the way. Morty settled back against the pillows. Rick moved his hands from Morty’s shoulders to his chest. Rick started a rhythm, steadily rocking his hips forward and back.

And then his movements quickened. Rick was gasping, whimpering, his short nails pressing into Morty’s chest. His face was flushed, dizzy and smiling. Absolute pleasure.

Morty’s eyes raked his body, soaking in the bead of sweat sliding down his neck and the flush on Rick’s chest. The muscles in Rick’s thighs would tense, just as his body tightened around Morty’s cock.

Morty’s eyes widened as he looked at Rick’s stomach.

“W-What’s wrong?” Rick said.

“Nothing. Keep going.” He watched as the flat plane of Rick’s stomach very slightly protruded each time he sunk down. “Jesus, I can see my dick.”

Rick looked down curiously. “That bulge?” He touched it with his fingers, and then firmly pressed with his palm.

Morty actually blushed. He could feel the slight pressure of Rick’s palm through his body. It was the most ridiculously erotic thing he’d ever experienced, and the innocent look on Rick’s face told him that Rick really didn’t know what he was doing to him.

“I-Is that good, Morty?”

“Yeah it’s fucking good. You look so fucking good up there.”

Rick smiled sweetly as he continued to move. And then his expression changed, concentrated pleasure as he focused on what he was doing.

“Touch yourself,” Morty murmured.
“Okay,” Rick said with embarrassment, fingers wrapping around his dick. He stroked himself to the rhythm of his body. Morty moved his hips, pumping up into him and making Rick whimper. “Ahh, M-Morty it’s so... I-I can’t do this for much longer.”

Morty held onto his hips, thrusting into him without mercy. Rick cried out, his body going rigid. He came hard, tightening around Morty’s cock and sending him over the edge too. Morty swore, thrusting into him until it was too much to take. He sunk back against the bedding, Rick slumping over him. Rick’s head rested against Morty’s shoulder.

After a moment of recovery, Rick moved over, settling against Morty’s side. Rick looked lovely, hair dampened with sweat, purple hickeys decorating his neck from the night before. Morty kissed his forehead, and Rick leaned in to have a kiss on the lips.

They laid there for a while, the sunlight fading and brightening as small clouds passed overhead. Morty turned to look at Rick. “Can I ask you a personal question now?”

“Sure Morty, but I think you must know everything about me by now.”

“Well there’s still one thing.” He smiled playfully. “What’s with that sex toy in your drawer? I thought you said you didn’t use one.”

Rick’s face went scarlet. “Y-You saw that?!”

Morty nodded and Rick buried his face against his shoulder. He mumbled, “Oh gosh. Ahh, I’m so embarrassed!” He looked at Morty again. “When did you see that?”

“Pretty soon after I arrived. I didn’t trust you yet so I was looking through your things to find out more.”

Rick gaped. “All of this time? Oh Morty!”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry!”

“You don’t look sorry!”

Morty laughed. “Fine, I’m not that sorry. Just tell me about it.”

Rick looked as if he were being punished. He sighed heavily. “Like I told you, I don’t... I-I don’t use it like you’re supposed to. I’ve never put anything inside me. But sometimes when I’m just... getting off with my hand, I um...”

“Yeah?”

“Ugh. I uh... I like to put it in my mouth. I like to i-imagine I’m making someone feel good.”

Morty stared. “That’s... hot.”

Rick just looked more embarrassed. “I may have... I may have thought about you once or twice.”

Morty grinned wickedly. “You like sucking dick?”

“Shh, Morty don’t say that! And n-no, I haven’t.”

“But you’d like to?”

Rick looked away. “Well of course.”
Morty couldn’t stop grinning. Zeta-7 was just too damn cute. He pulled him closer and Rick cuddled up to him. Morty ran his fingers through his pale hair, feeling like he could fall back to sleep. Couldn’t they just stay like this forever?

But they couldn’t. A bell chimed, and they both turned their heads.

“What was that?” Morty asked.

“My doorbell.”

“I’ve never heard it before.”

Rick raised his brow, smirking. “Morty, was that a jab at me?”

Morty laughed. The bell rang again and they both hurried to get dressed, passing clothes to one another and hurriedly pulling on shoes. Rick got dressed first, leaving Morty to head for the door. Morty finished tying his shoes, put on his eyepatch, and went downstairs.

Rick stood at the cracked door, and glanced back at Morty with confusion. “It’s for you.”

He opened the door wider, and Morty saw Bald Rick standing there. The agent turned away, walking down the steps to wait for him in the yard.

Morty went through the doorway, brows drawing together. “This couldn’t have waited another day?” He stepped into the yard, surprised to see over twenty armed Citadel soldiers standing at the ready. “Agent? Are we really doing the mission now?”

He looked at Bald Rick’s face again, and realized that something was wrong. He looked livid. Out of his pocket he pulled a small recorder. Morty recognized it. It was one of the dozens he’d filled over the years. His stomach dropped.

“Morty #1679, you’re under arrest for the murder of twenty-seven known Ricks.”

Bald Rick grabbed him, and Morty didn’t fight as he cuffed him.

“Morty!” Zeta-7 cried. “What’s going on?”

“Go inside, Rick,” Morty said, not wanting him to see this.

“No, he’s under arrest too. For harboring a criminal, and for hiding a weapon of mass destruction,” Bald Rick said. “We found the anti-portal device in his basement.” Two of the soldiers approached Zeta-7 at the door, roughly pulling his arms forward to cuff him.

“HEY! Get off of him!” Morty shouted, struggling against Bald Rick.

Zeta-7 Rick was wide-eyed and confused, but he seemed to focus when he saw Morty struggling. “It’s okay, Morty. I-I’ll do something. Don’t be scared.”

After passing through a portal in the front yard, Morty was pushed into the back of a police cruiser in the Citadel. Agent Rick sat in the passenger seat, typing on his phone as a Rookie Cop Morty drove.

“How could you arrest my Rick?” Morty growled. “You know he didn’t do anything wrong.”

“How could I arrest your Rick?” the agent repeated furiously. “How could someone murder
twenty-seven people?”

“All of them were connected to the Black Market! After I escaped, I hunted them down. You can’t blame me for that!”

The agent shook his head. “I knew some of those Ricks. They couldn’t have-”

“Yes they could!” Morty shouted. “You think they ran their business by being obvious?”

Bald Rick didn’t answer, and Morty dropped back against his seat, wrists twisting uselessly in the handcuffs. “How did you… how did you find my recorders?”

“I had men search J19ζ7 Rick’s house while you were with me and he was in the hospital. I didn’t expect your compliance, and so I was planning to use whatever I could find. It took our team a while to listen to your recorded journals. And fuck, I wish I hadn’t found that shit. You know how fucking frustrating this is for me? To have to arrest the only person who I really need to take down the Black Market?”

Morty stared blankly at the back of the seat. “What about my Rick?”

“Yeah, I didn’t expect to find anything like what we found in his lab. An anti-portal device that can seal off entire dimensions? That’s some serious shit. I’d never even thought of such a thing.”

“He wasn’t going to use it against anyone!”

“I get it, Morty. He wanted to be alone. I got the idea after we read his journals. Honestly, I’m going to do what I can to help your Rick, but I can’t vouch for the council. They’ll do what they see fit.”

Morty closed his eyes, his mind racing. He felt like there was an animal in his brain, clawing at his skull in an attempt to escape. But there was no escaping.

xxxx

Things moved quickly. Morty was driven straight to the Citadel Capital Building, and presented to the Council of Ricks. Of course, this was the ‘new’ Council of Ricks, as the old Council had been wiped out by C-137 along with the original city. But these Council members looked much the same, just haughty Ricks with absurd haircuts.

Morty stood in the center, his handcuffs hanging in front of him. But really, what could he do against the twenty COR soldiers surrounding him, and the hundred or so civilian Ricks packed around the perimeter, spectating? All of them were armed, as anyone who knew Ricks would know. J19ζ7 was probably the only Rick who didn’t carry a weapon at all times.

J19ζ7 Rick was cuffed as well, and stood off to the side with an armed guard on either side of him. Rick and Morty looked at one another but didn’t speak.

One of the council members leaned forward. “Morty #1679, you are being charged with the murder of twenty-seven Ricks. How do you plead?”

“Guilty.”

“You know we found all of your electronic journ- oh. Guilty?”

“Yes. I’m guilty, and I don’t regret killing any of them. They were monsters who spent their money watching Mortys fight each other to the death. They sold them to one another, sexually abused them,
tortured them. If I could do it all over I would kill them again.”

“You know the Citadel has laws, right?! If someone wrongs you, you need to go to the police. We have no proof that any of those Ricks did anything you accuse them of. They had no fair trial. Do you have the proof?”

“...No.” Morty wanted to explode. He was so angry. He knew half of the Ricks he had killed would have been able to pay their way out of this or get out on bail and then vanish. There would have been no justice.

“Well then, as far as we’re concerned, you murdered twenty-seven innocent Ricks.”

Morty couldn’t help looking over at his Rick. Zeta-7 had tears streaming down his face. Morty couldn’t blame him. Who could forgive something like that?

Bald Rick approached, standing a few yards away from Morty. “I’d like to discuss the situation regarding J19ζ 7 Rick.”

“Ah, Agent Rick,” the council member said, “You mean the one who built the anti-portal device?”

“Yes. I feel that although Morty #1679 is guilty of murder, his Rick should not be held accountable. I would like to represent him in his trial.”

The council looked shocked, turning to one another. “He was housing this bloodthirsty boy! And he built this atrocity, this anti-portal device!” The council member reached down and brought up the device, the pyramid with a red bulb atop, and set it down on the table between himself and another member. “This device is the epitome of anything that could be anti-Rick! Our legacy is that Ricks invented interdimensional travel, and this doofus would have all of our masterful work undone! Adn paired with this evil little Morty, one can only imagine the chaos and destruction that would ensue? It would be the end of us!”

Bald Rick looked unimpressed. He turned to the guards and onlooking citizen Ricks. “I need a show of hands for everyone here who has made something that could be categorized as a weapon of mass destruction.”

Every Rick in the room raised their hand.

“Alright, keep your hand up if you’ve built two or more weapons of mass destruction.” Two thirds of the Ricks kept their hands up.

The agent turned to face the council. “As you can see, it’s in our nature to test our limits, as the most intelligent people in the multiverse. Therefore, I see nothing wrong with Zeta-7 having built a weapon. He has a history of compliance with the council, and he has no record of any rebellion or even violent tendencies toward other species. In my men’s research, we found his most recent experiment to be an attempt to genetically modify beets to be able to sing.”

“Beets?” the council member said, “As in, the vegetables?”

“Beets, the vegetables. I also have a character witness available.”

“Ugh, no. Enough,” the council member said. He leaned in with the others, discussing for a moment. They separated and the member spoke. “As J19ζ 7 is clearly the most ridiculously innocent Rick in the entire Citadel, we’ve decided that he can go.”

Morty breathed a sigh of relief. And he knew he owed all of this to the Agent who was glaring at
him coldly.

“And Zeta-7?”

Rick looked up quickly, wiping his eyes. “Y-Yes?”

An assistant Morty approached the council, taking the anti-portal device and setting it on the floor. The council member pulled out his ray gun, blasting it into pieces. He looked at Rick with fire in his eyes. “No more anti-portal devices. Do you understand?”

Rick stared at the shattered device. “Yes, of course…” The guard beside him reached over and took off his handcuffs. Rick rubbed his wrists, gingerly taking the portal gun that was offered. “But what about my Morty?”

“Morty #1679 is no longer yours. For his crimes against Rick-kind, he is sentenced to death and will be executed immediately. Of course, you will be assigned a new Morty.”

Morty caught a glimpse of the shell-shocked expression on Rick’s face, and had to look away. The council turned back to him.

“Morty, do you have any last words?”

Morty looked over at Rick, but his eyes were on the floor. Morty turned back to the council. He knew Rick already understood how he felt, and he couldn’t say those words in front of everyone and risk the repercussions it might have on Rick. He thought about his time with Rick, and decided that he’d been lucky.

But then a green light flashed in the corner of his eye. Rather, three green flashes, one after the next. Morty turned along with everyone else, to see three portals on the floor, forming a tight triangle. And in the center was Zeta-7.

“Zeta-7, what are you doing?” a council member asked, annoyed.

“I just… I just wanted to say that I’m tired of being compliant! I’m tired of you jerks pushing me around! A-A-And I’m not going to let you kill my Morty!”

“Agh, somebody just shoot him!”

“You don’t want to do that!” Rick shouted. “I-I-If any of you shoot me, whichever direction I fall, It’ll be into one of these portals. And they all lead to one place, C-137.”

The hall was silent, the name striking fear through all of them.

“You wouldn’t dare!” one of the council members shouted back. “You wouldn’t dare break the treaty! All Ricks tied to the Citadel are forbidden from entering C-137! Do you know what he would do to us?! Have you forgotten what he did to the last Citadel?”

“I haven’t forgotten,” Rick said, “A-A-And that’s why I know you won’t shoot me.”

“What do you want? You want us to free your little serial killer? Fine! Close the portals and you can both go home.”

Rick shook his head. “No, I’m not falling for that. I know that you’ll kill us both if I close the portals. I know that Morty and I are n-n-never going home.” He looked at Morty with determination. “Morty, come here.”
Morty didn’t hesitate. He ran to Rick, looking down at the three portals. It wasn’t hard to jump between two of them, landing in the center, in the small patch of floor where Zeta-7 Rick was standing. Zeta-7 took his cuffed hands.

“Y-Y-You have to go to C-137. You’re not a Rick so it won’t violate the treaty. And it’s… I-I-It’s the only place the Citadel won’t follow after you.”

Morty shook his head. “I’m not leaving you here. They’ll kill you!”

Rick smiled. “I’m not afraid to die, not if it’s for you. I love you, Morty. N-Now you have to go.”

“No! No way!” Morty panicked. “Come with me. I don’t care if we break the treaty. I’ll make it work! I’ll kill C-137 Rick myself. I’ll-”

Rick shut him up with a kiss, and for a moment Morty forgot everything else. Suddenly Rick’s hands were on his chest, shoving him back. Their kiss broke and Morty was falling. Green light blinded him as he fell through the portal, into C-137.

TBC
Morty fell out of the portal and crashed through the branches of a tree, his head knocking hard against the ground. His vision swam. He groaned and turned over, looking up at the triangle of portals above the trees. Morty scrambled to his feet and then fell again, his head spinning. Holding onto the trunk, he managed to stand once more. He looked up at the portal, panicking.

“Rick! Jump!”

The portals began to shrink.

“RICK!” he shouted, but the portals closed.

Morty staggered back, hands still bound together by the cuffs. He leaned against the trunk of one of the trees. He was in some sort of woods. He was in C-137. Zeta-7 was at the Citadel. Who knew if they had shot him as soon as the portals had closed. Zeta-7 could already be dead.

A pathetic noise escaped him. Morty bent forward, breathless. Zeta-7 was probably dead, and it was his fault. His bloodlust, his need for vengeance had led him to kill those Ricks, and now he was paying for it. His Rick was paying for it. Morty’s lip trembled, tears spilling from his eyes, from beneath the patch. Morty wiped at his face, his hands coming away bloody. He’d cut his face on the branches on his way down.

Blood on his hands. It made sense. Morty wanted to lay down on the ground and stay there until he died. But a little voice whispered in his mind, something he wouldn’t expect.

What if he’s alive?

What if, by some miracle, Zeta-7 was alive? Maybe they would arrest him. Maybe there would be a new trial. Even C-137 Rick had been spared the death sentence when he’d been accused of murder. Morty knew the Council had a history of torturing criminal Ricks. As much as he hated the idea of anyone laying a finger on his Rick, if he was being tortured, it meant he was still alive. It meant Morty could rescue him. His Rick may have been a sweet and gentle one, but Morty believed in his strength. If he was being tortured, Morty believed he would survive.

Morty began to run. He ran aimlessly through the woods until he heard something, a strange rushing sound. He followed it until it became clear. Traffic! He ran until he broke through the trees, stumbling out to the side of a highway. He hadn’t been in a forest as much as a small plot of woods between two highways.

He darted across the six lanes, cars and trucks honking and swerving as he crossed. Again he entered the trees, sliding down a steep slope and coming out again. He was in the back of a shopping center. He ran, looking around desperately for something familiar.

At the end of the shopping strip was a closed pet store, which had gone out of business after all of the dogs in the world had left. The store remained vacant, the ‘P’ having fallen to leave the sign
Morty continued on. He walked along the side of the road, ignoring the cars at a stop light, and how their doors locked when they caught sight of a bloodied kid in handcuffs. Hopefully they wouldn’t call the police.

Morty entered his neighborhood, rather, the neighborhood where most Smith families lived. He found the house, walking over the long crack surrounding the house. He stepped up to the door and knocked, body swaying as he waited.

Summer opened the door, her eyes widening. “You’re… not my brother.”

“No. But… If you would- if you’d help me… I need to see your Rick.”

Summer sighed. “Oh boy. Okay. Well, he’s not here. Grandpa Rick and my brother don’t live here anymore.”

Morty’s stomach dropped. “They don’t live h- but, where? I need to-”

“Relax, okay? They don’t live that far. I’ll take you there. Just come in for a minute and let me clean you up.”

“No, I need to see them now. Please.”

“Ten minutes won’t kill you,” Summer said, grabbing his shoulder.

Morty pulled out of her grip, staggering back into the yard. “Ten minutes could kill somebody else! I have to see Rick! I have to…” His head swam. He touched the back of his head where he’d fallen and hit it, and his fingers came away bloodied. He hid his hand behind his back.

“Okay, okay, I’ll get my keys.” Summer disappeared into the house. Morty wiped the blood on the side of his jeans. A moment later she returned with her car keys and a bottle of water. They climbed into the car and Summer set the bottle on his lap.

“What do you need Grandpa Rick for?”

“It’s complicated.”

“Psh, don’t be a dick. I’m giving you a ride, at least tell me what’s up.”

Morty thought about how to explain it. “My Rick has been captured by the Citadel. It’s my fault because I killed a bunch of Ricks a few years back.”

“Hmm,” Summer murmured, brows raised. “You sound like a real edgelord.”

Morty sighed.

The drive took them into a pretty little town that housed a state college. They drove along the edge of the campus until they reached a neighborhood on the outskirts. They passed a few fraternities before Summer pulled up in front of a large house with a picket fence.
“This isn’t their house,” she clarified before Morty had even asked. “They rent the garage on the side, and the room above it. I think the homeowners converted it into an apartment.”

Morty turned his head, studying the nondescript garage and the windows above it. “Why here?”

“My brother goes to the college we passed. Morty was only living in a dorm for the first year before Rick moved here so they could live together. God, they’re pathetic. Attached at the hip, like all Ricks and Mortys.”

“Right,” Morty said, looking at his hands.

“You ready?”

“Yes, thank you for driving.”

Morty got out of the car without looking back. As he stood, he lost his balance and grabbed the door, steadying himself. His pulse pounded in his ears. After a moment he stood up straight and shut the door. He heard the car reverse and drive off behind him, hazy eyes trained on the garage. He could hear a buzzing sound, and a sudden flash of light through the small garage windows.

“Shit!” he heard Rick yell through the door. “Morty, get the fuck down here and help me with this!”

He heard the rumbling of feet before Rick said, “Nevermind. It’s dead.”

Morty staggered up to the door and knocked. There was a pause before the garage door began to rise, and he stepped back as it lifted up. C-137 Morty stood near the garage door button, nearly face-to-face with him. Rick was busy at the workbench, cutting open an alien carcass and getting blue bodily fluid everywhere.

“Jesus, what happened to you?” C-137 Morty asked, seeing at the blood on Morty’s face. And then his features twisted as he studied the eyepatch. “Have… h-have we met before?”

“Who is it?” Rick called out, without looking up from the carcass.

“It’s another me, but he’s all bl... Rick, y-y-you’d better…”

“I need your help,” Morty said to Rick, cutting to the chase.

C-137 Rick finally turned, his shirt and face splattered with blue. He glanced over Morty and huffed. “Great, like I really need another useless, piece-of-shit-grandson in my life. And you look like a bundle of fucking drama on top of it. What do you want?”

Morty was on edge, his hands tightening into fists. “I need… I need your help.”

“Y-Y-Yeah, I got that much. What do you want?”

“I need.”

“Rick!” C-137 Morty wailed, cutting him off. “He looks really familiar, and I-I-I’m getting a bad feeling about it.”

“I need weapons. And a portal gun.” Morty blinked as he began to see double.

Rick, the two Ricks he was seeing, stood and approached him. “Why the hell would I give weapons to some piece of shit I don’t even know?”
“Rick,” C-137 Morty whined. “Rick, I remember him! He was the one who was keeping all of those Mortys hostage! Rick, we can’t trust him! He’s bad!”

Morty ignored him. “I need… need weapons. And a… portal gun. My Rick is being held by the New Citadel… I have to… have to save…”

Morty felt Rick shove him, and he staggered back into the driveway.

“Is that true?” Rick asked. “Were you working with that slow-clapping, ‘evil’ -Rick-motherfucker?”

“I’ll reimburse you,” Morty said. “If you help me s-save him… My Rick knows how to make an anti-portal device. Y-You could seal up the Citadel for good.”

“I don’t want to take one more step anywhere near that retarded, members-only shit hole. If I wanted to build an anti-portal device I would have figured it out already.” Rick pulled a laser gun from his lab coat and pointed it at Morty’s forehead. Morty heard the gun whine to life, and felt the heat of it against his skin. “If you’re- if you’re the fucked up Morty who helped string up all of those Mortys as a shield, why the fuck shouldn’t I blow your brains out right now?”

“My.. My Rick is innocent. He needs to be saved.”

“Not good enough.” Rick pulled back the hammer of the laser gun. “Last chance.”

Morty’s eyes welled with tears. He tried to think of something, anything he could offer. But there was nothing.

“Stop crying,” Rick growled. “You’re not getting any sympathy out of me, not if my Morty’s right about you. I was framed for all that shit you did!”

Morty’s knees buckled, hitting the pavement. He looked up at C-137 Rick, bleary-eyed. It was over. He couldn’t save his Rick.

“I fucking hate you,” he said. “You’re the worst Rick of them all.”

C-137 Rick rolled his eyes. “Like I haven’t heard that before.”

Morty collapsed, his vision going black.

~

J197 Rick stood in the hall of the Council of Ricks. The three portals had closed. He stared at the floor where Morty had disappeared. His heart ached at the thought that he’d never see him again, but his heart was also full. It was a feeling he cherished, despite the pain. Maybe he wouldn’t see his Morty again. In fact, he probably wouldn’t. He would probably die today. But Morty was safe, and hopefully C-137 Rick would take care of him, treat him right.

The room was silent, the crowd of Ricks in a sort of muted shock. Zeta-7 looked up at them, at the hundreds of eyes. Was it because he had kissed his Morty? He supposed it didn’t matter. He dropped
the portal gun, which clattered to the floor.

A pair of Guard Ricks hurried forward. Zeta-7 waited without moving, and didn’t struggle as they grabbed him. One of the guards punched him in the stomach, and he doubled over from the pain. His arms were pulled behind his back and he was cuffed. He raised his head and another fist came at him, knocking his face to the side. He cried out this time, unable to help it.

The silence was broken, furious roars erupting from every direction. Over the sound of the crowd of Ricks, the Council shouted angrily with amplified voices. Zeta-7 didn’t bother to listen.

“Stop!” he heard someone shout.

One of the guards stepped to the side and Zeta-7 looked up from where he’d fallen to the floor.

The Agent Rick with the shaved head stood over him, fire in his eyes. Zeta-7 shut his eyes as the agent approached, expecting to be hit. But instead he felt a firm hand grabbing his upper arm. He opened his eyes as the agent hauled him up to his feet. The crowd continued to yell, small items being thrown as he exited the hall with the agent.

J19ζ Rick was pushed into the back of a police cruiser. Agent Rick climbed into the front and drove off, swerving around the crowd and speeding ahead. Rick stared at his knees, thinking about Morty, hoping he was alright.

“I’ve got to hand it to you,” the agent said, “That was a genius move.”

Zeta-7 met the bald agent’s eyes in the rear-view mirror. “I-I-I’m… I’m s-sorry I had to break the law. But I had to save my Morty. A-A-And I’d do it again.”

“Yeah, yeah. We all saw your little moment before you pushed him into the portal. I don’t even know what to think of this anymore. If he’s in C-137, there’s no way for us to reach him. So, congratulations.”

Zeta-7 watched him in the mirror. “Y-You seem different from most Ricks.”

“That’s funny, coming from you. We may be Ricks, but we’re our own men. I liked your Morty, even if he turned out to be a mass murderer. He was the product of the wrong side of the Citadel. I understand his motives, because my own Morty could have turned out the same way... if he’d survived longer.”

Zeta-7 was having trouble following, feeling that he didn’t know the full story here. It was also difficult to give the agent his full attention, what with his Morty on his mind. “I-I’m sorry about your Morty.”

“Yeah, me too,” the agent said.

They reached the station and J19ζ Rick was brought to a cell. Once locked up, the agent reached through the bars to undo his handcuffs.

“Listen, I’m not going to be able to protect you forever. I can get you some time because the Council owes me, but I won’t be able to postpone your punishment forever. This isn’t going to be pretty for you.”

“I-I understand,” Zeta-7 said, lacing his fingers together. He glanced up and saw that the agent was glaring. He looked… angry at the world. Zeta-7 stepped forward, holding onto the bars. “Y-You know, I don’t regret adopting my Morty. Even with all of this. I missed my old Morty, but I didn’t
feel like I was betraying him when I invited a new Morty into my home. He needed me, a-a-and I needed him even more. It was… i-i- it was the best thing I ever did.”

The agent sighed, checking his watch. “What are you getting at?”

Rick glanced away, hesitating, and then he looked at the agent again. “I don’t know w-what happened to your Morty. But I think he would want another Morty to get a chance to be happy, to be loved by a Rick like you.”

Agent Rick’s eyes went wide, his face reddening. “You trying to get something out of me?”

Zeta-7 Rick sighed and turned away, walking to the back of his cell. He leaned against the wall and slid to the floor. He wasn’t trying to get anything. Even if he had been, there was nothing the agent could give him. He only wanted one thing, and it was gone.

~

Morty woke feeling numb. The pain in the back of his head was gone, replaced by cold. The cuts on his face, scrapes on his hands and knees, pain he hadn’t even noticed before was now noticeably absent. He was lying on something cushioned, most likely a couch. His handcuffs were gone. He opened his eyes, and his blurred vision slowly focused into clarity. His gaze traveled along a crack in the ceiling, to the wall behind the couch. The wall was covered in technical drawings of inventions, blueprints, sketches of meeseeks and portal guns and… a few sketches of what could only be C-137 Morty, reading or sleeping.

He reached behind him, feeling that the cold was from an ice pack behind his head. The plastic baggie crinkled beneath the towel it was wrapped in. With his arm raised he noticed a band-aid on the crook of his elbow, and pulled it up to see a small needle mark. So that was why he felt better. Replacing the band-aid, he let his arm fall to rest at his side again.

Slowly Morty turned the other way. Beside him, C-137 Rick sat in a chair, watching him closely. He was leaning forward, elbows on his knees with his hands laced in front of his mouth. Morty didn’t turn away, and they stayed that way for a while, studying one another.

“How long-” Morty’s voice cracked, and he cleared his dry throat. “How long have I been out?”

“About two hours. You need water?”

Morty spoke slowly. “I need weapons and a portal gun.”

C-137 Rick dropped his hands and leaned back against the chair, just watching him.

“Did you hear me?”

Rick nodded absentmindedly, still focused on his face. “Y-Y-You’re really him. My… my original.”

Morty closed his eyes and looked away, instead studying the crack in the ceiling above.


“Well I was there,” Morty said curtly.

“Morty… I never meant to leave you. I thought you were behind me. I-I-I thought you were right there behind me! I turned around and the portal closed and I was alone! I swear to you, I grabbed a
gun and I went right back. The two amphibians were there but you… y-y-y-y-you weren’t! I shot them and cut them open looking for you, Morty! But you were gone.

“I was twenty feet away from you, unconscious,” Morty said, eyes trained on the ceiling. “The amphibians came at me and I ducked, and they crashed into one another. It gave me a second to escape, so I ran to a nearby tree. It was just a little thing, more like a lone branch. I climbed to the top, but I slipped. I fell so hard I broke through the clay ground into one of those cavern pockets. I was only a foot or two beneath the surface when I blacked out.”

Morty took in a breath and exhaled, fixated on the crack in the ceiling. “I-I woke up down there and I thought I was going to have to be quiet, so the monsters wouldn’t find me. But it was quiet outside. I sat up and looked out, and… a-a-and they were there, dead. Cut open. Gutted. I never knew why they were gutted, what had happened to them.

“Where did you go?”

“I walked back to the town, the one we saw a few miles back.”

“I went there! I-I-I scoured every inch of that place, but I couldn’t find you anywhere!”

“I usually left town during the day to help down by the river. You probably missed me by half a mile.”

Rick rubbed his mouth, brow furrowed.

Morty continued. “I worked in the village a few weeks until another Rick showed up looking for mutant amphibian eggs. I begged him to take me along. I thought if I went with a Rick he would help me find my own Rick. But that Rick, he made me… I didn’t get on his ship for free.

“Then he brought me to the Citadel, and I recognized it. You’d brought me there once before. I thought I was saved. I thought he was going to bring me to an authority, someone who could find you. I kept reminding him what dimension I was from, and he kept saying he was going to get me there. But after a while I stopped believing him. That’s when I began making promises. I promised him I wouldn’t tell you what he’d done to me. I promised to let him do it again if he just took me to you after. But he didn’t. And when he grew bored, maybe a month later, he sold me to the Black Market.”

C-137 Rick stood up from his chair and walked away. He went to the small kitchen area and leaned his hands against the sink, head bowed, his back turned to Morty. Morty watched him for a moment before turning away again.

Morty’s eyes widened when he heard Rick’s trembling voice. “My Morty,” he cried, “My grandbaby…”

Morty felt himself break, his cold expression twisting, exposing him. He rolled onto his side, body trembling as hot tears slid down his face. Morty had always imagined a reunion with his grandfather ending in bloodshed, but nothing was going the way he expected.

“I didn’t know what to do without you,” Rick cried. “Little Mort, my little grandkid who was smarter and braver than all the other Rick’s Mortys. I was so proud of you.”

Morty kept his hand clamped over his mouth to avoid making noise. He listened to Rick, listened to him cough and sniffl.

“I r-remember when y-y-you freed all of my lab specimens. Didn’t want me to hurt them… y-you
were so gentle to everything.”

Morty sobbed out loud, the anger swelling in him. His life had not allowed him the luxury of being gentle. “Stop! J-Just stop. I don’t want to hear any more!” Morty sat up sharply, turning to Rick. “I hate you!” he bellowed. “I don’t care what you say to me or how sorry you are! I fucking hate you! You ruined my life!”

Rick turned to face him, still standing at the counter. “I know,” he whined, “I-I know, I know… It r-ruined my life too. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry-”

“Save it!” Morty hissed as he got to his feet. He wiped the tears from his face with the backs of his hands and stood there, fists clenched. “If you’re really sorry, you’ll help me save MY Rick! If you’re sorry, you’ll give me weapons and a portal gun!”

Rick used a dirty dishrag to wipe his face and his running nose. “I can do a lot better than that, Morty.”

TBC
The End

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who supported Sticks and Stones with your kind words, advice, and beautiful artwork. I hope you enjoy the final chapter!

A Rick and Morty pair walked down a crowded Citadel street. Aside from the fact that they each carried a black duffel bag, there was nothing about them that stood out. Unibrow and lab coat, brown hair and a yellow shirt. Grandfather and Grandson. The pair were the same as most of the others around them. They turned onto a less crowded street and walked a few blocks, stopping in front of a large city building, the Rictopal Hotel.

“You sh-EUGHH-sure this is it?” the Rick asked.

“For now,” the Morty replied. “The entrance will be around back.”

They continued on, around the edge of the building.

From across the street, a group of five, grungy-looking Mortys watched them. One kept watch while the other four followed around the corner, their switchblades drawn, intent on finding out if there were valuables in those duffel bags. The lookout waited, but eventually grew impatient and followed. Around the corner he found four crumpled bodies on the ground. That was the last thing he saw before a pair of hands grabbed his face, turning sharply and snapping his neck.

The Rick and Morty moved closer together as they approached a metal door. A narrow window opened and a pair of bouncer-Rick eyes looked out at them.

“Good Boy Rick invited me,” the Rick outside said.

The bouncer’s eyes slid from him to his Morty. “This your tip?”

“Sure is,” the Rick said, elbowing the sulking Morty beside him. “I’ll be glad to have him out of my hands.”

The bouncer slid open the heavy metal door, his eyes widening as he looked down at the previously concealed gruesome scene. The buff bouncer immediately reached for his gun, but the sulking Morty straightened and swung at him, his fist connecting with the bouncer’s throat. The bouncer’s gags turned into gurgling as Morty finished him with a knife.

His body dropped with a thud, and the Morty pulled an eyepatch from his pocket, adjusting it over one eye. “You ready, C-137?”

C-137 Rick stared down at the muscular corpse, and then looked up at his original grandson. “As ready as-URRP I’ll ever be.”

Rick opened his duffel bag and pulled out a mechanical sphere with a red, glowing orb centered in the middle. As the device made contact with the ground, it split open in two with a loud hiss, and two platforms emerged from within. The orb was lifted on a slender pole and the pair stepped onto
the platforms, an orange laser shooting out to scan both of their bodies, building a layer of armor from the bottom up.

Once they were properly equipped, Morty opened the duffel bag he had been carrying and pulled out a pair of long blasters, tossing one to Rick.

They opened a set of double doors, revealing a dark night club, with booths and tables where Ricks were drinking and laughing, exotic Mortys warming their laps. Scantily clad Mortys danced around poles, music blasting beyond a crowd of dancers in the background.

“Hey, no guest weapons in here!” one of the Ricks wearing a suit shouted. He pulled out his gun, and Morty pointed the blaster and blew off his head. Pleasure Mortys everywhere began to scream and Ricks shouted to one another, Ricks in suits leaping to their feet and firing at Morty and C-137. Some of the bullets hit them and clattered away, others missing as they dodged. The scene devolved into mass chaos. Morty did a roll, pointing upward and blasting the faces off a pair of Ricks. In the corner of his eye he saw a pair of patron Ricks crawling along the floor, scrambling away. One blast blew through the first and killed the second as well. C-137 Rick saw a Rick using his pleasure Morty as a shield, and used his grappling hook to catch the Rick’s ankle. The pleasure Morty yelped as his Rick was torn away, dragged to C-137. Rick grabbed the patron Rick’s head and tore it from his body.

Morty caught sight of one of the patron Ricks running for the exit, and he shot a hole through his chest.

“Block the exits!” Morty shouted. He and C-137 split up, Rick for the door from which they came, and Morty for the opposite door that lead elsewhere. Ricks dropped like flies. Slowly Morty and C-137 made their way back together as they cleared the room of all the Ricks. Among the bodies, the pleasure Mortys trembled, crying and hiding and holding one another.

“Show yourselves,” Morty shouted. “Don’t cross me and I won’t shoot you.”

He waited with C-137 Rick, as the pleasure Mortys slowly got to their feet and came closer, stepping over limbs and gore as they went.

“You!” one of the Mortys said, and Morty turned to look at him. It was the Phone Morty from the Summerween party, who had somehow made it back here. “Y-Y-You killed my Rick!” he shouted, diving for a gun on the floor. Phone Morty shot at him just as Morty aimed. A bullet grazed Morty’s cheek in a flower-burst of blood. Phone Morty took a hit to the chest, and dropped dead. Morty lowered his weapon and looked at the others.

“Like I said, don’t cross me and I won’t shoot you.”

“What are y-you even doing here?” one of the dancers said, a Morty with blonde hair, a fur coat and a pink speedo.

“I’m purging the Black Market,” Morty said.

“Y-You’re freeing us?” asked a Morty in gold sequins.

“I’m giving you a choice,” Morty replied. “You can walk out that door right now, and do whatever you want. Go to the Citadel police for help, find your grandfather on your own if he’s worth finding, maybe start anew on your own. Or you can stay here and help us purge. I know all of those hotel rooms upstairs are filled with your friends, in the hands of Ricks who deserve to die. If we spare them, they will always come crawling back, recruiting more Ricks and abducting more Mortys to
fuck and murder. If you live through the purge, I’ll make sure to send you wherever you want to go. But you’ll have to decide now, because I have somewhere to be.”

The Morty in sequins stepped out of the crowd, sulking and holding his hands. “I-I want to help, b-b-but I got in trouble last month and… a-a-and Good Boy Rick cut the tendons in my wrists. I can’t hold a weapon anymore.”

“Then you can be a lookout,” Morty said. The sequin Morty brightened up, nodding.

The blond-haired Morty in a speedo stepped forward. “If I help you, can you get me back to my grandpa in Miami?”

Morty nodded, and Miami Morty grinned. Morty instructed the pleasure Mortys to find weapons, which was easy to do among the scattered bodies on the floor. The opposite door lead to a stairwell, where C-137 Rick and Miami Morty lead the others upstairs to the brothel.

Meanwhile, Morty headed downstairs. Two floors down he began to hear the roar of gamblers. He opened the door that lead to a vast pool room. The large swimming pool had been emptied, and was now surrounded by shouting Ricks, waving money and placing bets. Around the edge of the room, almost fifty battered, gladiator Mortys knelt with electronic handcuffs bolted to the floor. And inside of the pool, blood ran along the grout between the tiles. A pair of Mortys fought, one throwing the other to the ground and punching his face until both knuckles and cheekbone were broken.

Morty fired at the ceiling above the pool, sending a shower of plaster and debris falling over the two battling Mortys. They stopped and turned, along with the rest of the room.

“What is this?!” a Rick shouted, stepping out of the crowd. He was thicker than the others, built up on fat and muscle, his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. “Who the URP-fuck are you?”

“What?” Morty called out, “You don’t recognize me, Good Boy?”

Good Boy Rick pulled off his sunglasses, eyes wide. “Evil Morty, my prized gladiator! I should have recognized you by your eyepatch, or maybe the stink of you being such a pussy, running away from here.”

“Always the charmer,” Morty said, smiling. “I have a bet for you. Beat me in the ring, and I’ll fight for you again. If you lose, I leave, and I take one of your gladiators with me.”

“You could beat every Rick in the room all at once, wearing a weaponized suit of armor,” Good Boy Rick said.

Morty pressed a concealed button on the armor and it pulled away from him, folding up into a metal backpack. He dropped the backpack to the floor and showed Good Boy Rick his bare hands. Aside from the blood on his face and the patch over his eye, he was a normal looking Morty. “Fair enough?”

Good Boy walked up to him. Morty expected his customary nose-to-nose grin, and was caught off when he grabbed Morty and threw him into the pit. He rolled to a stop and gasped, the wind knocked out of him. The two gladiators had already vacated the pool, and he stayed there, fighting for breath on his own. He felt the tremor as Good Boy Rick’s feet landed nearby, and felt every footstep as he approached. He was just catching his breath as a thick hand gripped his throat, lifting him to his knees. Rather than holding himself up, Morty dropped his weight, pulling up his legs and sending his heel crashing into Good Boy’s face. He felt and heard his nose break, and gasped for air as the fingers released him.
Good Boy Rick roared as he held his face. He swung his fist down, but Morty rolled out of the way in time before the fist shattered the tiles beneath it. Rick grabbed for Morty’s ankle but Morty got away, and they circled one another for a moment. Blood was bubbling and dripping from the Rick’s furious face. Morty’s side ached, although he was fairly sure that no ribs had broken. Rick came at him straight on, one arm reaching for his back pocket. Morty saw it and dove, tripping the Rick and knocking him to the ground. The crowd was cheering, but it sounded different now. Rick was cheering, but so were the gladiators! Beyond the cheers Morty heard a clatter. What Good Boy had been reaching for in his back pocket was a small knife, which had been knocked across the pool.

They both scrambled to their feet and ran for it. They dove in at the same time, Morty grabbing the knife just a second faster and turning. Good Boy Rick, still diving for it, ran himself straight into the blade. Morty shoved him away, onto his back, and pulled the knife out of his chest with a spray of blood. The Ricks above gasped as Morty grabbed the heavy Rick and lifted him up with all of his might, throwing him downward again until his head cracked against the tiles. There was more blood, and a last groan from Good Boy Rick before Morty lifted his head once more and broke his skull against the floor. There was more blood, and the room was silent.

Morty picked up the knife and stabbed it into the dead Rick’s wrist. He continued to stab and saw, the disgusted noises of the crowd not reaching his ears. Finally, he stood, carrying the severed hand with him. He crossed the pool and went up the steps, and pressed Good Boy Rick’s hand into the security scanner. It scanned his prints and chimed, and Morty pressed a button.

The electronic handcuffs holding all of the gladiators to the ground opened, and they slowly rose to their feet. They watched Morty, who didn’t speak. Chest still heaving with exhaustion, he raised his chin. A new roar broke out among the gladiators, a battle cry. They rushed for all of the gambling Ricks, the ones they’d seen night after night, paying to see them slaughter one another. They fought them with bare fists and raw rage. It took no more than six minutes for less than fifty gladiator Mortys to take down two hundred Ricks. At the end of it, they gathered around Morty. Morty #1679 spoke.

“I’m here for two reasons; firstly, to wipe out the Black Market. I’ve done that, and now I need volunteers for the second. You know I’m the last Morty who would ever want to admit that there are good Ricks out there. But the truth is, there are. I found the best one of them, and the Citadel took him away from me. Now I need your help to get him back.”

Zeta-7 Rick woke from the jangling of keys. He sat up straight from where he’d been sleeping on the floor of his cell, and looked up to see Agent Rick unlocking his cell. Zeta-7 rose to his feet and the Agent came to him, grabbing him by the front of his shirt.

“Y-Y-Y-You know about this! You had something to EUGH-do with it, didn’t you?”

“W-Wha? What are you talking about?”

“Don’t play dumb with me, seven. I’m talking about your little boyfriend!”

The look of shock on Zeta-7’s face must have been enough to dissuade the Agent from his previous conviction that Zeta-7 knew something. He cuffed Rick in the front, grabbing him by the shoulder and leading him out into the front office of the precinct. Half the cop Ricks and Mortys had stopped what they were doing, and watched the TV mounted to the wall.

Zeta-7 looked too, and watched from an overhead helicopter video as a mob of at least two hundred Mortys marched down the street. Some of them looked tougher than others, bloodied and tattooed, while others looked less so. But all of them were armed with guns or blasters, and carried anything
from bats to chains with them. One of them, with a green mohawk, revved a chainsaw above him.

And behind them walked a two-story tall mecha. The mech’s torso was that of a ‘Rick’ flying saucer, with cannons on each arm and long, armored legs.

“You know who’s steering that robot?” The agent growled in Zeta-7’s ear, “IT’S C-ONE-THIRTY-FUCKING-SEVEN!”

But Zeta’s attention was still on the TV. The copter turned and focused on the front of the mob, and there stood a Morty with an eyepatch. His Morty.

“Are y-y-y-y-you listening?” the Agent roared. “You broke the treaty!”

“He freed them,” Zeta-7 said, smiling.

“What?”

“Th-Those boys. The Mortys.” The Agent turned to the TV once more. Zeta-7 continued. “My Morty told me there were others that had been hurt too. I think they were involved in something terrible.”

The Agent’s voice wavered. “The Black Market...” And then he was darting around the other cops, pushing for the front doors. Zeta-7 Rick hurried after him, and they stood out on the top of the steps. The mob had arrived, and Morty #1679 stood at the front, only a few yards away from Zeta-7 Rick. Morty smiled up at him, and Rick smiled back.

There were two rows of armored riot police holding shields, protecting the precinct. And on either end of the building, police vehicles were parked with officers behind them, pointing their weapons at the crowd. Agent Rick ran inside and returned with a megaphone.

“Do not fire!” the Agent shouted through the megaphone. “I repeat, do not fire! Stand down!” The riot police hesitated, but backed off. Morty came forward and they let him through. He went up the steps.

“You did it, y-y-you fucking did it!” Agent Rick said, looking out at the crowd of Mortys.

“I told you I would,” Morty replied. “Now un cuff my Rick.”

“R-Right,” he replied, taking the cuffs off of Zeta-7.

Free, Rick wrapped Morty in a hug. “I th-thought I’d never see you again!”

“Me too, cutie.” Morty kissed him, ignoring the hoots and hollers from the gladiators below.

A police Morty stepped out of the precinct. “Agent Rick, the new council is on the phone. They want to talk to you right away.”

“Tell them to go fuck themselves,” the Agent said, turning to Morty. “I’m with you. Whatever you need.”

There was a field no more than half a mile from C-137 Rick and Morty’s apartment. Once used for carnivals, the field was now packed with white, refugee tents. The area was busy with Mortys who were once used for pleasure or battle, cooking at campfires or washing laundry in basins. Some chose to stay the way they’d been in captivity, their hair long and their clothes scanty, while others had returned to jeans and yellow shirts. However, the Mortys who had reverted to their old clothes
still bore scars on their bodies, tattoos, piercing holes they didn’t want, some with their fingernails missing.

The main tent had an open front, where a long line of Ricks stood and eagerly waited. J19-Zeta-7 stood behind a table at the front of the line, passing out digital tablets.

A nervous Rick at the front of the line asked Zeta-7, “Do y-y-y-you think my Morty’s here? He went… he’s been missing for eight months.”

“Just go ahead a-a-and fill out the form on the tablet, and we’ll see if he is.” Zeta-7 watched as the Rick did so, and the tablet screen turned green. “Congratulations!” Zeta-7 said happily. “Please wait over there.”

The nervous Rick made a ridiculous noise and reached over the table, pulling Zeta-7 Rick into an awkward embrace. “F-F-Fuckin’ thank you!”

“Hands off,” came a sharp voice. The Rick let go and backed away as Morty #1679 passed the line and went behind the table. He gave Rick a kiss on the cheek. “You tired?”

“A little.”

“Agent Rick is on his way to take the afternoon shift.”

The next Rick to step up to the table wore sunglasses and a pink suit.

“Don’t give him a form,” Morty said, stopping Zeta-7. He turned to the Rick. “You’re Miami Rick, aren’t you?”

The Rick pulled his sunglasses down, glancing over them. “How’d you know?”

Morty smirked. “Your Morty described you to a T. Go take a walk. You’ll probably find him tanning on the South end of the camp.”

Miami Rick grinned and turned away with a bounce in his step.

Soon after, Agent Rick arrived with a Morty in tow, approaching from afar. The boy had mechanical braces over his wrists and hands, correcting the hand-paralysis that had been inflicted on him in the black market. Morty recognized him as the one who had worn gold sequins.

Morty turned to Rick and quietly asked, “is that Morty requesting to find his old Rick?”

Rick took a moment to look at the Morty before answering. “Oh, D-904? N-No, not him. His Rick left him at- brought him to the Black Market to begin with, as a tip. I-I think he and Agent Rick are planning to stay together.”

Morty nodded. He was glad for both of them.

J19-Zeta-7 Rick and Morty #1679 stood on the front lawn, looking out at what was left of Rick’s house. It was a charred skeleton. The ashen remains of it were soggy from a recent rain.

They walked through the broken entryway, climbing over what was left of the door on the ground. Parts of the living room walls were intact. On one end, the wall still showed bits of the maps that Rick had collected over the years and used to wallpaper it. On the other wall, his book collection had toppled over, parts of burned bindings and pages scattered in the debris. The only part of the roof that wasn’t ash was that which had been over the kitchen. But it had since collapsed, crushing the
appliances and resting crookedly on the blackened ground.

The sliding glass door to the back yard had melted to the floor, and Rick stepped over it into the backyard. There was nothing to see but scorched earth. The garden had been torched. Morty could picture it, Citadel soldiers with flamethrowers, blasting fire in long sweeps. He could imagine the flowers wilting and catching fire, the tomatoes bursting and falling to the ground. Everything Zeta-7 had created was gone.

“I’m so sorry, Rick,” Morty said, walking over to him.

“I-It’s okay. I expected them to… t-t-to have done something.” Rick’s eyes were glassy and he wouldn’t meet Morty’s gaze.

“Rick, you don’t know how sorry I… I know this is my fault. They never would have done this if it hadn’t been for me.”

That was when Rick looked at him. “Hadn’t been for y-y-you what? Coming into my life? You know how things were for me. Without you I wouldn’t have… I-I-I wouldn’t have stuck around to appreciate any of this.” Rick wrapped his arms around Morty’s waist, forehead pressing to the other’s. “Y-Y-You saved my life, Morty. Nothing matters to me m-more than you do.”

Morty sighed. "I still want to make it up to you. What if we found a dimension somewhere and you built another anti-portal device? We could close up shop and never be bothered again.”

Rick looked surprised. “Oh no, Morty, we can’t do that. I don’t want to run away. Y-Y-You never know what the multiverse has in store for us. Don’t you think so?”

Morty didn’t really think so. The idea of living in a bubble with his Rick sounded perfectly acceptable, but he knew it wouldn’t be the best for them. He had to remember the terrarium. And so he nodded. “You’re right. But still, I’ll figure something out. Eventually I’ll get everything back.”

Rick gave him a crooked smile. “Well I do have insurance, you know. A-A-And I’ve made quite a lot of money selling my genetically modified vegetables. Wh-What about we take the money and buy a house where it’s safe, in C-137? We can live close enough for you to visit your grandfather.”

Morty huffed. “I don’t like that last part.”

Rick chuckled, resting his head on Morty’s shoulder. Morty ran his fingers through Rick’s hair as Rick continued. “I-I-It’ll be fun to decorate a new home. A-A-And we can build a greenhouse!” He looked at Morty again, and his previous sadness having faded away. “And once I plant a new garden, we can invite C-137 Rick and Morty over for barbecues! Think of it. Burgers with grilled vegetables a-a-and watermelon from the garden! We can invite Agent Rick and his Morty, too!”

Morty groaned. “Does C-137 Rick have to come?”

Zeta-7 smiled and nodded.

“Fine, but only because you insist.”

“Y-Y-You might come to like him, Morty. You certainly made a good team wh-when you rescued me.”

There was something sweet in the way Rick said it, which had Morty blushing. Rick leaned in to give him a kiss, and then took his hand. “Come on, Morty, l-let’s go.”
End.

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