Summary

New Years Eve flipped his world upside down, made him question his whole life, his sanity. Carl had been living in fear of his Godfather ever since, shaking everytime he entered the room, slowly chipping away at everything he was.

Then he met Coach Negan and everything started piecing back together.

Notes

To give everyone a fair warning this is a very dark fic. It contains the ongoing sexual abuse of a minor (Carl is 15 at the start) by Shane. I have tried not to make this too explicit however most scenes, particularly in the first chapters are very suggestive and partially explicit. It touches on suicidal thoughts and possible disordered eating.

The fic also features a possibly underage relationship, depending on where you live in the
world. Carl will be 17 at least and 18 for any serious smut if it occurs. It also includes a relationship between a coach and a student. So please do not read if any of this disturbs you. I also want to say that I do not condone any of the relationships within this fic in real life. These types of relationships are dangerous and any sexual attention from any teacher or person in a position of power is not normal nor is it romantic. It is however an interesting thing to explore within the safety of fiction.

On that note I'll be done with my rambles! I'd like to dedicate this fic to the lovely alison-wilson-101 on tumblr as it was her prompt that encouraged me to write this. Hope it lives up to your expectations lovely!

Comments and constructive criticism is welcome as always.
For auld lang syne, my dear

“One of the greatest tragedies in life is to lose your own sense of self and accept the version of you that is expected by everyone else.”

- K.L. Toth

New Year’s Eve 2015

“Lori…” Shane breathed out catching sight of the slender figure illuminated by the fridge light. It started at the voice and quickly spun to face him. Carl. Not Lori. He shook his head at the sight. Since when had they started to look so goddamn similar? He blinked, trying to focus himself when he realised that the figure was making noises at him.

“Shane? Shane? Dude, are you ok? Celebrated a bit too hard?” he said, voice light with laughter. Still grinning at his Godfather, Carl turned back to the fridge to reach for the snack that he’d crawled out of his bed for. There was nothing like a bit of peanut butter to sort out your midnight cravings. “Can’t believe you passed out before midnight! Maybe next year you’ll make it to 11:30 without five glasses of whisky.”

“Yea’ maybe.” Shane leaned against the door, hip sticking out from the frame, arms crossed over his chest. He contemplated the boy in front of the fridge. He looked so much like his Mom from behind, from the dark flowing hair down to that perfect, perky ass hidden under his pjs. Damn, the boy was gorgeous, got his looks right from his Mama. He couldn’t help but be drawn to the tempting pink tongue that was currently lapping at his finger to clear it, his brain helpfully supplied a delightful image of that tongue licking something else entirely.

“What are you staring at?” Carl interrupted his thoughts. “Want some?” He offered the jar to him.

Shane tilted his head and stood for a second contemplating the offer, it really had been too damn long since he’d had anything close to the pleasure he’d experienced that night with Lori. Maybe Carl took after his Mom in other areas too, his mind wickedly thought. “Maybe I will.” He bridged the gap between them, pushing closer to Carl than was necessary, invading his personal space. The boy didn’t seem too bothered though, he just gestured with the jar again looking up at him innocently through thick lashes. He ignored it, staring him in the eyes, Shane stroked a finger along a smooth porcelain cheek appreciating how those blue eyes widened in surprise. Those beautiful eyes. Sea-blue just like his Mom… “Lori” He whispered, pushing in close, before he captured the boy’s lips in a searing kiss.

Carl stood for a moment, in shock, unable to move as his mind fought to catch up with the moment. A satisfied moan vibrated against his lips, spurring him into action. He lashed out at Shane, hands moving to push him away, scratch at his face, anything to get him to away. He shouted protests against the lips still moving against his own. His actions got more frantic when a wet, slimy tongue slithered into his mouth. His mouth was dominating, unrelenting in its exploration of Carl’s mouth, Carl could taste the man’s whisky on his tongue. His stomach coiled at the bitter taste whilst his mind...
tried to keep up with the hands clawing at his body. One slid along his back, reaching down to grab a handful of his ass grinding their hips together. His stomach lurched when he realised the hardness he could feel was the man’s erection pressing unforgivingly against hip.

Ignoring the hands pushing at his shoulders, Shane pushed himself harder against the boy’s hips moaning at the feeling of a soft, warm body against his. This is what he needed. A good hard fuck. He had to get this thing out of his system, this disease that kept him in a constant state of agitation. His skin itched when she walked into a room, his anger licked at him like a fire in his veins at the mere sight of Lori with Rick. It’s what she needed too, he could feel it even as she pushed at him. She just didn’t want to give it up, she didn’t want to betray Rick. He got it. Releasing the plump lips in front of him he trailed wet kisses along the sharp jaw, unable to resist biting at the long neck. “Don’t worry baby I’m gonna make this so easy for you.”

“What - what do you mean? Shane - you’re drunk.” Carl pleaded “Please- please just stop for a second.” He pushed more at the hands still mauling his ass hard enough to leave bruises. Carl could feel tears fall, he’d never felt so scared, pain bit into him with each scratch of the man’s nails on his skin. He’d never seen Shane so out of control, almost animalistic in how he bit at Carl’s flesh, tearing at clothing to expose more of it to his hungry mouth. Carl wriggled harder, trying to escape the tight grip, all he managed to do was twist himself around to face away from the snarling face. Utensils clattered to the floor around them as his hand’s searched for something to help him, anything to stop the sweaty hands that slid against his flesh.

“Shane -no - stop!” Carl struggled harder against the bruising grip now on his hips, forcing him back harder onto the man’s hardness. He was repulsed by each desperate moan that fell from Shane’s mouth, getting more urgent the more he pushed against his ass.

“Shhh Lori shhh or Carl will hear.”

“What? Shane - no - it’s Carl. Please stop it’s just me.” Carl pleaded out as his squirmed in Shane’s hold. He tried to resist as Shane walked them forwards towards the island that dominated the center of the kitchen, but his bare feet just slid uselessly on the wooden floor. The edge dug painfully into his stomach as he was forced up against it.

“Stop struggling baby.” Shane gripped the back of Carl’s neck bending him over the counter. He stepped up to settle between the boy’s legs “You wanted this before. You fucking begged me for it” His stomach churned at the words, the smell of alcohol and sweat filling his nostrils. He could hardly breath, his lungs screamed for air that didn’t seem to exist in the moment. His chest constricted as it was forced harder onto the hard surface. A helpless desperation filled him, a petrifying fear inflaming every nerve in his body as he realised exactly what Shane was going to do. He struggled frantically against the bruising grip on the back of his neck, panicking all the more as Shane ground his still-covered cock against his ass. “Nononono….please…no…please…” His distressed begs fell on deaf ears, his mind echoed with the clinking of a belt, it spiralled into overload at the sound of a zipper lowering. Where were his parents? He pleaded and begged for one of them to come down the stairs, for them to sense he was in trouble. No one came. Just black spots appearing in his vision before an indescribable pain had him screaming into the hand now covering his mouth.

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The room was filled with the sound of hot panting, each one burned at the back of his neck where Shane’s heavy weigh still suffocated him. Carl felt the acidic burn of vomit creep up his throat at the sensation, he whimpered softly in pain as Shane finally withdrew his soft dick from his sore body. Still leaning over the boy, Shane raised a heavy hand and stroked it through the kid’s sweaty locks. “You are so goddamn perfect. Just like your mommy Carl.” He planted a falsely soft kiss on his
temple. “You should get back to bed before Rick notices you’re gone.” Wiping the sweat from his own brow, Shane stepped away from the boy. Not even bothering to redo his pants, the man stumbled away, crashing once into the wall knocking a photo which shattered onto the floor, before righting himself and heading upstairs.

Carl, still splayed, face down over the kitchen counter, dragged a trembling hand up to brace beside his face. He tried pushing himself up but couldn’t will his trembling muscles to work. Instead he found himself sliding down to the floor, gasping out in pain as his tender ass hit the solid ground. A cool breeze from a nearby open window had him shivering as it bit at his exposed flesh. He fruitlessly grabbed around his feet trying to find his pj bottoms, he couldn’t remember where they’d fallen. When had they left his feet? *Fumbling hands groped at the waistband before tearing them down pale thighs.* Carl squirmed, feet moving in all directions trying to get the man off him, trying to get him to just stop. *A sharp rap to the head disoriented him, he felt his legs being shoved apart as Shane steps in closer. He doesn’t remember feeling any material near his feet, he just remembered the rhythmic brushing of a hand against his ass. Another hand trailing from down his shoulder blades, lower and lower until -* Carl squeezed his eyes tight against the memory, breathing hard. He willed himself to get up.

He had to get himself upstairs. He needed to shower. Or sleep. He needed to not be here not in this room. His hand brushed soft material on the floor. His bottoms, he slipped them on and slowly stood, trying to cry out as pain flared through his body.

Gripping the banister tight he looked up the stairs, he wondered if he was safe going up there. He silently prayed that Shane had passed out in the spare room as he took a tentative step upstairs, ears searching for any noise. His body ached with each small movement. He tried to keep his tread light for fear of provoking another response from the monster lurking in one of the rooms. Carl flicked the light on in the bathroom, squinting as the fluorescent light filled the room. He quietly closed the door, locking it as quickly as possible, fumbling a few times as he tried to get the bolt to slip through the catch. When it was finally through he leaned against the door and for a few seconds he felt safe.

The scalding warmth of the shower was a relief to his aching limbs, the cascading water soothing each scratch and burning away the dirt he felt carved into his skin. He looked down and felt sickened at the trail of blood, mixed with something he really did not want to think about, that trickled down his inner thighs, all the way down his leg and into the drain. He wished he could follow it. He wished he could be swept away to float into the depths of water. He wanted to not exist. He wanted to be back in his own bed. Safe. Protected.

With a sharp inhale he focused on getting clean. He stopped thinking about the warm safety of his bedroom and concentrated on removing the sweat that still coated his body. He scraped the wash cloth all over himself, digging in deep in areas he knew Shane had touched. Infected, he thought to himself. He’d infected him with a sickness that no scrubbing would ever wash away. He felt vomit rise in his throat again as he started to clean between his legs. The soap easing the sharp sting he felt. He knew there would be bruises, he could feel them forming, on his ribs, the side of his legs. He saw crescent shaped dips on his hips where nails had dug in, a couple bleeding down to join the rest at the drain. He traced them lightly with his fingers, hissing when he put too much pressure on one. Mentally shaking himself he turned the water off and stepped out of the shower and into the steam filled bathroom. He grabbed a towel and began wiping the water off, carefully avoiding his new injuries but wanting to dry quickly. Wrapping the towel around himself he gathered his wrecked pj’s and approached the door. Shaking again, he leaned his ear against the door, holding his breath to listen out for any sounds of movement from outside. Upon hearing nothing but the familiar creaks of the old house he unbolted the door and stepped outside. Carl tiptoed from the bathroom, across the corridor and into his room.
His Godfather had helped him decorate the room. The same hands that had pinned him down only minutes ago had lifted him up to paint the top of the walls. The same voice that had told him what a “Good boy” he was and whispered his Mother’s name into his ear, had made him cry with laughter at his awful football jokes as they waited for the first coat to dry. He was just a kid then, only 8, he was still a kid now 7 years later. He still felt like that child that needed his mom to kiss his cuts and make him feel better but she wasn’t there. The time he truly needed her and she wasn’t there.

He made his way across the small room, the moonlight streaming through the open window being the only light. He grabbed some new pajamas from his drawers and tossed them onto the single bed that occupied a corner of the room. Dropping the towel, he stood for a moment. He could still feel each burning touch on his body. The shower hadn’t done anything to remove the stench of whisky that still suffocated his lungs. Turning, he threw his clothes on and slid under the covers, still wrinkled from where he had slept earlier. Before he’d woken up. Before he’d gone downstairs for a snack. Before...

He thought back to the words whispered in his ear not long ago. “Lori…” What did he mean? He had always sensed a closeness between Shane and his Mother but he never thought it crossed any boundaries. “You fucking begged me for it,” Carl was sickened to think his Mother would ever go near him. He knew his parents didn’t have the perfect marriage but he never thought his Mom would do anything hurt his Dad.

HE had called him Lori. When the drunk first stumbled across him in the kitchen he thought he was his Mother. He realised that with his long hair he looked a lot like his mother from the back but that couldn’t mean… no. His stomach knotted and rolled. He quickly shifted to the side, stomach trying to heave up whatever was left of his dinner. NO. He had to stop. He had to stop thinking. He had to stop thinking about that monster that was two doors down. Staying on his side he breathed deeply, trying to calm himself. He closed his eyes, hoping sleep would come quickly.

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New Year's Day 2016

He woke up to laughter, the familiar grumble of his father’s low chuckle contrasting with his mother’s light laugh. He felt a warmth spread inside at the noise. Throwing the covers off himself, he started his usual leap out of the bed but was soon stopped by the stabbing pain that overtook his body. He caught himself on his hands as he started to fall, crying out as he landed on his back. He quickly rolled over onto his stomach to ease the pressure, whimpering into the cover, he tried to breathe through it.

He’d forgotten.

It all came swarming back to him with each heaving breath.

Had that really happened?

His hand clenched beside his face, he felt an unexpected wash of anger surge through him. How are they laughing? How could they possibly be laughing with that man? Didn’t they know what he was? His Dad, the Sheriff, supposedly the best cop in town, couldn’t tell that his best friend, his ex-partner, was one of the monsters that he was supposed to catch. His Mom. “Lori baby...yes” echoed in his head. “You fucking begged for it.” Had she made this happen? Did she drive him to this? Too many questions spiraled around his head making him dizzy. He groaned as nausea rippled through him. Pushing his head further into the covers he tried to control himself. They didn't know. Maybe it was him, maybe he made it happen? He frantically searched his mind for some kind of explanation. He thought about every single move he made the day before, anything that would explain what had
happened.

Nothing turned up.

Had it happened?

A sharp knock on the door had him jumping in his skin. His stomach churned wondering who was at the door.

“Caaaarrl” He tensed even more when he recognised the drawl of his Godfather.

He couldn’t breathe, his mouth had dried up so that when he tried to talk all that came out was a small raspy “Wha- what?”

“Stop lazin’ around and get your ass out here. We’re all waitin’ for ya.” He shouted through the door.

“O-Ok I’m coming now.” He managed to blurt out, stumbling to his feet he cautiously approached the door. Reaching a shaking hand out he turned the doorknob and opened it. He was met with a sharp look from his Godfather who immediately took stepped towards him. Crowding him in against the door frame.

Carl felt a finger jab into his chest as he looked up into piercing eyes that seemed to go straight through him, he’d never seen such a dangerous look on his Godfather’s face. His usual softness had hardened it something unrecognisable. Was that even him? “Carl. Now I don’t need to tell you not to say anything about what happened last night, do I?”

He jabbed his finger again, heard the boy gasp out in pain. “Do I?” He repeated “I think your Daddy would be very upset to hear you spreadin’ lies about me. You don’t want to go and do that just when he and your mommy are finally sorting things out.”

Carl knew he had a point. His parents had been arguing so much since Mom had gotten a new job, they never seemed to be home together and when they were they fought like cats. Something had changed recently though, Lori seemed to be trying more with his Dad…the clogs in his mind slowly put things together, was she better because…

“Carl” Shane gritted out jabbing his finger out at the boney chest, it felt like he was stabbing right into his lungs. “Are you going to be a good boy and keep your mouth shut?”

“Yes” Carl rasped out in pain “I-I won’t tell them.”

“Good.” Shane relied. Ruffling his hair like he always did, he moved away from the boy and headed down the stairs “So get your ass down here.” he called over his shoulder.

Plastering a smile on his face, Carl followed the man down the stairs and into the waiting arms of his parents.

April 2016

Sixteen today.

Carl considered himself in the mirror. He knew he looked different, not older but more...worn. He’d lost weight, he’d always been on the slender side but now he could see his ribs poking out. All his clothes were too baggy now but he didn’t see the point in replacing them, it wasn’t like he had
anyone to impress. The bruises were too noticeable, too sharp a contrast on his pale skin, he trailed his fingers along to line of hickeys on his neck. Shane liked to see them. He liked knowing they were hidden under his shirts, he relished sinking his teeth into as much flesh as possible. He told him that he loved knowing that Carl was his. Carl winced as his nail caught a scab from his last visit with Shane. The man had delighted in scratching deep lines over his body, so much that many of them bled. He had scabs over his chest, a reminder of everything that he had to deal with.

“Come on birthday boy! I wanna have breakfast with you before I head to work.” His Dad shouted through the door on his way down the stairs. Sighing he went to his wardrobe to get dressed for the day. He had never really been into fashion but his choices had dwindled recently, he went for his usual choice of a plaid shirt over a plain tee. Choosing black for the undershirt as it would hide any blood should the scars tear open during the day. It had happened once before, at school, he had to make up a bullshit excuse that he’d been attacked by a cat before running out of the classroom. That incident had just helped to cement his outcast status.

Not that he’d ever been particularly popular but he’d had a small group of friends and he seemed relatively well liked in class. That had changed. Turns out if you stop making the effort to spend time with people then they stopped trying with you. He just didn’t see the point. He didn’t want to see them, he was sick of the same pointless conversations. All they cared about was TV or moaning about homework and classes. They didn’t see him. They didn’t see how everyday he was screaming inside for help. They didn’t notice how he’d changed, they didn’t see how he barely ate because every time he tried he had that damn voice whispering in his ear. They just saw that didn’t wasn’t around as much anymore or that he’d stopped talking. Slowly they stopped inviting him to parties and movies, then they stopped saying hi as they passed in the corridor and now they don’t even acknowledge his existence.

It was easier this way.

That's what he liked to believe anyways. Now it was his birthday and he had to go downstairs and pretend everything was normal. He had to pretend to his parents that he had friends to spend time with at school and that he was actually excited for the ‘special dinner’ that his mom had planned. He knew who would be there, his parents, Shane, along with some more of his dad’s work friends. He knew it wasn’t really about him. It was a chance for his Mom to show off her house to the wives, and for his Dad to relive his youth with his pals. It had nothing to do with his latest milestone.

Sighing again he grabbed his schoolbag from the floor, slung it over his shoulder and headed down the staircase. He found his family in the kitchen, Dad at the head of the table reading over the morning paper, and Mom at the oven. He could see she was making pancakes, his favorite, but she abruptly stopped when she heard him walk in. Racing over she enveloped him in a hug, not noticing how Carl tensed up at her touch.

“Happy Birthday honey!” She exclaimed in his ear “Come and sit! I’m making your favorite! Choc-chip pancakes!”

He faked a smile “Thanks Mom.” He walked over and sat in his usual spot. He liked sitting where he could look out of the window, he liked watching as the rain hit the glass, the noise soothing him.

“So, Carl, any plans at school? I know there’s the party this evening but are you gonna get up to anything after school with your friends?” His Mom asked over her shoulder as she flipped the latest pancake.

“Umm I think Enid and I are gonna hit the arcade for a bit. I’m not sure.”

“Oooo and how are things going with Enid? You ask her out yet?” His Dad teased. His Dad had
always thought something was going on between the two. He had kissed her once, in the woods, it was his first. They had never taken it any further, Carl just wasn’t interested in her in that way and she always seemed more interested in their friend Ron. Now? Well now they didn’t talk, and Carl just wanted to get through the day without anyone touching him.

“We’re just friends Dad. No plans for anything more.”

“Carl, she’s a nice girl. Why not give her a chance?” Rick tried again.

“I’ll...uh...I think about it.” Carl replied, getting frustrated with the constant pressure for him to date.

“Look, sorry Mom I’ve gotta go or I’ll be late for school.” Grabbing his bag again, he dashed out the door to the sound of his Mom’s protests.

Out in the crisp air he could finally breathe. It was early, he still had an hour before he had to get to school but he needed to be out of there. He figured if he started walking now he’d make it to first period. He usually got the bus for the long journey but he had time and the rain was starting to fade away into a light drizzle. Turning his head up towards the sky he enjoyed the refreshing sensation of droplets hitting his face. He hated the bus anyways. On a good day he got away with a few stares and whispered comments, on a bad day; it was worse.

There was no one around at this time of day, he relished in the silence of the neighbourhood. The road that was usually filled with kids playing or cars driving was dead. He was lucky to live here, or so he was told. His parents always told him that on days when he would complain that they were both at work too much. He hadn’t minded as much before, if they worked a lot then it meant he got so spend more time with Shane. It made him sick to think about how much he loved that. He used to look forward to those sleepovers where Shane would teach him the things Rick didn’t have time for. He gave him advice on girls, and allowed him to practice shooting his gun in the backyard. He let him stay up late and watch horror films. He comforted him when those horror films made him too scared to sleep. Those memories were all tainted now, he questioned every moment of them.

Everyday. Every night he analysed everything he could remember to try and piece together and explanation for what had happened but the pieces all just fell apart again and again.

He still gets sent to Shane’s. No matter how much he protests or pleads that ‘he’s old enough’ and that he can take care of himself, his parents just don’t listen. His Dad says it’s because he knows the kind of people that could hurt him and he feels happier knowing that Shane’s around to protect him.

‘If only he knew’ he thought to himself with a twisted amusement. Shane would certainly protect him from any monster if only so he could keep him for himself. Carl wondered how much truth there was to that. Shane had definitely succeeded in keeping Carl as close to him as possible. He came up with every excuse to come over and be around. He helped alienate Carl from his friends by taking up all his time, reminding him how worthless he was and how his friends didn’t truly care.

I suppose he ended up being right about that last bit. Enid had been the last of his friends to stick it out. Until Shane walked in on them watching TV and flipped out at her. He called her a slut and a whore, he told her she wasn’t good enough to be hanging around with Carl. After she had run out crying he had forced Carl to his knees and made him ‘beg’ for forgiveness. Carl remember he had forced himself so far down his throat that he could hardly talk that evening.

Lost in his thoughts he hadn’t noticed his arrival at the school As he looked up at the beaten building he took a deep breath. Maybe today wouldn’t be so bad. It’d be nice to have a quiet day on his birthday. Hell, he’d settle for no beatings. His hopes were dashed the second he stepped into the hallway, a crowd of jocks who were standing by the door threw something at him. Whatever it was hit the side of his face and trailed down to the floor.

“Hey! Get a fucking haircut princess!” one of them called out. He heard the group laughing like
hyenas at the insult.

He ignored it and stormed straight into the bathrooms to himself off. Breathing hard against the mirror he leaned his arms on the sink and willed himself not to cry. Today was Friday. He just had to get through today then he wouldn’t have to deal with these people for two whole days. His parents were supposed to be home all weekend so he might have a chance to relax. He might even have some time to do his homework that was more than overdue. Splashing his face with more cold water he gathered himself together for the 10th time that day and headed out to join the hordes of students heading to class.

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Stepping off the bus at the end of the day was one of his favorite feelings, he was finally free. It was now his time. He could do what he liked as long as he was home by dinner. He had to get home early today so he’d be ready when the guests arrived. He didn’t know exactly what he had to do to get ready for these guests. He didn’t want to change his clothes, he had nothing else to wear, but he’d been told by his mom to be there early and he still cared enough to try for her.

The bus stop was only a short walk away from his house and before he knew it he was walking up the familiar porch steps and walking into the spacious living room. His Mom and Dad would be at work for a couple more hours. He had some time. Scrambling up the stairs he changed into his sweats and hurried out the house again.

He ran. He ran until his legs hurt. Until he burned off enough of his anger and frustration that he wouldn’t say anything stupid that evening. It helped.

Arriving back at the house he could see his Dad’s patrol car on the drive, parked next to his Mom’s 4X4. Bracing himself for a lecture after his abrupt exit this morning, Carl entered the house to the sound of laughter in the living room.

He was there. Slouched in the corner of the couch, beer in hand, piercing eyes staring Carl as he entered the room. Carl could feel his gaze burning through him, he saw the man look him over, he didn’t want to think about the lustful look that was on his face. He turned his face away to look at his parents, his Dad was sat on the arm of the chair that his Mom occupied. They were clearly laughing at something Shane had said but they went quiet when he came in.

“Hey sweetie, did you have a good run?” Lori asked rising from the chair to pick the empty beer bottles that had gathered on the coffee table. She stroked him on the cheek as she walked past, frowning when she saw him lean away from her. “Are you ok?”

“Yeah Mom, I'm..uh… just sweaty from my run. Didn't want to get you all gross.”

“Now Carl you can't really say that to the woman who used to change your diapers” Shane inserted.

Carl’s face burned with humiliation as the room laughed, why couldn't he just leave him alone? “I'm gonna go shower.” He said as he practically ran up the stairs. He had to get away from the smug grin. He stripped quickly, tossing his dirty sweats into the wash basket, and stepped under the scalding spray. He hurriedly washed. Not wanting to be naked any longer than necessary, not with him around. He wrapped a fresh towel around himself and headed to the bedroom to change.

The dinner ended up being uneventful. Everyone got drunk except for him. His Dad allowed him one glass of wine which, embarrassingly, he spat back into the glass. It was vile, he couldn't understand why people would drink that for fun. The taste lingered in mouth even as he shoved the steak into it. Glenn, the husband of one of his mom's friends, had passed him some water and tried to
make him feel better by sharing the tale of his first alcoholic experience. He liked Glenn. The guy actually seemed to have an interest in his life, he was always asking about school and his running. He never appeared disappointed or uninterested in his answers.

Carl went up to bed long before any of them had left. He supposed this was what a Friday night looked like for married couples with children. Something to look forward to he guessed, if he even made it that far. He dressed for bed and sat at his desk. It was midnight, no longer his birthday, he felt tired but he knew there was no way he could sleep with that man in the house. His felt so on-edge, his ears twitched at every noise, every screeching laugh, every goodbye as people slowly left the house. He waited with baited breath to see if he could hear Shane's voice. Was he still here or had he left with the last lot? It wasn't uncommon for Shane to stay at the Grimes' especially if he had had too much to drink.

He heard feet on the stairs. He got up and moved closer to the door to try and figure out who was coming up. He heard his Mom giggle as feet stumbled down the hall.

“Niiight Shane!” She laughed out joined by his Dad's quick “G’night” then a door opened and closed. All was quiet for a moment. Filled with a sense of unease Carl stepped away from the door. Taking a couple of steps back he tried to calm himself, not daring to look away from the dark wood. He was frantically listening out for any signs of movement. Something that would tell him that he was safe, that Shane was too drunk to do anything and that he would be passing out in their spare room. The floorboard outside his door creaked. He held his breath. Hoping the next noise would be another step away.

He was wrong.

The doorknob rattled as it was turned from the other side. It seemed to take an eternity for the door to open, the moment stretching out as his pulse skyrocketed.

The door swung open to reveal the scruffy drunk man. He smiled at Carl, a sickeningly sweet one. "There's my boy, my sweet lil' birthday boy.” He stumbled forward closing the door behind him. “I missed you down there. It's not as fun without you.”

Every step Shane took forced Carl to take another back until he felt the hardness of his wardrobe behind him. Breathing harder he tried to prepare himself as the man drunkenly crept towards him.

"Where do you think you're going beautiful? Nowhere for you to run to. No one for you to run to. It's just you and me baby.” Shane raised an arm to push a piece of hair back from his face, trailing his hand further back to dig deeper into his hair.

"God I just love this hair” he twirled a strand around a finger watching, fascinated as it curled and moulded to the shape. “Nice and long just like your Mom's.” He shifted his gaze to look Carl in eye. He leaned in closer, nipping on an exposed earlobe he enjoyed the tremor it elicited from his boy. Whispering in his ear “I just love watching it bounce around when you ride my dick.”

Carl's stomach lurched, he desperately tried to keep down the acid that was slithering its way up his throat. He fought every instinct not to shout out as he was dragged by his hair over to the bed.

The next day he cut his hair.

The following evening Shane beat him so hard at the sight of the cropped hair that he couldn’t walk the next day.

Summer 2016
June arrived quickly. School ended much to his relief. He has the whole summer away from all the laughing jocks and shrill cheerleaders. He could get away from old friends who tried so hard to avoid his gaze. He didn't need to try, he could just exist.

He rolled over in his bed, languidly stretching on his back, he flicked his eyes over to check the time. 10:32. Later than he wanted to be in bed but it's not like he had anywhere to be. He had no plans. He vaguely heard his Mom pandering around the kitchen, he was surprised that she hadn't tried to wake him up. Recently she'd been more on at him to help around the house. She was getting frustrated at his 'lack of involvement in the family.' She was always trying to get him involved, they'd tried a movie night the other evening but it ended in a huge argument. He’d freaked out when his Dad had wrapped an arm around his shoulders, the sudden weight of flesh against the back of his neck throwing him back to that night. He couldn't cope with them. He couldn't deal with her trying too hard with him. Not when it was her fault it was happening. He looked like her. He could change his hair, could lose weight, and change his clothes but nothing would change how much he was like her. His nose and eyes were hers, so much of her personality was ingrained into him.

He started to notice little things they did the same way. They both crinkled their noses when they laughed, they chewed their lip when they were thinking, and they walked with the same stride. He never realised how much he'd taken after her. It might have made him happy before but now it just made him angry. He resented it.

Having washed and dressed he headed downstairs. His Mom was washing the dishes, singing along to the radio, she looked so happy.

“Morning Mom.” he murmured to her as he grabbed a bowl of cereal.

“Morning Baby. Did ya sleep well?” She asked, drying her hands on a towel.

“Yea…” he grabbed the orange juice from the fridge, drinking some straight from the carton, blatantly ignoring his Mother’s disdainful look.

“So, do you have any plans for the day?”

“Nah, I think I'm just gonna go for a run then hit the books. They gave us a load of summer reading this year.”

“Well as nice as that sounds I've made some other plans for you.”

He looked at her in shock. “What kind of plans?”

She sat opposite from where he'd seated himself at the table. “Your Dad and I have been talking and we thought it'd be a good idea for you to start learning how to drive.”

He was surprised to say the least, the last time he mentioned driving lessons his parents had given him a lecture on the importance of public transport and the safety of driving. His Dad said he'd seen too many accidents to let him on the road before he was ready.

“Are you serious?”

“Yeah, we think you're ready for it, and to be honest it'd be good for you to do something out of the house for a change.”

He ignored her last dig, he was too excited at the prospect of added independence. Just as he was about to reply the doorbell rang. His Mom jumped up. “That’ll be your instructor.” Looking over her shoulder as she headed to the door, “I think you'll be very happy with our choice.”
He followed her over, a feeling of dread settled in his stomach, coiling like a snake, making him slow his pace. He heard her greet whoever was at the door with a friendly “Hello!” Before she pulled the person into a tight hug. His eyes met predatory brown ones over his mother's shoulders.

Shane smirked at him “Hey there Carl, you ready to start driving?” He withdrew from the hug but Carl couldn't help but notice a hand linger on her hips.

He scowled at him in reply.

“Come on Carl, don't be so moody-” His Mom admonished him “-you might even have fun!”

“Yea’ Carl. Come on” Shane walked closer “let’s go have some fun.”

He saw the determined look on his Mother's face and realised there was no way out of this. He reluctantly grabbed his sneakers and joined them back at the door. Waving goodbye to Lori, Shane slung an possessive arm over Carl's shoulders and led him out to his car.

Almost immediately he felt suffocated in the car. His breathing became more erratic, body leaning as far away from Shane as he physically could given the small space.

“Now Carl, you gotta listen to everything I say here. If I tell you to do something you'll damn well do it. We clear?”

He nodded, refusing the look at the man. He focused on his hands on the wheel, they were turning white under the pressure.

“Ease up there boy.” Shane rubbed his hand on Carl’s knee, massaging softly. “You need to relax.”

Carl watched with a sickening fascination as the hand caressed up his knee and onto his thigh, curling around to lay heavily on his inner thigh. He could feel the sweaty heat from the hand through his jeans. He was glad he'd worn them instead of the shorts he'd considered. He couldn't handle the thought of that hand on his bare leg.

“Carl”

His voice snapped him back into focus.

“Let's do this. First you wanna check the mirror….”

The lesson went without a hitch. He even managed to forget who he was with. It was almost like before. He loved driving, not as relaxing as running but there was something to be said about watching the road just fall away in front of you

Just as he began to relax slightly he realized that they'd driven out of the cosy neighborhood and into the rural area of town. It was quiet, he realized they hadn't passed another car in a good ten minutes. He had no idea where they were, there were no street signs around just trees and fields.

Pointing to the left Shane spoke “Pull up over there.”

There was a small layby in on the side of the road. Slightly concealed from the road by thick trees, he probably wouldn't have noticed it had Shane not pointed it out to him. The car slowed to a stop, the air conditioning stopping, leaving them to sit in the stale heat of the summer.

He waited. Shane was looking over at him, he never really stopped looking at him. Carl had become as accustomed with his gaze as he was with breathing.
“Not bad for your first go Carl. We might make a driver out of you yet.” Shane reached out to run his fingers through the boy's hair. “I'm so glad you decided to grow this back out. It really fuckin' suits you.”

Like Carl had a choice on the matter. He could still remember the horrific lash of the belt on his bare body. It had taken him weeks to be able to move around properly after that. He'd learnt his lesson.

“It's a nice thing I'm doin' here Carl.” He paused “Teaching someone to drive is a big responsibility. Most people get paid for it and while I don't mind doin’ your parents a favor, I wouldn't mind if you wanted to show me a little more appreciation.”

Carl’s mind spiraled with the suggestion. He couldn't mean that? Not here. Anyone could drive past and see them. His heart pounded against his chest. He could run. Then what? Shane would catch him, he clearly knows this place. He knew there would be no one around.

Breathing faster he heard the clink of buckle followed by a zip that seemed to resonate through the entire car. He didn't want to look. He gazed resolutely at the wheel in front of him. He didn't have to look. He wouldn't.

“No need to be shy on me baby, I know how much you like it.” Shane cooed at him like he was some girl he picked up at a bar. Like someone who wanted this. Didn't he realise?

A hand gripped the back of his head and dragged him closer to the older man's lap. He was forced to look down at the large, red cock that stuck out of the man's jeans, already leaking at the head. Instinctively he tried to pull his head back but the hand held him firm, clenching down at the back of his neck.

“Now, now, Carl. Thank me for giving you such a great lesson today.”

Swallowing, Carl forced down the vomit that was threatening to seep out of him. He took a shaky breath and started to lower his head down.

Christmas 2016

He passed his test not long after his first lesson. His parents were surprised that he did it so quickly but they didn't know he had an extra motivation to pass. Every lesson ended like the first. Carl stopped waiting to be told to drive to the layby he just starting heading there after an hour. They invited Shane for dinner to celebrate and thank him. After, when his parents had gone to bed, Shane asked for another kind of thank you.

After all that effort he found his life didn't really change with his license. He still got the bus to school. He still ran every chance he got. Shane still found excuses to see him. Same old, same old. Autumn came and went. Halloween and Thanksgiving passed with the same traditions. The decorations came out of the closet and as usual Shane joined the family to help put up the decorations. His Mom sang carols whilst his Dad put up the decorations outside, and he, well he had to put up with Shane groping him whenever he had a chance. He could feel his gaze burning into him whenever climbed a ladder. He felt his body press up against him every time he leaned over to help him put up a light.

Carl took another shower after he left. Shane hadn't stayed. Hadn't done anything more than occasionally graze a hand along his back but he couldn't stand to have any part of him linger on his body. He scrubbed and scratched till he was raw. He could still feel it though. The heavy handprint on his back felt like a burn that would never heal.
He wanted to believe that Christmas Day would be different. He hoped that his parents might feel like a quiet Christmas with just the three of them. His hopes were dashed as Shane arrived first thing for church. Greeting the whole family with hugs and cheer it was clear to Carl that he'd already been drinking. His stomach sank lower as he was forced to sit between Shane and the edge of the pew. He couldn't move any further away and Shane kept pressing up against his side. A hand moved casually onto his knee, some might see it as a fatherly gesture but he knew it really meant a promise for things to come. He could feel sweat break out on his forehead as he was suffocated by the smell of Shane's bitter aftershave. He focused his eyes on the floor as he willed the pastor to finish. He needed air.

“Carl, are you gonna eat any of that or are you going to just keeping pushing it around?” his Dad questioned. Putting his own utensils down to wipe a pristine napkin around his face he continued “I thought we gotten over playing with your food.”

Carl looked up, he hadn't realised how little of his food he'd actually eaten, everyone was staring at him. Avoiding eye contact he muttered out a quick “sorry” and shoved a piece of turkey in his mouth.

“Carl…” His Dad sighed at him.

“Not now Rick.” Lori interrupted. She finished her glass of wine, not her first one Carl noted to himself.

Rick sighed yet again. Carl tensed. He was getting sick of all the sighing. All the words not being said. He was never good enough for them. Ever.

The remainder of dinner was painful. The adults drank their wine and discussed their day. Carl tried to eat whilst avoiding his Mom’s searching gaze. Had it always been like this?

He could hardly remember the last time they'd had a decent family dinner. It was probably last year…

He remembered the joy that filled the table. He'd been so excited to get a new Xbox for Christmas; his Mom had let him play it all afternoon. His Dad even joined his for a race. Then they'd eaten a turkey dinner that seemed to top all the previous years, but then he thought that every year. Shane had been there with his latest girlfriend, Andrea? He only vaguely remembered the dull blonde, he recalled that he'd been more annoyed that she'd kept Shane's attention away from him.

Stupid, stupid Carl.

He helped his Mom with the dishes after. His Dad went off with Shane to smoke cigars, as per their tradition. He fended off her constant questions. He didn't want her to know him. Not when she had never been honest with him. He'd figured it out. He knew his Mom had cheated on his dad. With Shane. He had pieced it together from Shane's words, it had kept him distracted whilst the man took from him again and again.

“Mom,” he interrupted another one of her questions. “I'm just gonna go up to bed. I'm super tired and I promised I'd help out at the church tomorrow.” It was a lie but he knew his Mom wouldn't question it.

Another concerned look from her. “OK Baby, see you in the morning.”

Avoiding the room where his Dad and Shane sat, he ran up the stairs and into his room. It was only 8. He flopped out onto his bed and buried his face into his cushion. He wanted to disappear into it.
He wanted to leave the darkness that swallowed him no matter where he went or what he did. The monster was always lurking, tainting his world and everything in it. He was *drowning* in it and no one could see. He was screaming and no one could hear.

*Click*

The sound of the door had him scrambling upright and back against the headboard. Breathing hard, he felt like a fly pinned on a web, forced to lie, paralysed, waiting for the big, bad spider to swallow him whole.

“Your Dad asked me to come up here and talk to ya.” Shane sauntered forward till he was beside the bed. “Apparently you've been acting all moody recently and they wanna know what's up.” He sat. “I told ‘em it's just the usual teen angst, not gettin’ laid enough ya know? Now *that* made your dad laugh.” Settling a firm hand on Carl's knee “Made me laugh too cos I *know* that's not true... Or have you been feelin’ left out baby?”

He shifted forward again crawling up to cover Carl's body with his own. He nudged Carl's lips with his own. Whispering over them “Don't worry I'll give you what you need.” He settled himself lower down between Carl's thighs. Lower than normal.

That night Carl had his first orgasm. He cried as the pleasure tore through him. Forced him to grab at Shane's slick shoulders as he tried to find something to tether him in the darkness.

Broken and crying he was left to curl up Shane finally exited the room.

Then, seven days later, he was cornered in his room again. A heavy weight straddled him as voice whispered in his ear “*Happy Anniversary Baby.*” Carl shivered as the familiar sound of a lowering zipper echoed in the room.

**April 2017**

Seventeen.

Would it ever end?

Could he make it to the end?
So ladies and gentlemen! The time has arrived to welcome Negan! I decided to make this chapter very Negan-centric to give you all a bit of backstory. The majority of the fic will be in Carl's POVs but every now and again we'll revisit the mind of our favourite bad boy.

Enjoy! All comments are welcomed.

Chapter warning: Slight violence.

"The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed."

- C.G. Jung

August 2017

He grunted as he dropped the last box in the middle of the floor. Wiping sweat from his brow he looked around at all the boxes that surrounded him. Who the fuck woulda thought he owned so much crap? Next time he moved he was chucking everything, and starting afresh. He could not go through this shit again.

His eyes caught on his trusted baseball bat, one of the first ones he owned. “Don't worry baby daddy's gon’ keep you around” He caressed the handle like the precious gem it was. Some might look at it and see an old, worn piece of wood but he saw the history. He saw the marks where he’d smashed it against a wall in frustration after losing a game as a teen, he could feel the indents of where his fingers had gripped the bat hard over the years, and there were the old blood marks from where he’d accidentally hit an old teammate. This bat had got him through the good and the bad, and now it had followed him to his newest home, Lawrenceville, Georgia. Boresville, in the middle of fucktown, he thought to himself, once again questioning his decision to leave Seattle. He knew it was the best thing but the thought of being stuck in this shit excuse for a town made his head hurt.

Rubbing his temples, he turned to head into the kitchen, he needed a drink after all that heavy lifting.

He found the box marked ‘booze and shit’ and dug out his favorite whisky and a glass. He settled into the corner of the couch not covered in boxes and relaxed into the plush cushions. He stroked a hand along the brown leather, another one of his prized possessions, he’d bought this nearly 10 years ago when he moved into his first house and it had done him well. He sipped at his drink, enjoying the sweet burn as it trickled down his throat. God this is what he had needed, all the stress from the
Looking around at his new home he had to admit that he’d gotten damn lucky with it. He managed to find a spacious cabin, hidden away in the woods, for a decent price. Selling his house in Seattle had left him with a more than generous budget for his move so he splashed out on the best cabin he could find. He wanted peace and his own space, he wanted to be away from the shitty suburbs where everyone knew your name and your damn business. A sanctuary from all the fucking bullshit that seemed to follow him around. The cabin was decorated with dark, wooden furnishings that fit perfectly with the forest setting. It even had a damn spiral staircase that dominated the living room. He’d bought it for the fireplace really, it was a grand, stone fireplace that would entertain him on the nights where TV would bring him no peace. He’d placed the couch right in front of it, his celebrated bat would hang over it once he put the fixing up. Another job for him to do before the weekend was over.

He'd left it a bit late to move. He was starting his new job on Monday, Coach for the local high school. A bit of a step down from college coach but it's what he needed.

Scoffing at the thought, he threw back the rest of the amber liquid and poured himself another one. Leaning his head back he stared at the ceiling, it was too high, how the fuck was he ever gonna clean up there? He shook his head. This must be small town livin’, nothing better to do than to clean, cook, and drink. With a sigh he stood, placing his glass on the small table in front of the couch, he made a start unpacking all the boxes.

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His first week hadn’t been too bad. He had to deal with all the damn schmoozing that came with any new job. The Principal had been too enthusiastic in introducing him to his new colleagues, apparently a college coach was considered a big deal in a town like this. He fuckin’ hated this shit but he did it. He smiled and charmed his way through the school, he flirted with the women, and talked sports with the guys. He was given the ‘grand tour’ of the school on his first day, he remembered most of it from when he came down for the interview but the Principal insisted on giving him ‘special treatment’, and it got him out of having to teach in the first few periods so he couldn’t really complain. Walking the dingy corridors gave him serious flashbacks to his own high school experience, not that he spent much time in the corridors, he was almost exclusively found under the bleachers smoking pot, or fucking whatever dumb blonde he fancied that week. Good times he thought to himself. He was knocked from his thoughts by a figure that barrelled around the corner and straight into his chest. He steadied himself and just about heard a muttered “Sorry” as the figure swerved around him and scurried down the corridor.

“Grimes! Watch where you’re going!” The Principal called after the kid “I’m so sorry about that. Kids these days! They just seem to have their heads in the clouds.”

Still watching the hunched figure in the distance he absently replied “No worries, you don’t get to be a coach without learning how to get knocked about a bit.” Just as he opened his mouth to ask more about the kid the other man moved on in the tour, and the conversation moved onto trophies and statistics. He forgot all about that small figure until the next afternoon.

He was out clearing up after football practice, none of the idiots had offered to stay and help so he had to spend his own time doing it. *Fuckin’ idiots* he thought to himself. It was definitely a change from his usual bunch of jocks who threw themselves at his feet for a *chance* to play on his team. But that’s what you get when you leave a top ten team and head out to the sticks. He was carrying the balls back to the cupboard when he saw him. He recognised the mop of hair on the boy’s head from the previous day, ‘Grimes,’ that's what the Principal had called him. He was running laps around the
track and damn that kid could run.

He'd never really paid much attention to track before, his focus had always been on football but as a sportsman he could always appreciate a good runner. The kid was fast. He didn't recalling seeing him at athletics practice yesterday and wondered why a runner like that wouldn't have been forced onto the team. He watched him for several minutes, the kid did lap after lap after lap and didn't seem to be slowing down. Good stamina too then, he was intrigued by the boy, wanted to know exactly why his ass wasn't out there winning the school trophies.

“Hey kid!” He shouted. There was no one else around so the kid slowed and looked his way. With a flick of his hand he gestured for the kid to come over, watching as he jogged towards him. Coming to a stop, the kid stood before him panting in exertion. “Need some water?” He asked him slightly concerned that the scrawny figure would collapse in a heap in the floor.

The boy shook his head. “No I'm good… thank you.” He panted between words. “Is there something wrong? Did you need the track or...?”

“No. No. I just - what's your name kid?” He asked.

“Carl.” Was all the response he got. Jesus, kids did not know how to have a conversation these days.

“Right, Caaarrrl.” He rolled the name out of his mouth like he was experimenting with it “Good name. Carl Grimes? I'm the one you bashed into yesterday. Coach Negan.”

Carl visibly flushed in front of him. “I'm sorry about that I just- I- um.” Carl went quiet for a moment “I just wasn't looking where I was going.” His eyes shifted to the floor.

Feeling bad at the guilty look on Carl's face he lightly tapped the boy’s shoulder. “Don't worry about it. I've had bigger men than you push past me. I'll live.” Jesting aside he hadn't failed to notice the flinch from the boy at the light tap. “You alright? Sore shoulder? I know I didn't hit ya that hard.”

Carl looked up at him sharply, was that fear on his face? “No- no I'm fine I- just. I've just been carrying loads of books around. Hurts my shoulder.” He responded. “Am I in trouble? I just need to get home soon it's getting late.”

“Riiight. No, you're not in trouble. I saw you running out there. You're good. I mean really damn good. Why aren't you on the team? I could do with someone like you out there. We might actually win something this year”

“Oh...um… thanks I.... I just like running. Team sports...they're not really my thing.” He eventually replied. Huh, this kid was something else. He couldn't remember a time he'd had someone turn him down. This was new.

“I thought trophies and attention was every teenagers thing.” He joked back at him.

The kid looked away, Negan thought he caught a flash of sadness on his face. Before he could add to him comment the kid met his gaze for the first time. He was taken aback by the determined look on his face.

“Look, I'm not interested OK? I run because I like it not because of some goddamn trophies.” Then he turned and ran away from him.

Negan could feel his mouth fall open. What a little shit! He choked out a laugh in disbelief, that kid had some fucking balls that's for sure. He could count on one hand the amount of people in the world that would have the guts to walk away from him, and now he could count on one finger the
amount of people that would run away from him. Grabbing the abandoned bag of balls from the ground he hoisted it over his shoulder and made his way to the store cupboard. Shaking his head, he thought about the boy all the way home.

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He kept seeing that damned kid. He literally ran laps around him as he attempted to sort out the dumbass football jocks. He didn't know what it was about him, but he kept drawing his attention like a moth to a flame. It'd been a week since they'd first met and he couldn't help but want to know more, or maybe it was just that he couldn't help but want to recruit the kid. Negan knew he was one for wanting the best and this kid was the best.

His eyes followed the boy as he walked from the field and into the locker room. Maybe he'd try having another chat with him if he was still around after he was done with these fuckwits.

Just as he blew the whistle for end of practice Carl walked out of the locker room and started across the field. Leaving the jocks to sort themselves out Negan jogged over to join the boy on his walk.

“Hey kid, that was some run today. New record for you?” Negan asked, trying his hardest to be as friendly as possible.

Carl gave him a weird look. “I have no idea. I don't really keep track.” Another short answer from the kid. Jesus.

“Riight...” Negan tried another tactic “So why do you run so much? Most students want to get the hell outta here after class not spend two hours running around the track field.”

Carl stopped and turned to face the coach. “Is there a reason you wanna know? If this is about me joining the track team again I can tell you know that it's not happening.”

“What?! Nooo.” Negan faked, the kid saw right fuckin' through him. “I was genuinely curious.”

Carl started to say something then faltered. He took a breath and looked Negan in the eye. “Why?”

Negan was taken aback by the kid’s searching gaze and the almost desperate way he asked him why. Negan struggled to find the answer. Hell, he didn't know why. He had convinced himself that it was because he wanted to recruit him but there was a part of him, a small part, that just wanted to know more about the guy. He didn't know why.

At the lack of reply Carl started to walk off again. Not wanting him to leave so quickly Negan grabbed the boy's arm, putting just enough pressure to stop him moving so quickly. Carl inhaled sharply at the gesture and immediately tried to move his arm away. Negan released him as soon as he saw the pained look on the face.

“Jesus you OK kid? I didn't mean to hurt you…”

“No, it's fine you didn't... I...um...hurt my arm on my locker earlier and it's still sore. You didn't hurt me.” Carl interrupted still rubbing at his arm.

“You want me to take a look at it?” Negan asked, concerned. “I'm no doctor but I know a thing or two about bruises.”

“NO!” Carl shouted out, Negan saw his eyes widen in shock at his own outburst, faltering slightly before speaking again. “Uh.... honestly it's fine. It's just a knock. Thank you though.”
“OK, if you're sure-?”

“Yes.” Carl quickly responded.

A stagnant pause filled the air. Neither knowing what to say. Negan sighed, realising the discussion wasn't going to go anywhere so gave the kid an out. “I'll let you get home then. Just take care of that arm alright?”

A curious look filled Carl's face. “Yeah...um...I will.” With an awkward wave he turned and walked away.

Negan watched him go.

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“Don't they ever help you clean up?” Carl asked the shocked Coach.

Negan was, once again, clearing up the shit left by the football team. He and Carl had exchanged a few conversations in the last week. Mostly Negan bugging Carl about his running and Carl fending him off with excuses. Negan had actually made the kid smile when he tried to bribe the kid into joining the team. What a brilliant smile it was. Maybe it was because he'd only ever seen the kid miserable but his smile seemed to make his whole face glow. Shut the fuck up he told his brain, he should not be thinking gooey shit like that, especially not about a student.

Negan looked up at him. “And get their hands dirty? I think the town would fall if that happened.” Carl's lips turned up at the sides, not a smile but enough to make Negan’s stomach flip at the sight.

“Do… do you want some help?” Carl tentatively asked.

Frowning Negan asked. “Seriously?”

“Seriously.” Was the response.

“You not afraid I'm gonna ask you to join the team again?"

Carl barked out a laugh, it sounded almost rusty, like he didn't do it often. “I'm sure you'll ask just as I'm sure I'll turn you down. Again.”

Negan chuckled, this kid knew how to keep surprising him. “Alright, could you gather up the cones in the floor? Just keep ‘em in a pile.”

They worked together, mostly in silence, Negan making remarks every now and again about how messy the jocks were and how ‘he didn't get paid enough for this shit.” Before long everything was cleared away and stored, ready for the next session.

Both panting lightly from the exertion they stood enjoying the cool fall breeze. Negan contemplated the kid. He'd never really had a chance to see him up close and relaxed. The boy was too skinny, anyone could see that. He could probably wrap his hand around his bicep without any trouble, heck he has wrapped his hand around that bicep. Even with all the baggy shirts Carl wore, every now and again he would catch a glimpse of a protruding bone when he was running. His eyes had dark circles under them, lack of sleep or lack of food? Judging by the lethargic pace the boy kept when he wasn't running he'd guess both. Not for the first time he wondered more about Carl. All he knew was that he liked to run and that he didn't like competing. Not much to go on.

Carl interrupted the peaceful silence. “I should get going. It's getting late.”
Negan checked his watch. Half five, shit he hadn't realised he had kept him so long. “Damn, sorry Carl I didn't realise it was so late. You gonna be ok getting back? Is there a bus that runs this late?”

“Umm no” He hurriedly added “but it's fine I normally walk home anyway. It's nicer.”

“Huh, never thought I'd hear a teen prefer fresh air and exercise. You are just full of surprises Carl Grimes”

He flashed a small smile at that comment. “Yeah. Anyways I'll...uh… see you around.”

“Yeah see ya kid.”

Once again Negan found himself watching him walk away.

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They fell into a kind of routine after that. Carl would run laps whilst he attempted to get the team into some sort of shape. Then Carl would head into the locker room to change before sitting on the bleachers until practice finished. Once the team had left the field they'd start clearing up together. As time passed they found conversation easier. Carl was actually a pretty sassy fuckin’ guy. He kept up with Negan and his, at times, crude comments. It didn't seem to bother him that his language bordered inappropriate nine times out of ten. Their conversations stuck on neutral ground, mostly them jokingly tearing the shit out of each other. Guy stuff. Nothing mushy.

He wanted to know more though. He still didn't know why the boy ran so damn much. It couldn't be for fitness or he'd be eating a helluva lot more. He still wasn't competing so why bother torturing yourself every day? Why did it bother him so much that he didn't know anything about him? The thoughts occupied his mind whilst they cleaned up that afternoon.

“Coach?” Carl's voice broke through his thoughts. “I think we're all done now.”

Looking around he realised the kid was right, the field was empty save the tall goalposts, the sunset shone through one of them making the pitch glow with a deep amber. Damn it was a beautiful.

“You know, that is why people live out here.” he pointed to the sunset. “You don't get that in the city.” he went to sit on the bleachers. It wasn't every day that you got to enjoy a view like this, and he needed to, sometimes he forgot that the world could be good and beautiful. Much to his surprise Carl perched next to him, not quite fully settling down, almost as if he wasn't sure if he wanted to commit to staying.

“So, where did you live before?” Carl asked, breaking the silence that had fallen between them.

Looking over at the boy, he leaned to rest his elbows on his thighs. “Seattle, up in Washington.”

“Bit of a distance from here. What made you move?” Carl settled himself more on the bench, Negan felt his shirt sleeve gently brush his bare arm. He skin tingled at the contact. Jesus how touch deprived was he? Getting all shaky over a damn shirt sleeve. He needed to get out, get hella drunk, then screw some girl in a bathroom. He shook his head, trying to focus himself back on the question.

“Uh…just need a change of pace. People left, things changed, and the city stopped bein’ fun when I had no chance to enjoy it.”

“Huh.” was Carl's only response his brow furrowing. Negan loved the simplicity that came with youth, nothing needed questioning, they just accepted whatever was thrown at him. Maybe resilience was a better word.
“So, you ever gonna answer my question?” Negan asked, looking over at the boy's face.

He saw it curl up in confusion.

“Why do you like running?” He clarified. The boy's mouth formed a slight O on recognition.

“Does it matter?”

“Yeah, it matters because I wanna know and I answered your question so it's only fair you answer mine. Quid pro quo and all that.”

“What?” Carl queried scrunching his face in confusion once again.

Shaking his head, fuckin' youths. “You need to watch better movies kid. Never mind for now. Just answer the question? You trying to impress a girl or something?”

“No,” Carl started, almost reluctantly he continued. “I just enjoy it. It's easy. You don't have to think about anything, you just run. One foot in front of the other. Nothing to screw up, no one to impress, and there's a freedom to it. I can go anywhere I want, all I have to do is put on my shoes and go. I can leave whenever, and no one will follow if I don't want them to. It’s… it's like coming up for air when you think you're gonna drown. It's something that's mine. No one can take it away from me.”

“Wow.” Negan stroked along his beard, tongue poked against his teeth as he contemplated what the boy had said. Damn deep for a 17-year-old. “Thanks for tellin me.”

“Did the answer live up to your expectation?” Carl joked at him.

“Damn, kid you always exceed my expectations.” Negan replied, a small warmth formed at the smile that appeared on the boy's face. Jesus, he was getting soft.

They both went quiet, enjoying the moment, and together they sat, side by side, watching the sun fade over the field.

As the sky darkened the temperature dropped and Negan felt Carl shiver next to him. As much as he was enjoying the peace he felt in the moment he didn't want the kid to get ill. “We should get you home. It's late and I'm not having you die of pneumonia because of me.”

Car looked over at him. Another curious expression covered his face, why was this kid so damn hard to read?

“Yeah, that'd be bad. Might ruin your evening.” Carl joked as he stood.

“Hey!” Negan stood moved so he was facing opposite the teen. “It would ruin more than my damn night. Don't even joke about that.”

Carl looked away, a flush filled his cheeks. “Sorry.” He said “I just forget…” Trailing off at the end, a small hand reached up to rub at the back of his neck.

Frowning Negan spoke “Forget what?”

“Nothing.” Carl replied “Doesn't matter. I'll... see you tomorrow. Same time.” He grabbed his bag and went off.

Negan chased after him. “Whoa, you don't get to make a comment like that and just walk off.”

“Can we not?” Carl kept moving as he spoke “It was a stupid thing to say. I'm sorry if it upset you.”
“Upset me? No. That's bullshit I want to know what you meant.”

Turning to face the Coach, Carl stopped moving “It was just a joke. Thank you though... for being bothered. It means a lot.”

His words struck Negan, left him frozen momentarily. Long enough for Carl to slip away, leaving Negan alone with his thoughts.

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He blew his whistle. “Alright you losers get your asses into the locker room and clean yourselves up. We'll practice more tomorrow. Same time.” He rolled his eyes at the grumbles from the boys. They'll learn to suck it up, bunch of pussies. Of course, no one stayed to clear up again. One of these days he was gonna make 'em clear all this shit up he thought as he bent to pick up an errant ball. He briefly wondered where Carl was, the guy was usually out of the locker room by now.

He shrugged to himself. Kid was probably takin’ his time jerkin’ it in the shower or somethin’. God knows he did enough of that at high school. He picked up some of the kit and began to take it inside.

Walking past the locker room he heard a loud thud followed by a painful moan. Frowning he dropped the bag he was carrying and pushed the door open. Noise filled his ears as he took a step inside, softly closing the door behind him.

“Look how fucking pathetic he is guys! Can't even stand his own against one of us. Maybe we should just put you out of your misery.” Another thud this time followed by a heart-breaking whimper.

He grabbed one of the baseball bats lying around before picking up his pace, he quickly found where the commotion was. Five of his players were surrounding a small heap on the floor, he quickly identified the heap as Carl, his little runner.

“Someone better explain what the ever-loving-fuck is going on here.” At the silence he roared “NOW!”

He saw them all looking at each other, panic filled their faces. Good he thought, they better be pissin’ in their fuckin’ pants right now. Lifting the bat, he pointed at one of them, the one that looked the closest to shitting himself. Nice and easy to break he thought to himself. He gave a quick glance down at Carl, the boy had unfurled himself but still remained on the floor. He was checking a cut on his leg. His anger intensified at the sight of blood against the pale skin.

“You wanna tell me what you and your little friends were doin’ here? Cos I sure as shit better hear a good reason why that kid’s on the floor, covered in blood”

“Uh...well...umm... sir-”

“Jesus fucking Christ.” he interjected “I want a reason not your fuckin life story. You.” he pointed the bat at one of the darker haired boys, Simon he thought his name was “Tell. Me. What. Happened.”

“We found him like this Coach, we were just trying to help him.”

“Sure it really fuckin looks like it. What did he fall on the floor and you accidentally kicked him?”

“I...”
The question was fuckin’ rhetorical. You must think I’m stupid as shit to believe something like that. I know what this is” He slowed walked in front of the guys. “This is you boys trying to pretend to be men. Frankly, it’s one of the most pathetic things I’ve ever seen.” He pointed at each of them in turn with the bat “Listen up boys and listen good, if I catch any of you even LOOK at Carl again I’m gonna take this bat and I’ll bash ALL of your heads in. Maybe then we’ll see if you’ve got any brains” There it was, the fear that spread over their faces was like a dream for him. Better than sex he was tempted to say. “Now get the fuck out of my sight and don’t bother coming back for practice tomorrow you’re all dropped.” He silenced their protests “What part of ‘get the FUCK out’ did you idiots not understand?!” They scurried from the room like rats, and Negan turned his attention back to Carl.

Kneeling down next to him he reached a tentative hand out to his shoulder. The boy flinched away. “Hey, hey it's OK it's just me.” he held his hands up as a surrender. “I’m not gonna hurt you here Carl I just need to take a look at you. I gotta make sure you're alright, OK?”

Carl sniffed then, after a long pause, nodded.

“OK, ok how about we get you off the floor and onto one of these benches? Can you stand?”

Another sniff “Yeah… I think so.”

Negan stood and offered a hand to the kid. Carl looked at his hand, then at his face, it was almost like he was examining him. Negan felt himself shiver at the questioning look and gestured again with his hand. “C’mon, just lemme help.”

Carl looked at the hand again but this time he tentatively reached his own out to meet it. Negan noticed the shake in the small grip but used it to help him stand just enough to move over to the bench.

“OK let’s take a look, where does it hurt?” Negan enquired, heading over to the locker he knew contained a first aid kit.

“Honestly I’m fine. I just need a band-aid for this cut and I’ll be alright.” Carl replied gesturing to his leg.

Negan stopped at the bench and looked at him in disbelief. “Do you honestly expect me to believe you were curling up in a ball there because of a cut?”

Clearly getting frustrated Carl snapped back “I don’t need you to believe anything. I just want the band-aid so I can go home.”

“C’mon Carl this is me you’re talking to, I know I've only known you a couple of weeks but I thought at least we were straight with one another.” No response. Inhaling deeply, he said “If you let me have a look at your ribs then I'll get you the band-aid.” Putting on his best ‘innocent’ face “I promise.”

Sensing the man wasn’t going to drop the matter Carl complied. He hiked up his shirt just enough for the man to see the bruises that scattered his torso.

“Jesus, those fuckers did that to you?” Negan exclaimed regretting it immediately when the boy dropped his shirt and flinched away from him “Shit, sorry kid I didn't mean to scare ya. I just can't believe they'd be so…” he couldn’t find the words. “is it ok if I...?” Negan let his sentence trail and used his hands to gesture at his ribs again.

Carl slowly raised his shirt again, eyes focused on the floor. Negan kneeled down before him, laying
the kit beside Carl on the bench, he reached his hands out and gently laid them on Carl's ribs. He could feel him trembling under his touch. Not wanting to upset him any longer than necessary he did a quick check over to make sure nothing was broken. He muttered a quick ‘Sorry’ when his touches caused the boy to flinch away.

“OK all seems good, could you just breathe in for me? Deep as ya can.” Carl did as he was told only letting out a small whimper as he reached capacity. “Alright, think they're just bruised you should be fine with some painkillers but you might wanna tell your parents so they can get a Dr to check you out.” Moving his hands away he was shocked to see a few angry looking bite marks just above the boy's hip bones. He frowned at the sight, and made to ask about them but Carl dropped his shirt and stood.

“Thanks Coach. I better be going now. I'll make sure to grab some aspirin when I get home.”

“Yeah, OK kid. You gonna be alright gettin’ home?”

“Mmm yeah I'll be fine.” He said as he dashed out the door. Not bothering to look back at the concerned Coach.

Negan sat back on the bench, resting his elbows on his knees, and stroking his beard as he considered what had happened. He supposed it wasn't too strange for a teen his age to have hickeys but those ones, they just didn't seem to have been left in the heat of passion. He rubbed his hand across his face. He was thinking too much into it. All that damn teacher training got too into his head. Barely three weeks in and he already needed a break.

Arriving back home he chuckled his bag down by the door, keys flew into the dish, and shoes settled somewhere on the living room floor. He strolled over to his mini bar and grabbed a bottle of whiskey. He was doing this far too much recently but god it helped.

He crouched down to light the fire. Basking in the heat that seeped through the air. He rolled his head to try and diffuse the tension that built in his shoulders. He ended up sat on the floor by the fire, his hand holding his glass perched on the top of a raised knee. He enjoyed the peaceful sounds of the fire crackling and the heat warming his feet. He thought again of the boy. It hadn't escaped his attention that some of the bruises he saw were old. He'd spent enough time getting bashed about as a quarterback in college. He knew his bruises. Some were weeks old. He wondered how long this had been going on for. How many times had those idiot jocks cornered him in the locker room and beat the crap outta him?

Pinching the bridge of his nose, kids were fucking brutal, if you were in the wrong side of them they could make your life hell. It would explain why the guy was so touchy around other people.

Fuckin assholes. He'd have to deal with those shitheads, no doubt they'd be complaining to mommy and daddy about getting cut. He wondered whether it was worth telling the Principal about this, would it help? He knew that it was rare for them to actually do anything but something told him that he needed to do something to help this kid. He just didn't know what.

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He didn’t see Carl the next day at school, or the rest of the week. He kept an eye out, hoping to see the familiar figure on the running tracks or even a glimpse of brown curls in the corridors. Nothing. Needless to say he was concerned. He even had another word with the idiots from before, just to make sure they hadn’t been poking around where they shouldn’t be. He was secretly pleased that he’d made such an impression on them that his mere presence was enough to have them cowering
like kids caught with candy. They’d all sworn Carl had been in class, that he’d been acting his usual self. “Freaky self” as one of the boys dared to put it, he made him regret it. Detention and extra laps for two weeks. Just what the boy needed. He couldn’t help but wonder if Carl was avoiding him. He couldn’t help but wonder why that thought bothered him so much. It wasn’t like the kid owed him anything, but Negan had gotten used to their afternoon routine.

He thought he was getting somewhere with Carl. He'd opened up to him on the field about his love of running, something that was clearly personal to him. They'd even joked around together, something that he didn't think Carl did very often. For him to clam up on him like that in the locker room felt like a step back. Maybe Carl thought Negan would think less of him because he was being bullied? For some reason that thought was intolerable to him. Surely Carl would know by now that he didn't give a shit what other people thought. Then again they had only been around one another for a couple of weeks. Something told him he'd only just scratched the surface with Carl.

He honestly wondered what the hell made Carl so hated in school. When he’d raised the issue it another teacher they just said that Carl brought it on himself because he didn’t “Play well” whatever that fuckin’ meant. Carl seemed like a decent guy to him, a bit short on his temper but nice, well-spoken. Just not deserving of beatings in the locker room.

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Subconsciously he started looking out for him everywhere he went, the corridors in the morning, the track field, he even kept an out when he was in the staff room. Late one night, and only after several shots of whisky, he realised that he cared for him. The boy had crept into his thoughts and made himself at home there. He brought out a fierce protectiveness in him that he didn’t even think himself capable of. Downing another shot, he promised himself that he’d always be there to look out for the boy.
Hope

Chapter Notes

annnd we're back on Carl. Time for his perception of their first meeting. If all goes to plan updates will come every Tuesday and Saturday.

"Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out."

- Vaclav Havel

August 2017

He'd at least made it to the new school year. Another summer filled with his parents, Shane, and more dread about the upcoming term. His final year. What should be a year filled with making final memories with his friends and planning for college will probably be spent the same as last. Getting hit in the locker room, pushed in the corridors, and dealing with the ever-increasing glare of disapproval from his teachers.

As if he cared what they thought.

Sure, he was thinking about college, he just wanted to get away from this damned place, from Shane and his groping hands, and from his parent's obvious disappointment. He had no idea where he'd even apply to. His grades, although decent, were nowhere near what was required for the Ivy League. He had to deal with the gut wrenching realisation that his dream of going to Yale would never come about. He'd cried into his pillow that night, so hard he thought his parents were sure to run in. They didn't. It was another thing that Shane had ruined for him. He just didn't have it in him to study hard anymore. What was once a beloved pastime had become a hell for him. He couldn't focus. All the words just blurred into one, growing more and more indistinguishable as he tried to focus. More than once he was left pulling his hair in distress as he tried to finish homework that was due the next morning. Most of the time he managed to scrape together just enough to pass but it was becoming more frequent for him to spend time in detention for failing to hand work in. Not that he minded of course, it kept him away from home. The only downside was that he couldn't go for his after school runs on the field.

He promised himself that he'd try harder this year so he could spend more time out there doing what he loved. Maybe it wasn’t all over for him, maybe he could get away, if he got his grades up this year then he could go to a decent college and start over. Something had to change or he was gonna snap, shatter into a thousand pieces like he’d been so longing to do since that first night.
As he got ready for his first day back, his mind whirled with possibilities for the day. Maybe he should try more, maybe it wasn’t too late to try and repair lost friendships. He snorted as he grabbed his backpack, he didn't want them back. Any sort of longing for their friendship ended when they turned their backs on him. He just needed to finish the year then he'd be gone. He could float away from this place and finally free himself from the chains he was in.

Rushing out the door he didn't even bother to say goodbye to his Mom who was sat watching TV in the lounge. They hadn't spoken much recently. They'd gotten into a big argument this summer over Shane. She'd wanted him to go over and help his Godfather redecorate. He wanted to stay as far away from that monster as possible. She kept pushing and pushing. Eventually he blurted out a skewed insinuation about her true relationship with Shane. She looked at him with pure shock, fumbled for more information from him. He then stormed out of the house to the sound of her trying to call his name.

She’d tried to speak to him again later but he didn't want to hear it. He only spoke to her now if his Dad was around and even then it was only one word responses. After several weeks of this, his Mom stopped trying and they spent their days in a silence with one another. He could see the misery on her face whenever he entered a room, a brief expression of hope would form but would be quickly dashed when he once again ignored her. Good, he thought to himself, it gave him a sick sense of justice to know that she was unhappy. That maybe, for a single moment, she felt an ounce of the pain and despair that he felt every minute of every day.

Arriving at school for the first day back was like walking into a hive of bees. He was surrounded by people squealing and hugging each other, the corridor was filled with conversation, of friends reuniting after weeks of being apart. Carl couldn’t stand it. He had to fight his way through the crowds to his locker where he picked up his books for first period. Keeping his head down, shoulders slumped, he tried to make himself as indistinct as possible as he headed to the classroom. As he was walking a hand appeared out of nowhere and slammed down on his books, forcing them to the floor. The hallway erupted into laughter, Carl could feel himself flush as his knees hit the floor, desperately trying to pick up all his books so he could leave.

“Watch yourself Grimes.” A voice whispered into his ear. Flinching away, he finally grasped the last book and walked off as quickly as he could. The laughs echoed in his ears as he turned a corner and went slam into something warm and solid. Another flush filled his face when he felt gentle hands on his arms keeping him upright. He blurted out a quick ‘Sorry’, twisted out of the hold and raced away down the corridor. He vaguely heard his name being called behind him but he ignored it and pushed through the rest of the crowds until he reached the classroom. Finding a spot at the back he briefly wondered who it was he had crashed into.

He was left alone for the most part that afternoon, he couldn’t face lunch in the canteen so he chucked his packed lunch away and sat in the library. He actually made time to visit the school guidance counselor so he could book an appointment to discuss colleges. It wasn’t something he was looking forward to but he was gonna need all the help he could get if he was ever going to leave this town.

He didn’t go running that evening, for the first time in awhile he wanted to study. Excitement had passed through him as he looked through the college brochures that he’d picked up in the office. He considered the smiling students looking up at him through the pages, he tried to imagine himself as one of them. Tried to imagine getting up in the morning to spend time in classes he enjoyed with people that liked spending time with him. He couldn’t picture it, but he could try. Hope told him that maybe it would be different away from this place, maybe he could be the guy that he once was. So he sat down that afternoon, at his desk, and worked on his first essay of the term.
The following school day passed uneventfully, he went to class, was pushed into several lockers, and picked at his lunch alone in a corner of the bustling canteen. No homework was given that day, the teachers must have been in a good mood or something, so it left him with ample free time that afternoon. As the bell rang, ending his final class, he got up and headed towards the locker room. He had about ten minutes to change before the football players would arrive to get ready for practice, enough time for him to slip into some gym shorts and sneakers. Making the familiar walk to the track he felt himself grow lighter with each step. Finally, he thought to himself when he reached the start line. As he took off running he failed to notice the hazel eyes following him on the field.

Time flew by as he ran his way around the track over and over again. He relished the time where he didn’t have to think, all he had to do was breathe and run. The world simply fell away. He hardly noticed when the football team left the field he just kept his pace and enjoyed the silence that had fallen over the pitch. It was just him and the grass, or so he thought until he heard a voice yell at him across the field. Turning his head, he saw a large figure gesture at him to come closer. Mentally groaning he slowed his pace to a jog and moved towards it, why couldn’t he just be left alone? More importantly who on earth was this guy and why did he want to speak with him?

His questions were quickly answered. Coach Negan, he vaguely remembered hearing something about the old Coach retiring, about time really, he hadn’t won the school any trophies for as long as Carl had been there. His mind flickered back to the previous day when he’d all but mowed down the man in the corridor. Guilt filled his body as he thought back to how he had just left without making sure the guy was alright.

He apologised profusely to the Coach when he finally made it over to him, hoping that he hadn’t made another enemy in the school. Not expecting the man to touch him he winced in pain as his hand made contact with one of the many bruises left by Shane.

He was surprised when the conversation turned to his running. He could hardly believe that the Coach was actually asking him to join the track team. He looked around quickly, wondering if the football team were about to jump out and laugh at him for daring to believe that the man thought he had talent. That didn’t happen and he was left to make excuses for not joining the team.

“I thought trophies and attention were every teenager’s thing?” The man had said.

Carl looked away from the Coach. Yet another reminder that he wasn’t like the others. He was an abnormality, a freak, singled out from the rest of the herd. Anger quickly replaced the sorrow he felt and he snapped at the Coach who the fuck was this guy? Who was he to ruin the bit of happiness that he’d felt after his run? Not wanting to be around him any longer, he turned and ran from him.

He didn’t stop until he was back in the locker room. Quickly changing back into his normal clothes, Carl started the long walk home thankful when he saw the Coach had left the pitch. Anger filled him the more he thought about the Coach’s comments. Another person who wanted him to be something he wasn’t, who wanted more from him than he was willing to give. Sure, he’d felt a small amount of warmth at the compliment the Coach had thrown at him but he didn’t want another obligation. He shouldn’t have shouted at him though. He was just doing his job, he needed good students on his teams so he could look good and win shit. It wasn’t his fault that Carl was incapable of seeing the good in anyone anymore. Just another person to add to the list of people that he’d pissed off.

Sighing Carl grabbed his keys from his bag, unlocked the door, and entered his house. The thud from his bag echoed in the room, overpowering the noise emanating from the television. Shane was sat there on his Dad’s favorite chair, beer in hand, watching some football game. His ears listened out for any noise in the house to suggest that he might not be alone with the man, eyes not quite willing
to lose sight of the monster seated in front of him.

His body trembled when predatory brown eyes landed on his, breathing quicked they dragged up and down Carl’s body. He felt naked already, he wanted to curl his arms over himself, hide away so he’d stop looking at him.

Shane put the bottle of beer down on the small table next to him, switching his attention fully on Carl. “How was school?”

The casual tone of his voice made Carl sick, as if he cared how school was, as if he was there for anything but the twisted acts that he would inevitably force on Carl. He hated this shitty pretence of caring, it was so much easier to hate him when he behaved like the monster Carl knew was lurking around.

“Caaarl?” Shane snapped his fingers. “It’s rude not to answer, need me to give you another lesson on respecting your elders?”

His face burned crimson as his mind remembered the humiliating spanking that the man had given him last time he’d dared to mouth off to him. It was worse than any beatings that he’d given him with his belt. He’d forced him over his lap like a fucking child, his knees as hard and unforgiving against his stomach as the hand was on his bare ass. He didn’t stop until Carl begged him to, nearly choking on his own tears as the pain became too much. Shane seemed to take a greater pleasure when he fucked him afterwards, slapping his hand down on Carl’s burning ass over and over as he took him hard. He never wanted to experience that again so he spoke up, voice trembling as fear struck at his heart. “Nono, I’m sorry.” He tried to act contrite, hopeful that Shane wouldn’t feel the urge to do anything. “I…was just…I wasn’t expecting you to be here.”

“Your parents decided to go out this afternoon, asked me to keep an eye on you. Make sure you don’t get up to anything you shouldn’t.”

His heart sunk with the knowledge that his parents weren’t around, nothing there to stop Shane from doing whatever he wanted. “Oh.” Was all he could say in response. Awkwardly standing there, he knew Shane would only chase him down if he left the room, it’d be worse for him if he walked away but there was no way in hell that he was going to move in closer.

Shane’s head tilted to the side, eyes continuing their pervasive investigation of his body. “C’mere.” He cocked two fingers, gesturing him closer.

Carl’s feet dragged as he did as he was told, stepping forward another few inches until he was an arm’s distance away from the man. He didn’t want to get any closer, he wanted to run, he urged himself to run. Hair-tearing frustration overwhelmed him when his body wouldn’t comply, it never did, it never fucking listened to him. Useless piece of shit.

“Take off your clothes.” Shane commanded, slouching back in the chair, getting comfy before the show.

The soft cotton felt like concrete as he dragged it over his head, mind protesting each of his movements. He shivered as the cold air in the room hit his bare chest. His hands were shaking too much, he fumbled at his belt, growing more frustrated when the hard leather wouldn’t budge. A loud ‘tut’ filled his ears before he was yanked forward the buckle, he stumbled before collecting himself. Watching as Shane’s large hands quickly unbuckled it, he flinched at the sound of it whipping through the loops, an all too familiar sound that usually came from Shane.

His almost ran when those hands turned to the fastening of his jeans. “Thought we were past the
state of me having to take your clothes off Carl, you’re a bit too old now to need the help.”

He wanted to cry. He wanted to run. He wanted to stop feeling those calloused hands brushing over his body as he stripped him of the rest of his clothes.

Shane sat back when he was finally naked, eyes once again resuming their causal perusal of his body. He knew better than to try and cover himself up, so he curled his hands into fists and dug his nails into his palm, focusing on the pain rather than the burning gaze scorching at him.

After a few more excruciating moments of this humiliation, Shane patted his knee. “C’mon, come sit on Daddy’s lap.”

Carl nearly threw up then and there at his words, not the first time Shane had forced him to play the dutiful son. It was a common occurrence now for Shane to force Carl to call him ‘Daddy’ he seemed to relish in the perverted takeover of his best friend’s role. He did as told, letting the man position him as he wanted, straddling him so he sat flush against his body. He allowed his mind to float away the second those hands started caressing his body, getting lost in thoughts of running again, feeling the breeze on his skin instead of sweaty palms.

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He went to the track every day. Carl thought that he might be able to convince his body to start acting as it should. It felt like running was the only time he had actual control over himself, he could push harder, go faster, slow down. He made the decisions. Deep down he hoped one-day running would become so ingrained in his system that he’d have the courage to run from Shane. It was the only time he could breath.

The Coach hadn’t tried to speak with him since their last conversation but every now and again their eyes would catch on one another as he made his laps. Carl knew he was watching him, it made him want to show off, to prove to him that he was just as good as anyone else. Having finished another run, he went to the locker room to change. He hurried as he heard the whistle blow to end practice, he did not want to be stuck in there when all the jocks came in.

He didn’t expect to be joined by the Coach on his walk across the field. He most certainly didn’t expect him to start on at him to join the team again.

“Hey kid, that was some run today. New record for you? He was asked.

Since when did the man keep such a close eye on him? It was almost unsettling to think that he was watching him so much. “I have no idea. I don't really keep track.” Carl wasn't lying. He never bothered timing himself, what was the point?

“Riiight. So why do you run so much? Most students want to get the hell outta here after class not spend two hours running around the track field.”

Irritated, Carl stopped moving and turned to face him. He was getting annoyed with this guy's constant interrogations. “Is there a reason you wanna know? If this is about me joining the track team I can tell you that it's not happening.”

“What? Nooo.” The older man replied, “I was genuinely curious.”

Carl looked him in the eye, why did it bother him so much that he wanted to know about him? He tried to search him for any sign of mockery but found nothing but a questioning gaze. He was tired. He was tired of people faking concern and trying to get him to do things he didn't want to do. He
didn't understand why, so he asked.

He could tell he had surprised the man. He saw the confused look form on his face. Seconds passed. He scoffed to himself, he knew it, Negan was just like the rest of them. Wanting something he didn't have the right to take. So, he walked away. He was stopped by a sharp pain shooting up his arm caused by a large hand wrapping around his bicep. Instinctively, he tugged his arm away, briefly surprised that he was able to do so.

“Jesus, you okay kid? I didn't mean to hurt you…”

Carl was touched by the concern the seeped through that sentence. Once again, he found himself having to lie to the man about his injuries. What had he said last time? He was losing track of them all. “No it's fine you didn't… I… um…” C’mon Carl think of something you idiot “Hurt my arm on my locker earlier and it's still sore.” Feeling bad at the guilty look on Negan's face he added “You didn't hurt me.”

“You want me to take a look at it? I'm no doctor but I know a thing or two about bruises.”

Panic shot through him causing him to shout out a quick “NO!” Shit, should not have done that. The last thing he needed was more questions. “Uh… honestly it's fine. It's just a knock. Thank you though.” Remember your manners Carl he thought to himself.

“OK if you're sure-?”

“Yes.” Yes, yes I'm sure I don't want you to see exactly what my Godfather does to me when people aren't around, he mentally added.

More silence. Carl looked around wondering if it'd be alright to just leave.

“I'll let you get home then. Just take care of that arm alright?” Negan said.

Carl didn't understand the other man. Why did he care? Realising he should probably answer he said “Yeah… um… I will.” He lifted a hand to wave at him and walked away.

He didn't stop thinking about the Coach the entire way home.

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He couldn't recall the last time he'd actually spoken with the school counsellor. He hadn't really felt the need to talk with them, they couldn't help him, not with Shane, but he knew that if he wanted to go to college he needed some advice. With his previous dream of going to Yale dashed he had no idea where else to even consider applying. So, there he sat in one of the uncomfortable plastic chairs waiting to be called in. He glanced up as another student left the office, his eyes followed them out of the door he couldn't help but wonder why they were there. Stress? College? Something else? He often wondered if there was anyone out there like him, anyone that might understand what he was going through.

His musings were interrupted by a gentle voice calling his name. He looked up to see the Counselor smile and wave for him to come in. Gathering his bag, he went into the small, brightly colored office.

“Please Carl, take a seat.” She gestured to one of the chairs that faced her desk. He sank into one and sat for a moment. Not quite sure where to even begin. It was stiflingly hot in the office, he could hardly breathe through the heat that spread her damn sickeningly, sweet perfume through the room.

“So Carl...” she began, rustling through some papers on her desk “I can see we've never met before,
which is quite unusual for my students.”

Carl rubbed the back of his neck, he felt awkward, he knew he should have made more of an effort to see her at least once a year. He just didn't have it in him to face the reality that his grades were not what they once were. It was bad enough dealing with his parent’s lectures, he wasn’t sure if he could handle it at school as well.

“Yeah… I'm sorry about that. I just-”

“Carl.” she interrupted “I think I know what happened.”

He looked up at her, shocked. Did she know? Maybe as a counsellor she had a hidden instinct. He heart raced at the idea that she could see through him.

Looking down at his transcripts she continued “You became lazy didn't you? I've heard about you from most of your teachers. You don't talk in class, even when you're called upon you only answer as briefly as possible.”

Carl felt his cheeks heat up. He didn't realise that his teachers would be talking about him behind his back. “I-uh- it wasn't laziness. I just had trouble concentrating.” he tried to defend himself.

“Well whatever it is you need to sort this out. Are you looking at college?”

“Yeah...” he replied tentatively

“Carl, I’m going to be honest with you, at this point I’m not sure if you’re committed enough to go to college. Your grades have slipped dramatically these last couple of years. I’m amazed that you’ve even kept a 3.0 GPA considering all the time you’ve spent in detention. Combining that with your lack of extracurricular activities, it makes it very difficult for me to recommend you for a college.”

Carl looked down, first clenching as embarrassment took over him.

“Look it's not all over. You managed to do surprisingly well on your SATs. That'll make you look attractive for some colleges, if you can sort out your grades this term then there’s a chance you might have a shot at some good colleges.” she said.

He abruptly stood up, he didn't want to be in this room anymore. This was such a mistake. “Thanks for the advice. I'll-uh think on it.” he spoke over his shoulder as he left the office.

He rushed through the corridors and into the locker room. Changing as quickly as possible and ran out onto the track, wanting to forget the last hour.

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Leaving the locker room two hours later he spotted the Coach out on the field, once again picking up all the crap. Carl felt bad for the him, he wondered if he’d known how bad the team was when he agreed to take them on, or if he'd been blindsided by it. He checked the time 4pm, it was still early, he wasn't quite ready to head home yet. Not with thoughts of college still bouncing around his head. Deciding to throw caution to the wind he approached the man still on his knees gathering balls.

“Don't they ever help you clean up?” He asked the Coach, noting the small glimpse of surprise cross his face as he turned it up towards him. He could feel his lips twitch up at the man’s reply, that had been happening a lot around him. It was refreshing for someone to be so blunt with him. He could use that kind of distraction right now.
He saw brows scrunch together in confusion. Followed by a quick “Seriously?”

“Seriously.” he affirmed.

“You not afraid I'm gonna ask you to join the team again?”

Carl felt a laugh erupt out of him. Internally he cringed at how raspy it sounded, then again it had been awhile since anyone or anything provoked that response from him. “I'm sure you'll ask just as I'm sure I'll turn you down. Again.” He teased.

Negan’s laugh had sent another wave of warmth through him. “Alright, could you gather up the cones on the floor? Just keep ‘em in a pile”

Carl nodded and started on his task. He couldn’t help but notice how well he and the Coach worked together. They flowed around each other, passing bags, and swapping places with an effortless ease. He listened to Negan's rants, laughing inside whenever Negan insulted a particular jock that he hated. Carl was actually disappointed to see that they’d finished. They stood together looking over the field until Carl realised with a jolt that it was late. The sun was setting and he still had an hour long walk home.

He spoke up “I should get going. It's getting late.”

Carl observed as Negan checked his watch, saw how his eyes widened when he saw the time. “Damn, sorry Carl I didn't realise it was so late. You gonna be alright getting back? Is there a bus that runs this late?”

“Umm no.” He hurriedly added “But it's fine I normally walk home anyway. It's nicer.” He wasn't lying, as annoying as it was having to walk he enjoyed the fresh air.

“Huh, never thought I'd hear a teen prefer fresh air and exercise. You are just full of surprises Carl Grimes.”

There it was again, that warm flush. It brought a smile to his face. “Yeah. Anyways I'll...uh... see you around.”

“Yeah see ya kid.” was the response he got. Carl began his walk home. Not such a bad end to a bad day.

**********

Laying in bed the next morning, his thoughts flitted back to the meeting with his counselor. Rage filled him when he thought about the words they'd exchanged. Who the fuck was she to say those things about him. Lazy she had said. He couldn't believe her ignorance, she hadn't even tried to listen to him. Just wrote him off as a student that didn't give a shit. He wished he was like that. He wanted more than anything to not give a shit. He cared so much that it hurt. Every time a paper came back with a large D on it he felt himself die a little more inside. He grew angrier with himself that he couldn't do better. Be better.

He went through the day in a rage. Striding down the corridors he ignored the comments thrown at him. He pushed back against any shoulder that bashed into him. He went through the day not thinking. He just wanted to finish the day and run it off. He had to run so he didn't go crazy.

Breathing in the fresh air on the field he nodded a greeting at the Coach and started. Finally.

He ran to the sound of a harsh voice shouting at the players. He tried not to think too much. He
wanted the voices in his head to shut up for just a minute, for the first-time running didn’t help. As he slowed to a walk his stomach still felt like it was tied in knots. His head pounded with thoughts of his failures, his failure to get good grades, be a better son, even stop Shane. Maybe if he managed to fight him off that first time things wouldn’t have gotten this bad. Maybe he’d even be heading to Yale next fall. He drowned himself in lost dreams as he helped Coach to clear up. He knew he wasn’t being excellent company but it was all he could do at that moment.

The Coach seemed lost in his own thoughts as well, it wasn’t until Carl told him that they were finished that he realised they were done. He watched him stand and look across the pitch. His broad shoulders blocked out the light as he stood in front of the setting sun. His face glowed where the sun hit his features.

“You know, **that** is why people live out here.” he pointed to the sunset. “You don't get that in the city.”

Carl watched him sit and stare out at the field. He heard the wistful tone in his voice, he wondered, not for the first time, what had brought a guy like him here. Couldn't be for just the sunset. He moved to sit beside the man, not sure if his presence would be welcome, he didn’t want to intrude on a private moment but he couldn’t help but ask. “So, where did you live before?” Breaking the silence that had fallen between them.

Their eyes met as the Coach turned his head to face him.

“Seattle, up in Washington.”

Wow, big city. He couldn’t even imagine getting so far away. He couldn't see why anyone would move from a place like that to this dump of a town. “Bit of a distance from here. What made you move?” Taking the answer as an invitation to stay Carl settled himself more on the bench. He listened carefully, waiting for the man to answer him.

“Uh…just need a change of pace. People left, things changed, and the city stopped bein’ fun when I had no chance to enjoy it.”

“Huh.” was Carl's only response his brow furrowing. He still didn’t get it. He didn’t want to push the man though. Whatever happened must have been horrible enough to force him to move.

“So, you ever gonna answer my question?” Negan asked, looking over at the boy's face.

His mind flicked through their conversations in his head, like looking through a file cabinet, as he tried to figure out exactly which question he was talking about.

“Why do you like running?” He clarified.

Right. That one. He couldn’t fathom why on earth he was so desperate to know the answer. Trying to get out of it he asked. “Does it matter?”

“Yeah, it matters because I wanna know and I answered your question so it's only fair you answer mine. Quid pro quo and all that.”

“What?” What on earth was he talking about? Quid pro what?

“You need to watch better movies kid. Never mind for now. Just answer the question? You trying to impress a girl or something?”

“No.” Carl started, he knew he wasn’t going to get out of this one. Carl had to respect that the Coach
had at least been honest with him when he answered his questions. “I just enjoy it. It's easy. You don't have to think about anything, you just run. One foot in front of the other. Nothing to screw up, no one to impress, and there's a freedom to it. I can go anywhere I want, all I have to do is put on my shoes and go. I can leave whenever, and no one will follow if I don't want them to. It’s... it’s like coming up for air when you think you’re gonna drown. It's something that's mine. No one can take it away from me.”

“Wow. Thanks for tellin me.”

“Did the answer live up to your expectation?” Carl joked at him. He hoped he hadn’t disappointed him and he certainly hoped that now he had the answer the Coach wouldn’t lose interest in him.

“Damn, kid you always exceed my expectations.” Negan replied. Carl smiled back at him. He really didn’t know what to make of him. He confused him, feelings he’d rather not think about bubbled to the surface at the small brush of an arm against his. So, he stopped thinking. He sat, by his side, watching the sun fade in the horizon.

Carl felt himself shake as the temperature suddenly dropped. He didn’t have a jacket on him, just the thin sleeves of his plaid shirt offering protection against the brisk breeze. He should get home.

“We should get you home. It's late and I'm not having you die of pneumonia because of me.”

“Yeah, that'd be bad. Might ruin your evening.” Carl joked as he stood. Negan blocked his way as he stood in front of him.

“Hey” The Coach looked him in the eye “It would ruin more than my damn night. Don't even joke about that.”

Carl looked away, he could feel his cheeks burn. He hadn’t meant to upset him. He was shocked that the man seemed hurt by the thought of him dying. He didn’t think anyone would be bothered by that.

“Sorry.” He said. “I just forget...”

Frowning Negan spoke “Forget what?”

“Nothing.” Carl replied, he’d said too much. He needed to leave. Now. “Doesn't matter. I'll...see you tomorrow. Same time.” He grabbed his bag and went off.

“Whoa, you don't get to make a comment like that and just walk off.” He heard the man catch up to him, just keep moving he thought.

“Can we not?” He really wasn’t in the mood for a discussion like this. “It was a stupid thing to say. I'm sorry if it upset you.”

“Upset me? No. That's bullshit I want to know what you meant.”

He had to get him to stop so he turned and spoke his mind. “It was just a joke. Thank you though. For being bothered. It means a lot.” He wasn’t lying. It meant more than he wanted to think that the man stood in front of him cared. He didn’t believe it was genuine but in that moment he wanted to live in the fantasy that he had someone there for him.

**********

He felt his heart sink into his stomach as he saw the jocks enter the locker room. Five of them. He briefly wondered where the rest were, not that any of them would help him but it might make them think twice about starting anything.
He tried to ignore them, he turned his back and reached down to stuff his shorts into his bag. The bag was kicked out of his hands. Sighing he watched as it slid over the slick tiles. No chance of just walking straight out of here then. Carl stood to face the guy that towered over him. He swallowed the ball of fear that crept up his throat. He knew the guy, Simon, they had French class together. Earlier that day he'd accidentally embarrassed the guy by pointing out several flaws in his pronunciation.

Holding his chin high he asked, “Can I help you?”

Simon laughed at him, a high hyena-like screech. “Can you help? Well let me fucking think Carl.” He mockingly placed a hand under his chin, trying to look pensive, Carl just thought he looked constipated. “You fucked up in class today. Made me look bad in front of my girl and you know that shit doesn't go down well with me.” He cracked his knuckles.

Carl stepped back in response, looking around for a way out. There was none, he was surrounded on all sides by this buffoon and his knuckleheads. Seeing Simon step forward he closed his eyes and waited for the pain to hit. He didn't have to wait long, the feeling of hard knuckles struck the left side of his chin forcing him into one of the boys in the circle. He felt himself be pushed to the floor, his hands scraping tile as they tried to mitigate the impact. A quick kick followed and left a brutal pain in his side, he could feel a moan escape him.

“Look how fucking pathetic he is guys! Can't even stand his own against one of us. Maybe we should just put you out of your misery.” Carl felt another kick hit him, too close to an old bruise, he couldn't stop another whimper. Maybe they should just put him out of his misery, at least then he wouldn't have to deal with this anymore.

“Someone better explain what the ever-loving-fuck is going on here.” A voice echoed in the now quiet room. Carl flinched as the it bellowed “NOW!”

He looked up to see the Coach pacing in front of the boys, baseball bat gripped firmly by his right hand, Carl was pleased to see utter fear on each of the boys faces. The Coach looked pissed, Carl didn't think he'd ever seen such anger on anyone's face before. His eyes were fierce as he stared each of the boys down, his body tense as if ready to strike out at any moment, even Carl felt scared of him. Now the attention was off him Carl unfurled himself from the ball he'd tucked into. He was sickened to see red splotches across his jean leg, rolling it up he could see a fairly deep cut on his shin. Must have happened when he fell to the floor he thought to himself.

He heard another shout from above. Quickly glancing up, he watched as the coach dismissed them all. He briefly worried that this would come back badly on him once the rest of the team found out what had occurred. His thoughts were dismissed by a shaky hand on his shoulder, he couldn't help but flinch away from it, couldn't help but feel a tear trickle down his face at the pain he was drowning in.

The Coach spoke again, “Hey, hey, it's OK it's just me, I'm not gonna hurt you here Carl. I just need to take a look at you. I gotta make sure you're alright, OK?” He had never heard anyone speak so softly. He sniffed and nodded.

“OK, ok how about we get you off the floor and onto one of these benches? Can you stand?”

Another sniff, he cautiously moved his legs around, not too much pain. “Yeah… I think so.”

He felt the man leave his side and stand, Carl saw a arm stretch out to offer a hand to him. Carl was fascinated by it. Who was this guy? Why was he helping him? He looked up into his eyes, searching them for any reason not to trust him. He couldn't find one. “C'mon, just lemme help.”
Carl felt his hand shake as he reached out to meet the one in front of it. He watched as their hands slot together, the touch made him shiver. He felt the grip tighten as he was pulled up, the man's other hand crept to rest gently on his side, keeping him steady. Carl couldn't stop shaking. He wanted to leave this room, he wanted to get away from this man and his kindness. Who was he to try and make him trust him?

“OK let’s take a look, where does it hurt?”

Everywhere he replied in his head. His body ached from the kicks, the pre-existing bruises protested at the new impact on his small frame. He really didn't want to get into it so he just said “Honestly I'm fine. I just need a band-aid for this cut and I'll be alright.”

“So you honestly expect me to believe you were curling up in a ball there because of a cut?”

Getting frustrated Carl snapped at him. He did not need another adult telling him how to feel. “I don't need you to believe anything. I just want the band-aid so I can go home.”

“C'mon Carl this is me you're talking to, I know I've only known you a couple of weeks but I thought at least we were straight with one another.”

Carl contemplated his words. He wasn't wrong, he knew every word Coach had said to him was the truth, he could feel it. Then again, his instincts had been wrong before. He remained silent.

“If you let me have a look at your ribs then I'll get you the band-aid. I promise.”

Carl looked up at the innocent look on his face. In any other situation he would have laughed. He sensed the man wasn't going to just leave him on his own. He reached with shaking hands to the hem of his shirt and raised it enough for the man to glimpse at his ribs.

“Jesus, those fuckers did that to you?” Negan exclaimed. Carl dropped his shirt at the words. He felt embarrassed, like all of his weaknesses were laid bare before the man. He knew he could see the bruises, bite marks, and scratches. He wanted to hide.

“Shit, sorry kid I didn't mean to scare ya. I just can't believe they'd be so…is it ok if I…?” At least he thought it was the jocks. That made it easier.

Hearing his words, Carl slowly raised his shirt again, eyes focused on the floor. Negan's face appeared in his vision as he kneeled before him. Cold hands touched along his ribs. He could feel how gentle he was trying to be but he couldn't help but flinch at each touch that brushes a bruise. At least it was over quickly, as light as the touch was he could barely stand having anything against his bare flesh. He breathed deeply when asked. He could hardly believe the pain as his lungs filled.

“Alright, think they're just bruised you should be fine with some painkillers but you might wanna tell your parents so they can get a Dr to check you out.”

Breathing a sigh of relief as the hands were removed from his body. The relief quickly disappeared when he saw the confused look on Negan's face. He followed the man's gaze realising that his eyes were resting on the bite marks above his hips. He dropped his shirt and quickly stood.

“Thanks Coach. I better be going now. I'll make sure to grab some aspirin when I get home.”

“Yeah, OK kid. You gonna be alright gettin’ home?”

“Mmm yeah I'll be fine.” He said as he dashed out the door. Not bothering to look back at the concerned Coach.
Carl could feel himself getting more and more panicked as he stormed out of the locker room. His heart pounded, his breath quickened, and he could feel dread fill his body. He ran. He ran until he was sure Negan wasn't going to catch up to him. Almost collapsing against a building wall, he rested his head against the brick. He tried to focus on the gentle scratch of the hard stone against his forehead. He could feel cold sweat drip down his face, his back, the cold slime inching across his flesh sent him shivering. Did he see?

He knocked his head against the wall. **Stupid stupid stupid** he thought with each hit. He shouldn't have been caught. He should've made sure he was out of the locker room before the practice ended. He damned himself for getting lost in his own thoughts. Pulling himself together Carl pushed up and off the wall. He had to get home. He needed to rest. The shirt burst of speed had sent pain ricocheting through his ribs again. He sent up a small prayer of thanks that it was Friday and he wouldn't have to deal with the repercussions until Monday. He wouldn't have to deal with Negan and his pitying face. Carl couldn't stand the idea that he would think of him differently. He didn't want his pity. He was so angry with himself for letting Negan see him so weak.

He walked up the steps of his house and crept upstairs to his room. He really didn't want to deal with his parents right now. Stripping down and slipping into some pjs Carl crawled into bed. He laid there, staring at the ceiling until sleep overtook him.

**********

“What the fuck is that?” Shane spat at him the next morning. He'd taken one look at his face from across the breakfast table and flipped out. He heard his Mom gasp in shock, and his Dad slam his glass down. He had tried to grab some toast and leave but his Dad instructed him to sit with the family.

“It's just a bruise. I got hit by a dodgeball.” He tried to explain. Carl tilted his face down and started to eat his toast, hoping they'd believe him and leave it alone.

Shane wouldn't leave it. “You gotta be kiddin’ with that explanation Carl. We're cops we know the damn difference between a ball and a fist. So, tell us. Who. Did. It.”

Carl refused to talk.

“Carl. Shane's right.” Carl snorted in derision at Ricks words, of course Shane was right. “-you need to tell us what's going on.”

His Mom looked at him, wide eyes pleading for him to talk. As if she had any right to be asking anything of him.

“Nothing is going on” Carl replied, growing more exasperated as the conversation continued. “Can we just eat breakfast? I have to get to the library.”

Rick slammed his hand down. “No Carl we can just ‘eat breakfast’ you need to start talking to us. You've barely spoken all week and now you come home with a bruise on your face? Do you seriously expect us to just leave it alone?”

He didn't know what to say. In his mind he thought about all the other bruises he had that they hadn't asked about. He knew they'd seen the marks on his shoulders but they'd never asked about it. He almost snorted at the irony.

A beeper sounded. His Mom looked down at her pager “Dammit I gotta get to the hospital.” She rose from her chair and pointed at him “This isn't over Carl. Tonight, we are gonna talk as a family.”
“I'll give you a lift Lori I gotta get to the station.” His Dad joined her at the door. Carl's eyes rolled as he saw him gesture for Shane to join them. Big mystery what they're talking about he thought. Deciding to leave them to it he returned to his room to pick up his backpack. He really did have to get to the library, he had an essay due Monday that he hasn't started.

He sighed as his door burst open behind him. He mentally prepared himself for whatever Shane was gonna say. What he didn't expect was for the man to drag his chair out from the desk and straddle it. He frowned in confusion, not quite knowing what to do he stood awkwardly, this wasn’t how things usually went.

Shane's gaze pierced his own. “We gonna talk about this or what?”

Carl twitched awkwardly, he didn’t want to talk with him. “I already said there's nothing to talk about.”

Sniffing, Shane said ‘fine’ and stood. He crossed over to Carl and began unbuttoning his plaid overshirt. Carl's eyes focused on the wall, he could feel knuckles brush his torso as they worked their way down the buttons. Not ideal, but almost better than the conversation that he didn't want to have. Carl felt his hands sweep up and slip it off his shoulders. He was surprised to hear a sharp inhale, and shifted his gaze to see what has elicited such a reaction. Shit. Shane's gaze was focused on the new bruises that littered his body from the other day. He tensed, not quite sure what his reaction would be. He was pissed at the boy earlier after he'd seen his face but was that reaction just for his parents?

“Did the same guys fuckin do this to you?” At the lack of response, he growled out “Carl.”

Carl looked at him and mumbled “Yes”

“Fuckin assholes.” Shane paced around, kicking the chair with such force it knocked it over. Carl's eyes followed him, body tensing just in case Shane redirected that anger at him. Shane stopped in front of him. “What are their names?”

“W-what?” He managed to sputter out.

“W-what?” He managed to sputter out.

“Why do you wanna know?” Carl asked defensively.

“So, I can go to their homes and kick their fuckin asses. What'd you think I wanna do?! No one touches my boy. NO ONE!” Shane shouted at him.

Carl took a couple of steps back, eyes widening in fear. He couldn't let that happen. Things were bad enough without having to worry about his bullies getting beaten up.

Seeing the distressed look on his face Shane softened. He stepped closer and placed gentle hands on Carl's face. They were so big against his delicate features, he was so fragile Shane thought to himself. He had to protect him. Keep him safe. “Carl, c’mon tell me.” he pleaded with him. “I just wanna keep you safe.”

Carl couldn't make any sense of it. He didn't want Shane being any more involved in his life than he already was. He didn’t want this sick, protective bullshit that he was spouting. Did the man not see that the only person who really hurt him was himself? So, he lied. “Don't worry they've been expelled. I won't have to worry about them again.”

Eyes searched his. He tried to put on his best honest face, hoping it would be enough to deter him.
“Carl…” Shane began.

Carl interrupted him “I'm OK Shane.” He placed a shaking hand on Shane's chest, hoping it would calm him. His stomach rolled at the contact but he didn’t want to deal with an angry Shane, if he could calm him down then maybe he’d actually make it to the library that morning unscathed.

Shane looked down at the small hand, he picked it up in his own and pressed his lips reverently against the palm. “I would do anything to protect you Carl. Anything.”

The intensity of his words sent another cold shiver through him. “I know” came his reply.

Tucking his hair behind an ear, Shane leaned his head forward and placed a kiss against his lips. “Don't worry baby, I'll make it all better.” He whispered, trailing his lips down to leave soft kisses on each of his bruises.

Carl tried not to feel anything as those sucking lips went lower.

********

It'd been over a week since he last saw Coach Negan, he had been deliberately avoiding him. His heart jolted every time he saw the hint of a baseball cap, hoping that it wasn't him. He dodged around corridors and took the longer route home to avoid the playing field. He didn't bother running. He didn't think it would make him feel better.

Funnily enough the only thing that he thought would make him feel better would be talking to the Coach. Carl enjoyed their conversations, the feeling of normality that came with them. He missed him. He'd only been in his life for two weeks and he'd already made it better. Which was why Carl found himself looking at the white door with ‘Coach Negan’ printed across the blurred window.

Carl approached the office, knocking lightly on the glass. For a moment, he hoped the man wasn't in his office, that he was off grabbing lunch or something. An abrupt “Come in” settled that. Taking a deep breath, he turned the knob with a shaking hand and headed inside.

Negan was sat behind a shoddy looking desk, reading some papers that were scattered across it. Carl noted with amusement that he was wearing thick black glasses, he didn't have him pegged for a glasses guy. Negan finally looked up, sitting up when he saw who had entered the room.

"Carl." Standing he quickly approached the teen, checking him over. He wanted to make sure he didn't have any new injuries to worry about. “Are you alright? Haven't seen you in a few days I was worried.”

Carl shifted under the thorough gaze “Yeah, I'm alright. I just came- I just wanted to talk.”

“Sure, yeah, of course.” Negan gestured to one of the seats in front of the desk “Take a seat.”

Carl slid onto the cheap leather, wriggling to get comfortable. He expected Negan to sit back in his chair behind the desk, needless to say he was surprised when he dragged another chair around to sit directly opposite him. No desk between them. Silence fell. Now he was here he didn't know what he wanted to say. All the words felt jumbled in his head.

“We don't have to talk about what happened if you don't want to Carl.” Negan said. He rested his arms on his knees, hands twisting together, he leaned closer “I don't wanna make you uncomfortable I just want to know you're alright.”

“Yeah, I'm OK. My ribs feel better, no more pain.”
“That's great. I'm glad.” Negan replied, he sat patiently he didn't want to pressure him into talking. So, they sat hovering in the quiet for a moment.

“It's never been like that before.” Carl started “It's usually just taunts or the occasional shove into a locker. They've never tried to…” The words trailed off.

“Beat the shit outta you?” Negan finished for him.

“Yeah.”

“And you think that's ok? That they do that? That you have to put up with that shit every day?” He questioned

“No!” He protested “It's just…”

“Just what Carl? Just normal? Cos it's damn well not.”

“Easier” Carl replied at the man. “It's just easier. It's easier to keep quiet and put up with it than telling people. Even if I told them who would believe me? I'm nothing but the freak who can't even keep his grades up enough to go to a decent college. I'm the kid who doesn't have any friends because he doesn't talk. No one gives a goddamn shit about me or anything I do. So, no I don't think it's normal. I think it's just damn easier.”

Negan was taken aback by the outburst, he wondered how long he'd been bottling this up for. “Carl…” he started.

“No. You don't get to look at me like that. You don't get to pity me” Feeling humiliated, Carl stood to leave but was stopped by a gentle hand on his hand. Negan rose to his feet and stood before him.

“No. You don't get to look at me like that. You don't get to pity me” Feeling humiliated, Carl stood to leave but was stopped by a gentle hand on his hand. Negan rose to his feet and stood before him.

“Carl. You need to listen here and listen good. I don't pity you- No don't look away.” He placed a finger under his chin and brought his face back around “You should not be spending your life feeling like you have no one. You have me and I sure as hell don't pity you. I think you're an incredibly brave person. Who's been through some fucking awful shit and I'm damn well gonna do everything I can to make sure this shit doesn't happen again. So, don't avoid me again, I don't want you to ever feel like you can't come to me with anything.”

In that moment, looking into kind hazel eyes, Carl actually believed him and for a second a flicker of hope flared inside of him.
As fall fell over the school campus, the leaves turned and fluttered to the ground, covering the paths with pools of rust and gold. Carl thought it was the most beautiful time of the year, when rain filled the skies and created a cool, crisp breeze. He loved to fill his lungs with it, enjoying the ache as cold hit warm, he’d always associated autumn with renewal, it was a time to shred the past and work on creating the new. Carl’s sole ambition was to do just that, be like a tree and surrender the dead part of him, ready to regrow into something new, not necessarily the same as before but something that resembled who he once was. It was easier said than done. He could scratch at the bad all he wanted, he could shed his pain and try to forget it but it would always be around him. Just like the leaves pooling on the floor, his darkness would surround him, building up until it swallowed him whole. He’d been drowning in it for the past few months, only getting momentary breaks from the black sludge that filled his lungs. When he ran he could breathe, he could take a break and be free. Recently though things had changed, he didn’t need to run to have those gaps he just needed to sit with Negan for a while. The man had helped him feel less alone. It was like he’d brought him back to life after wandering through it like a zombie.

They’d continued their routine after their talk in the office, but now their conversations had an openness to them that hadn’t been there previously. They’d stopped the pretence of clearing up, Negan now got whatever team he was coaching that day to do it, then after they were done, he and Carl would sit on the bleachers and talk. Never anything of substance but it meant the world to Carl. It was a whole hour, sometimes more, of feeling normal. He was learning how to be a person again, he was surprised to find that he was still able to hold a conversation, even more surprised that he
could make someone else laugh.

Life wasn’t all better but it was easier. Things at home were still as awkward as ever. He was barely in the house these days, not that his parents noticed they were always out at work. His Dad was trying though, he’d taken the weekend off to take Carl fishing. They used to do this every weekend before Rick had been made Sheriff, even when the weather was appalling they would laugh as the rain soaked them through or as the cold made their bones shake. It was the only time they ever spent with just the two of them, Carl used to live for the weekends where he could spend time with the man. He liked the easy conversation that flowed between them, they didn’t have loads in common but they could talk for hours about random crap. Everything from girls, to work, they even had a talk about what they’d do in a zombie apocalypse after watching ‘Night of the Dead’. It was fun. Now though? Now it was awkward and painful. Their conversations were stunted and full of unanswered questions.

How could you not know?

Why have you changed so much?

So many things left unsaid on both sides.

Carl hoped this weekend might shift things between them. Maybe they could take back a little of what was lost between them. Things hadn’t been bad when he’d told Negan about the bullying, maybe he could tell his Dad about Shane. Maybe a whole weekend with just the two of them would give him a chance to convince him what was going on. Shane had always told him that Rick wouldn’t believe a single thing he said against him, that’d he be able to sweet talk him around, but what if he wasn’t there to poison his head? He mulled the thought over all week, considering every outcome. It could go very badly wrong. He could lose everything. Shane could be right; his parents could disown him for lying about their friend. He could lose his house, his parents, any semblance of a life. A small part of him thought about what could happen if Rick believed him.

His internal debate ended up being redundant. Shane, for the first time ever, ended up joining them for this trip. He wanted to see what the fuss was about apparently. Of course, Carl only found out the morning of the trip, no time get himself out of it. So, there he was, sat in the back of their new Range Rover watching his Dad laugh and joke with the man who made every inch of his body scream with pain. Sickened at the sight he turned to look out of the window, trying to muffle the noises coming from the front. Two hours of hell later they finally arrived at the lake, it was as beautiful as he remembered he thought as he looked out at the blue water sparkling under the sunlight. He jumped when a hand clamped down on his shoulder, his Dad stood at his side, taking in the view.

“This’ll be good Carl, a nice break from everything, it’ll give us all a chance to talk.”

“Sure Dad.” Shrugging the hand off his shoulder Carl headed back to where they’d left their supplies, grabbing his bag and a hatchet, “I’m gonna go get some wood for the fire.” he shouted over his shoulder as he walked into the forest that surrounded the lake.

Striding through the foliage he tried to get as far away from the camp as possible. He figured he had about an hour to sort himself out before either of them came looking for him. Even in the fall the trees were still full, more brown than green but they were gorgeous. He watched as birds flew between trees, getting ready for the brutality of winter Carl supposed. He frowned when they suddenly turned and flew off.

“Carl!” A shout came from behind him.

He clenched his eyes shut. Not even ten minutes had passed.
“We’ve barely been here five minutes and you’re already running off.” Shane held his hands up questioning him.

“I’m not running off” he snapped back, he was already pissed off that the man had to ruin his weekend and now here he was trying to ruin the few minutes of peace that he’d wanted. “I’m getting wood for the fire unless we wanna freeze to death tonight.” Carl actually didn’t think that would be such a bad thing but he had to keep up the pretence.

“You coulda waited till we put the tent up. Then we could’ve all gone together.”

“I don’t mind” Carl said tersely. “It gets it over and done with. More time to fish, right?”

“Right.” Shane replied. “I’ll help.”

“No” Carl practically shouted at him.

Shane’s face turned to steel. “You wanna say something Carl? ‘Cos you look like you’re about to burst.”

“Why did you have to come?” He asked in despair. “Can’t I have one thing that you don’t touch?”

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean Carl?” Shane, his voice as aggressive as if he’d shouted at him. “You don’t like having me around? You didn’t seem to mind me so much the other day when you were squirming on my dick. Didn’t take much to get you to come screaming.”

He flushed with shame at the memory, once again he’d been forced to feel a pleasure that he never wanted. “You know damn well that I didn’t want that. Any of it.” He wanted to scream at him, having to settle for a hushed shout for fear of his Dad hearing. How dare he make out that he was a willing participate? Like he actually wanted him.

Shane grabbed his throat and slammed him against a nearby tree. “What are you tryna accuse me of here Carl? Hmmm?” He questioned, looking him in the eye, daring him to continue.

Carl said nothing, he could feel the bruises forming at the crushing grip on his throat. He could barely breathe.

“Yeah, that’s what I fucking thought.” Shane practically spat at him.

The grip was released. Carl breathed a sigh of relief, thinking it was over. He wasn’t expecting to be turned around and smashed up against the tree. He winced as the hard bark scratched at his face. A hand on the back of his neck pinned him down again, throwing his brain back to the memory of that first time, phantom pain hit him all over again. A bitter cold pinched at his thighs as the man yanked his jeans down. He desperately tried to pull them back up but was stop by a vicious growl in his ear, warning him.

Chest heaving with breaths that didn’t seem to do anything to calm himself, he brought his hands up to brace himself against the tree. He tried to relax, tried to stop every muscle tensing as he heard his zipper fall.

Hot breath smothered his ear, before more cruel words spilled into it. “Think you need a lil’ reminder of how much you fuckin’ love this shit.”

A loud spit had him recoiling into the tree, he wanted to fall into it, hide until he was safe again. He wanted his Dad to come over and see what the man was doing to him, he wanted to scream but his throat was paralysed, lost in the fear of the pain he knew was coming.
His eyes screwed shut as his body was ripped open again, he thought about the sunset, he thought about the smell of the field, the comforting laugh of Negan. *Anything* to get him away from here.

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“No…nononono…please….no…don-ah.” Carl begged as his orgasm overwhelmed him once again, pleading with his body to not react again, not to feel pleasure again. It took too much from him, left him with nothing but a quaking body and a shame like he’d never felt before.

“Fuck…Carl…baby yesss.”

He whimpered as he was forced back harder on Shane’s dick, wincing at the salty burn of his come. His heavy weight slumped against Carl’s back, squeezing him between his hard body and the tree. They stood there together, panting, locked in some twisted lover’s hold. It was repulsive.

It hurt when the man finally withdrew, he briefly wondered if there was some tearing. It had been awhile since Shane had taken him without any preparation, he wasn’t used to the pain. He trembled as he pulled up his trousers, it hurt to bend, he flinched when Shane stepped closer and grabbed them, pulling them up for him. He felt ashamed as Shane did up his jeans, just like he used to when he was a kid. He tried to avert his face when sickeningly gentle hands tilted it upwards, gentle turned into painful as Shane dug his nails into Carl’s chin to force him into place.

“Carl…” He almost whined at him. Carl noticed the pained look on his face, what did *he* have to be upset about. “Why do you make me do this? I try and be nice and all you do is provoke me into doing the worst.”

“I...um..I-I’m sorry.” He stuttered out, still in shock at being taken so brutally. He just wanted to leave now, he wanted to get away from this man and go heal his wounds in peace. The vomit creeping up his throat grew more insistent, urging for release.

“I know.” Shane stroked a hand across his cheek, finger picking up a droplet of tear, Shane looked at the wetness at on his finger. He looked fascinated as it trailed down the digit, returning his gaze to Carl he spoke again “God, you are so damn gorgeous when you cry.”

He leaned in to place a punishing kiss on Carl’s lips, slimy tongue seeking entrance along the seam. He dominated him, Carl could feel him getting caught up again, a hand slipped down to grab his ass and pull their hips together. He let out a muffled moan as the touch sent new waves of pain through him. For once the cry seemed to get through to Shane as he stopped the moment it escaped him. He pressed their foreheads together, panting out a “sorry,” as he tried to calm himself. Carl let him rest against him, he felt defeated, no more fight left.

Shane finally righted himself and stepped away from Carl. “We should probably get back; your Dad’ll be wondering where we got to. C’mon.” he said placing a hand on his shoulder, leading him back to the camp site.

His Dad looked up as they arrived back, his face twisted with confusion. “Where’s the wood?” he asked

Shit. He’d forgotten.

Shane looked over at him, rubbing his neck sheepishly. “We..uh...got caught up talkin’ right Carl?”

“Right.” No point in trying to say anything else.

Rick laughed, “God, I should not leave you two to go off on your own.”
No, you damn well shouldn’t Carl thought.

“C’mon if you guys help me finish putting up this goddamn tent then I’ll help you fetch some.”

Carl wasn’t sure how much help he’d be considering he could hardly walk without pain but he gritted his teeth and tried to act normal.

The weekend passed without any more incidents. He caught a few fish, made a few jokes, and tried to convince his Dad that he wasn’t totally fucked in the head. He actually had a decent discussion with his Dad when Shane had gone off to piss. They spoke about college, he never realised how much his Dad regretted not going. He and his Mom had gotten married young and they didn’t want to move or separate, especially after she’d gotten pregnant, so he skipped the whole college experience, enrolling in the Police Academy instead. Carl had been about to confide in him about his current college situation when he was interrupted by Shane’s return. He clammed up after that, not bothering to join in the conversations anymore.

The journey home was a bitch, he could hardly sit, he was fidgeting around so much that his Dad had to tell him to stop, it was too distracting apparently. He ignored Shane’s smug look reflected in the rear-view mirror.

As soon as they were home he snagged his bag and practically ran back inside the house. Brushing his mother off as he walked up the stairs to his room. For the first time in a while he couldn't wait to be back at school.

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Carl was in a foul mood the next day, another meeting with the guidance counsellor that went sour. Just what he needed after his shitty fucking weekend. She’d called him into her office to express her disappointment that he hadn’t been in to see her again. As if she’d be any use if he had bothered to go. He chose to spend his time ensuring that his grades were up to scratch instead, he had to get into college. Besides, he pondered, if he didn’t hand in his work then he’d get detention and that meant he’d have to miss his time with Negan. It still felt weird to call him that. The man had made it clear that if he ever called him Coach again then he’d “kick his ass from here to Helsinki.” He never thought he would find the threat of violence funny but it warmed him to know that Negan wasn’t going to treat him any differently, even after seeing him so weak and pitiful.

“So, what's got you upset?” Negan asked as Carl slowed to a stop in front of him. He passed the panting teen a bottle of water and watched him chug it down.

“What makes you think I'm upset?”

“You run faster when something’s pissed you off.”

Carl couldn’t believe Negan had noticed that. He hadn’t even noticed it himself, not consciously anyways. He knew he pushed himself harder when he had things he didn't want to think about but he didn’t think it was noticeable.

“So, what's pissing you off?” He asked again as they sat in their usual spot. The same place where they first watched the sunset together.

Carl sighed. He’d just burnt off his stress, he really didn't want to be thinking about it again.

“C’mon.” Negan nudged his shoulder with his own “Whatever it is I'm sure it's not as bad as you think. You can talk to me about these things Carl, might be more helpful than running it out all the time.”
Maybe he had a point. Maybe this was one thing he didn't have to keep to himself. “A few weeks ago I saw the guidance counselor.” He started, looking down at the ground he thought about what he wanted to say. How much did he want to tell him?

“Scary shit.” Negan replied “Those asshats barely know what they're talking about.”

“Yeah well this one thinks I'm too lazy to go to college.”

“What?” He exclaimed looking over at Carl in disbelief “She say why?”

Carl begrudgingly told him about his grades.

“Well that's fuckin stupid. So, you've had a rough year it's not the end of the world. It doesn't mean you're incapable of going to college.”

“You think so?”

“Yeah, you did well on your SATs right?”

“Better than average.” He replied, a slim light of hope filled his chest.

“There ya go then.” Running a hand through his hair Negan continued “Colleges don't give a shit if you had a rough patch, unless you want Ivy League. Most of them just need a decent essay and good SATs and I'm sure you can whip a good essay out your ass.”

Carl laughed. “I like to think so.”

“Well whenever you're done with it give it to me and I'll read it over. I'm no genius but I did write a few essays in college.”

“Wow and here I thought you were just a dumb jock. You actually went to college?” He jested.

“You rude lil’ shit.” Negan laughed “I take that back you can read your own fuckin’ essay.”

“So sorry for hurting your feelings.” Carl added playfully, jostling his shoulder. “I'm sure there's a brain in there somewhere.”

“You bet your ass there is.” He added “a BIG one.”

“Suuuree” Carl responded. “So what college did you end up at?”

“UDub. The best of the best.”

“UDub?” Carl tried to figure out which college that could be.

“University of Washington. Up in Seattle. I stayed up there after I graduated, until I moved down here of course.”

“Huh.” Carl mulled it over. He'd never even thought of Washington, then again, he'd never thought about anywhere that wasn't Yale. He mentally added a note to look it up later.

“Yeah. Good times.” Negan replied, a nostalgic smile flirted across his face.

“Were you the typical frat boy jock then?”

Negan chuckled “No... well yeah mostly actually. Don’t get me wrong I went to class, studied the
shit outta my books, and all that jazz but I did enjoy a drink or two”

Carl had an inkling it was more than one or two drinks, he said as much.

“You are just askin’ for it today, callin’ *me* a drunk.”

“Am I wrong?” He raised a questioning brow at the man

“Uh… no.” Negan admitted. “You can take that smug look off your face, you’re not always right.”

“I seem to be when it comes to you… Coach” Carl teased.

“Alright… OK..That’s how it is.” Negan stood. Carl paused for a moment, briefly panicking that
he’d gone too far with the man. His worries were swept away when a cold stream of water hit his
face. Negan had tipped the water cooler he kept by the pitch over his head.

“You had that coming.” Negan laughed out. “The words ‘drowned rat’ come to mind.”

Even shaking under cold water Carl couldn’t stop the laughter bubble out of him.

October 2017

“Early acceptance deadlines are soon.” Negan started “You started your applications yet?”

Carl picked up another cone, Negan had decided to be lenient with the football team that night, not
making them clear up.

“No.” was his short reply.

“How come?”

“I still haven’t figured out where I want to go yet.” He twiddled the cone in his hand. He really
hadn’t, he’d been looking at a few brochures but only a few stood out. UDub had been one of them,
the architecture reminded him so much of the Ivy Leagues that he coveted. He thought about
Georgia too, not as expensive but not nearly as far away as he wanted to get.

“Can’t argue with that. You’re kickin’ ass this semester with your grades, right?”

Carl chuckled, “Yeah, sure we’ll call it that.”

“Well then maybe you should apply for normal admission.” He suggested.

Carl had never thought about it. He liked to be prepared, he’d rather apply for early acceptance.

“Not that there’s anything wrong with applying early but if your grades are better this semester then
you’d be in with a better shot of getting into the college you want.” Negan elaborated.

He had a point. His grades last year were nowhere near his best, his current ones better represented
what he was capable of. It would also give him a chance to decide where he really wanted to go
instead of randomly picking.

“Yeah. I’ll think about it.”

“Whatever you decide let me know if there’s anything I can do to help. I’ll even lie and say you’re
on the track team if you want some pretty extracurriculars on your apps.”

Laughing again, Carl said “Thanks, it’s probably the closest you’ll ever get to having me on that losing team.”

“Hey!” Negan said defensively “We came second to last in the last meet.”

“Wow. I’m so impressed. Please let me join you amazing team.” He deadpanned.

Negan threw a cone at him that he caught. “Just finish cleanin’ up.”

Smiling, Carl did as he was told.

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Carl sat on his bed and contemplated the brochures surrounding him. How was he supposed to pick between all of them? He was lucky money wasn’t an issue, his grandmother had left more than enough for him in her will, he could go wherever would let him in.

Flopping back onto his pillows he grabbed the nearest one and looked up at it. ‘University of Washington’ spread across the top, he let out a sigh, this one kept coming back to him. As strange as it sounded, he didn’t want to like it. He couldn’t help but question why he liked it. Was it because of Negan? He didn’t want to be one of those people who liked something just because a friend did. He didn’t want to be influenced like that. He couldn’t help but be drawn to it though, the campus was undeniably beautiful and the reputation was amazing. He had no idea what he wanted to major in but at least they had great options. His GPA and SATs met their entry requirements, and god knows Seattle is far enough away from this hell hole that he might be able to breathe for once.

But there was the Negan problem.

He sighed, dropping the brochure to one side. He covered his face and for the hundredth time questioned why his life wasn’t easier.

**********

A couple of weeks passed and he kept coming back to that damn University. Others had interested him, the University of Boston had an amazing criminal justice course, he even flirted with the idea of warm beaches at the University of Miami. None of them held his interest in the same way as Washington had. Maybe Negan really was right, maybe it was the best of the best.

He really needed to pick. Even if he was going for normal acceptance he needed to write a damn good essay, which meant taking time to make sure it was good. The problem was; picking a topic. He had hoped inspiration would hit him at some point, no such luck. He was just filled with the typical cheesy topics that he knew would be tossed in the bin as soon as anyone saw the headline. He quickly passed on the idea of going to the Guidance Counsellor for help, she really was fucking useless. He remembered what Negan had said about helping him. Maybe he could give him a hand picking a topic. He was reluctant to ask him for anymore help, not after everything that had happened with Simon, and he didn’t want him knowing that he was applying to UDub, too much embarrassment if he didn’t get in.

He could do this on his own, god knows he’d done enough things by himself.

**********

“OK, what’s the deal with college essays?” He asked as he made his way into Negan’s office, he
chucked his bag on the spare chair and slumped down into his usual one. Every now and again he would join Negan for lunch in there, only on the days when he couldn’t face going into the cafeteria. Today, after spending several days trying to start this stupid essay, he had given up and decided to ask for help.

Negan swivelled in his chair to face him, mouth filled with his sandwich, he chuckled. “Finally broke did ya?”

Carl huffed. “How long have you known that I’ve been struggling with this?”

Negan smirked, “A few days, I’ve seen you in the library on my way to the playing field. You have the same look of defeat that I had when I had to write mine.”

“You coulda just told me what to do.”

“Where would the fun be in that? I like watching you squirm.”


Swallowing, Negan took his time replying. He swirled in his chair as he mulled over the question.

“You just have to take all the cheesy ‘I wanna make the world a better place’ crap and make it your own. Put your badass twist on it. They’re gonna want something interesting.”

Carl chewed on his sandwich as he contemplated his words. Sounds easy but God it’ll be hard to do.

“What colleges are you going for? I assume you’ve picked them if you’re working on your essays.”

Carl froze. Should he tell him? He couldn’t. He wouldn’t be able to face it if he was rejected. “Georgia. Figured it’s best to stay close to home.”

Negan nodded. “Good idea, it’s a lot cheaper than going out of state that’s for sure.”

Carl let the conversation trail off, probably not worth mentioning he had more money that he could think of when it came to college. They sat and ate in silence, just enjoying the simple comfort of being around one another.

**********

Halloween. Another stupid holiday that he didn’t wanna celebrate, if only other people thought the same. He sighed at the sight of more egg on his locker. He’d already cleaned it once that day but the same assholes pelted his locker once again. They knew better than to actually touch him, Negan seemed to have scared them off. They were let back on the team after the Principal had gotten wind of the situation, they were the best players after all. It really didn’t matter what they did to Carl as long as the team won some trophies this year.

At least it was the end of the day now. He could look forward to his run.

He walked into the house that evening, feeling lighter. Halloween would be over in a few hours and he could forget about all the stupid parties that he would never be invited to.

His Mom swirled to face him when he walked through the door, her finger still hanging on the edge of her lip as if he’d just interrupted her from a deep thought. Concern was etched over her face, it set Carl on edge. He grew more tense as his Father’s figure slid into focus beyond her shoulder. He felt
his breathing increase as he saw Shane sat in his usual chair, “Come sit on Daddy’s lap” floated through his mind, he snapped his eyes shut at the memory.

“-Carl will you answer you Mother. Now.” His father’s stern voice a blissful interruption to the haze that had fogged over him.

“I…uh… I didn’t hear what you said.” He directed his answer towards Lori, watched as she turned and wiped her brow in frustration.

“Jesus, Carl do you ever listen to me?” She asked turning back to face him. “Honestly these days it’s like you’re never here, even when you’re standing right in front of me it’s like I’m talking to thin air.”

He hung his head, rubbing the back of his neck as he tried to organise his head. What were they doing? Why were they talking to him like this? He felt trapped, he never thought they’d ever confront him like this, it was strange to think they still cared enough. The more pessimistic part of him thought they were just upset that their perfect son was slowly deteriorating into a failing misery. Why did Shane have to be there? Why did he have to force himself into every aspect of his life? Wasn’t it enough that he had his body whenever he wanted? Despairing thoughts crept into his brain the longer the silence went on for.

A loud sigh filled the room, he looked to the source, his Father, standing by their firepit. “Your Mom spoke with your guidance counsellor today.”

Alarm flashed within him.

His Dad looked him in the eye. “You have any idea how that went?”

He did. Not that he would ever admit it. He wondered what prompted his Mom to do such a thing. Wasn’t he a little too old for his parents to be interfering at school?

“Carl.” Shane’s voice shot through him. “We know about your grades. You wanna explain yourself?”

“Shane!” His Mother chastised “We agreed to let Carl talk, not to jump down his throat.”

Carl saw Shane lift his hands up in a false apology. “Carl will you please talk to us about this? We thought you were doing fine and now we hear your GPA’s dropped. Your counsellor even said you don’t seem to talk to anyone anymore, what happened to your friends?”

So many questions and he couldn’t answer any of them.

“Things just happened-” He tried to explain

His Dad quickly interrupted “Things don’t just happen Carl. Your Counselor says several teachers have complained about you not handing in homework and not participating in class. Christ Carl, you were on track for an Ivy League college and now your Counselor is saying there’s a small chance you’ll even make it into Community College. We wanna know what happened.”

What happened? Your best friend thought it’d be fun to make me into a replacement sex toy because your wife won’t screw him anymore is what happened. He wanted so desperately to scream that at him. He couldn’t. He didn’t think he’d ever be able to say the words, not out loud. “I don’t know. Things just got harder and I couldn’t keep up.” He offered, just lie your way through this Carl. They’ll leave soon, they always do. “I’m doing better now though, I’ve not had a detention yet this year and all my essays have been A’s. I just needed to figure some things out.”
“What about college Carl? They’re gonna look at how badly your grades have slipped and they’re not going to want you.” Shane spoke up again, patronising fake concern filled his voice. It made Carl want to curl up and cry, it was humiliating.

“Carl! Answer him.” His Dad demanded.

“When I spoke to the Counselor she said that if I increased by GPA this year then there’s a good chance a college will accept me. I just have to stay on top of things.”

“Maybe you need to someone around to help you do that.” He Dad said, giving his Mom a pointed look. Carl looked between them confused.

“Look, we’ve been talking a lot recently about everything that’s been going on...” his Mom started, he didn’t like where this was going. “We know that your dad and I haven’t been around much recently because of work and we know that’s gotta be hard on you bein’ on your own so much. Which is why Shane’s agreed to let you stay with him for the remainder of your senior year.”

“W..what?” He stuttered, eyes widening in fear. They wanted him to do what? Live with that monster?

“Yeah we think it’ll be good for you. We can’t give up our jobs Carl, not if we want to keep the house. Think about it Carl this way you’ll have someone with you whenever you need them. It’ll be good for your health.”

For his own health? He erupted into laughter, almost hysterical, he couldn’t help himself he stomach convulsed as he got caught up in the irony of it all. The whole damn conversation was ridiculous

“Like I’d be safer with him?” Carl eventually sputtered out.

His Father frowned in confusion, “What the hell do you mean by that Carl?”

Shane’s eyes flashed him a warning, the same look he’d get on his face right before he’d take his belt off. Carl fumbled under the gaze, he couldn’t control his thoughts, they slipped away from him the more he thought about it. He paced away from his parents, hands digging into his hair as he tried to formulate a single sentence. Words tangled together, twisting and knotting in his head

“Carl, we’re just worried about you.” His Mom tried to touch him but her hand felt like a searing burn on his skin, he flinched away. The upset on her face sent another wave of hatred and anger through him, it seeped into his bones and flowed through his veins. How dare she? How dare she have the gall to stand there looking sad when it’s her fault that this all happened? He couldn’t stand to be around her, her smell, her voice, it all reminded him of pawing hands and piercing pain. He couldn’t take it anymore. He was suffocating, drowning in their accusing stares, in the smug grin that seemed perpetually spread over Shane’s face. He had to leave. He had to get out now.

He ran for the door and out into the cold night air. He didn’t stop running. He wanted to keep running. He never wanted to go back to that hell hole. He didn’t want to go live with Shane. Be at his beck and call all the time. The thought made him sick. No. No. No. He ran faster. The street lights blurred into one solid stream of light as he flew past them. He had to get further away. He could still feel their stares. He could feel the hot breath on the back of his neck making it sweat. He could feel hard hands pinning him down as he pushed his way inside of hi-NO. He ran faster. Trying to outrun his thoughts. He didn’t hear the blast of a horn he only saw the blindingly bright lights sear into his eyes. He hadn’t even realised he’d moved into the road. He heard a car screech to a stop and a door slam open, his eyes still adjusting to the light that surrounded him he couldn’t see who was approaching him. He flinched and fought as hard hands grabbed his shoulders.
“No! Get off me.” He was hysterical. He didn’t want it. He had to get away.

“Carl. CARL! You gotta calm down.” He fought more as the arms surrounded him.

“Carl, it’s me Negan. You’re OK I’m not gonna hurt you. Listen.” The voice broke through his thoughts. *Negan* he recognized. He slowed his actions as his mind started to clear. Negan. Not Shane. He felt his breathing become more controlled as he sunk further into the arms around him.

“Negan” he breathed out.

Resting his forehead against a solid chest he realised his thoughts were slowing, becoming less and less fractured. Someone had *finally* stopped the screaming.
Carl hadn't realised that anyone cared about him anymore. Yet here was this man who listened, who waited, who didn't seem to give a single damn what anyone thought of him.

Slightly shorter chapter today as I decided the chapter flowed better when split into two. Hopefully the second part should be up tomorrow!

Enjoy and as ever thank you for all the lovely comments! You guys really do inspire me to get writing and to make the chapters as best as they can be.

"I'm in here
Can anybody see me?"

- Sia

“Carl…” Soft hands gently pushed him back, Negan's familiar face swirled into focus, eyes searching over his. “Are you hurt? Did I hit you with the car?”

Carl failed to form words, they kept failing him. He couldn’t focus his brain, the words slipping and falling around his head. His teeth were chattering, when did it get so cold? His lungs ached. He shouldn’t have stopped running, it was better when he was running. He should’ve run faster, then the car might have hit him, then it’d all be over. No more cold. No more aches. No more Carl. It’d be better.

“Carl!” Right Negan. Negan was here. Negan with his car and his warm hands. How was he so warm?

“Heads Christ, Carl. You’re freezing.”

He felt hands cover his cheeks, checking him over. Soft leather was wrapped around his shoulders, he lifted his hands to grab the lapels, pulling it tighter around himself. It smelt so much like the man, spiced with an aftershave he didn’t recognize, a slight hint of tobacco. It was as warming as the hands that tried to rub warmth into his arms. It wasn't working, the cold was too deep, too embedded into every nerve.
“C’mon, let’s get you home.”

Home? No. Not there. Not that place. He couldn’t be there. Was it even his home anymore? Now they wanted to leave him in that monster’s hands all the time. He couldn’t go back there. He would still be there, then he’d drag him off, finally take him for his own. He started to struggle against the hands leading him to the car. Sneakers scratching at the road gravel as he tried to still the feet moving him forwards. “No... no... please...I can’t go back there.... please don’t make me go.” He couldn’t breathe again. His heart pounded in his head that hurt so badly. His hands were too slippery to force the man away from him so he could get away. He had to get away he couldn't go back there.

“Okay, okay, okay… I won’t take you home alright?” Carl slowed his struggles as they stopped walking again. His mind snapped into focus again as his name was called. He looked up at Negan, what was he saying?

“Look, Carl, I won’t take you home but you gotta get in the car. You’re way too cold and we gotta warm you up. So please will you come with me?”

Get in the car? He could do that, right? Just a few steps, open the door then sit down. Easy enough. He allowed Negan to lead him over, watched as he opened the door, he then slid himself into the passenger seat. The warmth from the heaters still lingered from where Negan had been driving. He curled in on himself, closing his eyes to enjoy the warmth, he let his head rest against the window. He recoiled when Negan slammed the driver's door shut, the noise reverberated through his head, like a stab in the brain. His eyes shot towards Negan as he heard the engine shudder on, where was he taking him? Their eyes clashed together.

“I’m not taking you home, I just need to get off the road in case someone else comes along. OK?”

Carl twitched his head in an attempt at a nod. The car pulled away slowly and they drove. They didn’t seem to have any direction.

“Is there anywhere you wanna go Carl? Any friends you can stay with?”

Friends? Ha, he must know that he didn’t have any. Surely he’s seen him around school alone enough to realise that no one wanted to talk to him. “No... its fine just drop me off wherever. I’ll be alright.”

“You’re fuckin’ kidding me right? I’m not just going to leave you on the street this late”

Carl glanced at the clock 23:12 glared back at him. Shit. When had it gotten so late? “I don’t have anywhere to go. I’m not going home so just leave me wherever Negan.”

Negan looked over at him, sighing when he saw the truth in his eyes. “You know there’s no way in hell that I’m gonna do that. We can go back to my place until you’ve calmed down a little bit.”

“Negan, you don’t.” He didn’t want to inconvenience him anymore than he had.

“Carl, for the last goddamn time I’m not going to leave you out on the side of the road. So, you either tell me where you live or you’re comin’ with me.”

Carl remained silent.

“Fine. Buckle up we’ve still got a bit of a drive.”

Choosing to ignore the man Carl spent the journey gazing out of the window into the darkness of the night. He watched as the lights from the houses slowly dwindled and faded as they drove out of the
center of town. Tall trees now filled his view as they soared past them, heading deeper and deeper into nature. Eventually they turned off the main road and bumped along a short dirt driveway that led up to a stunning cabin. Carl was shocked. He never thought a guy like Negan would live somewhere so...elegant. Getting out of the car, he stood in shock in front of the large mahogany house.

“Not what you were expecting huh?” Negan asked as he walked up the porch stairs to unlock the door.

Carl looked around the exterior, briefly admiring the shining motorbike that was parked further along the drive. Of course, he had a bike like that Carl thought, it fit him so perfectly.

“You comin’?” Negan asked tilting his head towards the now open door.

“Yeah.” He mumbled out as he followed him up the stairs and into the house. His eyes were immediately drawn to the large spiral staircase in the center of the room, it was huge. The whole cabin was huge. Maybe it was the open plan that made it look larger than it was but it was bigger than his house for sure.

“Take a seat.” Negan flung his hand to gesture to the couches in front of the grand stone fireplace. He was heading into the kitchen area at the back of the room.

He tentatively sat on the couch, it’d been so long since he was in a stranger’s house he didn’t know what to do. So, he perched on the edge and looked down at his hands. Picking on a bit of skin that had flaked off, he waited for Negan to come back. He noticed he still had his jacket wrapped around him, it was too big for him, strangely comforting though. He should take it off, instead he wrapped it tighter around himself, wanting to bury himself in the warm musk that he’d come to associate with Negan.

“You still cold?” Negan’s jean clad legs appeared in his vision. He sat on the wooden coffee table in front of Carl and held out a mug filled with a brown liquid. Hot chocolate his mind filled in for him. He hadn’t had hot chocolate in years, his mom used to make it for him every night when he was younger. Every time he had a nightmare she’d be in his room, holding him before taking him downstairs and whipping him up a steaming mug. They’d sit there together slowly sipping on their mugs as his Mom made him feel better about whatever monster filled his dreams. He wasn’t sure if it would help as much as it used to but he was willing to give anything a shot. He lifted an unsteady hand to pluck the mug from him. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” Negan cradled his own mug in his hands and watched the teen, waiting for him to talk.

Carl lifted the mug to his mouth, blowing a shaky breath across the top to cool the liquid before he took a sip. It slipped down his throat like silk, warming him from the inside, he savoured every second of it. He breathed in the sweet, familiar smell and felt himself relax slightly. It was a nice distraction. He didn’t know what to say to the man, didn’t know what the man wanted to hear. He was probably just waiting until Carl stopped freaking out on him so he could take him home. Carl almost hoped he was wrong, that Negan wouldn’t stop questioning him until he had no choice but to tell him everything. It might ease the weight from his shoulders.

“Things at home…. they're just not great.” Carl rubbed a hand over his face. God when did things get so messed up? I mean here he was spilling his guts out to a teacher who just happened to be his only friend, if he even was a friend. He was probably only around because he felt like he had a duty to help the fucked-up student. Maybe he was a project to him, like a charity, something he could fix before he passed it along.
“Not great? In what way Carl?”

Carl sighed, leaning a head back against the cushion, where could he begin? What could he even tell him? The truth? Never his mind answered for him. He needed to keep Negan safe, he needed him on his side. He couldn’t let Shane take Negan away from him, not like his other friends. He didn’t even want him to know. It was the worst of him, the nasty, dark part that no one should ever see.

“Carl.”

The firmness in his voice made Carl snap his head back up, he looked at him, concern was etched over his face, underlined with a serious look.

“Are they hurting you Carl?” Negan leaned forward to rest a hand on his knee that Carl immediately shifted away from, knocking the hand off. Negan thankfully took the hint and put some distance between then once more. “You can tell me. I won’t judge or run off to the cops I just need to know that you’re safe at home.”

“No. No they’re not hurting me. They just…. They’re not around as much anymore. My Dad’s the town Sheriff, he’s always out and my mom’s a nurse at the local hospital so she’s pretty much always on call. It’s just me at home most of the time, gets a bit lonely.”

“Carl do you honestly expect me to believe that you ran in front of my car in the middle of the night just because you were lonely?”

“It’s the truth!”

“Carl.” Negan sat up straight, rubbing a hand across his eyes. “C’mon, this is you and me, I know when you’re bullshitin’.”

“I’m not bullshitin’. It was just too quiet in the house so I thought I’d go for a run. You know how it makes me feel better.” Carl explained, he was so tempted, so damn close to just telling him everything. The words sat on the tip of his tongue threatening to spill out. “No one would believe you Carl. No one. Even if they did you know damn well I’d kill anyone that tried to keep you from me.” All the threats spiraled in his head. How could he ever tell anyone with those words hanging over him? How would he even begin to tell him? How do you even tell anyone?

Negan sighed. “Carl I’m not gonna force you to tell me anything you’re not comfortable with.” Negan looked him in the eye, Carl nearly wept with the concern he could see in them. “I just...I care about you Carl I hate seeing you like this. Seeing you out there, in front of my car, my heart goddamn stopped. The thought of something happening to you…” Negan paused before standing, quickly moving over to the fireplace he knelt and started lighting a fire.

Carl let his words hang in the air. He didn’t know what to say. The words had moved him, had triggered something in him that he’d tried so hard to keep locked away. He felt emotions swirl within him, he’d gotten by for so long feeling nothing but fear, pain, and hatred but now...now he was overcome by heartache. Feelings of grief for the person he once was crawled up his throat, threatening to choke him. He wanted to be that person for Negan, he wanted to give him the best version of himself. Guilt stung him when he realised that would never happen, he would never be better, he could never give him more. This man who seemed to care so much about him when he had gone through the past few months feeling like no one ever would. He saw him when no one else had.

“The thought of something happening to you Carl is so fucking painful to me that I would move the world to stop it happening.” Negan spoke again.
Carl felt a tear trickle down his face, he had no idea that he mattered so much to him, that he mattered to anyone at all. He tried to wipe it away before Negan saw but he was too late. “Carl.” A soft voice whispered, Carl turned his head away, he hated anyone seeing him like this but he couldn’t stop the tears. He couldn’t stop the gut wrenching sobs that wracked his body at the soft touch against his cheek, trying to wipe away some of the tears that just kept on falling. Carl placed his hands over his eyes trying to stop himself, trying to keep himself from just completely breaking apart. He tried to control his breath, tried to stop the gasping heaves that choked out of him. He tried to push him Negan away, wanting to distance himself from feelings that he tried to suppress for so long, he didn’t want to feel anything. He didn’t want to hope that he might have a chance to escape from the darkness. Still, he couldn’t stop leaning into the arms that wrapped around him, couldn’t stop himself grabbing his shirt, gripping it tightly as he let the tears overcome him. He felt lost in the sobs that wracked his body, felt like he’d drowned in them, the steady rub of a hand against his back was the only thing keeping him afloat.

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Eventually the sobs ebbed off, he felt exhausted, his head hurt. He wasn’t sure if he was ready to leave the safety of Negan’s embrace, he wasn’t ready to face the harsh light in the room. He could feel dampness beneath his cheek, he flushed with embarrassment as he realised that it probably wasn’t just his tears that had caused the moisture on the other man’s shirt. He withdrew, gently drawing himself out of the comfortable arms, he used the cuff of his shirt to wipe at his face, vaguely noting that Negan’s jacket had fallen from his shoulders.

“Here.” A box of tissues was offered to him. He took it gratefully, trying to clean himself up. Christ, he’d made such a mess of himself and now Negan knew what a mess he was.

“Carl.” He refused to look at him, preferring to focus on wiping his face.

“I’m gonna take the mugs out alright? There’s a bathroom in the door to your left if you wanna wash your face up.” Negan continued. Carl saw him stand and walk over to the sink out of the corner of his eye. He couldn’t help but feel the sting of rejection, maybe this was too much for the man, no one wanted a sobbing teenager ruining their evening. Taking a deep breath, trying to stop the tears that wanted to fall again, he raised up from the couch and walked over to the bathroom.

The cold water was sharp against his face, a welcome relief to the stinging heat caused by his tears. He couldn’t look in the mirror that hung over the porcelain sink, he didn’t need to see what a wreck he was. He just hoped that he’d have a chance to let the swelling in his eyes go down before Negan kicked him out and took him home. He took a shuddering breath, knuckles gripping the sink harder, he’d been so stupid to break down like that. Negan probably thought he was an overdramatic teen who wasn’t getting enough attention at home. Stupid. Splashing his face once more he turned to dry it on a nearby towel.

He took another breath before twisting the doorknob, time to face the music he thought. Taking a tentative step out, he took in the sight of Negan sat on the couch he’d just vacated, head in his hands. The door behind him clicked shut, Negan’s head snapped towards him, gaze searching over his face. What was he looking for? The other man stood and walked over to him. Carl braced himself for the inevitable rejection that would follow.

He didn’t expect to be pulled back into another hug, didn’t expect a comforting hand on the back of his neck rubbing softly. The hand remained as Negan pulled back just enough for Carl to see his face. He wanted to look away but found himself unable to. He’d never felt so vulnerable as he did in that moment. He wanted to run. He wanted to stay in this moment forever.
“I’m sorry Carl.”

He frowned in confusion. What on earth was he sorry about?

“I’m sorry for whatever is going on that you can’t talk about, or that you’re not ready to talk about. Just know that whenever you are ready I’m here and I’ll always be here. There’s nothing you can say or do that’ll change that and I’ll work every goddamn day until you believe that OK?”

Once again, the man had surprised him. He still wanted him around. He didn’t hate him? Carl’s eyes searched Negan’s again finding nothing but an earnest honesty. It almost made him cry again.

He nodded back at the man’s words, heart melting at the small smile that formed on his face.

“Good.” Negan said dropping his hands from Carl. “You hungry? I know it's late but god knows how long you were out there running for.”

Once again Carl’s body embarrassed him by letting out a loud grumble at the mention of food.

Negan laughed “I'll take that as a yes then. I've got some leftover spaghetti, think I can work this god-awful machine to warm it up.”

“You don't have to-”

“Carl,” Negan interrupted “You're hungry, I have food. You don't have to protest everything. Now get into the kitchen you can help me figure out the microwave.”

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Sitting down at the wooden table Carl felt a sense of belonging that he hadn’t thought he’d ever feel again. Negan placed a steaming plate of spaghetti in front of him, his stomach growled again at the smell of real food, he’d lived off microwave meals for far too long.

“Thanks.” He mumbled as he shifted in his seat, surprised when Negan sat opposite him with his own plate. Guilt swept through him again when he realised that Negan must have foregone his own dinner to deal with the crying teenager in his lounge.

“You better eat before it goes cold Carl. If there’s on the thing I know how to cook then it’s goddamn spaghetti, I guarantee it’ll be the best thing you’ve ever had in your mouth.”

Well it can’t be the worst Carl sardonically thought to himself. Picking up his fork he began making his way through the pasta. He really wasn’t lying when he said it was good, all the flavors fused together creating the perfect dish. They ate together as they did at school, quietly enjoying each other’s company.

Carl was tempted to lick the plate clean as he finished the meal. Probably best he didn’t make himself look too crazy in front of the man. His eyes kept drifting to the wet mark left on Negan’s shirt, he probably did want to embarrass him by changing it in front of him.

“Thanks Negan, it really was amazing.” Carl figured he should remember some of his manners.

Negan looked up from his own plate, smiling when he saw Carl’s empty one. “Good. I’m glad. You want some more?”

“I’m good, thanks.”

Watching Negan finish his meal had Carl wondering about the man. They knew so little about each
other yet there was a connection there stronger than any he’d ever had in his life. Everything seemed to come back to him.

“Negan…” he started. Where was he going with this?

“Yeah?” Negan prompted after a few minutes of silence. He wiped his face with a napkin and waited for Carl to speak again.

“What did you learn how to cook?” He chickened out of asking something more personal. He didn’t even know what he wanted to know about him. He just wanted to know more.

“Ah. My...uh...ex-wife taught me. She lived in Italy for a while, picked up loads of great tips, and finally did the impossible and taught me how to not burn food.”

Ex-wife? He couldn’t imagine Negan married, couldn’t really imagine him as a domestic guy, coming home from work to his wife. God if he was married did they mean he had kids? The cabin didn’t really feel like a child-friendly place but maybe they were older.

“What...what happened with her?”

Negan sat back, he appeared deep in thought. Carl should not have asked that. Way too personal. He was so busy reprimanding himself that he hardly noticed when Negan started talking again. “We just… changed. We made each other more and more unhappy each day we were together. Even a simple conversation was plagued with insults and sly digs. We started bringing out the worst in each other instead of the best. I’d always loved her, she’d been the one for me since high school but one night, a few years after college I was in a bar and this girl came up to me. All flirty and gorgeous and I was tempted. I’d never even looked at another person the whole time I was with my wife but in that moment, I nearly took the girl home. That. That was when I realised things were done between us. We were no longer each other's world and I was OK with that.”

Carl didn’t know what to say. He felt bad for Negan, he couldn’t imagine how it must feel to just lose someone like that, to have your feelings just change. He barely realised the flicker of jealousy when it pinged through him. Refusing to acknowledge it he focused on Negan’s next words.

“It wasn’t all bad. I still have awesome memories of her, and we’re both a lot happier than before. I get to live in this awesome cabin, and she gets to travel the world like she’s always wanted.”

“Sounds like things worked out for the best.”

“It did. I can’t say I’m any worse off now.”

“Even with a mess of a teenager in your house?”

“Carl you’re not a goddamn mess and for the record this is the most company I’ve had since I got here so I’m not exactly a thriving member of society.”

Carl let out a small laugh “That’s because you terrify everyone.”

“Not you.” Negan pointed out.

“No. Not me.” They looked at each other, both questioning exactly how they’d ended up where they were. Both silently thanking whatever God was up there that they had ended up there.

“Is that why you left Seattle?”
“Pretty much, too many memories there, kept stressing me out.”

“Oh. Why come here of all places?” He couldn’t help but ask he was surprised that Negan was willing to talk about himself like this their conversations usually centred around Carl and his problems.

Negan twirled spaghetti around his fork as he thought, it was almost cute Carl thought to himself.

“Honestly? I have no idea. The job came up and I just went for it. I liked the idea of living in the middle of nowhere. I got sick of all the bullshit fakeness in the city, everyone wanting to know everything about you. Gossiping about you behind your back. It’s fucked up.”

Carl couldn’t stop the laugh that fell out of him. “Doesn’t sound much different from here.” No one was ever as they seemed, and no one cared about that. They were all happy to pretend that it was a happy place, that there weren’t any monsters lurking in the bushes.

Negan laughed with him, a deep throaty chuckle. “That’s true, although people don’t seem to be as observant here. More behind you back gossip I guess.”

“Yeah, they been gossiping about you yet?”

“Probably, god knows I’ve had enough of the ladies asking me about my damn love life. Your old biology teacher seems particularly interested.”

Carl could believe it. The lab looked out over the field and more than once he’d seen her looking out of the window at Negan. He usually noticed because he was doing exactly the same thing. “Yeah she's not quite been the same since her husband died.”

“Just wish she’d express her grief in ways that don't involve grabbin’ my ass.”

Damn laughter bubbled up again.

Negan stood to clear the plates away. Carl joined him.

“You want some help washing these?” Carl asked

“Nah, just need to load the dishwasher, you go make yourself at home on the couches I’ll be over in a minute.”

Carl did as told, taking the same spot as earlier, right in the corner. He wondered what would happen now. It was past midnight; would Negan insist on taking him home? He couldn’t stay here could he?

Negan passed him as he headed to the other side of the couch, flopping down on it.

“Right so what are we gonna do about your parents? You think you can go home?”

The big question. “They’ll be at work by now, they usually work overnight on Halloween. Lots of stupid people out getting hurt. I can go home, I just... I don’t know if I’m ready to.”

“Allright, you can crash here tonight, get your head together.”

“Thank you, I just need to be away for a while.”

“Yeah, I get you, think you can sleep now?” Negan questioned.

“I don’t think so..” He really didn’t know, these days he only seemed to fall asleep when he was
completely exhausted, the constant fear of who might join him kept his eyes wide open.

“OK. no problem lets watch a movie.” Negan stood and headed over to his DVD shelf.

“A movie?” Carl looked confused.

“Yes, a movie, you know one of those talking, moving pictures.”

“Haha very funny. You wanna watch one with me?” He watched as Negan crouched down in front of the TV, shoving a DVD into the player. It’d been so long since he’d watched a movie with anyone, the last time was probably when he’d been hanging out with Enid. His mind recoiled as he remembered how that had ended. It wouldn’t be the same today, Shane couldn’t possibly know he was here. Still his stomach twisted as his mind explored what could happen if Shane ever found out about his friendship with Negan.

Negan stood, remote in hand and flopped back onto the couch next to Carl, resting one had along the back.

“I wouldn’t have suggested it if I didn’t Carl ‘sides I’ve already said that we need to work on your real education.”

“Riiight…” Carl said shifting to get more comfortable. Maybe he could forget about Shane tonight, maybe he could just enjoy the evening. “and how are we starting the syllabus?”

“Silence of the Lambs’, absolute classic.”

Carl had a vague recollection of hearing the title, wasn’t it an old horror movie?

“Am I even old enough to watch it?”

Negan scoffed, “You can never be too young to watch this movie. Consider it a life lesson.”

Carl let out a little laugh as he curled his legs under him, resting more against the armrest. He leaned his head on his arm and watched as the opening credits rolled across the screen.

He couldn’t help but flick his eyes over to the man next time him as he watched the movie, it’s like they were drawn to him. It was strange, seeing him so unguarded, he looked so normal. Not that he was weird at school or anything but it was like his physical appearance finally matched the image that Carl had of him in his head. He wasn’t the hulking asshole that yelled and threw his cap on the ground when he was pissed, he was just a guy that had taken the time to get to know him. He watched as the light from the screen flickered across his face, illuminating sharp features, the salt and pepper stubble that covered the lower half of his face, the slight smile that formed whenever a joke was made. It sent a warm tingle through him, butterflies fluttered around his stomach. He wanted to etch this moment into his brain forever, the peace that filled him, he hadn’t felt so comfortable in such a long time. For a brief flicker of a moment, he felt safe.

Carl felt his eyes dropping they were getting heavier by the second, he tried to focus on the figures flitting across the screen but he couldn't help closing his eyes against the light. He felt his breathing deepen as he relaxed further into the plush cushions, lulled by the soft rhythm of Negan’s breath. He didn’t even notice as a blanket covered him.
Negan Interlude p.II

Chapter Summary

Negan's perspective on the events of Halloween.

Chapter Notes

New chapter a little bit earlier than I thought I'd post! Super super short compared to the others but I just wanted to have a little exploration of what's going on in Negan's brain.

"Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings - always darker, emptier and simpler."

- Friedrich Nietzsche

Negan Interlude pt.II

Jesus Christ. What the fuck was he doing? He looked down at the sleeping teen, now covered in the heavy blanket that he’d placed over him. He could get in a lot of trouble for this. Having a student sleep at his house, the town Sheriff’s kid? That was just fuckin’ beggin’ for jail time. Still, Negan couldn't help but notice how peaceful Carl looked, he'd never realised how tense he was while awake. Even when it was just the two of them he carried a tension that didn’t seem to exist now.

He sighed, rubbing his face, as he walked away from Carl.

Grabbing his favorite whiskey by the neck he didn’t bother taking a glass as he headed up the stairs and into his bedroom. He shut the door and leaned against it, breathing another heavy sigh, he chugged from the bottle. When had his life gotten so complicated again?

When a certain brunette ran into him one afternoon his mind supplied for him.

Placing the bottle on his bedside table, he stripped himself of his shirt and shucked off his jeans. He crawled into bed and rested against the headboard, there’s no way he could fuckin’ sleep now. Too many thoughts bounced around his head, too many to sleep but too many to focus on. Thousands of questions wanted to burst out. He wanted to go downstairs and scream them at Carl, shake him until he told him everything. He wanted to go downstairs and tell him sweet lies, that he’d be alright and now one would ever hurt him again.

Fuckin’ pussy, he chastised himself. Since when did you get so goddamn sappy? Just who the fuck was this kid to make him so soft? He mentally cringed as he thought of how he’d spilled his soul to Carl, he never thought he’d ever actually tell him how he felt but seeing him there, so vulnerable, so damn sad. It broke him. He wanted him to know he wasn’t alone, that he had someone there for him...
no matter what. These feelings he was having for him, they couldn’t be right. He’d never felt this way before. Every time he saw Carl sad he just wanted to make him happy, he knew he’d do anything to put a smile on his face. That smile that set him on fire, made him wanted to do the stupidest shit just to keep it on his face. Rage filled him whenever he saw anyone so much as look at him weirdly. Every time he saw damn Simon’s face he wanted to punch the living shit out of it for daring to touch him. Rage filled him again at the thought of anything happening to Carl at home. Carl had never let on about his home life, never gave any indication that he had anything but a normal home. He wished he knew what was going on, his brain was flooded with possibilities, physical abuse? Emotional abuse? Maybe they weren’t happy that his grades weren’t up to scratch?

He tried to consider how he could find out more. He didn’t have any excuse to meet his parents, he wasn’t his teacher, didn’t even coach him on a team. Besides what could he do if he did meet them? Yell at them until they confessed to whatever it was they were doing? Neither of them were particularly good options, especially considering who Carl’s father was.

He took another swig from the bottle. He was gonna need a lil’ more than this, reaching into his bedside table he grabbed the packet of cigarettes that he kept for emergencies, fumbling around to find the lighter. He found it buried under the condoms he’d been planning on using that night. He’d been on his way to a bar when he’d come across Carl, he was desperate for some company, to feel the touch of someone that wasn’t a 60-year-old biology teacher. A deeper part of him wanted to bury himself so deep in someone that he forgot about Carl and the feelings that damn smile of his brought up.

Raising from the bed he walked over to open the window and perch on the ledge. Negan looked out into the night and lit the cigarette, taking a deep drag he relished the flood of endorphins that flowed through him. He watched as the smoke flew into the night air, he hadn’t realised how much he was trembling. The events of the night had shaken him to the core. His emotions had been all over the place that night, fear mixed with concern, frustration and anger battled with each other making him sick with it.

He hadn’t known terror like he’d felt when he realised that it was Carl in front of his car. The sight of his distraught face, the sheer panic in his eyes as he fought against him, killed Negan. He desperately wanted to know the cause of it. Carl was so obviously lying, he’d been a coach long enough to know the signs of abuse but who was causing it? There was clearly something going on at home. Something bad enough that Carl wanted to run from it, that it provoked such a violent physical reaction from him. He was glad he could calm him, relieved when he felt Carl sag into his arms.

He didn't know why he’d hugged him the second time. It was inappropriate for God’s sake but the look on Carl’s face made it impossible not to. He just wanted to keep him in his arms, keep him safe from whatever was out there. How the fuck could he do that if he didn’t even know what it was?

He understood why Carl didn’t want to talk, Christ, they hardly fucking knew each other. It had stung though, he wanted Carl to feel comfortable talking to him about everything. He had meant what he’d said, he would wait until he felt like he could talk to him. He would do whatever it takes to convince Carl that he could trust him with anything. He hoped they were on their way there.

Negan didn't know why he'd told him about Lucille. He hated talking about her, his failed marriage had always been a sore topic. He'd never spoken about it with anyone, not even his friends back in Seattle knew the full story. Of course, he'd failed to mention to Carl that the girl in the bar was actually a guy in the bar. He didn't want to freak him out too much God knows what a small-town kid would think about bisexuals.
Such a fuckin mess.

He took another drag from his cigarette, briefly regretting not taking the whiskey with him when he'd moved across the room.

Since when did he care so much about what other people thought of him? When did he begin to care what this teenager thought of him? How could he even hope that Carl would tell him about his life when Negan couldn’t even be honest about something like that?

He was just so damn confused. He couldn’t get his head straight. His feelings were at war with his sense of responsibility. He and Carl had always toed the boundary between appropriate and inappropriate. They were too friendly with each other at times, more like buddies hanging out than student/teacher. He’d always been like that when he taught football though, he was too used to older students where it was fine to kick back and relax with them. First names were normal, and a good relationship meant better results for the team. Not that anyone at the school had commented on their friendship but he always felt on edge when they were together. Ready for someone to say something. He’ll be damned if they did anything to keep them away from each other, he wasn’t gonna abandon Carl when he so clearly needed someone.

He still didn’t know what it was about Carl that had captured his attention. Sure, he liked how he’d stood up to him, he was a mystery and they were always fun to uncover but there was something more there. Something he wasn’t sure he was ready to think about. Something that could ruin him if it continued. He didn’t see a way out though, he and Carl were intertwining, he couldn’t see his life without him. It worried him to be so attached to one person. The last time that had happened he’d ended up breaking their heart and leaving them to burn in the ashes of their marriage.

He rubbed at his eyes. He needed to sleep, needed to escape the thoughts for a while. He flicked the remaining ashes out the window and stubbed the butt against the frame. He needed to repaint it anyways. He walked back over to the bed and clambered on it. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep. Carl was safe he kept telling himself. For at least one-night Negan could protect him before letting him back out into the world.
Chapter Summary

The time they spent together was the highlight of his day, every glance of that damn baseball cap in the hallway sent tingles through him, even a single second of eye contact as they passed each other was enough to make him smile for the rest of the day. It was ridiculous.

Chapter Notes

Another chapter for you all! Gets a little bit rough for Carl but I promise it will get better!

As always thank you so much for the lovely comment and kudos! They're so very appreciated!

“I scream for everything that has gone wrong. I scream for everything broken in our lives.”

— Marie Lu

Halloween 2017

Carl woke feeling more rested than he’d felt in such a long time. He squirmed and twisted as he stretched his muscles out. Confusion hit him when his arms his soft cushion instead of a hard wall. He sat up quickly and looked around at the unfamiliar setting. The previous night came rushing back to him, he cringed with embarrassment as he remembered crying into Negan's arms. What a damn cliché. He didn’t even stay awake to finish the movie! He groaned and buried his face in his hands, such a fucking idiot.

Looking up from his palms he had another glance around, no Negan yet, must still be in bed. He looked to the stairs, should he go up and wake him? Too rude he corrected himself, he'd already ruined his night why ruin his morning too?

Padding over to the bathroom he relieved himself and splashed water in his face yet again. At least he had a decent night sleep for once, his face didn’t seem as pale as it usually was. Maybe he'd even be able to talk to his parents with a clear head for a change. God knows he needed to, he had to do whatever it too to convince them not to send him away. He never thought it’d come to this, having to talk his parents into keeping him around, he lightly hit his head against the mirror, why couldn’t he be better for them?

Leaving the room, he stood for a minute and took the place in, he could see why Negan had chosen
it, it was beautiful. He gazed out of one of the windows, the trees surrounding the cabin were turning a steady rust, he couldn’t see anything but trees around them. Perfect seclusion he thought, it must be nice to come back to a place like this every day, it really was a sanctuary from the nasties of the world. Stepping away from the window he went snooping around the rest of the ground floor, brushing over cabinets, briefly noticing a distinct lack of photos. His own house had pictures everywhere, you could pretty much see their lives in the frames, but here there was nothing but the occasional candle for decoration. Negan had mentioned friends back in Seattle, he wondered why there were no pictures of them, what about his family? The more he explored the house the more questions popped into his head, it was another stark reminder of how little he knew about him.

He flopped back down on the couch, eyes catching on a baseball bat mounted above the fireplace. He hadn’t noticed it before. Why the hell would anyone have a baseball bat hanging over their fireplace? He stood up again to get a closer look, he couldn’t see any signatures, nothing to indicate that it was anything special. Just an old bat with a lot of marks, and was that blood? Carl wrinkled his nose.

“Good to see you and my baby gettin’ on so well.”

Carl jumped at Negan’s voice, he hadn’t heard the man come downstairs.

“Baby?”

“My bat.” Negan moved to stand beside him, looking up at the bat with what Carl could only describe as pure adoration. He mentally added ‘freakishly attached to bat’ to the list of things he knew about Negan.

“You call your bat Baby?” Carl tried to sound serious but he couldn’t stop the hint of jest in his voice.

“Don’t judge! She’s got me through some of my hardest games as a player, kicked ass in many fights too.” Negan sounded almost proud of it.

So that was blood then. Nice. Somehow so typically Negan. “Sounds like a great bat.” He replied.

“She is.” There was almost a dreamy tone to his voice, like he was speaking about a previous lover. He certainly didn’t talk about his wife like that. “Anyway, you done nosy-ing around?”

Carl looked at him feigning shock. “I wasn’t being nosy, I was just waiting for you to get your ass outta bed.”

Negan looked sheepish. “Sorry I didn’t mean to sleep so late, I’m not normally this lazy.”

“Must be the old age thing?” Carl said with a grin on his face.

“You want me to leave you out in the woods?”

“I’m sure I’d find my way out.”

“I’m sure you would you lil badass. Anyway, no time for that, did you sleep alright?”

“Yeah” he replied. “Best night I’ve had in a while.”

“Good” Negan said as he walked into the kitchen area, Carl followed taking the same seat at the table. “Cos you happened to miss the best part of the movie.”
“Ah. The movie.” He couldn’t remember anything other than a creepy guy behind glass.

“Yeah, I really hope you’re doin’ better in your real grades that you are in my movie class.”

“Sorry I promise I’ll do better next time.” Carl said.

“Damn right you will.”

Carl couldn’t help but smile at the words, he wasn’t sure if there would ever be a ‘next time’ but it sent warm tingles through him to know that Negan would want one.

“Wanna go for a walk?” Negan asked as he placed a bowl of oatmeal in front of him. Carl didn’t remember him asking if he wanted food. The confusion must have shown on his face as Negan spoke again. “You're eatin’ the damn oatmeal Carl. You clearly don't eat enough at home but you'll damn well eat here.”

Carl scowled at him. He wasn't a child. He could decide for himself when he wanted to eat.

“Don't gimme that look. I'm not babying you. You train like a damn athlete for God's sake you need to eat like one. Besides I've got a long hike planned for us this mornin’ and I'm not havin’ you pass out like a princess just cos you wanted to make a point.”

Carl glared at him again but begrudgingly took up the spoon and started eating. Glaring at the know-it-all smirk on Negan's face. He hated it when he was right. Damn insufferable ass.

He helped him clear up breakfast, Negan had persuaded him to eat scrambled eggs on toast as well as the porridge. He felt so full he wasn’t convinced that it would fuel him, if anything all he wanted to do now was curl up and have another nap. Still he found himself throwing on his sneakers whilst Negan went to find some boots.

“Ready to go?” The voice behind him asked.

“Yeah.” He stood. “Let's do this.”

“Shit. Hang on. You need a jacket.” Negan darted off upstairs before Carl could protest, it wasn’t that cold.

“Here.” Negan shoved a grey sweatshirt at him as he hurried back downstairs. The big purple W stood out on the front, he recognised it from all of the brochures he’d seen from the University of Washington, he must have kept it from college. Carl threw it over himself, feeling slightly ridiculous as it dwarfed his small figure.

“Sorry I don’t have anything smaller.”

“It’s fine, thanks for letting me borrow it.” Carl gave him a smile as they walked out of the door. “So where are we going?”

“It’s a surprise.”

They headed away from the house and further into the woods. The crisp air filled his lungs, the familiar smell of autumn fell over him, it was blissful he thought. After several minutes walking in silence Carl couldn’t help but ask “Are we any closer to the surprise?”

Negan laughed as a reply.

“C’mon, tell me something or I’m gonna start to think you’ve brought me out here to murder me.”
Negan laughed even harder. “Murder you? Nah I’d have bashed you over the head with my bat last night if I wanted to off you.”

“Good to know.”

“I found this place a couple of weeks ago, it has a gorgeous view of the forest.” Negan admitted to Carl, he could tell the kid wasn’t gonna let the topic go.

“Sounds nice.”

“You’ll find out soon enough. We just gotta get up those rocks.” The older man stopped and pointed up at the stacked rocks, more like a rocky trail but still required a little bit of careful navigation.

Carl followed him up, watching each step as they got closer to the top.

Negan turned to grab his hand and help him up onto the final rock, not expecting the strong grip that pulled him forward Carl stumbled and went crashing into Negan’s hard chest. Arms wrapped around him as he tried to regain his footing, he could hear the Negan’s laughter where he was leaning against his chest. Why was he always making an idiot out of himself?

“We gotta stop meetin’ like this Carl.” Negan said, his grip loosening, arms slipping down to lightly support his waist as Carl stood straighter. “You gonna run off again this time?”

Their eyes met, blue hitting brown as they contemplated each other, both thinking about that first meeting, how much things had changed since then. A sense of longing filled the air, something flicked in their eyes. Carl could feel every centimeter of where their bodies connected, his skin tingled where Negan's hands were placed against his waist. He could feel hard muscle under his palms where he'd clutched at his arms.

“No, not this time.” Feeling overwhelmed by the feelings soaring through him Carl stepped away from him, removing all contact between the two, he joked “Not unless you’re gonna ask me to join your crappy track team again.”

Whatever moment they were having dissipated with his words. Negan chuckled again and walked onwards. He called out behind him. “Don’t want your sorry ass on the team anyways, you’d probably just end up falling over me again.”

Carl threw a stick at him. Ass, he thought as he followed.

Another couple of minutes passed before they came to the end of the path.

Negan was right, it was gorgeous up here. Carl might even go so far as to say it was breath-taking. All you could see was trees, the glorious rust and gold of the leaves covered the view. It was a clear day for once, blue skies with no cloud in sight. The perfect backdrop for the view. He stood, stunned, next to Negan.

Carl didn't know what to say. He didn't want to ruin the peace of the moment. The sounds of nature filled his ears in the most delightful way, he wanted to close his eyes to enjoy the bird song but didn't want to miss out on the view.

He sat, legs hanging over the edge, he needed to rest before the journey back down. Negan sank down beside him, their thighs brushed against each other through jeans as he shifted to get comfortable.

“What the walk?” Negan asked.
“Definitely.” He smiled over at him.

“Carl.”

“Yeah?” He replied absentmindedly, he’d been watching the birds floating over the treetops.

“I’m glad you’re here.”

“Me too.”

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“Drop me off around here, I don’t think my parents would be too happy to see my turn up with my high school coach.” Carl said.

“Good fuckin’ point.” Negan pulled the car over. They sat for a moment, neither knowing quite what to say. Carl felt like his life as becoming a sum of unspoken words that wanted to burst out of his chest.

“Thanks again Negan. I’ll see ya at school on Monday.” He had to get out of the car before he said something stupid. He placed his hand on the latch to open the door, shifting himself to get out he was stopped by a hand on his, Negan’s hand curled around his, squeezing gently. He frowned when he felt paper between them.

“I’m always here if you need me Carl, just give me a call. Whatever the time, wherever you are, if you need me I’ll be there.”

Carl nodded, giving the man a brief smile. He knew he wouldn’t use it. He didn’t want to bother him anymore than he already did. Dammit, there they were again, those damn butterflies fluttering around when Negan flashed a dazzling smile back at him.

“Good, see you later.”

Carl got out of the car and watched him drive off, he clutched the paper in his hand as he walked back to his house. Nerves filled him the closer he got, what on earth was he gonna tell them? How was he gonna avoid being sent to live with Shane? Panic settled in as he thought about what would happen if they didn’t let him stay.

Walking up to the porch he took a deep breath and stepped inside. His parents shot towards the door, both of them grabbing him into a crushing hug. It freaked him out to have them so close, it was too much, he could feel his breath catch in his throat. Thankfully they let him go before he started struggling too much, that would be harder to explain.

“You wanna tell us where the hell you’ve been?” His Dad started, he looked furious.

“I went to a friend’s house.” He moved further inside the house, he wanted needed some space.

His Mom followed close behind. “What friend? We called all your friends Carl, they said they hadn’t spoken to you in months so stop lying and tell us where you were.”

Great, now he’d have to deal with that on Monday. “It’s a new friend, Matt, he started this year and we’ve been getting close. I’m sorry for running off like that.” He tried to act remorseful. He needed to keep his mouth shut, he had to convince them that he could stay at home. That he was perfectly fine. Time to be the perfect son again. “I just freaked out. I didn’t want you guys to know about my grades, I knew how upset you’d be.” Carl looked down at his sneakers, all part of the act.
“Carl, we don’t care about your grades. We just worry about you baby.” His Mom spoke, brushing his hair behind his ear, a familiar gesture that used to be comforting, now it just made him feel awkward.

He squeezed Negan’s number in his hand, it was like having him there, he could almost feel the heat of his hand in his. He could get through this. “Mom, do I still have to go live with Shane? My grades are up this year I promise, sure it sucks being on my own but the quiet helps me study.” He quickly added “Being at Shane’s might be too distracting.”

At least he didn’t have to lie about that. He knew he wouldn’t get much time to study if he was around Shane all the time, it just wouldn’t be distracting in the way that his parents thought it would be.

Carl watched as they exchanged looks, hoping he’d done enough to convince them. His Dad still looked pissed but he threw his hands up in what looked like defeat.

“Fine. You can stay here but I swear Carl if your grades aren’t up this term you’ll be moving into Shane’s whether you want to or not.”

He nearly dropped to the floor in relief at his words. “Thanks Dad.”

He Dad just nodded at him, glancing down at his watch. “I gotta get to work.” He pointed a finger at him as he left the house. “We’ll talk about your punishment later Carl.”

He and his Mom stood in awkward silence for a moment.

“I’m…uh… gonna go get changed.”

He leapt up the stairs, ignoring the “Carl!” that echoed behind him.

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His Dad appeared to have forgotten his promise of a ‘punishment’, in fact his parents seemed to have forgotten about the whole damn thing. Their lives continued as normal, the only difference was the occasional question about his grades. Thankfully he’d been staying on top of them this semester and he was actually proud that he had A grades again. He felt cautiously optimistic about college now, he had yet to pick an actual campus but at least he might actually get into one. Carl might even go so far as to say he was having a good week. Shane had been away on a training course, his parents were keeping their distance, and he and Negan had been spending more time together after school.

Negan had taken to driving Carl home when they were finished at the school. They were always the last ones there, no one ever saw them and Negan always dropped him off at least a block from his house. Carl couldn’t help but feel slightly guilty whenever they did this. It was a constant reminder of how inappropriate their friendship was. The age difference didn’t bother him but he didn’t want Negan to lose his job because of him. It wasn’t so bad because he didn’t teach him directly but Carl was sure he’d be in a lot of trouble if the school found out that he’d slept over at his place.

A very selfish part of him didn’t care. The time they spent together was the highlight of his day, ever glance of that damn baseball cap in the hallway sent tingles through him, even a single second of eye contact as they passed each other was enough to make him smile for the rest of the day. It was ridiculous.

Mentally shaking himself he turned his attention back to his college essay. He’d actually been making progress on it, with a little help from Negan of course. They’d been working on it together in the evening. It was mostly Carl shouting out ideas and Negan declaring them as ‘Fuckin’ boring as
shit” or “Good”. Not always helpful but it got the job done and he was now nearing the end of the
damn thing.

Thank God.

Finishing it up took the remainder of his lunch break but at least it was done. All he had to do was
pluck up the courage to get Negan to read over it. It made him nervous to show Negan such a
personal piece of work, he wanted him to be impressed this was his first chance to show the man that
he wasn’t just a whiney teenager with issues. Having printed it off he headed to his next class,
thoughts filled with Negan.

That afternoon, Carl handed the finished piece to Negan, watching as the man sat on the bleachers,
take out his glasses, and start reading. He anxiously paced in front of him, absently biting at his nail
as he waited for him to finish.

“Can ya stop with the whole back and forth thing? You’re making me dizzy.” Negan spoke out, not
raising his head from the paper.

Carl froze on the spot. “Right. Sorry.” He went to sit next to him. Body not quite ready to stop
moving his knee jiggled, trying to remove some of the jittery tension in him. A firm hand came down
to hinder the movement.

“Seriously?” Negan asked.

“Sorry.” Carl blurted out, why couldn’t he just control himself. Negan’s hand remained on his knee
as he read, Carl found it strangely comforting. Most of the time he would do anything to escape
being touched, it usually sent tendrils of fear and discomfort through him. Even when Negan had
touched him before it electrified his senses so much that it was overwhelming, he was usually torn
between wanting more and wanting to run. Now though, in this moment, it was perfect, his hand
was a reassuring presence that calmed his nerves.

He saw Negan stop reading, watched as he took his glasses off and placed them back in his pocket.
He waited for him to say something, holding his breath as the silence continued. Finally, Negan
looked at him.

“That was brilliant Carl.” Negan smiled as he handed the paper back. “With an essay like that any
college will take you.”

Carl couldn’t contain the burst of emotion that spread through him, he threw himself into Negan’s
arms gripping the other man in a tight hug. For the first time in years in actually felt proud of himself,
college was becoming a real possibility and he had Negan to thank for getting him there. Laughter
bubbled out of him, joining Negan’s low chuckle. The embraced only lasted a few moments, Carl’s
arms tight around Negan’s neck, Negan’s hand gently rubbing his back, before they had to separate.
Carl suddenly remembering exactly where they were and how bad it would look if anyone spotted
him hugging the Coach.

He let out an awkward laugh as he sat back in his seat, rubbing the back of his neck as he tried to
calm himself. He felt embarrassed with his sudden outburst, not that Negan seemed to mind he was
still looking at him with that stupid grin on his face.

“Thanks. Just need to fill out the applications now.” Carl said to break the silence.

“Good, get on with it. Just promise me one thing Carl.” Negan’s face turned serious.

“What?”
Negan leaned in closer. “Promise me, no matter what college you go to, that you won’t join their damn track team.”

Carl rolled his eyes and hit his shoulder. “Sure, Coach whatever you say.”

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He once again cursed his luck as he realised why he and his classmates were being herded into the big gymnasium. He’d forgotten about Drink Driving Day. It was the big day organised by the local police force, AKA his Dad, where they’d gather all the high school students to drill it into their heads not to drink and drive. He’d heard the lecture at least a thousand times from his Father at home but he was still forced to attend the event every year. He took a seat at the back and waited for his Dad to make his entrance at the front of the room. His eyes scanned over the gym, he could see Enid snuggling up to Ron, when had they become a couple? He really had stopped paying attention to things. He could see the usual teachers hovering around the edges of the seats, he was surprised to see Negan there, probably making sure no one messes up his gym. Their eyes caught over the sea of students, Negan gave him a quick nod and a smile before continuing his discussion with the teacher next to him.

He turned his attention back to the front of the room as a figure sauntered across it. Shane, not his dad. When had he taken over?

The talk seemed to go on forever, Shane’s familiar drawl filling his ears, he was unable to escape the noise that echoed through the hall. Ever second made his skin crawl, he couldn’t stop fidgeting even after the kid next to him let out an annoyed sigh and glared at him. Every now and again Shane would catch his eye, each stare sending flickers of fear for him. This was supposed to be his safe place, one of the few places where Shane wouldn’t be. His heart raced in his ears, his head became filled with the heavy thud enhanced by the words spewing out of Shane’s mouth. He lost track of time, the kid next to him shoved at his shoulder to get him to move. The talk was over. Carl scrambled to get up so they could leave, he followed closely behind the group hoping to get lost in the hustle.

A hand landed on his shoulder, he was plucked out of the crowd and pulled aside.

“You gonna help me clean up?” Shane’s voice whispered in his ear. He didn’t have much of a choice judging by how hard he was gripping at his shoulder.

Carl watched as the room emptied, a twinge of disappointment flickered through him as he saw Negan leave with the rest of the teachers, he had hoped the man might have stayed. He let out a sigh and started clearing up, the chairs could stay but all the materials from the lecture had to go back into the store cupboard in the corner of the room. Shane was busy playing nice with the teachers that remained, if he was quick enough maybe he’d get out of there before they all left.

He carried as much as he could on each trip to the cupboard, there wasn’t much stuff but it was enough to wear him out after the first few drop offs. Shane was still talking to the teachers as he picked up the last items, he practically sprinted to the cupboard, he was nearly home free.

The next thing Carl knew was the ground coming up to meet his face. He cried out as his hands skidded along the floor, knees smacking against the ground. He turned to face his attacker, he was surprised to see Shane standing behind him, he thought it’d be Simon or one of his flunkies.

“What-?” He started, growing confused as Shane turned to lock the door behind them. He wouldn’t do anything here would he?
Shane glared down at him, eyes piercing in the dim light that seeped in through the only window in the small cupboard. Carl pushed backwards, creating more space between them, things felt wrong. His stomach twisted and churned, they hadn’t spoken since Halloween, two weeks had passed and Carl had managed to avoid the man. Now here he was, towering over him, looking almost as angry as the time Carl dared to cut his hair. He could feel himself tremor at the memory of unforgiving leather hitting his bare flesh.

“You wanna explain yourself Carl?” Shane asked as he shucked off the jacket he always wore to those talks. “You wanna tell me why you ran off on Halloween? Why you decided to reject my kind offer to take you in?”

“I… d-didn’t… I…. didn’t… uh… wanna be a burden on you. You work so hard, I didn’t think you’d want the hassle of dealing with a teenager.” The lies were becoming all too easy for him.

He drew away as Shane knelt down beside him, reaching his hand out to brush a cheek.

“Carl,” His voice was misleadingly kind. “You know you’re never a hassle to me. I love havin’ you around.”

The hand moved past his cheek and slid into his hair, brushing through the long locks. Shane looked over his face, leaning in close to place a chaste kiss on his lips. Carl tried not to turn away, he had to keep him happy. Shane sighed into his face, Carl’s nose turned at the foul breath, he looked away as Shane’s eyes closed in bliss.

“You always taste so damn good baby.” He nudged their noses together in a warped imitation of affection before sharply removing himself from Carl. He stood. “Can’t get too distracted though Carl. There’s still the matter of your punishment.” He unbuckled his belt. This time Carl did flinch as the belt flew through the hoops, he looked up in fear as Shane wrapped part of it around his hand.

“Shane... please... I’m sorry… I…. I won’t do it again... please you don’t have to do this.”

“I don’t want to do this baby, but you gotta learn. You can’t just run away from me Carl” He raised his arm and brought the belt down hard on Carl.

Carl cried out at the stinging blow, even through his clothes he could feel it burn into his skin. He curled in on himself, trying to cover his head as blow after blow landed on his body. His yells turned into whimpers, then into cries as the pain boiled through him. They blurred into one, igniting his body with pain, he didn’t even notice when Shane stopped. He flinched and tried to move away as hands touched his body.

“N-no no no... pl... please.” he tried to stutter out, pain erupted with every brush of Shane’s hands. He could hardly move, he wanted to get away but it hurt too much. He was stuck, the thought brought a fresh wave of tears to his eyes, more desperation sunk through him. His fingers desperately clawed at the wall in front of him, trying to find a grip to get away as those hands tugged his pants away.

“Have you learned your lesson baby?” His voice slithered into his ear.

“Ye-yes... yes... I-I’m sorry... please... I’m so sorry... just stop.” He begged as he felt unmercifully dry fingers enter him. His pleas went unanswered. He felt his mind float away as fresh pain seared through him, whimpers escaping his mouth with each thrust of the man’s hips.

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Carl lay there after Shane had left, he’d very quickly rejected the man’s offer for a ride home with a
quick lie about a meeting with the Guidance Counsellor. The door slammed shut behind the man, leaving Carl alone in the dark room. He had to get up. He didn’t know how long it would be before the next session in the gym, the last thing he needed was someone catching him lying there like that.

He shifted around, trying to find a position that didn’t hurt. No luck there. There didn’t seem to be a single inch of his body that Shane hadn’t inflicted his belt on. He almost cried as he tried to stand, his legs could hardly hold him up. His legs shaking as they tried to support his weight. He fell against the wall, desperately trying not to fall down again. Tears streamed down his face at the helplessness he felt, his forehead pressed to the wall as he tried to calm himself down again. Gathering some strength, he leaned down to drag up his jeans, making several attempts to do them up as his hands shook.

This time he couldn’t stop the yelp of pain as his bag hit a particularly sore spot on his shoulder. He took a second to gather himself again before proceeding out the door. He had no idea what the time was, Shane’s talk was at the end of the day, God knows who long they were in that cupboard though. Going across the field would be the quickest way home, he needed that considering how his legs felt like they could hardly keep him upright, but Negan. He was always out on the field after school, he was usually done within two hours but Carl couldn’t be sure. He didn’t want the man to see him like this. Shane had avoided hitting his face but he knew he would be red from all the crying he’d done.

He stood still for a moment in the empty corridor, closing his eyes to try and refocus himself. You gotta get home Carl. Just avoid the field, it’ll be easier that way. He nodded to himself, you can do this, just take it slow. He had to pass along to top of the field no matter what the route was but if Negan was still on the pitch he’d hopefully be too distracted to notice him. As he limped his way across the parking lot that was parallel to the field he failed to notice the eyes that follow him.

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He looked over himself in the mirror the next morning. He’d gotten lucky, his parents had been at work when he’d arrived home, no one to witness his slow climb up the stairs. He had to stop every other step to catch his breath, the pain was almost too much at times. He did stop for a few minutes when he reached the top, tears creeping to the surface as his new wounds were jostled. He’d manage to have a quick shower before falling into bed, sleep didn’t come easy, there didn’t seem to be a single position that didn’t irritate a mark.

Looking at himself now he was amazed he’d managed to get any sleep at all. His body was littered with bruises and welts, he winced as movement opened one of the marks left by the belt buckle, it had torn into his skin leaving a deep cut. He’d have to put something over it before school, he couldn’t walk about with blood all over his clothes. Speaking of, he tentatively bent down and picked up his outfit from the day before, he was surprised no one had stopped him on his way home, they were covered in blood. It wasn’t the first time he’d gotten blood on his clothing but there had never been as much blood as there was this time. He must have more open wounds that he couldn’t see, he tried to find them in the mirror but could only catch a glimpse of a couple. He sighed, he’d have to get rid of the clothes, he couldn’t risk washing them in case the stains didn’t come out and his Mom got to the load before he -id. So, he stuffed them into his backpack, making a mental note to toss them en-route to school.

He grabbed the first aid kit he kept hidden under his bed and tried to cover the welts that were at risk of bleeding. School would be fun with those, he dreaded the inevitable pain that would erupt every time someone “accidentally” bumped into him. Carl did think about ditching for the day. The thought was quickly quashed as he remembered that good attendance was a crucial part of his college applications, his teachers could say what they liked about his participation but he damn well attended
every single class.

Carl dressed and gathered all his books for school, he’d need extra time getting there today so it meant no breakfast, he just hoped he was early enough that his parents were still in bed. Opening the door a fraction he held his breath as he listened out for any noise that would place them anywhere but their bedroom. All quiet. Breathing out in relief he headed down the stairs, trying not to cry out as each step awoke a new ache in him.

The actual walk to school was just as painful, like the previous night he had to stop several times to gather himself together. His heart sank as he realised that he would have to miss his run that evening, reluctantly he thought that it was probably best he didn’t see Negan until he had healed a bit more. The man was too observant and the last thing Carl wanted right now was more questions. Heading into his first class he placed himself in his usual spot at the back and waited for the teacher to start his ramblings. He still didn’t pay much attention in class, preferring to people watch through the window. He nearly jumped out of his skin when the classroom door slammed open, revealing Negan.

“Sorry Mr. Masters, I need to borrow Carl Grimes for a moment, it’s an emergency.”

The teacher looked shocked at the sudden interruption. “Uh...sure...Carl go with the Coach.”

Still confused Carl grabbed his bag, he tried to minimise his limp, he could feel his cheeks flush as every set of eyes in the room focused on him. He followed Negan out of the classroom, tried to ask him what was going on but was silenced by a quick glare. Why was he so angry with him? Anxiety pricked at him, he wondered what he’d done to screw things up. He’d barely spoken with the man in the last few days, just their usual chats, he couldn’t have upset him.

When they finally arrived at Negan’s office, Carl waited as he closed the door. They stood facing each other, neither knowing what to say. Carl watched as the angry look turned into concern then anger again, the two emotions waring for dominance on the man’s face.

“Are you alright?” Negan asked eventually.

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just need to get back to cla-”

“Don’t bullshit me Carl, I saw you limping across the parking lot last night. You wanna tell me what that was about?” Negan interrupted.

Shit.

“I just turned my ankle that’s all. No biggie.” He tried to downplay it. “People get injured all the time it’s normal.”

“You seem to get injured a lot more than others Carl.”

“I’m clumsy.” He countered, he didn’t want to deal with this today. He didn’t want to deal with anything, he wanted to go to home, curl up under his duvet and forget the damn world existed.

“Carl.” Negan seemed exasperated, fingers tense over the ridge of his nose. Good Carl thought, he never asked him to get involved, he doesn’t have the right to any answers. Except for the fact that he was the only one to take him in when he was left out in the cold. He was there for him when he needed him. His brain reminded him that he wasn’t there when Shane beat the shit out of you. He was getting angry with the man, how dare he take him out of class just to bombard him with questions? Why couldn't he just leave him alone? Who was he to ingrain himself so much into Carl’s life?
“Can I go back to class?” He wanted to get away from this office. For once he wanted to be away from Negan and his damn questions. He was sick of feeling helpless, like he needed constant supervision and protection. He was sick of those damn butterflies in his stomach whenever Negan was around. He hated how vulnerable he was in front of him, how much he yearned to be around him when he wasn’t there. It was more than any friendship he’d ever felt and he was terrified.

Negan looked over at him, imploring with him through his eyes to give him something. Didn’t he see Carl had nothing more to give?

Sighing in defeat Negan said “Sure.”

As Carl reached for the handle, his soft voice stopped him. “If you want me to leave you alone Carl you just have to say.”

He leaned his head against the door, heart breaking at his words, he never wanted him to leave him alone, that was the problem. “No. I don’t.” He looked back at him. “Please… just… please don’t give up on me.” He pleaded.

Carl darted out of the room as soon as he’d spoken. He didn’t want to hear the response, didn’t want to think about the words he just said, how much he’d exposed himself to the man.
Dinner for All

Chapter Summary

Things change within Carl and Negan's relationships as Thanksgiving gets underway.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"When your stomach turns somersaults every time you see your love interest, when you can go without eating for half a day because you can’t think of anything else, and when the sound of her voice blocks out every possible distraction each time you hear it...then logic’s role becomes a very minor one."

—Erik Tomblin

November 2017

That afternoon he didn’t bother going to see Negan, Carl still didn’t want to deal with the repercussions of what he had said to the man. He still didn’t know why he’d said it. The thought of the man leaving him alone was just unbearable, like being forced to live without sunlight. He couldn’t go back to the life of despair that he’d lived before Negan had come barreling into his life. He just wasn’t sure he was ready to tell him everything. The thought petrified him, it’d make it too real. When it was just two of them, Carl could pretend that he was normal, that he didn’t have bruises on his hips or bite marks covering his chest. If he told him then it would taint their relationship, if Negan even believed what he was saying. He wasn’t sure that he’d be able to deal with that rejection. He didn’t even know that he’d be able to cope with Negan knowing. Would he look at him differently? Would he force him to tell his parents? He imagined it would be like unlocking Pandora’s Box. His entire world would change. Was he ready for that?

He just didn’t know, all the speculation was just exhausting. As he said before, it was just easier this way.

He kicked a rock as he walked along the sidewalk. He’d gone to the town library after school instead of going for a run, he’d meant to study for his test the next day but his mind wouldn’t focus, he kept thinking back to his conversation with Negan. Guilt stabbed in his chest as he recalled the hurt look on Negan’s face when he’d snapped at him. He wanted to make it right, he just didn’t know how. He kicked another rock into the road, frowning when it clinked against metal rather than gravel. Carl glanced over, recognising Negan’s car pulling up next to him.

“How long have you been following me?” He asked the man as he lowered the driver’s window.
“I haven’t been following you, I just happened to see you on my way home. You want a ride?” Negan replied.

Carl sighed, debating his options. At least if he went with him now, he could fix things. Maybe then he’d be able to focus on his studying. “Sure.” He said, moving to get into the passenger’s side. The day was a sharp contrast to the last time he was in the car, the air felt awkward, neither of them knowing what to say to break the silence. Negan started driving, heading in the direction of Carl’s house, both of their eyes fixed on the road ahead of them.

“Negan?” Carl broke the silence.

“Yeah?” Negan's eyes briefly flickered over to him as he replied.

“Can...would....would it be alright if we went to your place again?” Carl tentatively asked. He wasn't sure if he would be welcome there again, if Negan would even think it's appropriate to take him back there.

“Yeah. Sure, if that's what you want?” Negan let the question hang in the air.

“Yeah. Please. I'm not ready to go home yet.”

Negan nodded and changed direction. Things went quiet again, Carl hated it. Conversation usually flowed so easily between them, had he ruined things between them?

“So I had a talk with the Principal this morning...”

Panic spread through Carl, had he been talking about him? They'd never said that their conversations were private but he thought Negan would keep it all to himself.

“...turns out your old gym teacher decided to leave yesterday. Something about needing to get away from town? She always seemed a bit unsteady to me but anyways he wants me to take over your gym class.” Negan finished.

Carl was at a loss for words. He wasn't sure how he should feel about this new information. On one hand he was happy that he'd be spending more time with the man but on the other it made things a little bit more complicated between them. He'd actually be his teacher. Teachers didn't spend time with students outside of school, they certainly didn't take him back to their homes.

“It's only for a few weeks, just to cover until they find someone new. They know I don't have time to be teaching dodgeball when I've got to Coach several teams. Just means I'll be covering things like parents evening.” Negan glanced at Carl's face again, wanting to see his reaction to his words.

Carl could feel the colour drop from his face. Negan would be meeting his parents. He'd forgotten all about parents evening. It was coming up in a week or so. His parents didn't usually bother but with all the hassle about his grades they'd been adamant that they were going this year.

“That a problem?” Negan asked.

“No. No problem. I'm sure they'll be happy to meet you.” Carl finally replied.

“And are you happy for me to meet them?”

“Why wouldn't I be?”

“I don't know Carl you're the one who gets touchy when I mention them.” Negan responded.
“I’m not touchy.” Carl snapped back. He rolled his eyes at himself, very convincing Carl.

“Sure you’re not.”

Negan placed the car in park. Carl hadn't even noticed that they'd arrived. He got out of the car, ignoring the stinging pain from one of his bruises as he twisted out of the seat. He walked up to the house, waiting by the door for Negan to open up.

Negan chuckled the keys into the dish he kept by the door, shucking off his leather jacket as he walked into the house. Carl hesitated by the door, he could feel something brewing, sitting down didn't feel like the right thing to do in the moment. Negan turned to face him.

“Do you wanna talk about this?” He asked.

“About what?”

“Everything? Anything?”

“Not really no.” Carl replied. He really didn't feel like talking at the moment. He was still trying to make sense of the fact that Negan was now his teacher. He couldn't help but worry about parents evening. Would Negan say something about his bruises? About the bullying?


“You wanna watch a movie? Now?” He asked before sitting himself down on the couch.

Negan joined him. “Yeah. You don't wanna talk. I'm sure as hell not gonna make you so we might as well.” Negan checked his watch. “Besides it's only 5 so you shouldn't fall asleep this time.”

Carl shifted closer so he could hit his arm. “You're such an ass.”

Negan grinned at him. Carl grinned back, the tension slowly ebbing out of his body as things returned to normal between them. “I know. Now take your shoes off and watch the movie.”

Carl did as told before leaning back against the couch. The words ‘Hannibal’ flashed across the screen. Wasn't that the guy from the other movie? Must be a sequel he thought. Of course Negan would make him watch both.

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“Oh my god.” Carl said, eyes still fixed on the screen.

“Good right?” Negan was smiling, he’d never get bored of that movie. “Wanna watch the next one?”

“There’s more?” He asked incredulous. He wasn’t sure just what the hell he’d just watched.

“Yeah, there’s two more. One’s kinda shit but it’s still worth a watch.” Negan finally looked over to Carl, was that shock on the teen’s face?

“Should I be worried that you like movies where people eat each other’s brains?” Carl asked.

“How did you not like it? It’s perfection!”

“It’s creepy and she just falls in love with him? Even after he kills a guy in front of her?”
“Nah I don’t think she loves him, not yet anyways. She’s into him because he doesn’t think like other guys, he interests her, challenges her and she likes that. He seems to understand her in a way that no one else has, finding that in a person, it’s...well...indescribable.”

“Huh.” Carl replied. It’s still weird, but then he could understand what it was like to have inappropriate feelings towards the wrong person. He could even understand what it’s like to find that person that could understand what you were saying before you even knew yourself. He had found that in Negan and it was like finding a precious pearl after years of swimming in the depths of the ocean. He often wondered whether Negan felt the same way, or if he’d felt that way about anyone else. Carl felt a tinge of jealousy sting through him at the thought, he wanted Negan to think that way about him. More than anything he wanted to know that everything he felt about Negan was reciprocated in some way, the man had said he cared about him but how much? Did he just care in a way that teacher should care about their pupils or was it more?

Teachers don’t hang out with students in their house his brain reminded him.

Still he couldn’t stop that feeling in his body that Negan was only there for him out of pity, because he knew that Carl didn’t have anyone else.

A hand brushed over his hair, moving it away from his face. He looked over to Negan questioningly, blushing at the contact, he fought his body’s instinct to flinch away.

“You alright? You went all quiet on me?” Negan asked, moving his hand away from Carl face to rest along the back of the couch.

“Yeah, just thinking.”

“I wish I knew what goes on in that fuckin head of yours.” Negan said leaning his head on his fist.

Carl chuckled, he'd never had anyone say that to him before. “Nothing interesting up here. Just me.”

“Well you're pretty damn interesting.”

“Why?” Carl blurted out. He needed to know. God he needed to know why this man was so involved in his life.

“Why what?”

Carl stood, moving away from the man to look at the bat on the wall. He was hoping it might give him inspiration, maybe even some courage to finally ask what he'd be dying to know for the past few weeks. He breathed in deep, trying to summon the words in his head.

He turned, looking straight at Negan who was now sat at the edge of the couch. He looked so serious, Carl thought, like they were about to have the most important discussion of his life. Then again that was how he always looked when they were talking, like Carl was his whole world, it made his head spin.

“Why… why do you… why do you care?” He finally asked. His voice catching on the last word. “Why…” he stopped to think for a moment. “...why do you find me so interesting? Am I just a pity project to you? Someone you can use to feel better about yourself?” Now the words were flowing he could hardly stop. It was only the sight of Negan's saddened face that finally ebbed the flow.

“Carl...” Negan began. “You are not a damn pity project.” The man rose from the couch, he started pacing in front of Carl, hand rubbing at his forehead. He looked tense as hell, sadness transforming into anger on his face. “Is that what you really fucking think Carl?” Negan asked, stopping in front
of him for a moment anger seeming to build up within him, before moving on. “You really think I talk to you because I think you're some fucking charity work?” He scoffed as he walked on.

Carl took a step back, he wondered if he pushed him too hard this time. A burst of fear erupted in him, he still had the marks from the last time he’d upset someone. *Negan isn’t Shane* his brain tried to remind him but it couldn’t stop the slight tremble that shook his body.

“Un-fucking-believable.” He said as he turned again and resumed his stride the other way.

“I—”

“No.” Negan said firmly, pointing a finger at Carl. “Nu-uh. This is my damn time to talk and honestly Carl I’m fucking sick of the bullshit between us. I’m here because I damn well fucking care about you and it’s about damn time you believe it. When I look at you I don’t see a victim or a bullied kid that needs a friend. I see a fucking human being who I damn well like being around. I don’t see all the shit you go through with Simon or the bruises I fucking know you hide under all that damn clothing. I see a guy who isn’t afraid to do what he has to do to survive. I see a badass who fuckin’ ran away from me the first time we spoke because he was sick of the shit I was spouting out.” Negan walked closer to him, placing a finger under his chin to force eye contact.

Carl could feel the puffs of air coming from the other man flitter across his face. He wondered how long Negan had been bottling all this up for.

“I see someone I care about who’s hurting bad and there’s not a damn thing that I can do to stop it.”

Their eyes lingered on each other as he spoke, despair seeping into every word he spoke replacing the anger from before. “You wanna know why you interest me? It’s because you’re *you*. You have a way of making the world seem a little bit less harsh every.single.day that I see you, even if it’s just a glimpse of you in the fucking corridor. You give me hope that I can actually do something good in my life after all the shit that I’ve done. You laugh at my shitty fuckin’ jokes, you’re not afraid to call me out on my bullshit and you’re goddamn funnier than most of the asshats I’ve had in my life.”

Negan moved his hand to softly thumb away a tear that had trickled down Carl’s cheek as he spoke again. “Carl, you’re are an incredible person, whether you wanna believe that or not. All I’d ever want is for you to know that you’re not a charity case, you never have and you *never* will be. I don’t expect anything from you other than for you to be who you are. Whether you wanna talk to me or not I’m *here* and I always will be.”

Carl didn’t know what to say, he was too moved to speak. He’d never expected that response to his question. He never thought he meant as much to Negan as he did to him, he’d always felt like a burden, he’d not imagined that he was helping the man too. He tried to say something but the words wouldn’t come out. Once again he found himself overcome by his emotions, overwhelmed at the thoughts trickling through his head. For the first time in his life he had the urge to do something he never thought he’d ever willingly do, let alone want to do. He wanted to kiss the man, wanted to wipe away all the hurt he caused him with his accusations, wanted to use his lips to promise him a better future between them.

The thought terrified him, made him tremble at what they meant. Instead he chose to lay his head against the man’s chest, wrapping his arms around his waist as he clung to him. “Negan?” He whispered against him soft fabric of his shirt.

“Yeah?” He felt the man's lips move against his head, gently moving the curls of hair at the top, it made him shiver.

“I believe you…” He let his words trail off, he didn’t know what else he could say. The only
response was strong arms growing tighter around him and a soft sigh. He let his eyes fall shut, the thump of Negan’s steady heartbeat soothing him, obliterating any anxiety he felt that moment.

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Carl broke out of the embrace first, he wanted to stay wrapped up in those arms forever but his body protested at the prolonged pressure on his bruised back. He stepped back, rubbing his neck awkwardly, he cleared his throat. “Thanks, for-uh answering my question.” Really Carl? That’s the best you could come up with? His words were met with a chuckle an affectionate brush against his cheek.

“Anytime Carl.”

His eyes caught on the clock beside on of the couches, shit, 11pm, he hadn’t realised it was so late. Negan’s eyes followed his line of sight, quickly realising what had provoked the reaction from Carl.

“Past your curfew?” He asked.

“No. Well, yeah, I mean I don’t really have a curfew but I meant to study for my test tomorrow.” Carl explained. He really wasn’t prepared for it, he’d been so busy trying to finish off his damn college essay that he’d left his test prep for the last minute. It was only math, he was good at math but he would need at least a few hours to study.

“Ah, shit. I’m sorry Carl I shouldn’t have put the movie on.”

“No no it’s fine! I can just do an all-nighter, shouldn’t be a problem.” He hated the guilty look on Negan’s face.

“What’s the test on?”

“Math.”

“OK, have you got your books with you?” Negan asked, heading over to the dining table.

“Yeeah.” Carl replied, where was the man going with this?

“Great. Bring ‘em over here.” Negan cleared the table of the crap he’d left on it earlier.

“Why?”

“So I can help you study.” Negan sat down, gesturing for Carl to come over.

“You don’t have to I’ll be alright on my own.” He said even as he walked over to join him, placing his book-filled bag on the table.

“Yeah but it always helps to have someone to bounce ideas off. Anyways it’s my fault you’re so late. Do you need to tell your parents that you’ll be out tonight?”

Having drawn out his books he sat down next to Negan, flipping through his textbook until he landed on the topic for the test.

“Nah they’re both on night shifts tonight, they won’t notice I’m gone.”

“Huh, that’s shitty of them to leave you on your own all night.”

“I think it’s safe to say they know I won’t be having parties whilst they’re out.” Carl said, they knew
he didn’t even know enough people to have any party.

“Still what if something happened to you?”

“I’m 17 Negan, I can take care of myself.”

“I know you can but you shouldn’t have to, that’s what parents are for.” Negan explained.

“It doesn’t matter, anyways what do you know about algebra?” He asked.

“Jesus fucking Christ Carl you are all about the difficult questions today.” Negan joked as he picked up the textbooks, letting out a loud “Fucking hell” as he read over the questions. Carl couldn’t help but laugh at the confused look on his face.

“Alright the only way we’re gonna get through this is with a shit-ton of coffee, you start reading whilst I make it. Then we’ll get to the fun part.” Negan said as he headed towards the coffee machine.

“What part is supposed to be fun?”

“The part where I ask you all the questions and you have to answer them.” He replied with a wicked grin on his face.

Carl groaned and picked up his book. Tonight was gonna be a long one.

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He wasn’t wrong, they literally spent the entire night studying. The topic was a lot harder than he remembered, or so he thought but it could have been the fact that he kept getting distracted by the man’s face. He flushed as he remembered having to ask Negan to repeat several questions after he’d gotten distracted tracing the man’s lips with his eyes, watching as they parted and moved with each word. His gaze often trailing down to admire the stubble that grew over his sharp jawline. He had to keep reminding himself to stop being a damn teenager and focus on what he was actually saying.

When did he even begin thinking like this? He’d never been so interested in anyone’s physical appearance so much before. He could stare at him all day and it would never be enough to sate his appetite for him. Was this what it was like for normal teenagers? Did he have a damn crush on the man? The fact that he’d wanted to kiss him earlier would be a good indication. Way to make things even more complicated Carl. He involuntarily let out a pained groan, mentally hitting himself when he realised that he had actually groaned out loud.

“Don’t worry Carl, you’ll be fine, you know your shit.” Negan said as he finished off another cup of coffee.

Thank God for algebra he thought, saved him from a little more embarrassment.

“I’m gonna head up for a quick shower, then we’ll get going. You eat some damn breakfast.” Negan pointed his finger at him.

“Yes Sir.” Carl spoke with a mocking salute.

“You better get used to sayin’ that. Got my first class with ya later and don’t think I’m gonna go easy on you.”

Gym class with Negan? That was certainly gonna be interesting he thought as he grabbed a bowl for
cereal from the cupboard.

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Gym class with Negan was a stark reminder of how different the man was when it was just the two of them. The warm smile and jokey expressions were gone as he dominated the gym hall. Pacing back and forth in front of his class it was safe to say that Negan had successfully intimidated them all. Hell if Carl didn't know him as well as he did he'd probably be scared shitless of him.

The man was fucking cruel.

He made them run so many damn laps that even Carl was tempted to throw a ball at him as they played dodgeball. It didn’t help that he was still recovering from the injuries left by Shane, he would have been fine doing all the laps if it weren’t for the lingering pain.

“Havin’ fun?” Negan asked him as he waited by the side of the court. He’d been knocked out of the game pretty early, he was thankful for that, the anticipation of the pain as the ball hit him was worse than the actual hit.

“Oh yeah, it’s great.” He panted at him. “Anyone ever tell you that you’re a fucking ass?”

“Ooh language Carl!” Negan smirked back at him. “Want me to give you a detention for sassing the teacher?”

“If it means I can leave this class then hell yes please.”

“Nah, it’s too much fun tormenting you here.”

“I repeat: you’re an ass.”

“Yeah and you love me for it.” Negan joked at him, not realising the impact his words had on Carl. The warmth that tingled through him, the dizziness that swam over his head at the thought. He was startled by the whistle that blew in his ear.

“Alright you idiots, another ten laps of the hall then you can all go take a damn shower.” He looked over at Carl who was still stood there dumbstruck. “Move your ass Grimes.”

Carl hopped into action, running to get away from the stupid thoughts that flowed through his head. He hoped the Principal would find a replacement soon, he wasn’t sure how many more of these lessons his heart could take.

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Another week of that hellish class passed, he didn’t know what was worse, the constant running or the constant flush that seemed to spread over his face when Negan was in the room. There was something about seeing him scream at the other students that was oddly attractive, it made him even more clumsy in class. He seemed to spend most of the class on the sidelines trying not to stare at Negan, having been eliminated from the games early. The only thing he could do was run and even then he kept getting lost in his thoughts of the man.

He could hardly believe it when Parent’s Evening finally came around. There he stood, in the corner of the same hall that he ran around. The room had been set up with desks and chairs so parents could sit with each of the teachers for the required ten minutes. It was a fairly small school so there was plenty of room for the parents to spread around and wait. They’d been there for an hour already, an hour of him waiting nervously for the moment his parents met his Coach, before they finally sat
down with the man.

He watched them talk from the other side of the room. He wished he could listen in, wondered what they were saying. He frowned when he saw them all laughing, Negan really could get on with anyone. He nervously bit at his nail. He stood up straight when he saw his parents stand and shake hands with Negan. They were still laughing, Dad clapped the other man on the back and they separated. His parents walking back over to him.

“Just one more teacher then we’re all done.” His Mom said as they arrived at his side.

“That Coach is fantastic, did you know he used to play baseball?”

“Yeah Dad he’s mentioned it before. He is my teacher.” Carl replied, God his Dad seemed more into him than Carl was.

“Well, we’ll all be getting to know him a little better at Thanksgiving.”

“Wait what?” He asked. What the hell did his Dad mean by that?

“He’s coming over for Thanksgiving dinner. Oh look your math teacher’s free. We’ll be back in a bit.” His parents dashed off to the desk with his teacher, leaving him stunned in the corner.

“Why did you invite him for thanksgiving?” Carl questioned as soon as they were in the car. He couldn't believe them, as if he didn't have enough trouble at school without adding this to it. If word got out that a teacher was having dinner at his house he’d never hear the end of it.

“Because he’s new to town Carl, he doesn’t have anyone to spend Thanksgiving. It’ll be nice to have someone new at the table.” His Mom replied, glancing at him through the rearview mirror.

“Yeah, he seems like a great guy Carl I’m surprised you’ve never mentioned him before he spoke very highly of you.” Rick added.

Carl’s ears pricked up at the words. “Really? What did he say?”

“That you’re a great runner, could be the best in the school if you weren’t too busy studying to join the track team.”

Carl flushed at the compliment.

“I’m proud of you Son. A lot of the teachers said about how you’ve improved this year.”

Somehow his words didn’t quite have the same effect on him as the things Negan said. Still he smiled at his father and pretended that he was happy to hear his other teachers were happy with his work. All the while he was thinking of Negan, maybe it wouldn’t be so bad to have him over for Thanksgiving, at least it gave him an opportunity to see him outside of school.

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He threw another shirt on the floor. Jesus, why didn't he own anything that didn't make him look like a total ass? Why on earth did he think for a second that this could be a good idea? Negan would be arriving for dinner in less than an hour and he still had no idea what to wear. Their usual discussions always occurred around school so he never had to worry about what he was wearing but now he was coming to his home, for dinner, he had to look semi-decent. Letting out a sigh he eventually chucked on a navy shirt and some black pants. Negan had seen him sweaty and covered in his own snot and tears, he probably wouldn’t give a shit if he’d worn his pjs. He froze as the doorbell rang,
was that him?

He almost raced downstairs, reaching the door just as his Mom opened it to reveal Negan standing there, bottle of wine in one hand, flowers in the other. He couldn’t help but smile, who knew that he was a secret gentleman? Their eyes caught over Lori’s shoulder, both grinning at each other.

“C’mon in Negan, make yourself at home.” His Mom said as she stepped aside, welcoming him into their home.

“Thank you so much Mrs. Grimes, these are for you.” He handed over the gifts he’d brought much to his Mother’s delight.

“Ooh you didn’t have to! Please call me Lori, Mrs. Grimes makes me feel old.”

“Will do. Hey Carl.” He finally greeted the teen who was still stood on the stairs.

“Hey Coach.” He tried to act casual, like this wasn’t the highlight of his crappy day.

“Carl why don’t you take our guest into the living room?” His Mom told him. “We’re still waiting on Rick and Shane to get back from work, they shouldn’t be too long then we can all eat.” She continued before walking back into the kitchen.

“So… uh… who the hell is Shane?” Negan asked Carl when it was just the two of them. Carl began leading him into the living room, directing him to the couch when they arrived.

“He’s my Dad’s old partner, before he was made Sheriff. They’ve been friends for years, he always comes over for dinner. He’s the guy that did the drink driving talk.”

“Riiight the one with the stupid jacket and the swag of someone trying to recreate his youth?”

Carl nearly choked on the laugh that spurted out his throat. “Yep that’s him. Did you want a drink?” Carl asked him heading over the small bar they kept on a table in the room. “There’s some kind of alcohol here.” He really had no clue what was in each bottle, all he knew was that they all smelt disgusting.

Negan laughed at him and stood to join him at the bar. “Don’t worry I’ll deal with the drink.” He poured himself a large glass of whiskey, he was gonna need it if that Shane ended up being like he thought he would be.

He and Carl started a conversation about the drinks on the table, Negan trying to educate him on the beauty of a good whiskey when the door opened. They both looked over as his Mom raced in to greet the two men.

Carl hid himself near the fringes of the room as the men introduced themselves, he tried to look busy as he watched Shane and Negan shake hands. He wondered what the two would make of each other, he hoped they wouldn’t get along, he didn’t want to lose Negan to Shane just like he’d lost his Dad.

His thoughts were interrupted by his Mom speaking over his shoulder.

“Do you mind setting the table sweetie? Dinner’s nearly done and it’ll give the guys a chance to get to know each other.”

“Sure Mom.” He was reluctant to leave Negan alone with the two of them but at least he’d escape the almost constant glare from Shane. He heard the jovial laugh of conversation in the next room as
he laid the knives and forks down. It was mostly Shane yammering on about his day, usual shit from the man Carl thought. Everytime he heard his arrogant laugh echo through the house his hand would tighten around the knives still in his grip, wondering what it would be like to shove them into his face. He shook the thoughts from him and focused on his task.

Not long after he’d finished they were all sat around the table. His Mom had cooked an amazing dinner, not much was said as they all ate. The occasional comment from his Dad about how lovely the dinner was, was the only noise in the room. Carl, couldn’t help but notice that Shane seemed to be drinking more than usual, he seemed to be constantly filling up his glass. Even his Dad seemed concerned when the man stood to grab another bottle of wine from the kitchen.

“So Negan, you coach the football team?” Shane asked when dinner was over, they were all sat at the table waiting for the dessert to finish cooking.

“Yes, well I try to, they’re not particularly great at taking orders.” Negan replied, taking a sip from his glass. Carl noted that he was still on his first one.

“Huh, can’t say I’ve seen them do any better recently. Maybe you’re not coaching them hard enough.”

Carl was confused, since when did Shane care so much about high school football?

“It’s not so much about bein’ hard on ‘em you’ve gotta get them to trust you to make the right call at the right time. It takes a bit more effort than just yellin’ at them.” Negan explained, just who the fuck was this guy tryna teach him about being a coach?

“Still you’d think they’d have won a game by now.” Shane wasn’t stopping even with Lori shooting daggers at him.

“You know Negan used to teach college football in Seattle? One of the best teams in the country.” His Dad intervene, Carl actually felt a wave of gratitude for him.

“Is tha’ right? Why’d you leave then? Couldn’t hack it?” Shane said, clearly unimpressed.

“No, just fancied a change of scenery, cities tend to get boring after a while.”

Carl was impressed to see that Negan wasn’t rattled by any of his comments.

Shane opened his mouth to speak again but was thankfully interrupted by his Mom. “Honey, will you help me fetch dessert?” Lori asked Rick as she rose from her chair.

She and Rick picked up the plates from the table, Carl saw his Dad whisper to Shane to “Stop drinking so damn much.” Shane merely replenished his glass as a response causing his Dad to sigh and walk off. Typical responses from both of them Carl thought. He played with his glass as whist he waited for his parents to return, the room was filled with an awkward silence. Anger simmering between the two men sat opposite each other. Shane took another sip of his drink, staring Negan down.

“You teach my Carl much?” Shane asked. Carl felt disgust roll through him at the possessive tone.

“A bit. I’ve taken over his gym class whilst they look for a replacement.”

“Sorry you have to deal with that. Carl’s not the best sportsman, he’s more one for laying around in bed.” Shane snarked.
“Carl's one of the best runners we have. It's a shame I can't convince him to join the team.” Negan protested. He was gettin really fucking tired of this man.

“Oooh yeah Carl I bet you'd look damn good in those lil runnin’ shorts.” Shane leered at Carl.

Carl could see Negan getting angry, saw his hand curl into a fist the more Shane spoke. Acting out of instinct he placed a hand on Negan's knee, hand squeezing gently, trying to calm him down. It wouldn’t end well if Negan did anything to hurt Shane, as much as Carl wanted to see him lay the man out. He was actually grateful to see his parents return to the room, he removed his hand as he saw the tension leave Negan's shoulders.

Dessert finished without any more comments from Shane, instead Carl had to deal with the man dragging his foot up his leg, trying to get any contact with him. Negan and his parents held a polite conversation, trying to steer it away from any topic that Shane could contribute to. When they had all finished eating Carl practically jumped at the chance to take the dishes out. Negan offered to help but his Mom told him to relax as he was their guest.

Shane intercepted him on his way back from the kitchen, dragging him into the bathroom. He pushed him up against the closed door by the scruff of his collar. He leaned in close as he spoke, the smell of wine filling Carl's nostrils.

“You fuckin' him too Carl?” Shane asked.

“What? No! He's just my gym teacher.” He protested, he wanted to push him away, put some distance between himself and that foul breath. The man gripped him harder, a hand coming up to press against his shoulder, pinning him into the wall.

“I see the way he looks at you Carl. You know I don't like anybody touching what's mine Carl.”

“Yeah, you're right.” Carl was trying to soothe him, he had to get away before anyone came looking. “I promise Shane, I'm all yours. He’s just my coach, he means nothing.” He nearly threw up as the words left his mouth.

Shane rested his head against his, breathing Carl in deep. Carl could see him relax slightly, his drunken frame resting more heavily against his. He squirmed in response, trying to wriggle away.

“We have to go Shane or they'll all be wondering where we are.” Carl suggested.

“Yeah, you’re right.” Shane looked him in the eye “You’re always so right Carl.”

Shane trailed his fingers along his cheek, one finger deviating along his lip.

“Give us a kiss baby.”

Stomach churning he turned his face up to leave a peck against his lips, his attempt to leave after that was thwarted by a hand gripping his face. Shane deepened the kiss, swiping his tongue into his mouth, moaning against him. Carl just froze, let him do what he wants then you can go. His nails dug into his own palm, the pain distracting him from the probing tongue in his mouth.

Finally, Shane released his mouth, panting against him as he tried to control himself. Carl took the opportunity to slip away from him. He opened the door, stepped out into the hallway and straight into a hard chest that was becoming all too familiar to him.

“Hey, where did you get to your mom’s been aski…” Negan trailed off as his eyes caught sight of Shane leaving the bathroom behind him. He looked between the two, brow frowning as confusion
spread across his face. He opened his mouth to speak again but was interrupted by Carl.

“Just went to the bathroom to grab some cleaning stuff, I... uh... dropped some stuff in the kitchen. Gotta clear it up. Shane was just helping me look”

“Riiight. So, where are they?” Negan asked, looking them both over again.

“Couldn’t find any could we Carl?” Shane nudged at his back, coming to stand next to him. “Lori must’ve moved ‘em somewhere.”

“Sure.” Negan said. He was still looking at them weirdly.

“I better get back to the kitchen.” Carl spoke, darting away, leaving the two men to glare at each other in the hallway. Leaning shaky arms against the sink he took several deep breaths. He could feel his lies unfurling in front of Negan, the man clearly suspected something. How much longer could Carl put him off before he put it all together?

“Carl?”

He jumped and whirled around to face Negan.

“You alright?” He asked stepping closer to him.

“Yep. Totally fine, just tidying up.”

Coming to stand before him Negan looked him over. “Why're you shaking? You cold?” Negan placed a hand on his arm.

Carl pulled it back and stepped away. “I'm good… it's just weird ya know?”

“Having me here?”

“Just having you around my parents. It's… I don't know. It's like you're my escape from this place so it's weird having you in it.”

Negan nodded. “I'm sorry. If I've made you uncomfortable by being here.”

“NO!” Carl spoke, not intending to shout as he did. “It's been better. Having you here. I'm just… I'm sorry... about Shane. He can get weird when he drinks.”

Negan scoffed and moved to lean against the counter as Carl cleaned around him. “Weird isn't what the word I’d use.” He looked over at Carl, watching him closely as he spoke again. “He seems to be pretty harsh on you Carl. What's up with that?”

Carl paused what he was doing. So, he had noticed something was different. “It's just how he is. He wants what's best for me.” He spoke carefully.

“Huh. Alright.” Negan left the topic alone. Now wasn't the time. “Anyways I'm gonna head off. I feel like I've had about as much of that asshole as I can take.”

“You don't like him?” Carl was surprised. Everyone liked Shane.

“No I think he's a fuckin’ entitled ass who deserves nothing less of a punch in the goddamn face. Shouldn't be gettin drunk at the table it's just fuckin’ rude.” Negan ran a hand through his hair clearly getting more worked up the more he thought of him. “He should just be lucky that I don't have my bat here with me or he'd be fuckin regretting the shit he was sayin’ about you.”
Carl couldn't help but wish he did have the bat with him, *that* was something he wanted to see. He felt a flush of appreciation for the man spread through him.

“OK well I'll see you at school on Monday.”

“That you will.” Negan rubbed his hand along Carl's arm, his flesh pimpled at the touch “take care Carl.”

“You too” He gave a small smile as Negan left the room. He heard he farewells from the other room as he started washing the dishes.

By the time he finished the dishes and returned to the lounge his parents had gone up to bed and Shane, thankfully, had passed out on the couch. He headed upstairs to his room, he could squeeze in a few hours of studying before he needed to crash. At least the evening hadn’t gone too badly he thought to himself, he still couldn’t believe that Negan had seen through Shane. Maybe he could trust him…

Chapter End Notes

Slightly happier chapter there for you all! Finally seeing some more trust between Carl and Negan. I do promise that he will eventually tell Negan everything I just don't want to rush it. In my experience it can take survivors years to talk about their abuse so I didnt want him to just blurt it out without establishing a real connection between the two.

Hope you all enjoyed the mini-showdown with Negan and Shane! Thank you again for all the lovely comments and thank you to every person reading this you all mean the world to me <3
Chapter Summary

The holidays take over as the boys get closer.

Chapter Notes

Ummmm... has it really been a week since I last updated? Sorry guys! I had the chapter all written out a couple of weeks ago, then I got hit with a bit of writers indecision and then I had no wifi.

Annywways, the drama is over! I'm back and with a nice long chapter that will hopefully make you all feel nice and gooey! This chapter was orginally dark and nasty but I fancied a fluffy week so enjoy it because I'm all ready to ramp up the angst in the next one, which has already been written so it'll be up a lot quicker than the last one.

Big shoutout to thewalkingdead178 on tumblr for letting me bounce ideas off them! You're an absolute star lovely!

As always thank you to everyone for reading and commenting <3 You all keep me going!

"The best kiss is the one that has been exchanged a thousand times between the eyes before it reaches the lips."

- Unknown

December 2017

As always the time after Thanksgiving flew past and the next thing Carl knew the decorations were going up for Christmas. He and Negan hadn't really had a chance to talk after the dinner, both of them getting busy with the end of semester. He had finals to prepare for and the school still hadn't been able to find a replacement gym teacher so Negan was still running around trying to balance his coaching with the lessons. They still talked but they preferred to spend their time unwinding rather than dwelling on shit that neither of them really wanted to think about.

On the final evening of school they found themselves back out on the field watching the sunset again. This time Carl had bundled himself in the jackets the school kept for players to keep themselves warm between games. Negan was in his usual leather jacket, he hadn't been coaching
that evening so he didn’t need to wear the polyester sports jacket that he hated so much. Carl sighed at the view, it really was beautiful. Negan nudged at him, shoulders rubbing against each other.

“What’s on your mind?” He asked.

“Nothing... just... enjoying the view.”

“Yeah, I don’t think I’ll ever get used to this, but that doesn’t change my question. There’s something bubblin’ around in that head of yours. You’ve been acting weird since Thanksgiving.”

“There’s nothing going on, I’m just thinking about the holidays.”

“Riiight.”

Carl could feel something stirring in the air, he could sense that Negan was up to something. He hadn’t failed to notice the serious look that came over his face when they were together. There had been so many occasions recently where Negan had started to say something but failed to continue. It was beyond frustrating but Carl never pushed it, he had a feeling that he wouldn’t like what he was going to hear. So they’d continued in their usual routine, both stubbornly refusing to acknowledge the tension that was simmering between them.

“Is this part of the easy route?” Negan finally asked.

“What?” Carl was genuinely confused.

“You not talking about things? Is it part of the easy route?”

“What are you talking about? We talk about things.”

“No we don’t. We talk around things, we talk about shit that doesn’t even matter. We ignore the shit that’s right in front of us.”

“What do you want to talk about? I thought you enjoyed our conversations.”

“I do Carl, I love every second I spend with you but I can’t help but notice that we never talk about your life. You don’t talk about your parents unless I drag it outta you, I didn’t even know you had a godfather until your Dad mentioned it.” Carl’s heart skipped at the mention of Shane. “I mean you’re a teenager and you’ve never once mentioned a girlfriend, or a boyfriend, most teenagers are bragging about sex at your age and you’ve never even mentioned a crush.”

“So what? I don’t talk like normal teenagers, that a problem for you?” Carl was getting frustrated, exactly what was he getting at?

“Of course not, but God we’re friends Carl I’d like you to let me in every now and again.”

“And you think talking about my sex life is letting you in?”

“No, but it’s something more personal than who you think is a shithead in school. It’s something that people fucking talk about”

“It’s just not easy for me to talk about my personal life.”

“You know Carl, there’ll be a day when the easy route isn’t so easy... don’t get a huffy with me, just hear me out.” Carl restrained the second sigh that wanted to escape his mouth. “You are worth so much more than what you get and one fuckin’ day you’re gonna realise that.”
“And what happens then?” Carl moved as he spoke, anger inciting his body to do something. So he stood, pacing around in front of Negan. “What happens when this big revelation happens? When I realise that the world is just goddamn cruel? I mean what kind of world or God makes it so that good people have bad things happen to them? You ever stop think that maybe I deserve it?”

Negan practically leapt off the bench to stand in front of him. Then anger was palpable between them, both getting heated as the discussion continued.

“That’s fuckin’ bullshit and you damn well know it. Life isn’t as fucking simple as to give bad things to bad people, God knows I’ve done some awful shit in my time and you know what? My life’s not been bad, in fact it’s been fucking great. Karma is just bullshit that people tell themselves to feel better when the world doesn’t go in their favor. It doesn’t mean jack-fuckin-shit. Maybe for some crazy reason you think you deserve what’s happening to you, that karma is getting it’s own back for some stupid shit that you’ve done, but I think that’s crap. No one deserves to get cornered in lockers rooms by dumb shits who don’t know basic fuckin maths, or idiotic parents who can’t be fucked to do their jobs right. You deserve so much more than that.”

Carl sighed, fingers coming to rub at his eyes. “If I deserve more then why don’t I get more? Why am I still stuck in this shit?”

“Because Carl, sometimes in this fucked up world you have to fight for it. When it pushes you over you gotta get back up and fucking push it back. I’ve seen you Carl, you act as if you’ve forgotten how to do that, like you’ve given up on all this shit.”

“I’m just so tired. I fought for so long and all it got me was more bruises, what’s the point in starting now? What’s so different?” He looked up at Negan with pleading eyes. Negan wasn’t wrong, he’d given up months ago, long before he’d met the man. The beating from Shane when he’d cut his hair, his final act of rebellion, had finished him. It hurt too much to fight, it hurt to want to fight. He’d suppressed his feelings for so long that he’d lost any urge to do anything but wait for it all to stop.

“Now? Now you have me. I’m there for you every step of the fucking way Carl. I can’t fight for you but I can damn well pick you up any time you need me to.” Negan rested his hand on Carl’s neck, stroking his cheek as he finished. “You could really kick some fucking ass if you’d just let yourself feel something.”

Carl couldn’t deny the surge of emotions that came with his words, if only Negan knew how he made him feel. It wasn’t just affection, lust, or that other feeling that he really didn’t want to think about. The man made him feel everything. He’d inspired anger, frustration, and most of all hope. He’d made Carl realise that he was still capable of having emotions, of feeling something other than the despair that he’d drowned himself in. He stepped closer to him, allowing his emotions to control him for a single second as he raised a hand to cover Negan’s on his face, encouraging it to stay there as he tilted his head up. Flicking nervous eyes up to Negan’s he started to close the remaining distance, butterflies raging in his stomach as their lips neared each other.

“CARL!” A voice shouted from afar, he and Negan shot apart, their hearts pounding as they both realised what they’d about to do and where they’d nearly done it. Carl squinted as he tried to identify the figure that was creeping closer to them, heart sinking when he recognised the brown uniform of the police department and the dark hair that sent daggers into his chest.

“What the fuck is that fucker doing here?” Negan asked.

“No idea.” Carl replied, he knew that this wouldn’t be good whatever the reason was. He remembered the tension between the two at Thanksgiving and he wasn’t excited at the thought of a replay.
“What’s goin’ on guys?” Shane questioned as he finally reached the pair. “Bit strange to be hanging out alone on the field?”

“Not hanging out, just havin’ a talk.” Negan said, he really was not in the mood for this guy’s shit.

“About what?” Was the immediate response.

“Why do you need to know?”

“Because Carl’s my goddamn godson, I have a right to know if he’s bein’ harassed by the school Coach.”

Carl saw Negan take in a deep breath, gearing himself up for some kinda fight, he panicked. He couldn’t have the two of them fighting in the middle of the school, he knew what Shane was capable of, he could have Negan locked up for something like that.

“He’s not harassing me. He was just asking if I wanted to join the track team for the new season. No big deal.” Carl spoke, hoping to calm the situation.

“Tha’ right?” Shane was still eyeing Negan with anger and disgust.

“Yeah, I need the best and Carl is that.”

“You don’t have to fuckin’ tell me that.” Shane said. “I hope you respect him when he says no. I’m sure this isn’t the first time you’ve pestered him about it.”

Carl nearly laughed at his words, the twisted irony just tickled him.

“Of course I do. I was just making sure he hadn’t changed his mind. What are you doin’ here anyways? Not really the place for the police” Negan said.

Another glare from Shane. “I was pickin’ up my Godson, we’re going out for a family dinner.”

“Dinner?” Carl asked, he didn’t remember hearing anything about a family dinner. Then again it wasn’t unlike his parents to not tell him things.

“Yeah, your parents want to celebrate your Mom’s promotion at work.” Shane replied, not bothering to shift his gaze from Negan.

“Right, I...uh...still have some things to do here at school, I could meet you all at the restaurant.” He really didn’t want to spend anymore time with Shane than was necessary, especially if he was going to have to suffer through a dinner with him.

“Carl, it’d be easier if you came with me. Don’t be fussy.” Shane glared at him, reaching out to grab his arm and drag him along.

“If he doesn’t wanna fucking go with you then he doesn’t fucking have to.” Negan stood in between them, hand coming up to push Shane back.

“What the fuck does it have to do with you?” Shane questioned, pushing back against Negan’s hand.

“No! Don’t worry it’s fine, I’ll go.” Carl hastened to add. “The restaurant is ages away I’ll need a ride there or I’ll be all night.”

At this point he needed Shane away from Negan more than he needed to be away from the man. He walked over to Shane as he waved to Negan. “Have a good Christmas Coach. I’ll see ya in the New
Year.” He felt himself shrink at the sad look on his face.

“Sure Carl, take care.” Negan replied, watching the two walk away.

Carl winced at the possessive arm that Shane slung over his shoulder as they walked back to the car. He knew he’d only done it to piss off Negan, to make a show about who he belonged to. He wondered how much Shane had seen before he’d interrupted him and Negan, had he noticed them getting closer? Did he believe that they’d only been talking about track? The questions filled his mind as they neared the car.

“Get in.” Shane spoke abruptly.

Carl did as told. He couldn’t go back on his word now, so he sat next to Shane in the passenger seat. Waiting for them to get going. The car vibrated as the engine was turned on, the movements of the car lulling the nerves that lurked in his stomach as the school faded into the distance. Night was falling outside of the windows, it wouldn’t be long before the air grew colder and frost would settle on the ground. He was interrupted by a hand hitting his thigh, gripping hard into the jean covered flesh. He looked over at Shane who was focused on the road.

“Think we’ve got some time before we gotta get to dinner. Doesn’t matter if we’re a bit late, you’re parents won’t even notice you’re not there.”

His words were like a dagger in his chest, he knew the man wasn’t wrong, they really wouldn’t notice that he wasn’t there. He didn’t like hearing it though, didn’t like knowing that other people noticed the lack of attention his parents paid to him. The dagger twisted as the hand crept further up his leg, curling around his inner thigh.

Shane pulled the car off the side of the road and onto the grass bank. He switched off the engine and the lights, leaving them under the blanket of darkness. Carl tried not to look as Shane turned to face him.

“One day Carl, you’ll realise I’m the only one who notices you, the only one who loves you. Without me you’re nothing, a nobody. I hope you know that. That Negan might go on and on about wanting you on his team, but he only wants one thing from you and that’s not you on his team.”

Shane lifted his hand to brush along his cheek, a sick reenactment of Negan’s actions. “He just wants to fuck you baby, use you like a whore then leave to rot. He doesn’t give two shits about you. Men like him will say anything to get between your legs and you need to remember that. They don’t love you like I do”

Carl didn’t want to listen, didn’t want the words to sink in, he wanted to remove himself from the moment, wanted to not exist. He kept his eyes focused on the dashboard of the car, trying to forget the words that were embedding in his head. He didn’t want to think that way about Negan, Shane was lying. Was he? A dark voice echoed in his head.

“Get in the back.” Shane started unbuckling his belt as he spoke, interrupting Carl’s thoughts. “Take your fucking pants off too, we gotta be quick baby, and I think you need a reminder about just how fucking good to you I am. I’ll make you forget all about that bastard.”

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He forced himself to smile through dinner, shifting uncomfortably on the hard seat. He felt disgusting, he could still feel the cold slobber left by Shane’s mouth as he took in him the backseat. He couldn’t wait to get home and burn the marks away in the shower. He resented his Mother’s happiness, he resented her success in the face of his constant failure. Carl tried to pay attention to the
conversation but quickly lost interest, they never wanted to talk to him, just around him. So he let himself slip away into the recess of his mind.

He thought back to his conversation with Negan, back to that moment before they’d been interrupted. Were they really going to kiss? He’d wanted to do it, wanted to feel his lips against his after so many weeks of thinking about it. How would Negan even feel about it? He tried to think about Negan’s actions. Was he leaning in to meet him in the middle? Did he want it just as much as he did? So many unanswered questions hung in the air and he wouldn’t get any answers until the holidays were over.

Unless..

His mind thought back to the piece of paper he kept in his pocket. He could call him, they could meet up and they could talk. Maybe he was right about needing to be more open with him, God knows he deserved it, he’d answered all of his questions about his past life. Even the darker ones about his wife and their divorce. Still Shane’s words echoed in his mind, it seemed inconceivable that Negan would only want him for sex, but he couldn’t help but wonder. Is that why he wanted Carl to talk about his relationships? Was that a lead in? He tried to shake himself, he wasn’t like that. He wasn’t exactly wrong in what he’d said, people did talk about that kind of thing. Back when he and Ron were friends they’d talked non-stop about people they’d fancied, people they thought about screwing. Even after everything happened with Shane it wasn’t like he’d forgotten about sex, he still dreamt about it, the urges still lingered in the back of his mind. They’d become more and more frequent after he’d gotten to know Negan, the fantasies shifting from a random blurred face to take on the rugged, muscled body of the Coach. His stomach lurched and twinged in a good way every time he caught sight of a new piece of flesh exposed by the man as he moved. The first time he caught him in just a tight shirt sent his heart rate rocketing, and his mouth dried up at the sight of the tattoos on his muscled arms.

Probably a good reason to not talk to him about sex, or people that he fancied.

“Carl?” His Mom interrupted his thoughts. “What do you think about getting rid of the old couch?”

“Oh...uh...well...” He let himself get dragged into the pointless conversation and away from the thoughts still floating in his head.

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“Hey Carl.” His Dad poked his head around his bedroom door as he spoke. “Can I come in?”

Carl nodded, removing the headphones from his ears as he sat up to make room for his Dad to join him, the mattress squeaked under his weight.

“God, we really need to get you a new one of these.” Rick said as he tested the springs out around him.

“Uh Dad?” His eyes shot towards him. “What did you want?” It wasn't everyday that his Dad came into his room. Even more uncommon for him to sit and talk with him these days.

Rick shifted to face him. “We gotta talk Carl.”

“About what?” He asked nervously.

“New Years.” Rick let out a sigh, rubbing his head. “Your Mom and I have decided to go away again.”
“What?!” Carl couldn’t believe it. After all the shit that they’d spewed about feeling bad that they weren’t around because of work and now they were choosing to leave him. Maybe Negan had a damn point, maybe they were shitty parents. Carl couldn’t remember the last time that his parents had actually been there for him.

“We just thought it'd be nice to get away for awhile. Get away from the stress of work for a bit.”

“Stress of being parents you mean.” He snarled at him. Carl moved away from the bed. He didn't want to look at the man anymore. He was so fucking sick of their shit. He was sick of their lies and what felt like a constant need to be away from him.

“Carl you know that's not what we mean.” Rick spoke.

“Do I? Because that's what it damn well feels like.”

“We just thought it'd be nice for you to have some time with Shane. He thought.”

“Shane? Of course Shane had something to say about this.” He scoffed at him, running his hands through his hair in frustration.

“And what is that supposed to mean?”

“It means that you guys can't seem to make any kind of decision without consulting fucking Shane.”

“Language Carl!” He Dad shouted at him, not that Carl cared he was too caught up in his own stream of anger.

“So lemme guess I'll be staying with Shane whilst you guys are off having fun?” He questioned

“Of course. We thought you'd be happy about that. He's your Godfather, you guys always have a good time together.”

“Is that what he tells you?”

“Yeah and it's what you always told us.” His Dad sighed at him. “Is this some weird teenager drama Carl? Because I damn well don't have time for it.”

No, you never do Carl thought to himself.

“You know what? Never fucking mind.” Carl said as he stormed out of the bedroom. He ran down the stairs and blew past his Mom who had so obviously been listening in on the conversation. Coward, he thought, couldn't even be brave enough to come in and tell me herself. He grabbed his jacket and threw the door open, stepping out into the crisp air.

He rushed down the sidewalk, he didn't have a direction he just needed to get as far away from that place as possible. Not even two days into the holidays and he already wished he was back at school. No. Not at school his minded corrected for him, he wished he was back with Negan. Back on that bench watching the sunset fall over the field. He closed his eyes and stood for a moment, losing himself in the memory, it almost helped quell the anger in him.

Almost.

It surged within him again the more he thought about his parents.

Once again he was being abandoned, left to fend for himself in the hands of a monster.
He turned another corner, walking along the quiet street, he wondered what he could do now. It wasn’t late, only 4 in the afternoon, he could go anywhere but he could only think of one place he wanted to be. Reaching, into his pocket, he grabbed his wallet and opened up the part he knew the paper would be in. The one that Negan had given him with his number.

His fingers twirled the piece of paper around in his hand, he kept it with him wherever he went these days. It was never far from his hand. He’d promised himself that he’d never use it but he had nowhere else to go. Nowhere else he’d rather be might be more accurate. He did question whether he was being slightly desperate. It had only been a couple of days since they’d last seen each other but he couldn’t deny that every single second they spent apart felt like an eternity. He had such a longing to be around him, not even talk, just to sit with him brought him so much joy.

Totally pathetic.

He thought about the last time they’d spoken. Would Negan bring it back up? He was usually pretty good at leaving the past where it was,

Still he soon found himself listening to ringing as he waited for Negan to pick up. Shit, what was he even going to say?

“Hello?” The familiar voice filled his ear.

“Hey! It's uh Carl.”

“Carl! You alright?” He sounded concerned.

“Young… I mean… no. I'm OK I just… I had a fight with my Dad and now I'm too pissed to do anything but walk around like an angry teenager. Did you wanna join me?” He joked.

“You couldn't pay me enough to be a teenager again.” Negan laughed, the noise filling him with warmth again. “You wanna hang with me for the day? Or will you be busy destroying the fuckin' town in your teenage rage?”

“I think I could find some time for you between my rampages.”

“Alright. Where are you? I'll come pick you up as soon as I can get my ass outta bed.”

“You're still in bed?” Carl asked, it was well into the afternoon, how lazy was this guy? “I thought I was supposed to be the lazy teenager?”

“Well I have to make up for your failure to be lazy. I had a late night last night, celebrating the end of semester and all that.”

Jealousy pinged in him at the thought of how he might have been celebrating and who with.

“You gonna give me an address or am I gonna have to drive through town to find you?”

Carl gave him the address of a park that wasn’t too far from where he was. He could definitely walk the distance in the time it took for Negan to get there. He got lost in his thoughts as he walked, he really shouldn’t have run off like that. He should have stood his ground more, maybe if he had he might have made them realise how much he needed them around. It wasn’t that he truly needed them but he might have avoided being shipped off to Shane’s for New Years. His fist clenched as the more he thought about it. Ever since Negan had mentioned beating the shit out of Shane at Thanksgiving it was all he thought about when he was forced to be around the man. It was like Negan had unlocked a passion inside of him that he had long forgotten about, in more ways than one
considering all the thoughts he had about kissing the man recently.

A loud rumble pulled him out of his thoughts, he quickly stood as it roared closer to him. He couldn’t quite believe his eyes.

“Wow.”

“I know.” Negan let a cocky grin spread over his face as he leaned back in his seat, his helmet now cradled in his hands. He’d left his car at home and was currently straddling the gorgeous bike that Carl had seen outside the cabin. His eyes widened as Negan offered him a helmet.

“Wanna ride?” He asked

“On THAT?” He’d never been on a bike before, he always felt like the type that would fall off and die within five minutes of hopping on.

“No on my dick.” Negan said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. “Of course the bike.”

Carl blushed at the words, his brain unhelpfully providing him images of what the former would look like. Blushing further as he imagined what that would look like on the very bike he was straddling.

“Sure.” He eventually squeaked out. Jesus Carl get a grip of yourself. He shoved the helmet over his head, leaving the visor open. “What...uh... do I do?”

Negan shifted forward on the bike. "Hop on the back, put your arms around my waist, and hold on tight.”

It sounded simple enough, until he was actually pressed up against his back, hands wrapped tight around him. Sure they’d hugged a few times but it had always been in the heat of the moment and he was usually too wrapped up in his own emotions to really think about what they were doing. Now it was a completely different story, he could feel every single inch of where he was pushed up against Negan. He could just about feel the sinewy muscles underneath the cool material of his leather jacket, The firmness of his back seemed to fit perfectly between his thighs, he prayed for a moment that his previous thoughts wouldn’t come back to embarrass him. He was sure that Negan could feel as much of him as he could and he wouldn’t fail to notice if a certain part of his body perked up during the ride. His thoughts quickly disappeared as the man revved the engine, fear shot through him as he was reminded of the impending journey.

“Hope you’re ready.” Negan shouted over his shoulder as they shot off, dust billowing around them.

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“That. Was. Incredible.” Carl panted out as he stepped off the bike. Adrenaline flooded his body. It really was an incredible ride he could see why people loved these things so much. It was so freeing feeling the breeze float across his body as the sled through the streets. His heart pounded as with each turn, he felt himself come alive with every thrilling thud against his chest.

“Always is.” Negan replied, stroking along the handlebars. Negan really did have a strange affection for inanimate objects.

“Do you guys need a minute alone?”

“Ha-fucking-ha.” Negan got off the bike, grabbing his keys from the engine. “C’mon I got something to show you.”
Instead of heading into the house, Negan walked him over to a smaller building behind the cabin, Carl hadn't noticed it the last couple of times he'd been here. He followed Negan through the door, not quite believing the sight in front of him. The man had a fully blown gym in the room, machines surrounded the large mat in the centre of the room, he even had a punching bag hooked onto the ceiling.

“So this is what you do with your free time?” He asked, brushing his hand along one of the scary looking weight machines. He wouldn’t even know where to start.

“You don’t stay this good lookin’ by standing around all day.”

“Huh. Here I thought you got you looks from screaming at children all day”

“You are just full of funny today.” Negan meandered over to him. “What's brought this on?”

Carl sighed, continuing his exploration of the room. “I'm just getting a little sick of how things are at the moment. Figured it was about time I took your advice and stopped taking the easy route, stop hiding myself away.”

“It took you far too fucking long to realise that.” Negan brushed his cheek, he had a strange look on his face Carl couldn't quite place it. “I'm glad you did though. You deserve so much better than the shit that you get.”

“Well maybe I'm finally starting to believe that.” Carl replied, reaching a hand up to cover Negan's which still rested against his cheek. His flesh tingled at the contact, the warmth spreading through his entire body. He looked him in the eye, breath catching at the intensity of his gaze, the kindness that seeped out of them. It brought back that urge, the urge to close the distance between them and seal their lips together.

Instead he let out a nervous chuckle and took a step back, now wasn't the time to make a stupid mistake. Clearing his throat he stared around the room again, eyes landing in the punching bag.

“So... you box?” He asked.

“Eh, I mostly punch the shit outta it until I feel better.” Negan joined him by the bag, raising his eyebrows at Carl. “Fancy giving it a go?”

“You want me to try boxing?” He asked.

“I know it's not quite destroying a town but it'll be damn good for you to blow off some fucking steam.” Negan walked over to a cabinet at the side, he pulled out some wrappings, Carl recognised it as the things boxers put over their hands to protect themselves.

“You gonna show me how it’s done?”

Negan laughed as he walked back over to him, beginning to wrap his own wrists up.

“Sure, can’t have you breaking anything.”

Carl’s eyes widened as the man stripped his shirt off, eyes taking in every inch of flesh revealed to him. They flitted from the tattoos littered over his torso, the hair on his chest, the scar that resided above his hipbone, he briefly wondered where he got that from.

“You done pervin’?”
Carl snapped his eyes back up to his face, blushing at his words. “I’m not perving.” He said defensively. “Just waiting for you to show me something good.”

“Thought I already had.” The man replied with a wink.

“Eh I’ve seen better.” Carl tried to deflect the conversation. “Anyways, I thought we’re supposed to be boxing?”

“Sure, sure. It’s pretty simple, just hit the bag, try not to knock it too much or it’ll come back and smack you in the face.”

“Personal experience?”

“Shut up.” Negan replied before hitting out at the bag. “Just watch.”

Carl did watch, watched as droplets of sweat slid down his muscled arms as he hit out again and His tongue slipping out to wet his suddenly dry lips, he now understood why people went to the gym if they got to see sights like this. He couldn’t look away, he was almost sad when Negan stopped. He moved to stand in front of him, gesturing for Carl to give him his hands. Carl did as told, still watching a droplet of sweat trickle down his chest. He gave a slight wince as the tape was wrapped tight around his hand.

“Sorry, it’s gotta be tight or it won’t work.”

“It’s fine I can take it.” He said as his other arm was wrapped up.

Once he was done, he shifted so he was stood next to the bag.

“Go crazy Carl. Get all that anger out.” Negan said, standing on the other side to brace the bag.

Carl punched out with all his strength, fists making a loud thudding noise as it hit the bag. Instead of the pain he was expecting at the impact he felt a rush of pleasure soar through him. It felt like every hit was chipping at the rage inside of him, searing flickers of light into the darkness. He did as Negan said, he went crazy at the bag, punching as much as he could until his arms screamed at him to stop.

He panted as he came to rest on the floor, all his energy zapped out of him. He felt Negan sit beside him, felt an icy coldness hit his sweaty arm.

“Drink up.” Negan said, gesturing with the water bottle.

Carl gratefully accepted it. He chugged it down between pants, slowly recapturing his breath. Putting the bottle down on the floor he collapsed back and enjoyed the endorphins that soared through him. He couldn’t remember the last time he felt this relaxed.

“Wanna grab some food?” Negan asked, poking him in the shoulder.

“Sure. Whenever my body decides it can move again.”

“We’ll be here awhile then with your weak ass.”

Carl just laughed and gave him a small kick. “Shut up and let me enjoy my moment.”

“Sure boss.”

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“You’re not doing Christmas?”

“Nope. not this year.”

“That’s a crime.”

“No it’s not.”

“Yes it is, my Dad’s a cop I would know.”

Negan just laughed at him as he grabbed another slice of pizza, Carl had insisted that they get take out, he had a feeling that spaghetti was about the only thing Negan could actually cook. They’d moved into the living room when the pizza had arrived, Carl sitting on the couch, Negan on the floor next to the low coffee table so he had easy access to the food. He’d eaten about half of it in the time it had taken Carl to eat one slice. Somehow they’d ended up on the topic of Christmas and Carl had been shocked to find out that Negan would be spending it alone in the cabin.

“It’s just me here Carl, there’s no point in decorating and doing the whole dinner thing.”

“What about your family?” Carl asked.

“They’re up in Seattle, we’re not that close to be honest, they always preferred Lucille and after we got divorced they never quite forgave me for it.”

“That’s shitty.”

“Yeah, but I suppose you know all about shitty parents.”

“Yeah.” They sat in silence for a moment, both thinking about their shared disappointment with the parents they’d been given.

“So what did they do this time?” Negan said.

“Huh?”

“To piss you off?” Negan clarified.

“Oh, they’re going away for New Years again this year. I wouldn’t mind but this was after their shitty chat about wanting to spend more time with me. I mean they say that then two weeks later they’re planning a new trip somewhere without me.”

“Fuck, that’s fucking shitty.”

“Yeah.” was all Carl could say as he played with the glass in his hand.

“So you’re spending it on your own?”

Carl choked out a laugh, if only. “No-uh-I’m spending it with Shane, around his place.”

“Jesus-fucking-Christ, I can see why you stormed off. I’d do the same if I had to spend any time with that piece of shit.”

“Yeah, can’t say I’m looking forward to it.”

“Don't like spending time with him?”
“No. It's um… it's just hard work.” He replied tactfully.

“In what way?” Negan probed.

“He's just very particular in how he wants things done.” Carl shifted forward to grab another slice of pizza. “Anyways, it's not important. What is important is how we're gonna celebrate Christmas.”

“We? You'll be at home celebrating with your family and I'll be here celebrating with my whiskey and my bat.”

Carl rolled his eyes at him.

No chance. I may be at home for Christmas Day but that doesn't mean we can't celebrate before. You are getting a tree and we're gonna do the whole thing, Christmas movies, turkey, passing out on the couch from eating chocolate. It'll be fun.”

"Carl I don't."

"Nope.” He interrupted. “You said I have to start fighting for what I want so here we are. I want you to have a good Christmas.”

"I'm not gonna win this one am I?” Negan asked sighing in defeat.

"No chance.” Carl smirked at him.

“Fine.”

Carl whooped in joy, grabbing more pizza to celebrate. All he has to do was plan what movies he was gonna make him watch.

**********

Negan dropped him off after dinner, Carl left him with strict instructions to buy the best tree he could find and get everything ready for dinner the following Friday. Carl was practically buzzing as he walked the short distance back to his house. His mind turned back to his parents as he went up the stairs on the porch. It was late, he hoped they were in bed, he didn't want to deal with their bullshit again.

The lights were off when he entered the house, a good sign he thought. He could vaguely hear the TV in their room, but other than that the house was quiet. Carl crept up the stairs and into his room, softly closing the door behind him.

He changed for bed, mentally preparing a list of all the things he needed to do before Christmas. He definitely needed to figure out what movies to torment Negan with, but more importantly he had to send off his damn college applications. The deadlines were inching closer and he really wanted all that shit done with before Christmas. Sighing as he finally flopped onto his bed he tried not to let his mind think about New Years, about the inevitable hell that he'd go through with Shane. He couldn’t stop it though, no matter how much he tried to focus on the good that had come out of the day, but he couldn’t help but get drawn into the darkness. His body filled with tension as he fell into a restless sleep.

**********

“I don't think I'll ever get used to that thing.” Carl panted out as he hopped off the back of the bike. Negan had picked him up that afternoon and driven them back to his cabin. After a week of waiting
for this day it had finally arrived, he didn't know why he was so excited, they'd hung out more times than he could count so it shouldn't be this exciting. Then again he loved Christmas and the thought of spending it without Shane lurking in the background filled him with joy. It was like being a kid again.

He practically jumped up the steps to the front door, bouncing on his feet as he waited for Negan to join him.

“You're very peppy.” Negan observed as he unlocked the door.

“Just excited to be here. I love Christmas.”

“No shit? You're like a puppy on speed.”

Carl just grinned at him and walked into the room. He stopped as he took in the surroundings. His mouth shifted into an ‘O’ at the stunning decorations in the living room. Negan had turned the room into a pure Christmas haven, there were tinsel and lights everywhere. The smell of gingerbread filled the room, warmth from the already lit fireplace seeped into his skin. He couldn't believe it. His eyes caught on the massive tree that sat near the front door. It was huge. He'd never seen one that big, it must have taken more than Negan to set it up. The lights twinkled up and down the green pines, making it shine in the room. He couldn’t speak, he just stared in amazement, walking around to take it in from every perspective.

“You like?” Negan asked, still standing by the door.

“I….I love… I don’t even know what to say. Who would’ve thought you’d be a secret Christmas nerd?”

“I’m not, but you are so I thought I’d give it a go.”

“You did this for me?” Carl was moved beyond words, he’d never had anyone do anything like this for him before.

“Yeah, least I can do considering you’re gonna be helping me cook this damn turkey.”

“You want me to help you cook?”

“Hell yes! Spaghetti is about the only thing I can’t burn, I married a chef so I didn’t have to ever cook.” Negan explained as he lead them into the kitchen.

They both stared at the naked bird that rested in the centre of the table.

“We can do this right? Two smart guys. How hard could it be?”

They soon found out that it was borderline impossible. Carl poked at the burnt carcass, sticking the knife in to see if there was anything salvageable.

“How the hell did we burn it?” he asked Negan. They’d followed the instructions, they’d even double checked them with other recipes yet the bird was sat there as black as charcoal.

“Well I’m a shit fucking excuse for a cook. I don’t know what your excuse is, I thought you were supposed to be the smart one.”

“Hey, I made the potatoes and they taste great!” Carl protested.

“You started eating them?”
"I was hungry and your bird was taking forever."

"You can’t hurry perfection."

"Ooh yeah it looks so perfect." Carl said sarcastically.

"Shut it. Looks like it’s potatoes and popcorn for dinner.” Negan sighed as he chucked some potatoes onto the plates.

"Sounds perfect."

"One more sarcastic comment from you and I’m gonna make you watch another Hannibal movie.” Negan threatened.

"I promise I’ll be good.” Carl said, grabbing his plate and heading towards the couch. “Maybe we shouldn't have gone boxing whilst the turkey was cooking?"

"Maybe, at least I wouldn't have hurt my hand.” Negan followed him in, sitting down beside the younger man, plate in hand. “So what movie are you torturing me with?"

“‘Muppet’s Christmas Carol’” Carl beamed at him. It was his absolute favorite. He lifted his hand to grab the remote and press play.

“You’re kidding? We’re watching a movie with singing fucking puppets?” Negan groaned at him.

“Of course! You can’t have Christmas without it.”

“I’m sure I fucking could.”

“Just shut up and eat your damn potatoes.” Carl snarked at him, settling down to enjoy himself.

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“Well that was a big load of crap.”

Carl kicked him in the side, over the course of the movie he’d slowly sunk further down into the couch until he was eventually laying down, feet coming to rest on Negan’s lap.

“You just can’t appreciate decent films.”

“Nah that’s your problem sweet cheeks.” Negan pushed his legs off him and rose from the couch. He grabbed their plates from the table and took them into the kitchen. “There are some sheets and pillows in the closet if you wanna crash here tonight. The couch is all yours.”

“You’re only saying that because you can’t be assed to take me home.” Carl shouted back at him as he walked over to the cupboard. He dug around until he found the sheets, grabbing a few pillows before he headed back.

“You know me so damn well.” Negan replied. “Get some sleep, maybe you’ll look less shit in the morning.”

Carl flung his middle finger up at him as a reply. He made his bed as Negan headed up the stairs into his room. He hadn’t bothered bringing any pjs, didn’t think he’d be spending the night, so he stripped down to his boxers and undershirt. Hopping under the sheets, he let himself fall asleep listening the crackling of the fire.
He woke up in the middle of the night, some noise from outside startling him from his sleep. He
tossed on the couch, trying to recapture his sleep. It didn’t work, he sighed as he looked up at the tall
ceiling. His eyes caught sight of the tree in the corner of the room, it called out to him with its
flashing lights.

Walking over to the large tree he laid himself down under the pines, looking up into the twinkling
lights. He loved doing this at home, ever since he was a kid he’d lay there for hours watching the
lights change and flash. It was better than watching the stars.

“What the fuck are you doing?” A sleep-filled voice asked him from above.

Not bothering to draw his eyes away from the lights he replied.

“Watching the lights. It's nicer from down here. You ever try it?”

“Can’t say I’ve ever felt the urge to lie underneath a Christmas tree.”

“C’mon then. Live a little.” Carl gestured with his hand for him to lie beside him.

He shifted to accommodate his larger frame, their bodies settling against each other as they looked up
at the lights.

“How’s your hand?” Carl asked, breaking the silence that had fallen over them.

“Oh, fine. It’ll heal.”

Negan bent his elbow to raise his hand above them, Carl looked at the redness that stood out on his
knuckles. He brought his own up to compare, his was fine, the wrapping having done its job
protecting him against the heavy bag. Negan’s hand looked so much bigger than his own from this
angle. He said as much to Negan who laughed in response and placed their hands together so Carl’s
laid on top of his.

“You’ve got a point there, small hands.”

“That my new nickname?” His fingers twitched on top of Negan’s.

“Hmmm, not sure if it’ll catch on.”

They both laughed, tiredness and the happy memories from the day making them more relaxed.
Their fingers gently toyed with each other as they compared size. Not one of their most insightful
conversations but Carl loved the physical contact. His whole body vibrated at the proximity, the joy
making him heady, he felt almost drunk.

He watched as their fingers interlocked, watched as Negan’s larger hand curled around his. His
stomach tingled with excitement and nerves, breath quickening as his eyes met Negan’s. He’d never
gotten used to that look on his face, the one that made his brain melt and mouth dry out. He slowly
edged closer to him, wanting to be nearer, the air between them intertwined flowing from one into
the other. It was making him dizzy, his senses were filled with Negan and it was perfect. Lost in the
moment he inched further bringing his lips to brush against Negan’s. It almost was enough to make
his heart stop.

Tingles trickled from his lips to spread through his body at the first real touch. He felt Negan shift
himself to slot their lips more firmly together, he could feel the stubble of his beard scratch at his chin
as their mouths moved against each other. A soft hand stroked along his cheek, the familiar gesture
almost made Carl purr against him. In that moment it was just the two of them in that little spot, protected from the world by the grand twinkling tree. He tried to memorize every second of the kiss, the slight hint of tongue that teased out from between chapped lips, the warm breath that hit his cheek as Negan breathed out, the woody smell of the man that drove him crazy.

Eventually the need for air became too much, he pulled away, puffs of air hitting Carl's lips as they caught their breath. He pushed his forehead against Negan's, nudging their noses together, opening his eyes to take in the other man. He was relieved to see the man as affected by the kiss as he was, his eyes were frantically searching his face, and he was panting equally hard. The hand on his cheek moved down to curl around his neck, thumb stroking at his hairline.

“Jesus… What are you doing to me Carl?” Negan breathed out.

Carl couldn't answer him, couldn't possibly think enough to give him a decent answer instead he curled his head down to rest softly on his shoulder, allowing himself to be lulled to sleep by the hand still stroking his hair.
The Light

Chapter Summary

Carl wasn’t sure if he could take it, he could feel something inside of him breaking, tendrils of chains that had him pinned down for some long were slowly snapping.

Chapter Notes

And we're back! Another chapter for you all! It was originally twice as long but I decided to split it in two because I love to tease. It does mean that the next one will be up very very soon I just want to add a few more things.

It was also gonna be more angsty but they two decided to be cute instead. Don't worry there's still angst just with a hint of fluff.

"With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts."

- Eleanor Roosevelt

Christmas Eve 2017

His back twinged as Carl awoke, his body twisting on the hard floor digging into his hips, a sharp contrast to the softness under his cheek. He groaned as the pain trickled through him, lifting his hip up slightly to relieve the pressure. His hand curled on bare flesh, he frowned his fingers trailed through wiry hair, Shane? He flinched back, scooting away from the body next to him. His eyes focused on the dim room, shards of light flickered through curtains, his heart lifted when he realised exactly who was next to. Negan. His body relaxed, they were still under the tree, he had to remind himself not to sit up and disrupt the pine needles. Laying back down he rubbed his hands over his eyes, wiping the sleep away, a sigh heaved its way out of his chest.

Panic settled in as he thought about the previous night, he’d really crossed a line by kissing him. It just felt so right, he couldn’t resist drawing their lips together and when they started he didn't figure out how he could possibly find him attractive. Doubts pricked at him, was Negan just using him to make himself feel better? His Dad always said it was a big confidence boost when younger girls checked him out, was it the same for Negan? Shane’s words echoed in his mind ‘men like him will say anything to get between your
legs,’ it made Carl sick to think that Negan was trying to get him into bed. Another part of his brain rebelled, he knew Negan, he trusted him. The man had been there for him during some of his darkest times, had respected him when he needed his space, he wouldn’t be like that.

A moan from his side distracted him from his thoughts, he turned his attention to the body that was twisting beside him. He watched as Negan’s face scrunched up in pain, no doubt feeling the same aches that Carl felt when he awoke. Brown eyes came to rest on his face, his heart sank when he saw Negan frown at him.

“How the fuck did I let you convince me it was a good idea to get down here?” He rolled over onto his side to face Carl. “I’m achin’ like a whore after a busy night.”

Carl laughed, a deep belly laugh that echoed through the room. All the tension in his body dissipated at his words.

“You didn’t need much convincing.” Carl reminded him.

“Fucking lies.” Negan spoke again, he reached out a hand to brush against Carl’s cheek, his usual cocky smile appeared on his face. “Mornin’”

Carl couldn’t help but melt at the look, heart bursting at the attention. “Morning.”

“Quite a kiss you laid on me last night.”

“You complaining?” Carl waited with baited breath for a reply.

“Fuck no! If I had it my way we’d never have stopped but…” His words trailed off as the smile dropped from his face.

“But?”

“But I’m your teacher and this is so beyond fucked up. I could get into a helluva lot of trouble for this.”

“I know..I’m sorry.” Carl rubbed a hand over his face. “I just… I couldn’t help it.”

That damn smirk reappeared. “I don’t blame you I am fuckin’ gorgeous. I’d be kissin’ me too if I was you.”

“Arrogant ass” He pushed at his shoulder.

“Ouch, watch it I’m still in pain from layin’ on this damn floor all night.” Negan rubbed at the back of his shoulder.

“You deserved it.” Carl slipped downwards, gliding along the wooden flooring before he pulled himself up. “You need help gettin’ up old man.”

Negan just laughed at him as he stood, he moved in front of Carl, eyebrows wiggling up suggestively as he spoke. “I can assure you I have no trouble getting it up.”

Carl pushed his shoulder again, blushing as he walked away to the kitchen. He grabbed himself a glass of water and tried not to stare as Negan stretched himself out. Carl hadn’t noticed the previous night that Negan wasn’t wearing anything but his tight black boxers. He took a sip, wetting his dry mouth as he watched his tight muscles contract across his back, heart racing as he let his eyes wonder down from broad shoulders to a narrow waist. Sweat slicked his hands as he flicked his gaze to
glance at Negan’s ass, he couldn’t help but notice how firm it was, the boxers doing the barest minimum to cover it up. He turned quickly and took a big gulp as Negan spun around, although it was pretty obvious how he felt about the man, he didn’t want him to think that he was a total pervert.

“Gimmie some of that.” Negan plucked the glass from his hand. Carl could feel the heat from his body behind him, his heart now pounding against his chest as blood pumped through it. He didn’t want to think about where that blood was currently flowing to, he just hoped he could keep control of himself.

“So...where’s your...uh...shower?” He managed to squeak out.

“Upstairs, first door on the left, there should be some towels up there. You need to borrow some clothes?”

“Yeah, please, just a new shirt, my jeans are fine.” He replied, finally turning around to face him. He refused to let his eyes wander down to his glide over the tattoos and muscles he knew he’d find there. He let out a tense smile before darting around him to head up the stairs.

He hadn’t ventured up the stairs before, he always stuck to his spot on the couch when he’d been there before. His eyes trailed over the bare wooden walls as he walked down the hallway, they paused on the open door that exposed a large bed in the middle of the room, Negan’s room his mind filled in for him. His lust filled mind couldn’t resist floating the image of Negan in that bed through his brain. He shook his head and refocused his mind on getting to the shower.

Walking into the room on the left, he took in the large bathroom, it was bigger than his own bedroom. A huge sunken tub dominated the corner of the room, the depth contrasting with the high wooden ceiling. The walk-in shower was situated opposite the tub, partly covering the stone look wall, it was the perfect mix of modern and classic. Carl was impressed that a guy like Negan would have such good taste.

Locking the door behind him, he stripped off and stepped inside the shower, closing the door behind himself. He’d never been so confused by a shower before, there were so many knobs that it took him more time that he’d like to admit to figure out exactly how to turn it on. Even longer to get the settings right. He breathed in and enjoyed the heavy pressure of the hot water, it was more perfect that he could imagine. The water massaged over his aching skin, bringing a delightful pleasure that spread over him. It did nothing to stop the ache that he’d been trying to ignore between his legs.

He looked down at himself, almost confused by the hardness that stuck out from his body. It wasn’t like he’d never masturbated before, he spent most of his time when he was 13 jerking off under the sheets at night, it had just become a foreign concept after everything with Shane. It was like he started to dissociate his body with sex, it had merely become an object for Shane to use when he wanted, it never felt like his own anymore. Now he was getting a keen reminder that his brain did in fact control his body on occasion, the images of Negan’s practically naked body sending throbs of pleasure through him.

His brain supplied him with fantasies of those lips, how they felt on his, how they might feel elsewhere on his body. His breathing sped up the more he thought about it, the more he thought of Negan trailing his lips down his body, what he might do with them when he reached even further down.

He almost reached down to take himself into his own hand, he knew he could do it, could get himself off to those thoughts. He stopped himself though, it felt too weird to be doing those things in another person’s house, although he was fairly certain Negan wouldn't care, if anything he’d probably offer to help. Another wave of lust pulsed through him at the thought.
He groaned at himself, of all the times to rediscover that he actually wanted sex he had to pick the time when he couldn't do anything about it. A dirty part of his brain reminded him that there was definitely something he could do about it, he could always go out and grab Negan, ask for his assistance. He shook his head again, not the time, and he definitely wasn't ready for that.

His hand shot out and quickly turned the temperature knob right down, the best fix in a situation like this. His body soon cooled down under the punishing ice that flowed from the head. He quickly washed himself, not spending too long cleaning around his crotch in case his body got anymore ideas.

Stepping out the shower he grabbed one of the pearly white towels from the rack and wrapped it around his waist. He wiped at the steam from the grand mirror above the sink and took a look at himself. Allowing his eyes to trail over his body he was relieved to see no visible marks from his last visit from Shane. He didn't fancy putting his undershirt back on so he'd have to walk out of there in the towel, and he didn't want to deal with any questions about bite marks.

He took a deep breath and shoved his boxers on under the towel, he grabbed his undershirt and walked out from the bathroom. Hearing a noise from Negan's bedroom he padded across the hall to look into the room.

Carl was almost disappointed to see that Negan had gotten dressed whilst he was in the shower. He was currently chucking some clothes onto the bed from the dresser by the side of the room. His body now covered in a plain, white tee, the deep V of the neckline revealing a sliver of chest hair. His jeans were still underdone, Carl could see a hint of his boxers in the gap, it sent his pulse racing again.

“Hey.” Negan said as he turned to see Carl standing there. Carl could see his eyes flit over his body, he shivered under the gaze wondering what was going through his mind. He couldn't help but wonder if Negan liked what he saw, whether he'd truly find a skinny boy like him attractive. He'd never felt so vulnerable, never been so aware of the ribs that were so obvious under his skin, the hip bones that protruded out. In that moment he wanted to cover himself up, conceal himself from his gaze. He watched the man lick his lips, questioned whether he actually saw a flicker of lust fill Negan's eyes. The room was quiet for a moment, filled with tension. Carl became hyper aware of the bed that was in between them, almost a promise of things to come, things that could happen in that moment. He heard Negan clear his throat, breaking the moment.

“I...uh...here you can wear this.” He offered him a black shirt which Carl took gratefully.

“Thanks.”

“I brought your jeans up, you can get dressed in here. I'll wait downstairs, make us some breakfast.”

“Great.” He replied, his skin tingled as Negan brushed past him, the temptation to stop him with a kiss nearly overwhelmed him.

He quickly dropped the towel as he heard the door shut, walking over to his pull his jeans on. He slipped the shirt over his head and almost laughed at how big the shirt was on him, he was fairly certain he could double in size and it would still fit comfortably. Shaking his head, he dropped the towel in the clothes basket by the door and headed back downstairs. The scent of gingerbread filling his nose again as he got closer to the kitchen. Negan was busying around the kitchen, wash cloth hanging over his shoulder as he leaned down to open the oven, removing whatever was inside it.

“So what’s for breakfast chef?”
“Gingerbread cookies.” Negan announced in his usual theatrical voice, dramatically presenting the freshly cooked cookies to Carl.

“Cookies? For breakfast?” Carl asked.

“Of course, it’s Christmas right? You can eat whatever the fuck you want.” He shoved the cookies onto a cooling rack. “There’s some chocolate on the side there if you want something to eat while they cool.”

“Wow, aren’t you supposed to be the epitome of health? Considering you’re a Coach and all that.”

“Nah, that’s just what we tell people to look good.”

“Right.” Carl sat at the table, reaching out to munch on the offered chocolate, he couldn’t really complain it was every teenagers dream right?

“So we gonna talk about that kiss or what?” Negan asked, as blunt as ever, leaning his hips back against the counter.

Carl’s chewing slowed as he thought about his words, what exactly could he say? “What about it?” He tried to play it cool, tried to ignore his heart pounding nervously in his chest.

“Well, here I thought I was playing the creepy perverted Coach in some porno when I had dirty thoughts of you then you go and place a kiss like that on me. I kinda wanna know if that kiss means that you’ve been having the same thoughts or if I should lock myself up in jail already.”

Carl nearly choked on the chocolate still in his mouth, his eyes widened at the thought of Negan having any dirty thoughts of him. “Uh...well...yeah I suppose. I just....” Carl couldn’t find the right words to describe how he felt. “I don’t know… it’s pretty obvious that I’ve been thinking about you differently, as more than a friend. It’s not just… not just those kind of thoughts, it’s more than that.” He hesitated before he spoke again. “What... what is it for you?”

Negan rubbed at his face, sighing into his hands. It was so complicated.

The longer he waited for a reply the more the insecurities crept in, was Shane right about him? Negan had only mentioned dirty thoughts, nothing to do with falling for him. No mentioned if any feelings that resembled Carl’s own. Carl played with the food on his plate, twisting it in his fingers as he tried to distract himself from the anxiety flitting in his stomach.

“It’s... shit... I don't know I'm just as confused as you are. At first I thought I just liked the attention, it's been so long since I was with anyone that I figured I was just touch deprived or some shit like that but now...”

“Now?” Carl promoted him after a few moments silence, eyes fixed on his. The tension twisted in the room, tugging at both of them.

“Now...now it's more. I don't know what the fuck it is. All I know is that every moment without you is fucking hell. I mean, Christ I feel like a fuckin’ teenager with a dumb crush, it was not supposed to be this way.”

“I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

Carl sighed, standing up to pace away from him. “For all this.” He gestured between the two of
them. “This is so messed up.”

“Don’t apologise Carl, it’s not your fault. These things just happen, God, if anything it’s my fucking fault, I’m supposed to put a lockdown on this shit. I shouldn’t have allowed myself to get close to you but I was so damn selfish I couldn’t help myself.” Negan stood and walked over to Carl. “Whatever this is, it is not your fault. It is what it is.”

Carl nodded, he still didn’t know what to make of it. His head was jumbled as the reality of the situation sank in. Whatever they were it wouldn’t be normal, it couldn’t be normal. They’d have to be so careful, more careful, his stomach turned as he thought back to Shane catching them on the field. It could have been so much worse.

“Carl…” Negan cupped a hand around his neck. “It'll be alright. We'll figure it out. Together.”

“Yeah, yeah, it's what we do.” He replied, stepping closer to Negan, head resting on his shoulder. He breathed the man in, that woody scent replacing the gingerbread that was still stuck in his nose. A hand stroked up his back, as the other stroked along his neck, the movements relaxing him again.

“You want some gingerbread now?”

Carl laughed at his question. “Sure, let’s eat.”

They split and ate their breakfast, conversation falling onto simpler topics as the morning passed. The clock that ticked on the wall a constant reminder of how soon he’d have to leave. He promised his parents he’d be home by midday, it was Christmas Eve after all and he had to go play happy families with them.

“Almost time to take you home.” Negan said, his own eyes flicking to the clock.

“Yeah.” The mood sunk as the realisation hit them both. They finished their meal in silence, both wanting to beg the other to stay, neither brave enough to do so.

“When will I see you next?” Carl asked, he didn't want to seem needy but he needed some kind of hope to get through the next few days. He needed something to think about those days at Shane’s.

“Whenever you're free. I'm not planning on going anywhere anytime soon. You're the one with all the obligations. ” He joked.

“Yeah.” He broke off another piece of cookie, shoving it into his mouth, Negan was surprisingly good at the whole baking thing.

“Don't be so sad, I thought you were all into the whole Christmas thing?”

“I am. I just wish it was like it was when I was younger y’know? When it's all magical and everything is simple.”

“So it’s all complicated now?”

“Yeah, it’s different.”

“How come?”

“It just is.”

“Anyone ever tell you that you talk too much?”
“Funnily enough no, I’m sure you get that a lot thought.”

“Naah, who wouldn’t want to hear this voice?”

“Most people.”

“You’re an ass, why do I put up with you again?”

“Cos you have all those dirty Coach thoughts” He jested at Negan.

“Shit, yeah.”

Carl rolled his eyes at the smug grin on his face. “On that note, I’m gonna go get my things, I gotta get going.”

Carl grabbed his bag and stuffed his dirty shirt into it. He looked around the room, trying to memorize everything about it, he never wanted to forget the last 24 hours.

“Got your things?” Negan asked as he walked back into the room. He’d gone to the closet to grab their jackets, he chucked Carl’s over to him before putting his own on.

“Yep, think that’s everything.”

“Right, let’s get going then. Can’t have you late for lunch.”

Carl shivered as they left the warmth of the house.

“Shit, wait here, you’re gonna freeze on the bike like that.”

He started to protest but Negan had already dipped back inside the house. He shook as he stood there waiting for him to come back. His eyes were drawn to a red object in his arms as the man reappeared in the doorway.

“C’mere.”

Carl walked closer, bending his head as Negan lifted the object over his head. He quickly realised it was a scarf as the other man wrapped it around his neck. Fitting it snugly around it before tucking it into his jacket. It wasn’t much but it did offer a respite from the wind that snapped around them.

“Thanks, I’ll get it back to you next time.”

Negan waved it off, adjusting the scarf here and there. “Keep it, call it your present from me.”

“Thank you.” He looked up at him, smiling as the man continued to adjust the scarf. Carl placed his hands over Negan’s, fingers curling over the top. “I think it’s all good.”

“Yeah, looks good.” Negan brought his eyes up from the scarf to meet Carl’s.

They stood there for a moment, taking each other in. It was stupid, they’d see each other soon enough, but it felt like an eternity was spread out before then. Their fingers still intertwined on the scarf, the contact driving them together again. Carl’s eyelids fluttered closed as their mouths inched nearer, he breathed in deep as their lips met, savouring the taste of his lips. He wrapped his arms around his neck, bringing their bodies closer together, he felt Negan’s palms slip down from his neck, sliding down his torso to wrap around his waist. The warmth from his lips radiated through his body, battling the cold weather outside.
He tentatively opened his mouth, tongue slipping out to meet the one that nudged at his lips. Their tongues slid over each other, the friction sending his pulse rocketing again, electrifying every nerve in his body, he could practically feel the blood pumping through his veins. Carl could feel his body urge him to move nearer, it was like he was drawn to him like a moth to a flame.

He pushed even closer, wanting to feel more of Negan against him. Negan obliged, stepping towards him, hands pulling his waist closer. Carl could feel Negan’s chest against his own, could feel his breathing was as erratic, his mouth was almost insistent against his. Carl never wanted it to end, he clung to the man as his world spun, he felt drunk on his lips. He let out a small moan as Negan’s hand slid lower to cup his ass, he let his own palms trail down to his feel his chest, enjoying the hard muscles he could feel under his shirt. His hands slipped lower, gently toying with the hem of the man’s shirt, brief flickers of flesh made contact as they moved. His accidentally slipped lower, catching on his belt, he gave a jolt as the brush of sturdy leather sent a shot through his brain. Memories of a similar belt hitting his flesh resurfaced, the clink of a buckle before mind blowing pain forced him to pull away from Negan. Panting as he broke the kiss, he tried to refocus himself on the present, he was here with Negan, not with Shane he tried to remind himself.

“Carl, you alright?”

He could hear Negan’s voice, he looked up at him, eyes shifting over the figure as if they needed to double check that it was really him. “Yeah…yeah… I’m good… it’s uh, just a bit much.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to get carried away.”

“No! It’s fine, don’t worry.” Guilt pricked at Carl as he saw the sad look on his face. He forced a smile at him, trying to control the shake in his hand as he rubbed Negan’s arm. “We should get going though I don’t wanna be late.”

Carl pulled away from him, walking ahead to the bike, willing his body to calm the hell down before he got home.

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He walked into the house to the sight of his Dad on the couch, head in his hands. He looked almost sad. His head snapped towards him as the door slammed shut behind Carl.

“Hey.” The man spoke, wiping at his face, was that tears on his face?

“You OK Dad?” He asked, walking closer to him.

“Yeah, uh, just thinking about things.”

“Where’s Mom?” he couldn’t hear her pottering about the house, it was silent except for the two of them.

“She’s gone out, went to grab some more food for dinner tomorrow.”

“Right, I’ll just be in my room. Gimmie a shout if you need me.”

“Carl…” it broke his heart to hear how desperate his Dad’s voice was behind him. “What happened?”

Carl turned back to face him, looking questioningly at the man.

“With us? We used to be so close. Now you seem like you can’t even stand to be in the same room
Carl sighed, he seemed to be doing that a lot today. He went to sit on the couch opposite his father. “It’s not that, things are just… complicated.”

“Things are always complicated Carl.” He looked up at Carl. “There’s something more going on here. Something else.”

“There’s nothing else Dad, like you said the other day, it’s just stupid teenage stuff.”

“I’m sorry, for whatever it’s worth, that we’re leaving. Things have been tricky with your Mom lately, we just wanted some time to sort it all out. Not to get away from you but to protect you from it all.”

“You don’t have to protect me Dad, I know things aren’t right with you and Mom. I’ve known for ages.”

“Is that what this is about? The problems at school? Did we cause that?”

“No, Dad it’s nothing, it’s just stress. Nothing to do with you and Mom.”

“I know you’re not happy about going to stay with Shane, but it’s only a few days. Your mom and I are thinkin’ of doing a family holiday in the new year. It’ll be nice to get away, just the three of us.”

“Yeah, maybe.” Carl wasn’t sure, he didn’t even know if he could trust that he was telling the truth. Too many times he’d been told that they were gonna be together more only to be let down again and again.

“I love you Carl, I hope you know that.” His Dad looked at him earnestly.

“Yeah, I love you too Dad.”

“I just want what’s best for you, both of us do. We just… sometimes we don’t know what that is.”

“Well, maybe you shouldn’t go asking Shane for parenting advice if you wanna get anywhere.” He suggested, letting anger fill his voice for a moment.

“Yeah, maybe that’s not the best thing. He’s not the best moral judge.” Rick laughed, once again not hearing the frustration from his son.

Ready for the conversation to be over Carl stood. “I’m gonna head back to my room. See you later.”

He slept in Negan’s shirt that night, the scent of the man relaxed him, gave him the strength of getting through the days as his impending visit to Shane grew closer.

He found it harder and harder to be in his parents company as he was forced to spend time with them that day. Negan had certainly unlocked a rage in him that he never thought himself capable of. Every comment his mother made seemed to send the hair on his skin upright, he wanted to scream at his Dad every time he mentioned Shane.

He noted that they didn’t seem to be fighting much for a couple that were having trouble as he Dad had said. He noticed all the little acts of affection between them, if anything they seemed more in love than ever. Carl deviously thought about wrecking it, tell his Dad all about what Shane had done with his Mother, watch them fall apart at the seams. Then maybe they’d listen to him about that man,
he could twist the knife in further by making them realise what the man they trusted had done to their son.

He couldn't do it to them. As much as he hated them, or thought he hated them, he still loved his parents. Still wanted to preserve their happiness even if they didn't give a shit about his. Or maybe it was that he didn't want to deal with that shit, he couldn't face up to the drama, not when he was so close to getting away for good. He could leave home, leave Shane, leave his parents. Leave Negan his brain added, the thought sent a stab of pain through him. Negan was right earlier when he said about the two of them being apart, it was like a constant ache, like part of him was missing. He wondered how normal this was, he'd never really done the whole boyfriend thing before, he'd never even known he was into guys until Negan came along. He'd had a few fleeting fantasies about Ron when he was younger but sex has been far from his mind since Shane. Relationships had been far from his mind, the thought of getting close to anyone terrified him, the constant paranoia that they'd turn on him like Shane had was almost overwhelming. Yet Negan had managed to do it, had managed to worm his way inside Carl's heart and make a home for himself. He'd awoken long dormant emotions in him, made him feel like a normal human being for the first time in years. He wondered how normal this was, he'd never really done the whole boyfriend thing before, he'd never

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Christmas Day 2017

Christmas Day passed without too much drama, the usual shit happened. His Mom got annoyed that she was the only one cooking, his Dad had a bit too much to drink, and he spent his time fending off Shane's almost constant advances. Dinner was an awkward affair, Shane seemed determined to make things as painful as possible for him. He brought a date to dinner, some dumb bitch named Sherry, but he spent most of his time groping at Carl as he tried not to vomit over his turkey. Shane seemed to delight in making him as uncomfortable as possible, making small digs about him to Sherry, embarrassing him in front of his parents. His hand gripped his knife tighter and imaged sinking it into Shane's threat. The thoughts occupied his time as dinner passed.

The night ended with Shane sending Sherry off in a cab, and his Mom going to bed early in anger at his Dad’s drunken antics. Carl did the dishes to the sound of sniggering laughter from the other room, Shane and his Dad were reminiscing about their days as partners. At least they were keeping each other occupied, it gave Carl time to clean up in relative peace.

He found his mind drifting off as he put the dishes back in their places, he wondered what Negan was doing. Whether he’d gone anywhere, seen anyone, in a way Carl hoped that he had. It upset him to think that the man would be spending Christmas on his own, no one should have to do that. He briefly entertained the idea of giving the man a call before he went to bed, he just wanted to hear his voice even if it was only for a few minutes.

“Well aren’t you the perfect housewife?” A slurred voice broke through the silence. He turned to see Shane in the doorway, Carl wondered how long he’d been standing there for.

“Did you want something?” He asked briskly, turning away from him to grab another plate to put away. He was caught halfway to the cabinet, a long arm curled around the dip above his hip pulling him tight against Shane.

“You damn well know what I want.”
Carl’s feet became tangled with Shane’s as he tried to shift away from him, hands pushed at the hard chest, doing nothing to dislodge the weight against him.

“Shane... stop... Dad’s next door.” He shoved at him, hoping that he’d see the sense in his words.

“Don’t worry he’s all passed out.” Carl heard the man unbuckling his belt, he could feel the leather moving against his waist.

He was borderline hyperventilating as he was pushed over the counter, his mind flashing back to the first time they’d done this. It was almost like his body was experiencing the pain all over again, he twitch with each brush of Shane’s hand across his body. His pants were yanked down, hands grabbed at his hips to pull them back against his hard flesh. Carl let out a yelp at the sudden movement. He panicked as a hand reached out to cover his mouth, breathing becoming even more of an issue as it partially blocked his nose in the process.

“Shhhh, you gotta keep quiet, unless you want your parents to see what a whore you are for me.”

He tried to shake his head, tried to deny that he was anything but an unwilling participant in all of this but his mouth remained covered, his words became nothing but muffled grunts against the palm. He shoved his hands flat on the counter trying to push up to get away. He was stopped by the poison Shane trickled into his ear.

“That’s what they’ll think Carl if they come in, they’ll think you seduced me, made me do all this. I’ll make ‘em believe it just like I convinced them it was a good idea to leave for New Years. So stop whining and crying, there’s no point. Anyways, deep down you know you fuckin’ want this.”

With his last words he shoved himself deep inside him, Carl almost screamed as he was torn apart. He managed to keep it to a low moan that was muffled by the now soaked palm over his mouth, tears flicked down his face and onto it. His words always hurt him more, he knew he was right, knew his parents would never believe him over Shane. He couldn’t fight, he couldn’t risk that they’d come in there and see him. He was paralysed, left stuck in the man’s twisted web, waiting to be devoured whole. Hated flared through him, hated for his parents who would never take his damn side, they put him in this position. Hatred towards his own body for not being strong enough to fight him off. He clung onto the hatred with every painful thrust into his body, it helped to numb the pain. His fingers reached out and gripped the corners of the counter, squeezing tight to brace himself, trying to ground himself in the dark depths of his mind.

He felt the familiar burn of come as it filled his body, another muffled moan escaped him at the sensation. Air was forced out of his lungs as a heavy weight came to lie on top of his prone form. Hot breath filled his ear as Shane tried to get his breath back, Carl squirmed away from the hand that caressed his waist.

“God, I can’t wait for New Years baby.” A kiss was placed on his shoulder, it burned through his shirt. “Four whole days of this.”

Carl wasn’t sure if he could take it, he could feel something inside of him breaking, tendrils of chains that had him pinned down for some long were slowly snapping. Each beat of his heart a cue for them to chink away, anger aiding the process. Hatred was an acid the swirled through him, weakening the bond. He was almost ready, he just didn't know what for.
and it all falls apart

Chapter Summary

As Carl is forced to spend New Years with Shane he can feel himself ripping in two, everything in him breaking apart until he has nothing left to lose.

Chapter Notes

So we've finally arrived at Carl's visit with Shane. It's not a fluffy chapter but it's not anymore graphic than previous ones. Shane does fuck with Carl's head a lot in this one and poor Carl really does get his mind torn in half. Stick with me though it'll get better I promise!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"No one knows for certain how much impact they have on the lives of other people."

- Jay Asher

December 2017

The day came soon enough. He stood at the bottom of his bed looking out at the bundle of clothing stacked on it. He just needed to pack it all up and then he was...ready? Not quite the right word, he'd never be ready for this. Vomit seemed to be a constant presence in throat as the day he left for Shane's crept closer, the acid burning away at him. It was always different like this, it was one thing to suddenly be around Shane and his groping hands, but walking into it was always worst kind of torture. Thankfully it had only ever been for a night at most, he wished he was so lucky this time. Four whole days with Shane. Absolute hell.

He rubbed at his eyes, sleep hadn’t come easy the previous night even with Negan’s shirt wrapped him. He’d tossed and turned, unable to sedate his mind that persisted in showing him dark visions of what to expect in the coming days. Deep down he always knew that no matter what his mind showed the reality would be worse.

He was shaken from his thoughts by a knock on the door. A voice shouted through the wood.

“You ready to go Carl? We gotta get a move on.”

“Oh yeah can't have you missing out on your vacation because of your son can we?” Was what he wanted to say. Instead he said “Yeah I’m coming.”

He sighed as he heard the footsteps walk away from his door and fade down the hall. Realising he couldn't put it off much longer he shoved his things into his old duffel bag and dragged himself
downstairs with it. His parents were waiting by the door with their suitcases, just the sight of their happy faces made anger bubble up in him. He ignored his Mom’s words and headed straight into the car, waiting for them to join him. He adamantly stared out of the window for the short journey, any attempts to start a conversation were ignored.

His Dad pulled the car up at Shane’s, the white house standing alone in the sparse area, not a person to be seen for miles. Just him and Shane. He thought it was almost creepy how they both turned around to face him, pity a clear sight on their faces.

“We’re gonna miss you baby.” His Mom spoke softly, like she was trying appease him, trying to ease the pain of what they were doing to him. Too late for that he thought.

“Not enough to miss your vacation for.” He snarled at her, reaching for the door handle he shifted over and slipped out the car. He grabbed his bag that was by his feet and slammed the door shut behind him. He vaguely heard them pull away as he walked up to the familiar blue door of Shane’s house, it was smaller their theirs, no where near as nice as Negan’s but it suited Shane. It used to suit him too, used to be one of his favorite places to be before everything, now it was just another reminder of how his life used to be.

The door swung open before he even reached the porch, Shane’s broad figure nearly took up the whole doorway. Carl saw him give a friendly wave to his parents as they drove off. His feet grew heavier the closer he got to the building, his pace slowing as his body tried to delay the inevitable. Fear and dread crept in to replace his previous desperation to escape his parents, the reality that he was now going to be spending days with this man dropped over him.

“C’mon in boy. I’ve been waiting for you.” Shane whispered into his ear as he tried to get past without touching him. Shane had already been drinking, he stunk of whiskey, Carl briefly wondered if he’d pass out before he could do anything. He let out a shout as a hand slapped across his ass when he moved into the house.

He cringed as the door slammed shut behind him, he stood in the middle of the hall, unsure of his next move. He could go upstairs, drop his bag off but Shane would no doubt take that as an invitation. Then again he didn’t want to stand there around him, he could feel his eyes already burning into his back. His decision was made for him as Shane plastered himself along his back. He could feel the sweat from his hands through his shirt as Shane dragged them down his arms, one hand plucking the bag from his tightly clenched fist to drop it on the floor. The other trailing along his waist, lowering down to slip under his shirt.

Carl tried to squirm away from him but he was trapped in his grip. “Shane, I need to go upstairs, get rid of my things.”

“Mmmmmmmm, you definitely need to get upstairs, I’ve been thinking about you writhing around in my sheets. All. Fucking. Week.”

The hands persisted in their attempt to remove his shirt, one of them crept down to grope at his crotch through his jeans.

“Shane…” He protested, he couldn’t keep track of the hands that slithered over him, it was like Shane had grown another set, every time he pinned one hand down another would appear on another part of his body.

“Carl, it’s been too damn long.” He turned Carl to face him. Carl was sickened by the desperate look on his face. He pushed his hands against Shane’s chest, trying to put some distance between them. He stepped back but was quickly followed by Shane.
“But...we’ve....we’ve got four whole days Shane. You don’t need to do anything now.”

A seedy smirk appeared on his face, teeth creeping out to bite down on his lower lip as he no doubt thought of all the things he wanted to do with him.

“You’re not wrong about that.” He stepped Carl back until they reached the stairs, he pushed him down against the steps, crawling on top of his prone body. He slipped his hips between Carl’s legs. “That doesn’t stop us takin’ the edge off though.”

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Shane had let him shower after that, he’d ground himself between his legs, frotting against him until he came in his pants. Carl pretended that he’d done the same so he could get away, get into the shower to burn off his touch. The bathroom was his one sanctuary in the whole damn building, he could lock the door and pretend that he was at home, just getting ready for the day.

A knock on the door had him freezing, the soap slipped from his hand as he questioned if he’d actually locked the door. Panicking at the thought that the man might come in and ruin his time alone.

“Hurry up and get your ass out here Carl. I’ve got plans for us.” Shane shouted through the door.

Carl leaned his forehead against the cool tiles, the hot water burned a path down his back.

“Sure, just a sec.” He called back, taking deep breaths to calm himself. God knows what Shane had planned but he didn’t want to keep him waiting, no point in delaying the inevitable. He switched off the shower and grabbed his towel so he could dry off quickly. Carl shoved his clothes back on and walked down the stairs, trying to figure out where the man was. He found him in the large living room, relaxing on the raggedy couch that he’d had for as long as Carl could remember. Carl’s eyes furrowed when he saw the game controller on his lap, he recognised the familiar start up screen on the tv. He and Shane used to play on the Playstation every time they were together, whenever his parents dropped him off for babysitting duty, they’d find themselves playing whatever game Shane had bought that week. They hadn’t done it for years though, Shane preferring a whole different kind of game nowadays, it was an unsettling shift back to the old ways.

“Ready to play?” The man asked, chucking a controller at him. Carl caught it and walked on unsteady legs over to the couch. He sunk down into the opposite corner to Shane, eyes warily looking him over, but Shane merely turned his attention to the screen, flicking through the controls to start the game.

Somehow this was worse. It was easy to hate him when he was forcing himself on him, he could forget the good times, could forget how much he loved the man before everything happened. They hadn’t done anything like this since the first time he’d raped him, his visits usually involved him being trapped inside the bedroom. This brought everything back to him, the joy that he felt whenever he’d hung out with Shane, he had loved every second of their time together. He looked up to Shane more than he’d ever looked up to his Dad, his eleven year old self wanted to be like him so badly. He told him things that he’d never even consider telling his Dad, he told him about his crushes, what he thought about the kids at school, he even confided in him about his parents marriage, how much he actually wanted them to divorce just to stop the damn fighting.

It almost made him sick to think it but Shane was the one that brought him so much comfort. Whenever he woke from a nightmare it was his name on his lips, he was the one the called for to protect him from the monsters. The arms that he’d felt the most safe in were the same ones that pinned him down and took so much from him.
Those thoughts were the most dangerous. The ones that forced him to question every damn second that they had spent together, made him wonder if any of it was genuine, if Shane ever truly cared about him or if he was just part of the warped game that he played to get him to trust him so he could do what he wanted.

His chest ached the more they played, he wanted to get lost in the game but all he felt was the keen sting of betrayal. The constant abuse had numbed him to it, he’d grown so accustomed to the new Shane that he’d almost forgotten the old one. He’d forgotten how it felt to have that trust so brutally betrayed, forgotten how sick he was in the days after that New Years, how every time he replayed the events of that evening he found himself heaving into the nearest toilet. In his shock he’d almost convinced himself that it was all a bad nightmare, that it hadn’t truly happened. If it weren’t for the bruises and the constant ache whenever he sat down he might have actually succeeded. It was inconceivable to him that Shane would ever do such a thing, and it broke his heart every damn day after, every time Shane cornered him, made him do awful things that no one should ever be made to do, another piece of his heart chipped away. Until he forgot, he made himself forget to make it easier, he mourned the Shane he knew, buried him away in an effort to protect himself.

It all came rushing back in that moment. He tried to stop the tears in his eyes, tried to stop the vomit that crept up his throat, his body trembled as his mind attempted to reconcile how it all got to this. Looking over at Shane he tried to remember how it felt to be safe around him, to not have nerves twisting and writhing in his stomach whenever he was near. Even the sound of his voice had him on edge, ready to run at any moment. He longed for that time, longed for the simplicity that came before. He longed for some damn answers that he wanted to scream out at him. Wanted to know why he did it? Why he had to break someone that loved him so much?

“Carl? You alright buddy?” Shane asked, noticing his lack of participation on the screen.

“Yeah…” Carl sniffed, trying to piece himself back together. His hands shook as they gripped the controller, he tried to focus on the screen, blinking away the tears that blurred his vision. “Just needed a second to remember.”

“Shit, yeah, it’s been awhile ain’t it?” Shane looked him over, licking at his lips. “Been a little busy ain’t we?”

Carl just swallowed down the vomit and started playing the game. It'll pass he thought, it always does. He’ll forget everything, no use in remembering what’s long dead.

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“You’re so beautiful like this Carl.” Shane twirled his hair around his finger, his head was propped up on his arm so he could look down at Carl. They were lying in bed together, Shane always liked keeping him around after, liked to curl himself around Carl as they slept.

Carl wanted to squirm away, wanted to slap the hand away from him and tell Shane to go fuck himself. A darker part of him wanted to roll him over and beat the shit out of him until he was a beautiful bloody mess on the bed. Instead he lay there, lost in the fantasy of destroying Shane’s face with his fists. He shifted slightly when the hand slid along his torso, fingertips softly stroking down his chest and onto his stomach.

“Has Negan ever seen this?” Shane asked, fingers now drawing circles on him.

“What?” Carl asked, his eyes sharply moved to look over Shane’s face, trying to find a reason behind the question. Why on earth would he bring him up now?
“He ever see you like this? Naked, all fucked out, and satisfied.”

“NO! Of course not, he’s my gym teacher.”

“C’mon Carl, I see how he looks at you. You tryna tell me that he’s never made a move? Never lingered in the locker room a lil long when you’re showing? Never tried to bury himself in that sweet ass of yours”

“No he’s not like that.” Carl needed him to stop talking, he could feel his fist curl as the temptation to punch him grew in his mind.

Shane scoffed at him. “I bet he is.” He taunted Carl. “I bet he’s thought allll about it, I suppose I wouldn’t blame him, I know seeing you run around in tight shorts would make me wanna bend you over the nearest surface.”

Shane leaned down to place kisses along his shoulder, a nip to his collarbone making him flinch. He shoved at him in response, hoping he’d take the hint and drop the damn topic. He couldn’t stand to hear him talk so much shit about Negan. His actions merely encouraged him to roll back on top of him, almost suffocating him under his hot weight. The mouth trailed steamy kisses down his chest, white teeth scraping across his nipple before he took it into his mouth, toying with the bud.

“Shane…” he tried to squirm away from the hot mouth, trying to ignore the flushes of pleasure that stung at him. He felt him suck a mark onto his chest, shifting between harsh bites and gentle licks.

“Gotta make sure they all know who you belong to.” Shane murmured around a mouthful of flesh. “I’d kill anyone that tried to take you away from me”

Carl wondered how true that was, panic overtook him as he thought about what the man could do if he ever found out just how deep his and Negan’s relationship was. He cried out as the mouth nipped ever lower, sharp teeth digging into the soft flesh of his inner thigh. He winced as the mouth trailed the cutting bites higher up, each one leaving stings of pain that radiated through him.

Shane’s hands gripped his waist, shifting his hips higher as he crawled back up his body. Carl felt his heavy length against his hip as Shane pressed closer between his legs, grinding against him as moans left his mouth. Carl pushed against his shoulders, trying to dislodge the man. He felt the growl vibrate a warning against his neck.

“You need me to tie you down again?”

Carl frantically shook his head, he could still feel the throbbing burn on his wrists from earlier in the day. After they’d finished playing Shane had taken a great pleasure in tying his arms behind his back as he sat him on his lap, he teased and forced pleasure on Carl until he was crying and pleading with him to stop touching his oversensitive flesh. He said it was his prize for winning the game.

He moved his hands to grip the crisp sheets by his side tighter, his body unwilling to follow his mind’s instinct to get the hell out of the room. His breathing grew more and more unsteady as hands crept between his legs.

“Just relax.” Shane hushed him.

Carl let his mind float into the darkness as a finger invaded him. He closed his eyes against the fiery stare that trailed over his body, tried to imagine being anywhere but here.

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He wished that the next day was easier, almost wished that Shane had decided to keep him in bed all day. Things were always simpler when he could let himself lay back and float away in his mind, dislocating his brain from whatever was happening to his body. Instead Shane decided to confuse Carl even more by taking him to the shooting range. He was surprised that Shane even let him out of the house, he figured he’d be imprisoned in there for his whole visit. The fresh air was a relief to his body, he could relax for awhile, certain that Shane wouldn’t try anything whilst they were out in public.

It had been ages since he’d last held a gun, another revisit to his past from Shane. When he turned 13 Shane had taken him around the back of his house and let him shoot cans. As he lived in the middle of nowhere it meant they could let loose and do what they liked. Carl thrived under Shane’s praise, feeling like an adult when he entrusted him with his handgun.

Now, four years later they were at a real range, shooting at cardboard people. Shane passed the gun he’d been using over to him, something akin to a dare flickered behind his eyes, tempting Carl to use it on him. He walked past him, stopping at the line, he raised the gun and let out a few practice shots. Even with the distance he could see that he hadn’t hit his target at all. He cursed himself when that inspired Shane to stand up behind him, hands twisting his hips. To an bystander it like he was helping him with his stance but Carl could feel his palms linger over his body, rubbing gently on the top of his hips. He shot more ferociously this time, imagining Shane in the place of the target, he could almost see the blood seeping through his shirt, smile fading as he realised what Carl had done. The thought made his head soar with pleasure.

Dinner that evening was a quiet affair, Carl sat awkwardly opposite Shane at the small table. He played with the takeout in front of him, Chinese, from his favorite place. He’d almost felt touched that Shane remembered, it had been so long since they’d done this, maybe the man was feeling nostalgic. The noodles spun around his fork, he’d never got the hang of the whole chopsticks thing. He looked up and watched, lip curling up in disgust as Shane shoved more food into his mouth. He’d always been a messy eater, never kept his mouth shut, you could always hear the saliva mashing up the food. He was almost fascinated by the sauce that trailed down from the corner of his lips, his eyes followed its path down to his chin.

The uneasy tension that filled the room took away any inkling of hunger that he might have felt. He was on unsteady ground, balancing on the wire, not sure which way the wind was going to blow. The last day had knocked him sideways, the constant flickering between painful abuse and happy memories had his emotions all over the place.

“You gonna eat any of that or are you just gonna push it around your mouth all night?”

Carl didn’t bother answering, just continued to twirl the noodles around as Shane finished his.

“Allright then, if you’re not gonna eat then we might as well go to bed darlin.” He chucked his napkin onto the table, moving to stand by Carl, hand outstretched offering his assistance. Carl didn’t take it, instead he sat back and looked up at him.

“I’m not tired.”

“Don’t worry you will be, now get up.”

He remained seated.

“You are just really fuckin pushing it tonight Carl.” Shane grabbed his hair, the force on the strands forcing Carl to stand, the chair falling back as it was pushed away from the table. “After I was so
nice to you earlier.”

“Nice?” He asked, outraged by his words. “How is raping me nice?”

Shane’s face twisted in anger, his other arm came up to thrust him against the wall.

“Rape? That’s a fuckin’ joke if I’ve ever heard one.” He laughed at him. The condescending tone just further enraged Carl.

“It is rape. You can gloss over it all you damn well want, but we both know I don’t want this. I’ve never wanted this. You’re just a sick old man, who couldn’t get his own way so he decided to take it out on a child.” Carl couldn’t stop the words coming out of his mouth. He was damn sick of the almost affectionate feelings that had reawakened in him as the afternoon had passed. He wanted to hate him, he didn’t want to laugh at his stupid jokes, didn’t want the flutter of hope that maybe Shane wouldn’t hurt him again, didn’t want to feel the pleasure that was forced on him time and time again, making him loathe his own body. He was sick of the man toying with his emotions, playing him like a fucking game. He wanted the anger, he wanted the pain, he wanted the reminder that the man was a fucking monster.

“SHUT. THE. FUCK. UP.” He roared at Carl, lifting his body forward only to slam him back against the wall. Carl’s body shuddered with the impact, his back still had bruises from the staircase earlier that screamed with pain.

“You’re only gettin’ pissed because you know I’m right.” He taunted, beyond caring about himself. The stinging pain not quite enough to outweigh the glee that trickled through him. Even the punch to his stomach made him laugh out. It was nice to get under his skin for a change, make him squirm instead.

“You are not right.” He growled at Carl. “You want this as much as I do. You fuckin’ come every damn time I touch you.”

“You make me. I don't want it-”

“YES YOU FUCKING DO.”

Another punch came, knocking the wind out of him, he would have doubled over if it weren't for his arm holding him up. His hand gripped his hair again pulling his face up.

“You want me to make this worse for you Carl? Huh? Cos I can make it hell for you. I can make your parents believe anything I want. You remember that chat about you coming to live with me? I can make it happen.” Spit hitting Carl’s face as he snarled at him. “You’ll be here, all mine, all the fuckin’ time.”

“They’d never let you do that.” Carl spoke, trying to convince himself more than anything.

Shane laughed again, the shrill sound pierced through him. “Yes they fuckin’ would. I can do anything Carl and they’d fuckin’ thank me for it.”

Carl brought his hand up again, trying to land a punch across that smug face, his efforts were thwarted by Shane. Shooting pain ran up his arm and across his shoulder as it was twisted behind his back, whimpering as Shane used his body weight to push it even higher, his body turned to face the wall. Carl was sickened to note the hardness he could feel against his backside.

“You better start playin’ nice Carl.” He leaned in to whisper in his ear. “I could keep you trapped here, keep you all chained up like a pet. You’d never go to college, never see your friends, your
little Coach Negan, ever again.”

Carl couldn’t help the flinch that overcame his body at those last words.

“Oooh, touched a nerve there did I? Maybe I was wrong earlier, maybe Negan doesn’t wanna get in your pants, maybe you want to get in his? Little slut like you, bet you can’t keep your legs closed.”

He struggled against the grip, stars blinked in his eyes after a sharp knock to the head.

“You know I’m fuckin’ right. I can make it so you never see him again. I’m a cop Carl, I could get him locked up on whatever charge I like. Maybe I accidentally walked in on him fiddling some of his students. I’m sure it wouldn’t be hard to persuade some of them to lie about it, not after all I’ve heard about how he treats them.”

“No… don’t please…” Carl whispered against the wall, tears falling down his face. He couldn’t let Shane ruin Negan’s life. He was a good man, he didn’t deserve any of this.

“No? What are you gonna do to convince me?”

“What…whatever you want. Please.”

“Mmmm, I dunno Carl, it’s gonna take a lot more than begging to convince me not to do it.”

The grip on his arm was removed, fingers sneaking under his shirt as nails scratched deep lines along his torso. Hot breath panted in his ear, the moisture making his hair stick uncomfortably to his flesh. His body ached from holding himself taunt, from the injuries inflicted on him by Shane, he wanted to cry out as one of the nails caught on his ribs, he must have bruised them with his punches.

“Let’s start nice and easy, get on your knees and apologise for calling me a rapist.” Shane murmured in his ear.

Every inch of him protested as turned and he slid down the wall, his knees fell hard on the wooden flooring. He looked up at Shane, remembering Negan as he tried to look remorseful.

“I’m sorry I called you a rapist.” He could hardly bring any emotion to it, even he could hear the monotone way he spoke, the angry look on Shane’s face said that he had heard it too.

“Try. Again.” He ground out.

Carl took a deep breath. Think of Negan, you have to do it for him, you have to do it for yourself. He couldn’t bear the thought of being forced to live with the man, having to deal with this every day.

“I’m sorry for calling you a rapist.”

“That’s my boy. Now tell me you want me.”

“I...I want...I want you.” His voice faltered the more he spoke.

“I know you do sweetheart.” A finger trailer along his chin, an almost loving gaze filled Shane’s eyes. “It’s about damn time you realise that I only do these things because you fuckin ask me for it and tonight I’m gonna make you realise how much of a goddamn desperate slut you are for my dick.”

Carl’s mind tried to block out his words, he wasn’t a slut, he never wanted it, never asked for it. Even as his mind denied it there was the constant doubt in his head that maybe deep deep down he did want it, why else would he find any kind of pleasure in the man’s touch. Shane had told him so
many times that if you really didn’t want it then you wouldn’t like it. What if he was right? He was so confused. How could his body and mind be so at war with each other?

“Take out my dick and make me nice and wet, it’s all the lube you’re gettin’ tonight.” Shane instructed.

His shoulder screamed as he brought his hands up to unfasten Shane’s jeans. He swallowed down bile as he pulled out Shane’s hard length, a misleadingly tender hand reached into his hair and encouraged his mouth towards it. He allowed himself to be led, opening his mouth to take him inside.

“Fuuck, you are damn good at this.” Shane looked down to watch himself thrust between those gorgeous red lips. He petted the hair on his head, stroking it lovingly. “It’s all you’re fucking good for, in time you’ll realise that Carl.”

Shane yanked him up and bent him over the table after, still-full takeout containers falling to the floor around them as Shane took him brutally, each thrust shifting it forward. His saliva wasn’t enough to stop the burning stretch, he could feel himself tear the faster the thrusts got. All he could hear was the nasty words Shane whispered into his ear, reminding him who he belonged to, who he’d always belong to.

After awhile Carl almost believed him.

He tried to block out what happened after, when he was lying in bed he tried to stop the memories of the evening seeping in. All the degrading things he was made to do, how he was made to say how much he enjoyed it, how much he had to beg for more. Shane went out of his way to punish him for his earlier actions, took every opportunity to force Carl to orgasm just so he could gloat in his face.

He felt ruined. His body was limp, muscles stretched beyond imagination, and he was so damn tired. His head flopped to the side, looking over at Shane’s sleeping face, the sunrise through the curtain illuminating it.

He wished he had the strength to bury a knife into it.

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New Years Eve 2017

The next thing he knew he was waking to a stifling heat, Shane’s body covered half of his, an arm and leg possessively draped over him. He tried to wriggle away but only encouraged his arm to curl tighter around his waist, pulling him closer.

Carl pushed at the hand, trying to dislodge the grip, nearly groaning in frustration when it simply slipped along his sweat-slicked skin. He could feel his breath quicken as the claustrophobia set in, he hated being trapped, he needed some space. The arm was pushing down on the bruises that were flourishing on his stomach, making him groan out in pain.

“Mmmm, baby stop wriggling around, I need some fucking sleep.” Shane murmured against his shoulder.

“Lemme up, I...uh...I need some breakfast, I’m starving.”

“It's a lil late for that. It's nearly dinner time.”
Shit, he hadn't realised it was so late. Carl almost sent up a prayer of thanks as he stomach growled, his body actually working for him for once. He felt himself breathe as Shane rolled off him, flopping onto his back on the bed. Almost immediately Carl darted up, grabbing his clothes that had been thrown onto the floor, he practically ran out of the room.

In his hurry he hadn’t noticed the sharp pain that whipped through his body at his movements, he held back a moan as he knocked a bruise on his arm. He slowly became aware of similar prickles of pain all over his flesh, each movement seemed to knock the bite marks that Carl knew were hidden under his clothes. Shane had really done a thorough job of marking him up, he hoped they’d fade by the time he left the place.

Walking into the kitchen he headed over the the cupboard he knew he’d find some cereal in. He wasn’t that hungry, contrary to what his body thought, but he’d force himself to eat if it meant being away from that man and his hands for two minutes. He was surprised to find the it empty, none of the usual packets were in there. He slammed another cupboard shut, no food in there either. Was he gonna starve to death as well this week?

“What are you up to?” Shane asked, leaning against the doorframe. Carl jumped at the voice, he hadn’t heard him come downstairs.

“Looking for something for the food. You ever go to the grocery store?”

“Shit. I knew I’d forgotten something.” Shane opened the fridge. “Is there nothing in here?”

“Nope. I could...uh...go grab some things? From the store? It should still be open” He offered. He’d do just about anything to get away from the house, even if it was only for a couple of hours.

“Yeah, yeah, alright.” He grabbed his wallet from his pocket, shoving a few bills at Carl.

Carl took them, trying to avoid making contact with the other man. He quickly stuffed them into his pocket as he went to grab his coat. A hand shot out to grab his arm, pushing him back against the fridge, pinning him with his body.

“You not gonna give me a kiss before you go?”

Carl felt his stomach turn in disgust, he hated the false domesticity he forced on him. He tilted his head up to peck him on the lips, trying not to let his disgust show on his face. He stepped to the side trying to slip away from him, he let out a grunt as he was pushed back again.

“What am I your uncle? C’mon give me a proper kiss.”

Why did he always want more? He obliged him, trying not to focus on the lips on his. He just had to do this then he could leave, he clenched his fist again, letting his nails dig into his flesh to distract himself.

He was finally released, Carl tilted his head away from the mouth that panted in his face, the wet heat misting his cheek. He dipped under Shane’s arm, muttering out a goodbye, as he headed out the door. He breathed a sigh of relief when fresh air hit him, he needed this time, needed to sort his head out before he returned and did something truly stupid.

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Carl arrived back from the trip armed with the food, he kicked the door shut behind him as he walked into the house.
“Theere he is! My boy!” Shane stumbled towards him, grabbing him into a tight hug. Carl nearly fell as the man’s weight rested on him, he dropped the bags he was carrying as a hand grabbed at his ass. He tried to get it off him, the sudden onslaught too much for him. He was still so sore from the previous evening, every inch of his body hurt, every nerve seemed to scream at the simple contact. The man had clearly been drinking when he’d been gone, he could hardly keep upright.

“Shane, I need to put these away.” Carl’s arms pushed at his shoulders.

“Nooppe, you need to stay right here and take off those damn clothes.” Shane mouthed at his neck, pushing him back against the door.

“C’mon, the stuff will defrost.” He tried to push him again but was surprised by the sudden slap on his cheek. Harsh fingers grabbed at his chin forcing himself to look into his eyes, anger shone out, Carl felt himself tremble slightly. A drunk Shane was never a good thing.

“I thought we dealt with this last night. You fucking belong to me Carl, you do as I say.” Shane gritted out, digging his nails in deeper to make his point. “If I tell you to jump, you jump, if I tell you to beg, you beg.” Shane yanked Carl’s hair back. “...and If I fucking tell you to take your damn clothes off then you fucking take them off.”

Carl knew there was no reasoning with the man when he was in this mood, if he wanted to get out of this place without more bruises or broken limbs he knew he had to play along. Especially after their discussion last night, he had to think about Negan, keeping him safe. He nodded his head as much as he could with the punishing grip still on his face. He knew he was right when the grip loosened, the fingers smoothing over his lips before Shane removed all contact. He looked at Carl expectantly.

“So strip.”

Carl did as told, mechanical hands removed his shirt, and jeans. He kept his eyes fixed on the wall behind Shane’s shoulder, he didn’t need to see his lustful look as he removed his undershirt before finally taking off his boxers.

“Fuckin’ perfect.” Shane spoke before placing a punishing kiss on Carl, tongue slipping between his lips as he pushed him back towards the couch.

Carl landed hard against the cushions, he hardly had time to react before Shane shoved his legs apart and crawled between them. Unsteady hands gripped his dick, pumping him slowly, Carl tried to squirm away from the touch. He didn’t want his hands on him, he tried to roll over, hoping the man would just take his pleasure and leave him alone. He was too tired to deal with him, too tired to lay there and pretend he enjoyed what Shane did just so he didn’t get beaten again.

“Nuh-uh. You stay where I put you.” Shane spoke as he tried to stop Carl moving around. Carl didn’t listen he kept try to escape from the grip.

“I said STOP.” He shouted, lifting a hand to smack him across the face.

Carl groaned as pain exploded in his face, he could feel a warm wetness dripping down from his nose. He tried to breathe through it but ended up choking on blood, all the while Shane keep pulling at his cock trying to make him hard.

“Why do you make me do that Carl? I hate ruining that gorgeous face of yours?” He leaned closer to his ear. “You think Negan would wanna see you looking like that? Covered in your own goddamn blood?”

“Shut...up.” He managed to sputter out between heaving breaths.
“You think Negan’s gonna be upset that his pretty young thing’s gotten all dirty? That someone got there first? Or does he already know? You use the things I’ve taught you on him? Sucked his dick all the way down your throat like I know you can?”

Carl could feel his air cut off as Shane grabbed him around the throat, squeezing as he spoke.

“What is it baby? Don’t you like it?” The hand gripped him tighter, the other pumping him harder. “Not as good as when Negan fucking does it?”

Carl could feel himself snap as soon as he mentioned his name again. All the anger and pain he kept bottled up inside himself exploded as he brought a hand across Shane’s face. He relished the shout of pain that escaped the man, enjoying it even more as another slipped out when he did it again. He pushed Shane off of him, the man falling to the floor in his drunken, pained state.

He absentmindedly grabbed at his clothes, shoving them on as he darted out of the living room, he fumbled with the door cursing as the knob slipped in his grip. Shane’s hard body slammed into him, knocking the air out of his lungs, the force shoving him flat against the door. He tried to push, he managed to knock his head back into Shane’s face, the man stumbling back in pain. Carl’s head spun, the hard impact on his skull making him dizzy, he fumbled again with the door.

This time Shane grabbed him around the waist and yanked him away from it, he pinned Carl’s arms to his side as he pulled him along the hall. Carl didn’t let it deter him, he fought as hard as he could, kicked any part of the man that he could reach.

His hand slammed down to break his fall, he quickly twisted around on the hard floor, he kicked out as Shane knelt down in front of him. Hands, grabbed at his, tightening around his wrist, desperation set in as the man squeezed them into one palm. He had to get free, he couldn’t take it, not again. He had to do it for himself. Carl tried one last time, raising his knee up he shot his foot out, nearly cheering as he managed to make contact. He heard the shout of pain but didn’t stop to see the effect. He slid out from under him, urging his body to pull himself up, he stumbled to his feet and finally ran out of the door and into the night.

He ran down the street, barely noticing the pain in his feet as flesh hit hard concrete. He needed to get out of sight before Shane came looking for him, he knew he had a bit of time before the man recovered, Carl hoped the whiskey would slow him down. As he slowed to a stop he thought about his options, his first instinct was the call Negan but he had no idea if he’d answer him at this time. The man could be anywhere. He had no other choice though, he was stuck out here, he couldn’t go home, couldn’t go back inside to him.

His hands shook as he dialled Negan’s number, he was freezing he could see his breath cloud in front of him as his breath flew out of him. He wiped the blood that dripped down his nose. He tried again to type out the number on the phone finally managing to put the right digits in, he hit the green call button. He pleaded for him to pick it up, his heart sinking with each beep of the ring. Just as he was about to give up hope a gravelly voice answered the phone.

“Hello.” He sounded so tired. Carl felt guilt prickle him, he had no idea what time it was.

“It’s Carl.”

“Carl?” The voice sounded more alert. “Are you alright what’s up?”

“Yeah. I mean no… could you come pick me up?” He heard his voice break at the end of the sentence, he willed himself to stop crying.
“Where from? Are you safe?” Carl heard the sounds of shuffling in the background.

“Yeah, I think so.” He sniffed, god would his nose ever stop bleeding?

“Where are you? I need the address.”

He told him the street over from Shane’s, the last thing he wanted was for the two to see each other.

“Alright I’ll be there soon, sit tight.” The man hung up and he was left there alone. He looked around, making sure Shane wasn’t following before he headed to the next street. As he arrived at the place where he told Negan to pick him up, he sat on the edge of the sidewalk. He hadn’t bothered picking up a coat as he ran out of there, he was shaking in his boxers and a thin shirt, it was all he’d been able to grab. Looking up he noticed the snowflakes tumbling from the sky, he turned his head and noticed the light sheen of snow that covered the floor. It really was beautiful. He wrapped his arms around his legs, and watched the snow fall. He shoulders shuddering as he tried to control the tears flooding out of him.

Chapter End Notes

Guess what's coming next?
Negan Interlude pt.III

Chapter Summary

Negan didn't want his mind to trickle down that dark path, he wasn't sure if he was ready.

Chapter Notes

Baby chapter! Sorry it's so short but I felt like I needed to break the chapter up a bit.

“Realisation is not acquisition of anything new nor is it a new faculty. It is only removal of all camouflage”

― Ramana Maharshi

New Years Eve 2017

His eyes frantically searched the sidewalk, squinting as he tried to make out any sign of Carl in the darkness. Hadn't this damn town heard of fucking streetlights? His fingers tapped on the steering wheel as he grew more and more frustrated, he couldn't keep his body still, he had been aching to be by Carl's side since he called him. He'd never heard him sound so desperate, not since Halloween, Negan's mind ran wild with the thoughts of what could have happened to him. Just as he was about to ditch the car and fucking run along the street to find Carl he caught sight of a small figure hunched on the side of the road.

He slammed on his breaks as he pulled up near him. He just about managed to shove the car in park before he leapt out, running around it to reach him. Shock slowed his movements, his body freezing on him as he took in the shaking figure in front of him. Too many questions stirred in his head, each one seemed just as important as the other. Where are your clothes? What happened? Who the fuck am I killing tonight? They all swam in his head as he tried to figure out if he needed to get him to the hospital.

His stomach turned as Carl finally raised his face from the comfort of his knees to look at him, it was covered in blood. The most shocking part was the vacant stare on his face, concealed behind tears, Carl’s eyes seemed to look right through him. It chilled him to see him so void of emotion, even in his darkest times he’d always been able to see that spark that made Carl who he was, he couldn’t see any of it now.

“Carl…” he didn't know what to say, where the fuck do you start? He knelt down in front of him, the two figures lit up by the headlights of the car, now that he was closer he could see the bumps along his shivering flesh. God he must be freezing. Negan quickly shucked his jacket off his shoulders, leaning forward to wrap it around him. He was startled by the harsh flinch that erupted out
of Carl’s body, confused by how he quickly shuffled his body backwards. Was that fear on his face? Negan tried to ignore the sting of hurt that flicked through him at the thought that Carl would ever be afraid of him.

He held his hands up, hoping he’d believe that he wasn’t going to hurt him.

“I just wanna give you my jacket Carl. You’re gonna freeze to death if you stay like that.”

Carl slowly relaxed back again, eyes still wide, watching him carefully as he swung the coat over his shoulders. Negan’s eyes were immediately drawn to the red strips around his wrists as the teen moved his hands to wrap the leather tighter around himself.

“Can you move?”

A sharp nod was his reply.

“OK, that’s good. Are you alright to get into the car?”

Another nod.

“Good, even better. Let’s go.”

Negan rose up and stepped back giving Carl some space to stand. He turned and opened the passenger door for him, watching as he tentatively approached the car. They stood close for a moment, Negan finally getting a chance to have a better look at him, his eyebrows furrowed as he saw the blood dripping from his face. His original thought was that it was a nosebleed until he caught sight of the angry flush to the skin around his nose, definitely caused by a hit to the face. Anger curled up in him at the thought of someone doing this to Carl. A hand scrambled in his pocket grabbing a wad of tissues that he always kept on him.

“They’re clean I promise. It’ll help stop the bleeding.” He offered them to Carl, hating the anxious look that covered his face as he took the tissues from his hand.

He stepped back to let Carl get in the car uninterrupted. He closed the door once he was safely inside. Negan walked over to the driver’s side, taking the time to collect himself. He needed to clear his head, he had to be there for Carl. Whatever had gone on that night had clearly shaken him.

He slid into his own seat, starting up the engine to distract himself from the tense silence that sat between them for the first time. Even that night on Halloween hadn’t been this bad, for the first time in his life he was genuinely lost for words.

“You gonna tell me what happened?” Negan asked.

“Not right now.” Was all Carl said in reply.

Negan sighed, his hands tightened up on the steering wheel, knuckles turning white under the pressure. He needed to know what had happened to him. Needed to know why the fuck he was half naked with blood all over himself.

“But later? We’ll talk later right?” He knew he was pushing it but he knew he had to get some answers tonight or he’d have to resort to more extreme measures.

“I… do I have a choice?”

That was like a punch to the gut. As if he’d ever force him to do anything he didn’t want to do.
“Yes. Of course, you should damn well know by now that I’d never force you to say anything you weren’t ready to say.”

No reply came from the teen. Negan flicked his eyes over to him, saw him curl up against the door, he wasn’t going to get much out of him like this. He turned his attention to the road, the snow was piling up quickly, if he played his cards right they’d be home before it got too dangerous.

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The car slowed to a stop as they arrived back in the cabin, the silence was unbearable as the noise from the engine dimmed. They sat there, in silence, neither knowing quite what to say.

“Are you alright walking?” Negan asked, looking over to him.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine.”

“I can help if you need it?”

“No. I’m fine”

“OK, ok. I’ll go open the door. Take all the time you need.” Negan said before climbing out of the car. He did as he said, walking quickly over to the door to unlock it just as Carl took his first step out of the car. He looked ready to fall over at the slightest breeze. Negan’s body urged him forwards, screamed at him to go help him but he knew his help wouldn’t be welcomed. He didn’t think he could take Carl looking at him like he had done earlier, the fear tore right through him. So he watched, body tense as he looked for any sign that Carl might fall, he’d damn well be there to catch him if he did.

It took awhile but he finally made it to the door, he stopped at the doorway looking pensive. Negan wondered what was going on his mind, was he scared? Did he think Negan was going to do something? His mind tried to find the right thing to say, find anything that would help him feel more at ease but he realised there was probably nothing that would help, he wasn’t even sure that Carl was really listening to him right now.

Carl eventually took that step forwards, inching into the house as if he was waiting for something to jump out at him.

Shutting the door behind him, Negan gave him a wide berth as he kicked off his shoes and walked over to the fireplace. He had to heat this place up a little for him, he had no idea how long Carl had been out in the cold that night. As he fixed the fire he saw Carl creep over to his usual spot on the couch, sitting down on it, eyes transfixed on the floor, hands still pressing the tissues to his nose. The sight of the blood stained tissues was a sharp reminder of his other priority at the time. Leaving the fire to establish itself he headed into the bathroom to grab the first aid kit he kept there along with some towels. He hoped he’d grabbed more than he’d ever need but he wasn’t sure how many more marks were on him.

He placed them on the wooden coffee table in front of Carl, he knew he’d need some water to help lift the blood from his face so he headed into the kitchen to pour some warm water into a bowl. Carefully picking it up, Negan walked back to the table and positioned it next to the towels before sitting himself amongst the items.

“Carl? I’m gonna need to clean up your wounds now, is that alright?”

There was a tense pause before Carl gave a sharp nod.
“Thank you, can you take the tissues from your face?”

Carl did as he was told. He remained quiet as Negan tended to his wounds, only the occasional twitch indicating that he felt any kind of pain. Negan wondered where he head was at, what he was thinking about. He tried to work as quickly as possible not wanting to inflict anymore pain on him that necessary.

“There’s some blood coming through your shirt Carl, did you get hurt under there?

“I...uh...I think so.”

Jesus Christ what had this fucker done?

“Can I see?”

Fear flashed on his face again.

“I just wanna make sure you're alright. Remember when I checked your ribs before? It'll be just like that OK? I'll be quick then you can cover up again.”

For a moment Negan didn't think Carl would let him, his mind was already working on an alternative way of looking him over. To his surprise Carl shifted and removed his shirt, he caught the wince of pain as he lifted it over his shoulders.

Negan nearly threw up at what he saw.

Scratches covered his chest, deep lines that trickled blood down his torso. He could quite clearly see teeth imprints where they'd dug into his flesh, leaving angry red marks that were quickly bruising. He could hardly see any white skin amidst the deep purples and blues, the occasional angry red flushed the skin. His eyes were drawn down to his hips where dark bruises and crescent-shaped indents decorated his skin.

His mind started to trickle down a dark path, it was slowly piecing together everything that had happened over the last few months. Quotes from his teacher training echoed in his head, instructions for looking out for certain types of abuse matched up symptoms with a diagnosis. His brain rebelled against it, not willing to comprehend that something like that could've happened to Carl. Who could possibly do such a that to him? His parents, although as absent as shit, seemed to care about him. He definitely didn’t notice any weirdness with them at Thanksgiving…

...Thanksgiving…

Shane.

He’d been with Shane that night, hell he’d been with him the last couple of days if Negan remembered correctly. His instincts told him that he’d had something to do with all this shit, the man was definitely a bit fucked in the head. His mind recalled the comments he’d made at the table ‘I bet you’d look damn good in those lil runnin’ shorts.’ He’d passed them off as comments made by a drunken idiot but now they took on a much darker meaning. Was he the guy that hurt him? The question lingered on his tongue until he thought better of it, now was not the time to be interrogating Carl.

His hands shook with anger as he refocused on his task, dabbing at the wounds with antiseptic, bandaging up what he could, dabbing cream at what he couldn't. Tossing bloody towels to one side as he cleaned him up. He checked his ribs for any breaks, thanking God when he didn't find any. He didn't want Carl to have to deal with that particular pain on top of everything else.
He worked quickly, finishing up before Carl got too uncomfortable.

“All done.” He gave him a small smile, hoping to reassure him. All Carl did in response was grab his bloody shirt and cling it to his chest, refusing to make eye contact with him.

“I’m gonna go grab you some fresh clothes Carl, I won’t be long OK?”

No response.

Negan sighed as stood. He jogged up the stairs, not wanting to leave him alone any longer that he absolutely had to. He headed straight to his chest of drawers, opening the first one so he could shuffle through his sweats. They’d be the best option for him, nothing too tight to hurt him. He grabbed the sweatshirt that he’d leant him once, when they’d gone for a hike, his heart warmed as he thought of that day.

He took a moment to lean against the chest, taking a deep breath, trying to calm the emotions raging through him. He wasn’t used to feeling so damn helpless, he had no fucking idea how to bring Carl out of this comatose state he was in. Every time his vacant eyes met his he felt more and more desperate to help him. His instinct was go out hunting until he figured out exactly what the fuck had happened to him. Go out with his bat and beat anyone that stood in his damn way, just hit, hit, and hit until he got the answer he wanted. Anger was how he’d always dealt with things, if he didn’t get what he wanted he’d scream and shout at the world until he got it. Part of the reason his marriage broke down was because of the anger, Lucille couldn’t handle his inability to control himself when he got pissed. It was why he moved to this damn place, the stress of running such a big team exacerbating the anger inside of him.

Carl had helped to change all that, he calmed the storm in a way that only whiskey had been able to do before. Everytime he was with him it was a break from the constant beast that raged inside of him, the affection he felt for Carl was a welcome distraction in his moments of anger and frustration. Now he wanted nothing more than to do the same for Carl, be a lifejacket for him in whatever pool of darkness that he seemed to be drowning in.

He took another deep breath, resisting the urge to down a few shots of whisky first, he headed back down the stairs gripping the clothes tightly in his hands. Carl hadn’t moved since he’d left him, his eyes focused on the wall, arms wrapped tightly around his legs as he bundled himself into the corner of the couch. He looked so damn small.

He cleared his throat, making his steps more pronounced as he walked down the final few steps, he didn’t want to startle him anymore tonight. He wasn’t sure if he’d succeeded. Carl’s head didn’t move from it’s position, his eyes didn’t shift from that spot on the wall.

“Carl…?” He quietly asked. No response. He walked closer, standing in Carl’s line of vision, he held out the clothes to him. “Here, they might be a bit big on you but they should do for now.”

Carl finally looked at him, eyes seeming to focus on anywhere but his face. He reached out a tentative hand to take the clothing from him.

“I’ll...uh...go to the kitchen. You can change in here...or the bathroom. Take whatever time you need, you can leave the bloody bits in the hamper I’ll sort them later.” Negan said, backing away from him to head into the kitchen. He was at a loss of what to do, he adamantly kept his head facing away from the living room, not wanting Carl to feel uncomfortable. He could make coffee, but that would just make the both of them more jittery than before. He thought about making them something to eat, but quickly dismissed the idea. Carl already looked on the verge of spewing his guts out, he himself wasn’t sure if he could eat with the thoughts about what had been happening to him rushing
through his mind.

He remembered back to Halloween, remembered the hot chocolate he’d made for him, it seemed to help then so maybe it would do something now. Thinking it was worth a shot he grabbed a couple of mugs and started whipping a couple up. As he was heating the milk he heard the bathroom door shut, at least Carl was up and moving around. The door opened again just as he was swirling the mixture in the mugs. He took them by the handles and carried them into the living room. Carl was curled up in the corner again, swamped in Negan’s clothes.

“I made you some hot chocolate. Thought it might help you warm up a little bit.” He placed his own mug on the table, turning Carl’s around to offer him the handle, ignoring the burning as the heat poured through the mug and onto his hand. He was relieved when Carl took it off him, maybe he was coming back to himself, the tremor in his hand wasn’t as bad as it was when he had grabbed his clothes.

“Thanks.” Negan was overjoyed to hear his voice again, as sore as it sounded.

“No problem.”

They sat in silence, sipping at their mugs to distract from the inevitable discussion. Carl clearly wasn’t ready to talk. Negan wasn’t sure if he was ready to hear it, he could explain away the bruises, he knew how to handle it when someone was being beaten. It wasn’t pleasant but God knows he’d dealt with enough punches to know how to help with them. The other marks were proving difficult for his mind to comprehend. The bite marks, the rope burn around his wrists, the unmistakable finger shaped bruises that he’d seen on his hips as he cleaned him up. His mind didn’t want to go there, didn’t want to conceive that Carl had been hurt in that way. It was unchartered territory, he was out of his depth, the helplessness surrounded him. His biggest concern was letting Carl down, if he was right Carl was gonna need him, need someone. He was fucking terrified that he’d do or say the wrong thing and ruin their relationship forever.

“Negan…?” A small voice broke the silence.

“Yeah?”

“Could...I need...could you talk to me?” He eventually got out. “Tell me something please...anything.”

There was a request that he wasn’t expecting. His mind raced as he tried to figure a topic out, something safe, something easy. Something funny? He had no idea.

“Right, shit, yeah OK. I can do that. I ever tell you about the time I fucked up Lucille’s birthday? No? Shit that’s surprising cos that’s a good one.” He tried to act normal, maybe that would help, get things back to how they usually were. “So, I thought it’d be a great idea to surprise her. Now this was back before we were even living together, so I decided to go round her place a surprise her with some balloons, presents, that kind of mushy shit. I use the key she gave me and walked right in there, singing and dancing, throwing the balloons around, wishing her a happy birthday. Only to realise that she was with her parents, who kindly told me that her birthday wasn’t for another fucking month. That was the first time I met them and they hated me every second after that. No matter how much I hit them with my outstanding charm, they always remembered me as the idiot that couldn’t remember their daughter’s birthday.”

“What did Lucille think?” Carl looked a bit brighter in the face, not quite smiling but his eyes seemed to be coming back to life.
“She loved it.” He chuckled to himself remembering how they’d laughed all about it, that day becoming her unofficial birthday. “She always loved that kinda shit, she had a great sense of humor, and she always saw the good in people.”

“She sounds great.”

“Yeah, she was.”

“Do you wish you were still together.”

“Honestly? No. We were bad for each other. We took so much from one another that we hardly recognised who we were anymore and now… now I have someone in my life who makes me feel like I'm the man I once was.” He looked Carl in the eyes hoping that he'd understand exactly who is was talking about, wanting to convey exactly how much he meant to him, how much he'd always mean to him no matter what.

He saw Carl swallow as tears appeared in his eyes again. Negan could see that little spark appearing again, could finally recognise his Carl in the depths of his eyes. Maybe now was a good time to try.

“What…” he began tentatively. “What happened Carl?”
All I can say is thank you to everyone that's commented! I'm overwhelmed by the response to the last chapter! I was going through a bit of a lull with my writing, generally hating everything that I was writing, but you guys have literally given me life with it again. I do read every single one and I love them all!

It's another fairly short chapter but I really wanted to focus on the characters and their conversations. I didn't want to detract from anything by putting in more scenes.

I really hope you all like it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“And when at last you find someone to whom you feel you can pour out your soul, you stop in shock at the words you utter— they are so rusty, so ugly, so meaningless and feeble from being kept in the small cramped dark inside you so long.”

— Sylvia Plath

January 2018

“What happened Carl?”

Three little words.


Such simple words that didn’t have a simple answer.

What had happened Carl? He asked himself. How did you get here Carl? What happened to you? No answers swirled in his head. He had no idea. He had no idea how things had gotten so damn bad.

Carl couldn’t find the words, he could feel his mouth open and shut at each attempt to speak. How do you say it? How do you describe years of pain, abuse, and torment? How could he ever summarise what he went through? It was beyond words, beyond description. How do you describe being torn apart and left to piece yourself back together time and time again? How do you describe feeling so alone, so abandoned by everyone around you that you felt like there was no reason to exist?

Did he even want to tell him?

The question encroached on his thoughts, he could tell a lie, he was so used to doing so he could make it believable. He could tell him that he went out and got assaulted by some random guy, not great but easier than the reality.
Less questions.

He almost started talking, the lie lingering on his tongue, until he looked up into Negan’s eyes. Those eyes. He was expecting them to convey pity, a disappointment that Carl could let something like this happen to him, but all he found was kindness and concern. That was all Negan had ever shown him, he’d only ever been kind to him, never expecting anything in return for it. Time and time again he’d been there for Carl whether the problem was big or small, he’d helped him through it. When no one else was there to listen he was.

Maybe now he’d listen again.

It wasn’t that he felt like he owed it to Negan. That he wanted to tell him out of some sense of repaying him for being there. He wanted to tell him because he wanted him to know. He wanted Negan to know everything about him, wanted to explain that there was a perfectly good reason for being so fucked up. That he used to be a good kid, someone different, someone who didn’t flinch at the slightest touch. That this thing had changed him, mutated him into someone that he didn’t necessarily recognise.

He knew he had to do it now or he’d never have the courage to do it, everything had been building up to this moment. It was like he was running at a cliff’s edge ready to jump off, hoping that Negan would catch him as he fell.

“New Year’s, a couple of years ago…” He started, still unsure where he was going with it. “Shane stayed over, he always does...always gets too drunk to head home so he crashes in the spare room. He’d passed out earlier than usual that year so things wrapped up pretty quickly, we all went to bed early, not bothering to ring the new year in or anything.”

Carl sniffed again, shaking hands raising the tissue that he’d been clinging onto up to his face again as he felt some more droplets of blood fall out. He closed his eyes as the memories filled him, he could remember feeling hungry as he went to bed, he hadn’t really eaten that afternoon, too busy playing games with Shane and his Dad. He wanted to hit his past self as he thought about how he’d gone downstairs to grab a snack, maybe things would have been so different if he hadn’t had gone down there.

“I woke up early in the morning, before everyone else was up, I was hungry so I went to grab a snack. Just some peanut butter, my favorite.” He hadn’t been able to eat it since, the taste sending vomit soaring up his throat as it sent his brain throttling back to that night. “Shane… he woke up. Found me in the kitchen, he was still drunk, thought I was my Mom. He started saying things, stupid shit, I passed him off as drunk and ignored it. I should have known better. He…”

Carl wasn’t sure if he could say the words, let them spill out. He swallowed, trying to keep control of his stomach, fresh tears flooded his eyes, distorting his speech.

“He kissed me… on the lips, kept talking about how much I looked like my Mom. I pushed him away, I tried to push him away.” He corrected. “You have to believe me Negan I tried to keep him away but I couldn’t. I wasn’t strong enough…” He was earnest in his pleas, he needed him to believe him, needed him to know that he hadn’t wanted it. That he’d tried to fight it. “… I couldn’t stop him...he pushed me down...he…” he almost choked on the words.

“It’s OK Carl, you don’t have to say it.” Negan’s voice was so heartbreakingly soft, Carl couldn’t bring himself to look at him.

“I have to. I need to say it.” He said.

“Alright, whenever you’re ready, I’m listening.”
He took a deep breath, trying to muster up whatever strength he had left.

“He raped me.” A mixture of terror and relief filled him as the words left his mouth. There it was. Bomb dropped. It was out there in the open, it felt like he’d sliced himself open, leaving himself exposed for everyone to see. Vulnerable. Terrified. “I couldn’t make sense of it. I think I was in shock, I tried so hard to deny it, move past it. Shane was so normal the next day that I thought my brain made it up. I couldn’t tell anyone, I tried to tell my Dad but the words just dried up in my mouth. How would he ever believe me? How could I expect him to believe me when I hardly believed myself? So I didn’t think about it, I kept it to myself, fell apart on my own. Questioned everything about that night in my mind until I thought I was gonna go crazy. Then it happened again, and again, and again. For two years he raped me over and over, for two years my parents handed me over on a platter for him to do what he liked with me and they didn’t even realise it.”

“Jesus fuckin’ Christ.” Negan's voice was muffled by his hands that covered his face. He couldn’t believe the words that were falling out of the boy’s mouth. Couldn't believe that he'd been forced to go through this on his own. Couldn't believe that his parents couldn't fucking see what was going on right under their damn noses. Something beyond anger ripped through him as he thought about that fucking bastard. Negan tried to calm himself, there would be time for that later, now… now he needed to be there for Carl, he was more important than anything.

“Carl…” He didn’t know what to say. His heart broke for him, tore in his chest as tear-filled blue eyes finally met his.

“Do...do you believe me?” A small voice asked. He needed to know that he believed him, needed to know that the man wasn’t going to turn on him.

“Yes...yes God yes Carl. I believe you.” Negan wanted to wrap his arms around him, protect him for the rest of his life. His hands darted forward, flailing in the air as his mind tried to decide if it would be appropriate to touch him. He remembered how Carl had reacted to his touch earlier, barely allowing him to clean the wounds. He settled for resting them on his own knees, gripping them to stop himself just pulling Carl into his arms.

Carl almost sank to the floor in relief, a sob escaping him. He believed him. That was all he needed, all he ever wanted to know. His hand trembled as it stretched out to take Negan’s, fingers curling around it, squeezing hard as he tried to gather strength from him. He felt the man’s other hand cover it, cradling the small hand between them bringing them up to his lips, trying to give as much comfort as he could. Carl leaned in closer, resting his head on Negan’s knees as the sobs wracked his body. He believed him. He believed him. He believed him. It ran like a mantra in his head, swirling and swirling, trying to embed itself deep into his brain. He believed him.

“Oh...Carl.” He heard the man whisper, felt his head come to meet his, resting his forehead on the back of his head. They sat there in the moment, hearts torn open, emotions run raw, they sat and held each other as they shared in the pain that Carl had buried in his soul for so long.

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When his tears ran dry, he let his head rest in his lap, taking deep breaths to calm himself. He could feel himself getting worked up again, his initial relief slowly being edged out by panic. There was still so much he hadn’t told him, sure he was kind now but what about when he found out about Shane’s threats? Would he still care about him if he knew the amount of times he found pleasure under Shane’s hands?

“You OK Carl?” Negan asked, feeling him tense up under his hands.

Carl rose up, lifting his head from his lap, he rubbed his face as he thought about what to tell him
next.

“We don’t have to talk about it anymore Carl, we can talk about whatever you want, or not talk. It may surprise you but I’m really damn good at the whole not talkin’ thing.”

“I just… I guess I just don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything. We can just sit here and hang, or you can go to sleep if you feel like it, or we can talk. Whatever you want I’m here and I’m not goin’ anywhere.” Negan curled his hand around Carl’s again, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

“Thank you.” Carl said. Gratitude filled him, he was almost worried that Negan would bombard him with questions now that he knew what was going on. He could feel them hanging in the air, could see them on his face. He wasn’t sure if he was ready for them. It had been hard enough telling him what happened, saying those words nearly destroyed him. It was the first time he’d ever said those words out loud, even in his own mind he’d never used those words. Saying them out loud made it all more real.

He’d been raped.

Shane raped him.

It was like his mind was finally ready to accept that fact.

“Carl…”

He snapped his attention back to Negan.

“…have you ever…told anyone what happened?”

Guilt struck at him, it seemed that one simple question from Negan incited another ten in his mind. Too many to answer at once. He tried to focus himself on the one, grounding himself to Negan and his voice.

“No...I...I just never thought I could, never thought anyone would believe me.” He said. He’d never really considered it, it seemed like Shane knew every time he was thinking of telling someone. He’d drip his poison into his ear, told him so often that everyone would reject him, think him a liar, that he started to believe him.

“Not even your parents?”

“They were more than friends with Shane, he’s like...family to us. They always seemed closer to him...I guess I just thought they’d prefer to believe him over me. That’s what Shane always said anyways.”

“That motherfucker.” Carl could sense Negan getting angry again, although the irony of his words made him chuckle.

“What’s so funny?” Negan asked.

“It’s not funny, I don’t know maybe it is in some twisted way.” Carl said. “He and my Mom, they...uh...had an affair at some point. I dunno when, it was all he could talk about when he first started...first started raping me.” He quickly sobered up the more he spoke, the laughter ebbing away. “It was why he did it, I think. He wanted her but couldn’t have her so he took me instead.”
“Fuckin’ sick fuck.”

“Yeah, I never really understood it, he thought we looked alike. Then it became different, he stopped mentioning her, it was almost like he fell in love with me instead. He became more affectionate, tried it make it seem more...more like a relationship.” Vomit licked at his throat as he spoke, his skin crawled as he remembered all the times he tried to make love to him. How Shane liked to pretend that Carl had seduced him, that Carl wanted every single bit of what he gave him. “He made me...God...he made me like it. He always wanted me to enjoy it as much as he did. I hated it, you have to believe me Negan, I hated every second of it. Every time he...he made me...come...” He practically choked on the last word as it fell out of his mouth. He could feel the tears take over as shame hit him in full force. Shame that he couldn’t stop his body from finding pleasure amidst all the pain. He could recall all the humiliation that he suffered at Shane’s hands, he looked down at the floor, no longer wanting to look Negan in the eyes. “I hated it. I didn’t want it. I didn’t.”

"Carl …” Negan could feel his heart break in two all over again, just how much had that monster made him suffer? “It’s OK.”

“How is it OK? How could it possibly ever be OK? I enjoyed it Negan, sometimes it felt good just not to feel the pain anymore.”

“Carl that doesn’t change the fact that it’s rape.”

“How? How does it not? If I didn’t want it then I wouldn’t have gotten any pleasure out of it Negan.” His frustration made him angry, angry with his own body for confusing him like this.

“It doesn’t work like that Carl. It was a physical reaction, nothing more. It’s like feeling pain when you touch a bruise, you don’t want to feel the pain but it’s still there, you can’t deny it. It does not mean that you wanted it. It means that Shane was a fucking sick fuck who was trying to convince himself that he wasn’t a fucking rapist. It’s still rape, it’ll always be rape no matter how much Shane might try and convince you otherwise.”

Carl took a moment to think through his words, they challenged all the thoughts he’d ever had, mitigated the shame he felt as he thought about his reactions. He rubbed his face again, as much as he could without irritating his bruises. He felt so tired. His brain was jumbled, that night confusing him beyond reason, so much had happened it was hard to wrap his brain around it.

“You may not believe me now Carl but it’s the truth.”

“Shane...he always said it meant that I wanted him... I always thought that...that maybe deep down he was right.” He flushed in embarrassment. “He had so much more experience than I do, I thought he knew something I didn’t. Maybe I had led him on or something”

“It’s a normal reaction Carl, no one would think any differently because of it.”

“Really?”

“Christ yes, no one with a brain would think you’d fucking want anything like this and I’ll quite happily fuck anyone up that would dare fuckin’ think otherwise.”

“Good to know.”

“Anytime, anywhere.” Negan said. “I’ve got your back.”

In that moment Carl knew that he meant it. His body warmed at the words, his injuries seeming less painful as he basked in the knowledge that he’d always have him by his side.
“Thank you.” He whispered.

“You never have to thank me for anything Carl.” Negan replied.

“I do, I don’t deserve this…” He thought back to Shane’s threats. What he threatened to do to Negan if Carl went against him, and still he’d done it. He might as well have put Negan in a jail cell himself. “Shit, Negan I’m so sorry, so sorry.”

“Whoa whoa, why are you sorry? You haven’t done anything wrong.”

“But I have. Shane…he…he said if I ever said no, then he’d hurt you. Get you thrown into jail. I knew that and I still went against him, God I punched him.” His mind raced with the thoughts of what Shane might do, he knew what he was like, he’d probably pissed him off even more with his actions tonight. His heart hurt as he realised the man might do something worse.

“I mean first of all well fuckin’ done for punching him, I’ve never been more proud of anyone in my life. Second, you have no damn reason for bein’ sorry, I can handle a guy like Shane-”

“He’s a cop-” Carl protested.

“I don’t give a shit Carl. If he wants to fuckin’ have a go at me then he can do his damn worst. I’d rather take any hit or punch, fuck I’d rather spend the rest of my life in jail on some trumped up charges than think of that man laying a single finger on you again.”

“Negan… I can’t ask you to do that.”

“You’re not asking, I’m telling you. Whatever that shithead threatens I can take it.”

Carl sighed, this was not how it was all supposed to go. Why couldn’t he have just been stronger and stayed with Shane? He only had a few more months until college he could have dealt with it until then. At least Negan would have been safe.

“Don’t sigh at me Carl, you mean more to me than anything that bastard can throw at me.”

He nearly cried at his words, God he really was a wreck. “I really don’t deserve you.” Carl said, voice distorted by tears.

“Yes you do, you deserve more than a guy like me.”

Carl leaned into the hand that brushed a errant tear away from his face, taking in the warmth on his cheek. He covered the hand with his own keeping it tight against him, breathing in his reassuring scent. “You’re a pretty amazing guy to me.” He said, finally releasing his hand.

“You’re just bein’ nice because I let you wear my sweatshirt again.” He teased.

“True, I’m only ever here for the sweatshirts.” Carl laughed.

“Do you think you can get some sleep?” Negan asked.

“I dunno…” He wasn’t lying, he was exhausted but he still couldn’t stop his brain from working at 100mph. Just as he couldn’t stop the sting of worry as he thought about Shane and what the next day might bring.

“Maybe you should try, you’re bound to need some sleep after everything.”

“Yeah… you’re probably right.”
“I always am.” Negan said.

Carl choked out a laugh, at least some things never change. More relief seeped through him, at least Negan wasn’t any different, maybe he didn’t think any differently of him now he knew. The thought of Negan thinking of him as nothing more than a broken, damaged, kid tore at his heart. Only time would tell if that was the case but, at least for now, Negan was his normal self.

“C’mon you can sleep in my bed tonight, no way are you sleeping on that damn couch with those bruises.”

“It’s fine I’m good here.” He really didn’t want to put him out anymore than he had already, and God knows he’d had more than enough comfortable nights on that very couch.

“Not up for discussion Carl, you’re sleeping in that damn bed.”

“I’m not gonna win this one am I?”

“No chance.”

“Right.” He tried to raise up off the couch, quickly abandoning his movement as pain ricocheted through him. He wheezed as his ribs protested, he squeezed an arm across them, cursing himself when that just sent another strike of pain through him.

“You know maybe the couch is the better idea, I dunno if I can get up the stairs.” Carl panted out.

“I could always carry you?” Negan offered.

A deadly glare from Carl was the only reply.

“I’ll help you up OK? We’ll take it nice and slow.” He stood in front of him, hand outstretched to Carl.

Carl nodded in return, trying to brace himself for the pain, he gripped Negan’s hand firmly in his and used it to slowly get to his feet. He leaned against him as he breathed through the pain, taking strength from him.

“You alright?”

“Yeah, just need a minute.”

“Take as long as you need, I’ve got you.”

“OK, let’s do this.” He said as he caught his breath.

Together they moved slowly, inching towards the stairs. Negan’s arm wrapped around his waist as they headed up them, cradling him close to help him up. Each step was a small torture made easy by the constant stream of jokes that spilled from Negan’s mouth.

“If you keep making me laugh we’re never gonna make it to the top.” He said, as they reached the halfway point.

“Sorry, can’t help my mouth sometimes.”

Carl laughed at him. “Don’t worry I like your mouth.” He blushed as he realised exactly what he’d just said. At least he could still make an idiot out of himself.
“I like yours too.” Was all he said in reply, chuckling along with him.

After a lot more pain, effort, and cheesy jokes from Negan they made it to his bedroom. Negan helped him settle into the bed, overly fussing with blankets and pillows.

“Negan, I’m fine, as comfortable as I’ll ever be like this.”

“OK, good, just makin’ sure. I’ll head downstairs, I’ll be on the couch if you need me, just shout.”

Carl grabbed his arm as he turned to leave. Turning his eyes up to his.

“Will...will you stay? I...don’t know if I’m ready to be on my own yet.”

He knew he was being needy, but he wasn’t wrong, he wasn’t ready to be on his own with his thoughts.

“Yeah...sure...I’ll make a lil nest for myself on the chair. Don’t worry I won’t go anywhere.”

More guilt stabbed at him, making him sleep in a ridiculously small chair just because he didn’t want to be on his own. He contemplated telling him to sleep next to him, his mind wanted him there, wanted to curl up in his arms and feel protected for the first time in years. His body wasn’t ready yet, he wasn’t even sure if his mind wanted him there really, not with Shane so present in there.

“Thank you.”

His usual charming, soft smile spread across his face, sending pleasant tingles all over him again.

“Anytime Carl.”

Carl curled up on his side, facing Negan. He watched him drag a pillow from the bed and sink down into the old lounge chair, he heard it squeak as he wriggled to get comfortable. His eyes fluttered closed as sleep overwhelmed him, Negan’s face being the last thing he saw as he drifted off.

Chapter End Notes

As a sidenote, I volunteer as a support worker for people who have been victims of a crime. As part of that I do support a lot of people of have suffered sexual abuse from a variety of ages. I just wanted to share this with you so you guys don't think that I've made up what I've written or that the things Carl is thinking and feeling is overdramatised because they're all things that I've experienced through my conversations with these people. I wanted to do justice to the real life feelings of abuse victims (I hate the word victim but I'll use it in this context.) and how easy it is for offenders to warp their minds.
New Year, New Problems

Chapter Notes

New chapter for you all! I'm so sorry this one's been a bit delayed. I literally wrote a whole chapter out hated it, then wrote a new one. I'm so glad you all liked the previous one, I wanted it to be as perfect as it could be. This chapter focuses a little more on Negan and Carl than I originally planned but I felt like I wanted to play out their new dymanic. It was originally more fluffy but I figured that was a bit unrealistic given the circumstances. So things are more angsty now, with a tad more depth to their relationship and what's going on in their heads. Also we're back on the 9,000 words chapters so this one should keep you going for awhile!

As always I love the comments and kudos they make my day <3 Thank you so much for reading and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Keep your face always toward the sunshine - and shadows will fall behind you."

- Walt Whitman

New Years Day 2018

Negan didn’t get a single second of sleep that night.

Carl’s voice echoed in his head, “He raped me.” It ran through his mind over and over again like a mantra on repeat, a constant reminder of the conversation they’d had that night. Each time it played he wanted to hit himself, wanted to beat the shit out of his past self for not realising what was happening sooner. Memories played out like a movie in his brain, he frantically searched them for any hint of what was happening to Carl. Small things, insignificant moments that he’d passed off suddenly became more poignant, strange bruises that he told himself were just accidental, hickey’s that he’d passed off as being from a secret girlfriend that he didn’t know about, the painful tension he’d sensed between Shane and Carl at Thanksgiving, it all piled together to fit into the puzzle. It seemed so damn obvious, how the fuck had he missed it? Anger at himself surged up within him, his body tensed in the chair, nails dug into his palms as he scrunched his hand up. The pain was the only release from the rage inside him that so desperately yearned for an outlet.

He knew he’d never sleep like this, he was far too wired, far too tempted to hunt Shane down and make him regret even looking at Carl. He knew he’d be able to find him, he was sure that Carl hadn’t run too far from where he’d been staying when Negan had picked him up, the damage on his feet not nearly bad enough to be from a long distance. All Negan would have to do is drive around a little more, cover some more ground, the area was fairly sparse from what Negan remembered so it shouldn’t be too hard to find a house in the area. He’d find him that was certain. His mind provided helpful images about what he’d do to him, his toes almost curled in pleasure as he thought about
slamming his bat down onto his head. His cries of pain, pleads for him to stop would be music to his ears. Negan knew he wouldn’t stop, that fucker didn’t stop so why would he? He’d keep hitting, feel the warmth of blood hit his own face as he destroyed him. The fantasy pulled him in, it almost had him up and out of the door with his bat. It’d be worth driving in this goddamn snow if it meant he could give Carl peace in this world.

Carl.

The one thing that stopped him from moving out of the chair, part of the reason he knew he wouldn’t sleep like this. He couldn’t leave him, he’d promised he’d stay there with him, watch over him whilst he slept and he’d never want let him down again. So he sat there, stewing in his own anger, watching as Carl’s chest rose and fell with each breath. He looked so damn peaceful, it was like the first night he stayed with him, his face was relaxed for once, not a single bit of tension appeared on it. Now he knew why that tension had been there, if only he’d known back then. Maybe he should have pushed more, he’d known something had been wrong, he’d just assumed it was crappy parenting. Maybe if he’d asked him more, made him feel more comfortable then he might have told him what was going on. How many nights of horrific abuse could he have saved him from?

A surge of vomit hit his throat as he thought about all the times he could have saved him, all the opportunities he’d missed to realise what was going on. He just about made it to the bathroom before he threw up that night’s dinner. Negan slumped against the wall by the toilet, panting heavily as his mind reminded him of all the times Carl had come in with fresh bruises, a face that was more absent than usual, a new limp that Carl had said was because he’d run too much. He thought back to the time he’d seen Carl limping across the parking lot, that was after that damn talk Shane had given the school. He remembered leaving him in the gym with Shane to go coach the fucking football team. Something must have happened then, right under his damn nose, in his fucking gym. More acid burned his throat as bile hit the toilet. Had he missed any signs there? That time on the field when Shane had led him off the pitch to go to dinner with his family, had he taken him off to… he retched again into the bowel. He shuddered and tried to stop himself thinking about it. That time he found them in the bathroom at Carl’s house. He squeezed his eyes shut against the images of Shane wrapping his fucking hands around Carl, seeing him smooth a hand across his shoulder. He gagged again his body shook again as it tried to bring anything up. How many times had Carl begged for him to stay in his head? How many times had Negan failed him?

Breathing hard he sat back against the wall, bringing his knees up to rest his arms on them. He dragged a towel down from the rack to the side of him, the soft cotton a blessing against his face. He breathed into it, inhaling the familiar scent of the laundry powder, he almost laughed at his thoughts. Stupid fucking thing to focus on. You gotta pull yourself together Negan, this isn’t about you and your fucking pity party. He sat there for a moment, waiting for his stomach to settle. As soon as he was sure he wasn’t about to heave over the toilet again he used the towel rack to pull himself up. He slowly crept back into the bedroom, resisting the urge to go downstairs and grab the bottle of whisky he knew was waiting for him, the last thing Carl needed was another drunk guy around him. He sat back in the chair, why the fuck had he even bought this damn thing? It was like sitting on a bag of fucking nails, and it was tiny, he wasn’t a large guy by any means and he could barely fit in the damn thing. He shuffled back into the chair, throwing the blanket he’d grabbed over his legs as he closed his eyes, he needed to get some sleep if he was going to be any use to Carl in the morning.

Easier said than done, it took him ten minutes of trying before he gave up on the idea of getting any shut eye that night. Every single time he closed his eyes he could see Carl and Shane, images of Carl being pinned down and hurt by that monster. He was haunted by thoughts of Carl crying out for Negan to help him only to be ignored. Shifting again in the chair, he resigned himself to a restless night, at least he’d be able to look out for Carl. If he had any nightmares, woke up in the middle of the night wanting to talk or whatever, Negan would be there for him. He’d been through so much it
was the least Negan could do for him.

The more he sat the more he thought about his own actions towards Carl. He’d been kicking himself for the last week over kissing him, he’d already classed their relationship as inappropriate especially given the less than fucking decent thoughts he’d had about him. Kissing him had made it a thousand times worse, it wasn’t just crossing the line it was shitting on it as he took a running leap over it. It wasn’t so much about him getting into trouble if they were caught but he hated the thought that people would look at Carl differently if they knew his Coach had been making moves on him. Knowing what he knows now, he wondered whether what Shane had done had influenced their relationship at all. He had no idea how Shane had messed with his head, had he only kissed him out of some obligation or had he really wanted to do it? Did Carl genuinely have feelings for him or was he just picking up on Negan’s own inclinations? He quickly dismissed that last thought, at the very least he’d always kept his feelings under control around him. He made a promise to himself to keep a distance in the future, keep any romantic elements out of their relationship until they both knew what Carl wanted. Fuck, until they both knew what they wanted, even Negan was confused by his feelings. He wasn’t going to lie, Carl was attractive, thinking about screwing him didn’t exactly come as a surprise to him but the feelings that had grown were definitely a shock to the system. It wasn’t love...not yet anyways, it was more of a feeling of finding someone that matched him, someone that he couldn’t help but want to be around all the damn time.

Negan shook his head. He was really a fucking mess.

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A sharp pain in his side woke him that morning, Carl winced as he shifted on the mattress trying to find a position that didn’t irritate his body. No such luck there. No matter how much he moved around his ribs wouldn’t stop aching. Instead he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and opened them up, they landed on Negan who was still sat in his chair. He couldn’t believe he’d actually stayed there all night, as guilty as Carl felt about asking him to stay on the chair he couldn’t stop the warmth spread through him knowing that Negan cared enough to do it.

“Mornin’” Negan’s voice sounded more hoarse than usual. His usually bright eyes seemed dull this morning, dark purple encircled them, Carl wondered how much sleep he got last night, guilt ate at him, was he the reason that he’d been kept awake?

“Morning.” He eventually replied.

An awkward silence fell between them, Carl had no idea what to say, how do you follow up on a conversation like last night? He looked down at his fingers, absentmindedly twiddling them to distract himself from the awkwardness.

“I’m sorry.” Carl started, it felt like all he could do was apologise. “For taking your bed away, it can’t have been comfortable sleeping on that chair.”

“Carl you don’t have to apologise, I wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t want to.”

“Right…”

Unnatural silence fell between them again, Carl wondered if they’d ever get back to their usual ease, he was ready for this awkwardness to be over. Anxiety curled within him, trickling doubts into his mind, had he ruined everything between them when he told him about Shane? He shifted again on the bed, he couldn’t get comfortable, he’d never felt so out of place. Not just physically but everything inside himself felt wrong, like something had changed within himself and he couldn’t figure out if it was for the better or not. He was so lost in his thoughts that he didn’t see Negan move,
it wasn’t until he felt the mattress shift under the man’s weight that he realised he was sat in front of him.

“Ribs still givin’ you trouble?”

“Little bit, just twinges.”

“I’ll grab some aspirin for you, it’ll help ease it off. Your nose looks better.” Negan reached out to tilt his face, brown eyes looking it over. “Definitely less angry. How are you feeling?”

“Other than the twinges I’m all good.” Carl said. He hoped his body would heal quickly this time, he really wasn’t look forward to constant pain whenever he moved.

“I didn’t mean physically.” Negan clarified. “How are you doing?”


“I guess that’s normal, shit I don’t know, I’m probably talkin’ outta my ass here.”

“Don’t worry I wouldn’t expect anything different from you.” Carl said with a slight grin on his face, maybe the key was to try to be normal again, force them back to how they used to be.

“Good to know you’re still a charmer.” Negan grinned back at him, it didn’t quite reach his eyes like it normally did, the small creases that usually made Carl’s heart skip a beat not quite appearing in the corners. Still it was better than the awkward silence that had been between them. “Anyways, you should go take a bath and I’ll go make us some breakfast.”

“A bath? You tryna tell me I smell?”

“Is that not obvious?” Negan deadpanned. “It’ll help with those twinges, I’ve got some special stuff that’ll help your muscles relax. It’s supposed to be for sporting injuries but I’m sure it’ll be fine here.”

“It’s worth a shot.” Carl gave a weak smile as he pulled the bedcovers off himself and scooted to the edge of the bed. Negan stood up beside him.

“You need a hand?” He offered one out.

Carl shook his head at him.

“I’ll be fine, just need a minute.”

“Alright, I’ll go run that bath, you take your time.”

Carl watched him leave, he was slower than normal, like he’d aged 20 years in the last 12 hours. He could almost feel his heart break at the sight knowing that he’d caused it. He’d added this horrible weight onto his shoulders that Negan was now forced to carry around. He hoped the man didn’t regret inviting him into his life although Carl was certain that if Shane followed through on his threat then he would, regardless of what he may have said the previous night. The sound of rushing water reminded him of what he was actually supposed to be doing, he put a bit of pressure on his feet the scratches on them protesting the extra weight. Thankfully not too painful but he’d have to be careful as he walked, he didn’t want to risk bleeding all over Negan’s floor. As Negan had said, he took his time getting to the bathroom, he swore it wasn’t this far last time he’d been here. It seemed to take forever to get there, the large bathtub was almost full when he reached it. Negan was standing by the side pouring a purple liquid into it, Carl couldn’t deny that it smelt amazing.
“Looks impressive.” Carl spoke over the gushing water.

“Yeah, I love a good bathtub, it was part of the reason I bought the place.”

“Never would have taken you for a bubble bath kinda guy.”

“Well don’t go spreadin’ it around, I’ve got a rep to maintain.”

“Your secret’s safe with me.”

“You enjoy yourself anyway, I’ll be downstairs if you need me. Feel free to grab whatever clothes you need from my room.” Negan gave him a tense smile that left Carl feeling cold inside before leaving him alone in the steam.

It had been so long since anyone had done a bath for him, he couldn’t even remember the last time his own mother had done it. It was touching that he would do it for him. He stripped off quickly and sank into the welcoming heat. Whatever Negan had put in the water was amazing, his aches quickly dissipated as he basked in it. The sweet lavender smell encased his senses, he closed his eyes and relaxed further down letting the water envelope him to the chin. He made a mental note to have more baths in the future, they were so damn relaxing. God knows he needed to relax after last night.

His mind was still in disbelief that it had actually happened, hitting Shane, running away, telling Negan everything. He lingered on that last thought, he’d actually told someone. Two years of hiding it away and now someone else knew. The whole problem shared is a problem halved saying is complete bullshit. It didn’t feel easier having shared with Negan, if anything he felt more burdened by it now he had to worry about Negan. Not just because of the threats Shane had thrown at the man, he now had to worry about what Negan thought of him. Their relationship had been complicated enough beforehand now there was an extra layer of problems to fight through.

Part of him wished he’d kept quiet, at least until he and Negan had time to figure out what the hell they were. It had only been a week since their first kiss, they’d not discussed what had happened, not really anyways. Were they a couple? Dating? Obviously their relationship was problematic given their ages and the small fact that Negan was his teacher, or used to be his teacher. Now the school had found a replacement gym teacher Negan would go back to being the guy that coached at his school. Not that it made much of a difference in terms of legality, it was still wrong. It didn’t bother Carl, he was fine keeping their relationship to themselves until it was the right time to go public but did Negan feel the same? Was he willing to risk everything just to be with someone as damaged as Carl?

As much as he wished that they’d had more time to figure out what they were before Carl told him about Shane, at least Negan now knew what he was getting into. That Carl was a mess and any kind of relationship with him wouldn’t be easy given his issues. Christ, they’d only kissed twice and he’d already freaked out about it.

He could tell Negan was already being weird with him, even with the smiles and jokes there was something hidden under there that Carl hadn’t seen before. Like he was trying to conceal something from him. It was making him paranoid, was it disgust? Did he not want him around anymore? Had he pushed him into having a bath so he wouldn’t have to deal with Carl?

Not wanting to deal with those thoughts anymore Carl sunk down in the water using it to hide away from his own thoughts.

Just as he was starting to look more like a wrinkled 90 year old Carl emerged from the water, grabbing the towel to pat himself dry. He caught sight of himself in the mirror and immediately
wished he hadn’t. The dark bruises were so obvious on his pale skin, he was more concerned with the bruises that decorated his face though. Two purple bruises had circled his eyes from where his nose had been hit, that would be hard to explain to his parents when he returned home tomorrow. Still that was the least of his concerns at the moment. Leaving his mirrored image behind himself he padded back to the bedroom, faintly hearing Negan singing along to some old rock song on the radio. He rolled his eyes at the noise, the man really wasn’t musically talented, although the delightful smell of bacon definitely made him reconsider whether Negan could actually cook. The rumble in his stomach was a surprise, he hadn’t realised how hungry he was until he smelt the food. He quickly got dressed and headed down the stairs.

The large smile that spread across his face almost hurt but he couldn’t help himself not after seeing Negan dancing in front of the stove, frilly apron wrapped around his waist. He wished he had a camera, wanting to preserve the memory forever. He’d never admit it but he actually giggled at the sight, the noise causing Negan to drop the spatula that he’d been waving around and swing to face Carl. He laughed harder at the sheepish look on the man’s face, it was worth the protests from his ribs.

“I’m sorry.” He blurted out between his laughs.

“Sure you are.” Negan rolled his eyes as Carl kept laughing, as embarrassed as he felt, it was worth it to hear that beautiful laughter again. “Alright chuckles, sit your ass down breakfast/lunch is ready.”

“Lunch?” Carl asked as he slid into his usual chair.

“Yeah it’s a bit later than I thought. Nearly two in the afternoon.”

“Two?!” Carl exclaimed. “Jesus how long was I asleep for?”

“I wouldn’t worry about that Carl, you obviously needed it. It’s the damn blackout curtains in my room, I didn’t even realise it was light out.”

Negan placed a plate full of food in front of him, it made his mouth water as he waited for the man to sit with him, he still had manners after all. He did have a limit though, the second his ass hit the chair Carl grabbed his knife and fork and shoveled food into his mouth. It was beyond good, the bacon was so tender and the eggs practically melted on his tongue. He was grateful Negan had put so much on his plate, he was damn starving. When he took a break to grab some juice he caught sight of the expression on Negan’s face, shock mixed with slight astonishment.

“Hungry?” He asked.

“Little bit.” Carl replied sheepishly before returning to his food, making more of a concentrated effort not to stuff his face like before. More silence fell between them as they ate, every silent second was a constant reminder that things were still strained between them. Every single word they’d exchanged had been halted, things hadn’t flowed like they usually did. It was like they were stuck on opposing sides of a rushing river, he could see him but he didn’t know how to get across to him. Every attempt had him drowning under the water. Negan didn’t seem to know what to say either, Carl caught him opening his mouth several times as if he was going to say something but changed his mind at the last minute. Now that Carl had finished eating the silence was borderline painful, the only noise in the house was the clinking of Negan’s knife and fork as he ate. He let his eyes wander around the room, taking in the small tidbits that he hadn’t noticed before, all the cookbooks that decorated the shelves, the small herb garden he kept over by the window. He wondered how often Negan actually used the kitchen, it still looked pristine and he couldn't imagine the man was much of a cleaner.

“Carl, are we just gonna sit here like this?”
His eyes snapped back to Negan as he spoke, the man had finished his food and was leaning back against the chair with his arms folded over his chest.

“Like what?”

“Like I’m the one night stand you’re doing your best to get rid of.”

“What? I’m not trying to get rid of you. Just waiting for you to finish your damn food.”

“Well I’m all done now, we gonna talk?”

“We are talking.” He knew he was being pedantic, he was letting his frustration with their lack of communication rile him up.

“Carl…”

“Negan…” He responded.

They glared at each other. The atmosphere in the room becoming more charged as they let the emotions that they’d been burying bubble to the surface.

Just as Carl was about to speak again his phone buzzed in the lounge, they both turned to look at it. Nerves twisted in his stomach as he limped over to it.

He could feel the blood drain from his face when he saw the name light up on the screen.

“Shit…” his hands trembled as he looked at the phone buzzing incessantly in his hand. “It's Shane.”

“Shane? Are you fucking serious? That fucker thinks he can just call up? Gimmie the fucking phone I’ll deal with him.” He held his hand out expectantly.

Carl shifted away from him, hands shaking as he thought about who was on the other end. He had to take care of this, he’d made the mess and it was time to clean it up. If he played his cards right then maybe he’d stop Shane from doing anything stupid.

“No, I’ll...I’ll deal with him.”

“Carl-”

“Negan, it’s fine...it’ll be fine. Just...trust me?”

He could see Negan’s jaw clench as he gave the briefest of nods, obviously not happy with his decision. At least he actually listened to him and kept his distance. His thumb hovered over the decline button, contemplating just ignoring the call so he could stay in the safe bubble he’d created with Negan, instead he sighed and hit the green accept button. He could feel the phone shake against his ear as he whispered out a greeting.

“Where the fuck’re you.” His low voice slurred in his ear, still drunk clearly. Drunk was good, drunk meant that maybe Carl could lie his way out of it.

“Uhhh. I’m home...Mom and Dad called last night and asked me to grab some groceries before they get back. Remember? You gave me the money for it.”

A deep pause on the phone, all he could hear was the heavy breathing down the line. His stomach twisted as he wondered if he’d been believed.
“Shit. I don’t remember that. Fucking’ shit.”

Carl heard something tip over in the background.

“Why are there groceries here? Did you forget ‘em or somethin’? I can come get you, bring you back here, I’m sure there’s plenty we can do before we need to get them back to your parents.”

Carl could almost feel the leer in his voice, it made his skin crawl. Pushing it to the side he replied.

“They’re for you. You didn’t have any so I got you some as well, I dropped them off before I got the bus home.”

“Huh…”

“Yeah…”

Carl waited, pacing anxiously, he wished Shane would finish up. He wasn’t sure how much longer he could keep up this pretence for. He could see Negan out of the corner of his eye, arms crossed, looking like he was itching to interrupt the conversation.

“I’m gonna miss you baby…it’s been so damn nice having your sweet lil ass around here.”

“I…uh….I’ve gotta go…someone’s at the door.”

He hung up and threw the phone away from himself, he vaguely heard it thump to the floor, he clutched at his hair as he paced back and forth trying to squeeze the man’s voice from his head. The frustration from before mingled with the anger that Shane had burst the bubble he was in, forced himself back into his life when he was trying to get away from him.

“What the fuck did he want?” Negan asked.

“Wanted to know where I was.”

“You should’ve let me talk to him.”

“So you could say what?” It was unfair of him to ask, he knew Negan was only trying to help but right now he didn’t want it. Right now he wanted to boil in his anger, he increased his pacing in an attempt to stop himself taking it out on Negan.

“Somethin’ that would get him to fuck right off.”

“Oh yeah cos that would’ve helped so much.” Carl said sarcastically.

“Why are you gettin’ pissy with me?” Negan was getting just as angry with him, his voice getting louder in the room.

“I’m not pissy maybe I’m just sick of you babying me.”

“I’m not babying you.” Negan spat out.

“Yes you are. I can handle Shane. I’ve been doing it a lot longer than you.” He shouted at him, he’d stopped pacing, now the two of them were standing opposite one another. Electricity sparked between them as they let their anger out on each other.

“Oh yeah cos that’s been workin’ so well for you.”
Carl flinched back like he’d been slapped, he steeled himself under Negan’s anger, not willing to be the one to back down. He needed this, the release.

“You don’t get to fucking say that to me. I’ve been dealing with this shit for years. I’m the one that’s had to put up with his groping hands, and seedy comments. I’m the one that had to deal with being whipped every time I dared to say something out of line. I’m the one that had to bend over whenever he fucking wanted me to. So no you don’t get a say in it, you don’t get to decide how I handle this shit.”

“I’m not trying to decide anything for you Carl but you can’t fucking expect me to stand by and let you talk to that shithead.” He gritted out, trying to get a grip on his own anger. “It’s not who I am and you damn well know it.”

“Do I? How much do I even know about you? I mean, Jesus, I didn’t even know you were into guys until we kissed.”

“C’mon Carl I thought we were past the superficial shit like that? You may not know the facts but you know the kind of guy I am.”

“I thought I did but maybe I was wrong.” He wanted to hurt him, punish Negan for not stepping up more that morning, for not being the guy he was last week.

“Yeah well I know I was wrong about you, at least I’ve never hidden shit from you.” That was one step too far. Negan knew it before he’d even let the words fall from his mouth. The hurt look on Carl’s face was enough to stop himself saying anything else. They both stood panting in the room, both realising that they’d let this get too far. Negan watched the hurt look melt into guilt on Carl’s face before he turned sharply and stormed off up the stairs.

Negan just watched him go.

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Carl paced more when he reached the bedroom, anger eliminating any pain that the movement caused. He wasn’t angry with Negan, he was pissed at himself for getting that mad with him. It was incredibly unfair, he shouldn’t have expected Negan to be the same, it didn’t mean he was a bad person. It was what he'd been expecting, he didn't know why it was such a surprise to him that Negan would change when he knew. He stopped in his steps, taking a deep breath he tried to calm himself. He was being paranoid, he knew it. Negan had every right to be pissed at him, he had hidden things from the man. He'd been so open about his past with Carl, he'd answered every question Carl had asked never hesitating. Carl on the other hand had never really told him anything about his own life. Guilt stabbed at him again, he shouldn't have been that harsh on him. He sat down on the bed, head in hands, as shame filled him. He'd fucked up again. Possibly ruined one of the best things that had ever happened to him.

A small knock on the door interrupted his thoughts, he turned to look at Negan, guilt swelling again at the sad look on his face. He’d never wanted to be the reason behind that look, it nearly broke his heart.

“Can I come in?” Negan asked.

“It’s your room, you can do what you want.”

“Okay, better question. If I come in can we talk or are we just gonna scream at each other again?”

“No more screaming I promise.” Carl said, shifting further along the bed so Negan could sit with
him. They sat in silence again for a moment, Carl could feel the light heat as their arms brushed each other. He found himself leaning into the comfort of having Negan by his side again.

“I’m sorry for getting angry and saying that shit.” Negan paused before continuing. “I didn’t mean it Carl, I don’t care that you didn’t tell me, I don’t hate you for it I hate myself for not being the person you could tell sooner.”

“You’re not wrong though, I’ve always hidden things from you. I had no right to say that you weren’t the person I thought you were because you’ve always been you. I just...I got scared.”

“Of me?” Negan was horrified at the thought that he’d ever scared Carl.

“No, not like that. You were being weird earlier, we weren’t talking like we usually do. I just thought that maybe you didn’t want me around anymore, or that you thought you couldn’t talk to me. I hated myself for making it that way and I took it out on you. I’m sorry.”

“Shit, Carl I didn’t even think. I always want you around it’s not about that. I just-”

“Negan-” Carl didn’t want to hear the rest, he knew it would be some excuse for him to pull away.

“Please Carl, just let me finish.”

Carl nodded, bracing himself for the words he knew would hurt.

“I...I don’t know what to say to you Carl. I’m drownin’ here. It’s not that I couldn’t talk to you or that I don’t want to it’s just... I have no idea what I can say to make it better, I have no idea what to do. I’m terrified that I’m gonna say the wrong thing and cause you more pain. It’s hard not knowing where I stand, I’m so torn all the time. I wanna give you space, let you decide how much you want from me, but I also want to wrap you up in my arms and never let you go.”

“I didn’t realised…” Carl couldn’t finish his sentence.

“I’m not great at talking about how I feel Carl, even worse about showing it. I was so damn angry this morning, not with you but with myself. I failed you.”

“Yes I did Carl.” Negan’s jaw clenched as his earlier thoughts returned. “I didn’t see what was going on, hell maybe I didn’t want to see what was going on. I made excuses for the things I saw, passed them off as stupid shit when I could’ve pushed harder to find out what was really going on. I let you down Carl and I don’t know if I’ll ever be able to forgive myself for that.” His voice broke as he finished the sentence, head hanging down in shame as he tried to pull himself together again.

Carl placed a hand in Negan’s, shifting closer to him he let his forehead rest on his shoulder trying to give as much comfort as he could.

“It’s not your fault Negan. You couldn’t have known, if my own damn parents couldn’t figure it out how could you possibly know?” He whispered against him. “If you’d pushed me I probably would’ve run so far away that you’d never see me again, I wasn’t ready for you to know before and that’s on me, not you.”

He felt Negan’s hand squeeze his tight, he moved his head back as the man twisted to face him. Carl looked into broken brown eyes, reaching his other hand to brush along his stubbled cheek.

“I don’t blame you for any of this Negan.”
“It’s not your fault either Carl, none of this is, you hiding it away that’s Shane’s fault not yours.”

“Yeah. Guess all we’re guilty of is saying stupid shit instead of saying what we really mean.”

“Well that’s what I’m good at.”

“Me to.”

“At least we can work on it together.” Negan said taking both of Carl’s hands in his own.

Carl knew they had a long way to go, both of them needing to heal from the night’s revelations but at least they had each other.

"Carl?"

“Yeah?”

“Did you wanna talk about us? The whole kissing thing? I know it’s gotta be confusing with everything that’s going on, I mean shit I really shouldn’t have let it get this far I was just bein’ selfish.”

“Right now? I don’t know.”

“Okay, that’s fine. I just...shit...I gotta know Carl did you wanna kiss me?” Negan almost sounded desperate in his question. “You weren’t doing it because you felt like you had to or anything?”

“God no, Negan. No, it’s not like that at all. I kissed you because I wanted to. I’d been thinking about it for ages, couldn’t stop thinking about it actually. I don’t know what that means, I don’t have much...experience with the whole emotions thing but I do know I wanted to kiss you. You didn’t make me.”

Negan let out a sigh of relief that echoed in the room.

“Thank God for that.”

“I don’t need a label on us Negan if that’s what you’re thinking about. I’m gonna assume this whole situation is unchartered territory for both of us.”

“Hell yeah, can’t say I’ve ever been tempted by a student before.”

“Glad I could be the first.” Carl joked. “Whatever we are, it feels right. That’s all I know and I’m not sure what that means in the future but for now that’s enough for me.”

“Me too.” Negan replied. “Whatever you want this to be I’m down for it. You set the pace Carl, I’ll take as much as you want me to have.”

Carl was grateful for that, he didn't want the pressure of a label.

“Not that I want to talk about it but what happened on the phone with Shane?” Negan asked.

“He was wondering where I was. I think he believed me, he sounded drunk, he was pretty drunk last night so there’s a chance he really doesn’t remember what happened.”

“That’s good, gives us some time to work things out.”

“Work what out?”
“What we’re gonna do about Shane, I’m not havin’ you go anywhere near that bastard again.”

“I don’t know what we can do. Me telling you doesn’t change anything, my parents… they still wouldn’t believe me, they don’t see Shane like you do.”

“You can’t keep letting things go on as they are Carl, there’s no way in hell that I’m gonna let him touch you again.”

“What am I supposed to do about it?” He asked, letting desperation cloud his voice.

Negan sighed, letting go of Carl’s hands to rub at his face. He was too run down to think of something good.

“I don’t know, but we’ll figure it out. What time are your parents back?”

“They’re back later tonight, but they arranged for Shane to drop me off tomorrow afternoon.”

“Tomorrow afternoon? Fucks sake, most parents would kill to see their kids again after being away and they’re willing to wait until tomorrow? Jesus Christ.”

There was that clenched jaw again, it almost made Carl worry that he’d grind his teeth into dust if he kept that up.

“That’s just what they’re like, they care...they just don’t always remember how to be good parents.”

“They’re gonna ask about those bruises y’know?”

“Yeah I know.”

“What are you gonna say?”

“I dunno, I’ll probably say I got jumped walking from the grocery store or something.”

“You could always tell them the truth, you never know Carl they might believe you.”

“And if they don’t?”

“Then you have me.”

Carl looked down at his feet, Negan really had him there, at least he knew if the worst did happen, if his parents ever did reject him then he’d have a place to go to.

“I don’t…I don’t know if I’m ready to tell them Negan.”

That was what it had boiled down to, it had nearly killed him to tell Negan. Every word bit away at him as he’d spoken, he’d barely been able to look Negan in the eye after. He knew it would be worse with his parents, at least with Negan he knew he could say what he wanted. Conversations had always been easy between them, it was a completely different story with his parents. The years had made conversation so damn difficult, even the simplest greeting took more effort that it should.

Carl looked up as Negan sank into his vision, crouching down in front of him.

“I’m not gonna push you here Carl, I’d never make you tell anyone that you don’t feel ready to tell. If you wanna wait to tell them then I’ll support you in any way that I can. All I ask is that you call me, if Shane so much as looks at you funny, call me. I’d never be able to live with myself if Shane hurt you and I could’ve stopped it.”
“I promise.”

Watery blue ones met soft brown ones, Carl felt his lips twitch up in an attempt at a reassuring smile.

“Good. So we’ve got till tomorrow then? What do you wanna get up to?” Negan slapped his knees as he stood, walking around the room as he tried to figure out what they could do.

“There’s another Hannibal movie for us to watch right?”

Carl almost laughed at the look of pleased shock on Negan’s face. He’d never admit it but the movies were actually growing on him, more often than not he’d find his mind drawing back to that charismatic killer, spending far too much time thinking about the debates that Hannibal had raised in the movies. The morality of murder being far more interesting that learning about algebra. He wanted to see more, understand more of this character that was dominating his thoughts. The fact that it made Negan so happy was just an added bonus.

“Seriously?”

“Seriously.” He confirmed. “Not like we can really do much when I can barely walk up the stairs without wanting to die.”

“True. Alright, let’s get you downstairs then.”

This time Carl let Negan help him up, he leaned on his arm as he hobbled down the stairs. Negan left him on the couch in his favorite corner. Carl felt the grin spread over his face as he watched Negan patter around, he looked like a kid on Christmas day, practically bouncing around the cabin as he prepped their snacks. Carl grabbed the blanket, draping it over his legs to get himself more comfortable. He gratefully accepted the massive bowl of popcorn that Negan handed to him, and waited patiently for the man to join him on the couch.

“Hope you’re ready for this.” Negan said as he flopped down next to him, the credits starting to play across the screen.

“Always am.”

He settled himself in for the duration, eyes eagerly taking in every scene that appeared. It was a nice distraction from the tense afternoon. Nevertheless, as much as he wanted to keep watching, he found himself growing more and more tired as the movie played out. Eyes grew heavier as much as he tried to keep himself awake, the movie was starting to pick up to the main plot, his mind protested his body’s instinct to sleep, wanting to keep watching. His body however relaxed further into the couch, slumping down as he curled up into the heat by his side, his eyes fluttered shut as he finally gave into his body’s craving.

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He awoke to his pillow shifting around under him, disgruntled he wrapped his arm tighter around it, flinging a leg over to quell the movement so he could go back to sleep. He was shocked when his pillow let out a low chuckle, he blinked his eyes open and shifted his head back to take a better look at what he was resting on.

He could feel the blush burn at his face when he realised that it wasn’t his pillow that he’d trapped under him it was Negan. Carl had his arm flung over his waist, fingers gripping at the soft material of his shirt, the shirt that looked slightly damp where his face had previously rested. He was mortified to think that he’d probably drooled on the man in his sleep.
“Shit, I’m sorry, thought you were my pillow.” He said sheepishly. He knew he should probably remove himself from the man. At the very least take his leg off his lap but he couldn’t find the energy to move, for the first time in days he was actually comfortable and his mind was protesting any idea that involved him removing himself from his current position.

“Nice! I clearly need to work out more if you think I’m squishy like a pillow.”

Letting his mind win this one time, Carl returned his head to his chest, nuzzling back down into his warmth as he managed to get himself more comfortable.

“No...not squishy... just warm... s’nice.” He could already feel sleep taking over again, the irresistible lure of peace and quiet winning out. He didn’t hear the man’s reply, just felt his chest vibrate under his ear as he let himself sink back to sleep.

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2nd January 2018

Carl’s body tensed as he awoke, all he could feel was the heaviness of the arm wrapped around his waist, the hand curling possessively over his hip. His mind raced as he tried to figure out how he’d gotten back here. How was he back with Shane? The hard body shifted against him, he squirmed back as much as he could in the grip that simply grew tighter as he moved, trapping him in. His pulse raced, breathing became harder as panic set in, he couldn’t be back there. He squeezed his eyes shut even tighter, not wanting to open them, opening them would make it real. He didn’t want it to be real, he wanted to be with Negan, he begged his mind to let him stay with Negan longer in his imagination. The hand slid up his waist as his body shifted more, Carl didn’t want to wait to see what it was going to do next.

“Nononono...” He murmured, pushing more forcefully against the chest, legs coming up to force himself away from the man. He felt himself move backwards, he was almost confused when the arm just slid away, he’d expected more of a protest. He knew it would come, he knew the man would never let him go that easily. He knew he was gonna get it, he’d be punished for this. Twisting quickly he crawled away, feeling a surprising softness under his palms as he scrambled along the floor until he hit a soft wall in front of him. He curled up as much as he could, hands clutching at his hair, trying to protect as much of his body as he could. His body shook uncontrollably as he waited for the sharp sting of leather, he deserved it, he’d caused so much trouble.

“Carl? What’s going on? Are you alright?”

He heard his voice in his head, Negan’s voice, he wished he was here, where had he gone? Why had he left him with Shane? Had he even been with Negan in the first place or had he made it up? Tears slipped out as he started to question himself, he felt his grip on reality slip away, the tension in him mounted the longer he waited, why wasn’t Shane doing anything? He wanted it over with, wanted him to do what he wanted so he could go back into his head, back to Negan. His body jolted as a hand touched him, nononono not that, he didn’t want soft touches, not again. He pushed himself further into the wall, a soft whimper escaped his mouth. He wanted to fade away, wanted to not exist in that moment.

“Carl...please....it's Negan you're safe here it's alright I'm not gonna hurt you.”

His heart tore inside, Negan sounded so desperate, why was he still there? Why would his mind torment him like this? He sobbed, his head hurt so much.

“Shhhh Carl you're alright, I'm here, you're safe.”
“But you're not here.” He sobbed out. He wanted him to shut up, Negan couldn't be here now, even in his mind he didn't want him to see this.

“I am here Carl. C’mon look at me, just open your eyes, just for a moment.”

“I can't.”

“Yes you can, you can do this Carl. I'm right here, remember we watched the movie last night? Then you fell asleep right at the good bit. You're here with me in my cabin.”

He sounded so real, his voice sending memories seeping back into his head. He remembered breakfast, the phone call, falling asleep on his warm chest. Was that real? He had to know. He slowly let go of his hair, tentatively raising his head so he could look out. He could just about make out Negan’s face blurred by tears that were yet to fall from his eyes.

“Negan?”

“Yeah, yeah it's me.”

He came closer, Carl could see his face more clearly, concern etched all over it. Shakily he raised his own hand, he watched as it reached out to brush his fingertips across his cheek. His heart skipped a beat when it touched actual flesh, he was real. Relief flooded him. He really was safe. He let out another sob, this time in relief, as he threw himself into Negan's arms, wrapping his own right around his neck. He cried into it, harsh sobs wracked his body reawakening the pain in his limbs. He didn't care though, he was safe.

“I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm so sorry.” Was all Carl could say. He truly was. He was sorry for being a fuck up. Sorry for literally crawling away from the man. Sorry that he couldn't do something as simple as wake up with someone without freaking out. Guilt made him sob harder even as soothing hands rubbed circles on his back.

“It's alright Carl. Shhh, it's alright.” More soft words were muttered into his ear, reassurances whispered at him. Eventually he calmed, the tears dried on his cheeks, and he just relaxed against him. Breathing the man in, trying to embed him into his senses.

He kept his face buried, not quite ready to face him yet. He could feel Negan's face against his, felt the slight scrape of stubble against his cheek as he nuzzled against him.

“I'm sorry.” He said one more time.

“Carl, you've got absolutely nothing to be sorry for.”

He was so kind. He really didn't deserve it. He sniffed again, and leaned back, he'd shifted onto the floor when he'd launched himself at the man. Now he was sat there, leaning back against the couch, trying to put himself back together again. He reached out a hand to grab Negan’s, clutching it to remind himself that he wasn't alone this time. He didn't have to do this on his own anymore.

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Eventually his breathing settled, he loosened his grip on Negan and shifted his sore muscles.

“You alright?” Negan asked.

“I think so, I’m sorry.” He said again. Was he ever going to stop needing to apologise? Why couldn’t he do normal things without having a meltdown?
“Carl, it’s fine. It’s normal, don’t worry about it.”

“It’s not normal though is it? It’s not normal to have flashbacks to being groped by your Godfather!”

“Carl-”

“Don’t. You don’t need to answer that it’s not fair. I just… I want to do normal things. I don’t want every part of my life to be infected by this thing that’s happened to me.”

“It won’t Carl, but it’s gonna take time and I’ll be here every step of the way.”

“You sure you wanna be?”

Negan forced Carl to look at him.

“Yes I’m damn sure. You’re not gettin’ rid of me that easily Grimes. I’m in it for the long haul. Good and bad. I’m here.”

“You don’t have to be.”

“I know, but I want to be.”

Carl didn’t know what to say to that, he gave him a watery smile, swallowing hard against more tears. He’d done enough crying that day.

“You ready to get up?” Negan asked. “Cos I don’t think my old man back can handle being on the floor for another minute.”

Carl gave a brief laugh as he nodded. “Sure old man let’s get up.”

They helped each other up, both unsteady in their aching bodies. Carl noted the time as he stretched out, one in the afternoon. His stomach plummeted as he realised what that meant.

“I gotta get home…”

“Shit. Already?”

“Yeah, They’re expecting me back around 3, at least if I get home early then I can be there just in case Shane makes an appearance.” Carl didn’t fail to notice the angry tick on his face as he mentioned his name.

“Right, I’ll go grab my coat then, did you wanna borrow something?”

“Nah, the sweater’s enough for me.”

Carl opened the door and waited on the porch. His fingers brushed the snow from the deep brown railings, he thought back to the last time he was on this very porch. The memory of that steamy kiss warmed him inside, it brought a smile to his face, even as the slam of the front door brought him back to the present.

“Ready to go?” Negan asked.

“Nope, but let’s do this.”

He sat in the passenger seat, fingers squeezing the leather by his legs harder and harder the further they got from the cabin. They travelled in silence, the only noise was the snow breaking under the
tyres as they drove along the empty roads. Far too soon they reached the familiar white houses in the suburbs, the roads he used to play around were now a sight of dread for him. Negan pulled the car over, a few houses down, closer than normal but considering how much his feet still hurt Carl was extremely grateful.

“Thank you again.” Carl was the one to break the silence. He flicked his eyes over to Negan, the man was still gripping the steering wheel knuckles a sharp white on his tanned skin. He looked pissed. “Negan?”

“I really don’t like this.”

“I know.” Carl hung his head, if he had it his way he’d stay with Negan for as long as the man would have him.

“You better go before I go in there and do something really fucking stupid.”

Carl nodded, feeling dejected, he grabbed the handle and started opening the door. He was stopped by a hand on his arm. Carl looked back at him, getting lost in those brown eyes once more.

“I’ll be alright.” He said, turning to face him properly.

“I know, I just don’t know if I’ll be.” Negan tried to laugh it off but he couldn’t. He’d never felt so jittery in his life, his body at war with himself, terrified worry mixed with pure anger. He felt sick with it.

Carl placed a hand on his arm, stroking it as he tried to calm him.

“I’ll tell them, I promise. Maybe not today but I swear I’ll do it.”

“I know. I just want you to be safe until then.”

“I’ll call, I promise I’ll call if anything happens.”

Negan nodded, steeling himself for the inevitable. He placed a hand on the one still stroking his arm, he gave it a gentle squeeze.

“Alright. I’ll see you soon OK?”

“Yes.” Carl gave him a brief flicker of a reassuring smile. He wanted to kiss him goodbye, like they had last time, wanted one more moment of normalcy between them before he went back to the dark but he couldn’t find the courage to do it. So he left took his hand back and headed out the car, vowing not to look back as he walked to his house.

He heard the engine roar as he shot down the road behind him, leaving him alone. He saw his Dad’s car on the drive, happily noting that Shane’s wasn’t anywhere to be seen. This he could deal with, just his parents, and if he kept them occupied with enough questions about their holiday then he might just get through the conversation.

Not having his keys on him he had to ring the doorbell and wait for them to come to the door. His mother’s happy face appeared in front of him as the door opened, her smile fell as he took in his face.

“What happened?” She exclaimed, grabbing his shoulders to pull him inside so she could look him over.

He shifted uncomfortably under her searching gaze, he hated the attention. Her hands brushed
incessantly over his face, looking over at each of the marks.

“It’s fine Mom, I got jumped on my way back from Shane’s. I’m alright, just a bit bruised.”

“It is not fine Carl. Where was Shane? He was supposed to be bringing you home.”

“He was too drunk to drive so I walked. It’s no big deal Mom, I’m alright.” That reassuring smile appeared on his face, only it was more fake this time.

“This is happening far too much Carl.” She shook her head, pulling him over to sit on the couch. “Is anything bleeding? You need me to get the first aid kit?”

“Nah, I’m good. Really. How was your vacation? Did you have a good time?”

“Carl…”

“Hey Carl, when did you get back?” His Dad appeared in the doorway, rubbing a towel over his wet hair, he must’ve been in the shower.

“Look at him Rick! Shane got too damn drunk to drive so he had to walk home and got mugged.”

“What?” Rick walked over to Carl, looking over his face. “Son of a bitch I swear I’m gonna kill him one of these days, how could he be so irresponsible?”

“It’s fine Dad honestly. I’ll be alright.”

“Did you get a good look at them? I’ll write up a report when I get to the station in the morning.”

“Dad, please, just leave it. I didn’t see who did it, they pushed me to the floor. Luckily I left my wallet at Shane’s so they didn’t get anything.”

He’d not seen his Dad look so pissed in awhile, it was touching to know that he still cared so much about his wellbeing. He almost told them then, the concern that was etched on their faces was a shocking reminder that they actually cared about him. He’d been so caught up in his own feelings and the thoughts that Shane had put in him that he’d never concerned that his parents might actually care. With all the marks on his body they might even believe him.

“How was your vacation?” Carl asked instead. He wasn’t ready for that, wasn’t ready for the questions.

“It was good, the place was lovely. Did you have fun with Shane?”

“Same as always y’know.”

“I’m sure it was. I can’t believe he let you walk home alone. I’m gonna give him a call.” Lori stood, walking over to the phone.

“NO.” He shouted at her, quickly calming himself he spoke again in a softer voice. “Honestly, he offered but I insisted on going on my own. There’s no need to call him, he’s probably still too drunk to understand.”

He could tell she didn’t want to drop it, her face was still twisted in anger, he gave his best innocent face at her. As usual it worked a treat, she melted in front of him and rushed back over to hug him.

“I’m so sorry you got hurt baby.” She murmured into his hair.
He managed to contain his wince as they both wrapped their arms around him, one arm pressing down on one of his bruises. Unwarranted tears watered his eyes, an unexpected wave of emotion crashed over him as he was cradled in between them, it was almost too much for him. His parents were never usually this tactile with him, then again he usually brushed them away, this time was different, he found himself relaxing into them. He nestled his head into his Dad’s shoulder, wrapped his arms around the pair of them. Negan really had helped him, he’d encouraged him to be more open, to allow himself to feel what he wanted to feel and in the moment he wanted to feel loved by his parents. He wanted one moment to forget the years of resentment and just be their kid again.

Chapter End Notes

P.S. Does anyone know of a good word processor? I'm using google docs atm but it seems to do funny things to the formatting when I transfer it over to AO3, like it keeps adding spaces that aren't supposed to be there or shifting the paragraphs so it looks weird.
Sorry for the wait guys! I'm starting a new job very soon and there's so much pre-training training to do that I've been a bit swamped. Also I really wanted to be able to update with chapter 16 fairly quickly after this one for reasons that will be obvious once you've read this.

Thank you again for all the lovely comments I'm sorry I haven't replied to them individually but I do love every single one of them <3 Much Love L xx

"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow may be for us and it may not."

- Della Reese

January 2018

They treated him to his favorite take out that evening, his Mom wanting to do her usual motherly smothering by feeding him as much as she could. It was nearly too much, she constantly kept touching him, brushing her hands over him to make sure he was alright. He was never more grateful to his Dad than when he insisted that she stop. Every bone in his body had been screaming at him to get away from her incessant touching, his muscles tensing every time her fingers hit his skin. That night was almost like old times, only without the constant fighting between his parents, they ate on the couch in front of the tv watching some crappy action movie. If it wasn’t for the constant ache in his body from his injuries he would have loved every second of it.

Unfortunately he reached his threshold for the pain around halfway through the movie, the pressure on his aching ribs was too much for him. So he made his excuses and headed to his bedroom, trying not to notice the sad look on his parents’ faces when he left. The stab of guilt was unusual, it never bothered him to leave them alone, then again it never seemed to phase them that he’d left the room. Maybe he’d just failed to notice it before, maybe he was always caught up in his depths of despair that he didn’t realise the impact that he had on them. Still, it didn’t hinder the resentment he felt, didn’t ease the knowledge of their failure to notice what was really happening with him. It was a relief when he entered his room, he could finally relax.

He pulled Negan’s sweater up, hands brushing over the bandages that covered his body. He wondered how long it’d take them to heal. He was sick of looking at them, sick of knowing exactly how he got them and the reminder of what Shane was capable of. It hadn't escaped him that Shane hadn't come to visit. He’d been on edge all afternoon, ears pricking with every car that passed through the quiet street waiting for one to pull up in front of his house. He wondered how long it would be before he graced them with his presence. It wouldn't be long, that he knew, Shane had never let more than a couple of days pass before he saw them. Hell his parents would probably be inviting him over tomorrow, eager to see him again. Carl glanced at the clock by his bed, it was still
fairly early. Shane could still make a visit before the morning. It made him more uneasy, he sat on the bed, fingers curling around the edge. Would he come that night? The fear that had left him whilst he was with Negan crept back over him. Would he be safe tonight?

His thoughts led to a darker place, would Negan be safe tonight? If Shane wasn't here then he could be with him. He could've followed through on his threats, arresting the man all because he'd dared to leave him.

His hand fumbled for his phone, he found Negan in his contacts, pushing the call button. He waited anxiously for an answer, every ring was like a shot through him. Was he right? Had Shane got to Negan? His whole body sank with relief when he heard the familiar gravelly voice fill his head.

“Carl. Is everything alright? Are you okay? Is he with you? Did the fucker touch you? I swear to fucking god I will kill him if he's near you. I'll wring his fuckin-”

“Negan!” He interrupted. The man really did know how to ramble on. It was touching to know how much Negan worried about him. “I'm fine, honestly. I just-I needed to hear your voice.” How pathetic was he?

“Huh, never thought there'd be anyone that liked hearing my voice more than me.”

“I don't think it's possible for anyone to like your voice more than you.”

“You might be right there.”

Carl laid back on the bed, easing the pressure on his body.

“Did I interrupt anything?”

“No no, I'm just… doin' the usual.”

“Drinking or hitting on your bat?”

“You know me too well.”

Carl laughed at that.

“Maybe.”

“What are you up to?”

“Trying to sleep, not having much luck.”

“Ah, want me to read you a bedtime story?”

“Nah I think I'm good.”

“Shame I know a few good ones.”

“I'm sure you do.”

There was a pause.

“I miss you.” He admitted. They'd only been apart a few hours but it felt like an eternity.

“I miss you too.” His heart warmed at his admission, at least he wasn’t the only one feeling their
“At least we’re back at school next week, back to normal.” Carl tried to make light of it, tried to make it seem like it was a good thing but he knew it wasn’t. If anything being at school would be worse than not seeing each other, it would be torture to be that close to the man without being able to touch him freely, to be around each other but to pretend that they weren’t as close as they were. School was a constant reminder that their relationship was forbidden, even as friends it bordered on the line of inappropriate.

“Yeah…”

Another pause rested between them. Carl hated it. They couldn’t talk like this, not with ears potentially listening in.

“Negan?”

“Yeah?”

“Why were you drinking?” He’d hesitated before asking, he didn’t want to overstep boundaries but he wasn’t sure if he’d be able to sleep with the knowledge that Negan was drinking because of him.

“I…” A loud sigh filled Carl’s ears, that was enough of an answer for him, it must be to do with him if he was taking his time to answer. Guilt swarmed him. “I’m sorry.” Was all Carl could say to him. This had been what he’d been trying to avoid, he didn’t want to hurt anyone else’s life.

“It’s not your fault Carl, I’m not drinking because of you so don’t think that for a second.”

“So why are you drinking then? Cos you don’t sound like you’ve had one glass for fun.”

Yet another heavy sigh.

“I’m drinkin’ because… because I can’t get the thought of Shane touching you out of my head, or the thought of me beating the shit out of him. I...God Carl, I had to drink to stop myself doing somethin’ really fucking stupid. I want to kill him for what he’s done to you and I was scared that I would actually do something. That’s why I was drinking Carl, not because of you but because of myself.”

Carl was speechless, what on earth do you say to that? The thought of Negan doing something like that was terrifying, as much as he wanted Shane gone he would never want Negan to do it.

“Negan…”

“It’s fine Carl, don’t worry about it.”

“But…”

“You should go to bed Carl.” Negan interrupted. “It’s late, and you need to get your rest.” Carl knew when he was being brushed off, he reluctantly said. “Okay, goodnight.”

“Night.”

He was left feeling rejected when the phone clicked off. The home screen glared back at him, almost taunting him whilst he furiously debated with himself whether to call Negan back or not. It pissed him off that he just hung up like that, so many things were left unsaid, Carl hadn’t gotten any kind of reassurance that Negan wasn’t going to do anything stupid. At least he wouldn’t be able to do
anything that night, his voice had that familiar drunken haze to it that Shane’s always had when he’d had too much to drink.

Still sleep didn’t come easy that night with the knowledge that Negan was thinking such dark thoughts. He’d always known that Negan had a darker side, the man had given him peeks of it when they’d spoken about his past but he’d never imagined that it extended so far. It made him shiver to think of what Negan was capable of when he put his mind to it.

The more worrying thing was that the thought of Negan killing someone didn’t bother him as much as it damn well should have.

**********

The morning light woke him up, the sun glared at him through the open window, bird song grated on his tired ears. He practically threw himself out of bed to slam it shut, the lack of sleep making him grouchier than usual, or it was the reminder that Negan had clammed up on him last night. Asshole. After everything Carl had confessed to him the least he could do was talk this through with him. The clothes given to him by Negan itched at his skin annoying him almost as much as the man himself. He stripped himself of them, throwing them to the corner of his room before putting on his usual outfit. He’d deal with them later, make sure to wash them before he took them back to Negan.

The house was unusually busy that morning, his Dad was buzzing around the getting ready for work, his Mom was dragging the laundry from their holiday up and down the stairs. She gave him a quick peck on the forehead as she shot past him in a hurry to get back up the stairs.

“Mornin’ kiddo, sleep well?”

“Yep.” He lied. “You back at work already?”

Rick gave him a sad smile, tucking his shirt into his jeans, the Sheriff badge shining brightly on his chest. “Yeah, no rest for me. It’s only a short shift though, I’ll be back before dark.”

“Great.” Carl went to sit on the couch, shifting to find a comfortable position.

Sensing his discomfort his Dad asked “You alright? You need me to get you anything? Aspirin?”

“Nah, I’m good.”

“Alright, how did you get on with Shane anyways? You guys have fun?”

“Same old same old really.”

“That it? Same old same old?

“Yeah, not really much to say.”

Carl was more concerned when his Dad came to sit in front of him, he had that weird paternal look on his face like he was about to give him a lecture.

“Carl…” He began “Is everything alright with you and Shane? Things have been weird between you two lately, you’re usually so chatty after you guys hang out and now… now you do everything to avoid talking about it.”

Carl was at a loss for words, he didn’t realise his Dad would even pick up on that kinda thing, he was usually so oblivious to everything that didn’t concern him. Just exactly what had his Dad picked
“I...um... things are fine y’know?” He knew his answer didn’t help things when his Dad let out a sigh and hung his head.

“Carl, is it his drinking? He doin’ it too much around you?”

Carl’s body filled with relief, drinking he could work with, maybe even use it to his own advantage. He hung his own head, trying to play the hurt teenager. “Yeah.” He said quietly. “He keeps getting worse Dad, I thought New Year’s would be fine but...he just wouldn’t stop, he drank the whole time I was there.”

“Dammit Carl, I’m so sorry I left you with him, I’m sorry you had to deal with that.” Rick’s hands grabbed at his own, cradling them softly. “I’ll have a talk with him about it, maybe get him to get some help.”

Carl let a few fake tears come to his eyes and nodded. He felt guilty lying to his Dad like this but if it meant he could get a break from Shane it’d be worth it. “Dad?”

“Yeah?”

“Could... Can I have a... break from Shane? I don’t like being around him when he’s drunk.”

“Of course Carl, I’ll do what I can to make that happen. Hopefully I’ll sort him out soon, he can’t keep drinking like this.”

Carl didn’t want him to stop drinking maybe one day he’d drink himself to death. But he gave his Dad a watery smile and thanked him.

“It’s alright Carl. I’ll do anything for you, I hope you know that.”

In that moment Carl almost believed him, he gave him a quick smile. “I know. I’m uh gonna go grab some breakfast.”

“Alright, you seen my cell phone by the way? I can’t find it anywhere.”

He shook his head as he left the room. The kitchen cupboards were practically empty, another reminder of the lies he’s had to tell in the last 48 hours. His stomach grumbled at him, the take out from the previous night hadn’t sated him in the way he wanted it to. Just as he went into the lounge to ask his Dad to give him a ride to the grocery store the doorbell rang out, it was like a shot to the heart. He knew who it was. Who else would it be?

Rick looked up from the couch where he’d been digging for his phone. “Are you gonna get that Carl? I’m busy right now.”

“Right, yeah, sure.” His hand trembled as he reached out to twist the knob. His fears confirmed when Shane’s face appeared on the other side of the door. A disgusting smile appeared on his face when he saw who had opened the door.

“Hey Carl, long time no see. How ya been?” He asked, stepping inside the house, deliberately brushing his body past Carl’s. “Jesus, what the fuck happened to your face?”

Thankfully his Dad interrupted before he had to answer, although it was almost worse having to watch them embrace each other. Laughs escaping as they patted each other on the back, a sickening display of their brotherly affection for one another. Carl rolled his eyes, even after their conversation
his Dad just took Shane back in like always. He left them to it, walking back into the kitchen to clean up the dishes from the previous night. The muffled sounds of conversation from the other room filled his ears, he tried to figure out what they were saying but he couldn’t. Huffing out a sigh he focused on washing the dishes, getting lost in thoughts of food that they needed to buy,

“What are you doin’ out here gorgeous?”

The plate he was holding clattered back into the sink at the sound of Shane’s voice. He had hoped that the man would be too distracted with his Dad to bother him. Trying to act normal he picked the plate back up to wash it, trembling hands fumbeld with the wash cloth. He was hyper aware of the fact that Shane was creeping ever so closer to him.

“Need some help with that?” He asked slinking his arms around Carl’s waist, pressing his body against his back.

Carl dropped the dish again, mesmerised as it sank back into the soapy water.

“Not talkin’ to me again?” Shane’s hands slid possessively around his hips, pulling his them back deeper against Shane. He was sickened to feel the familiar hard length against him. “Remember what happened last time you ignored me Carl? If you don’t I’m more than happy to give you a reminder.” The last word was accompanied by a hard grind against his ass.

“You shouldn’t do this here. Dad’s in the other room.” He tried to reason with him.

He felt the sigh of hot breath against the back of his neck, Shane gave him a nuzzle that sent shivers down his spine. “He’s gone upstairs, there was a mark on his uniform, we’ve got some time.” Sharp teeth nipped at his earlobe, he squirmed away from it.

“Shane…” He tried protesting again, he couldn’t do much more, if he tried to hit out at him his parents would no doubt hear and come rushing in. He wasn’t ready for that, not yet. Panic soared through him when fingers dipped under his jeans reaching lower, he pushed away from it but that only forced him back into Shane.

“I just cannot get enough of you.” He murmured against his skin, hot breath sweated at Carl’s neck.

“Hey Shane, you want a ride to work? I’m gonna head out in a bi- what’s goin’ on here?”

At the sound of Rick’s voice Shane’s hands shot back up to his waist. Carl’s heart pounded as he waited for Shane to answer, his own mouth frozen in shock. The room filled with tension.

Then Shane laughed.

“Just teasing Carl about those bruises.”

Carl nearly gasped out in pain as Shane tickled his waist.

“Need to teach him how to fight don’t we?” Shane continued.

Carl had never felt so disappointed when all his Dad did was laugh and clap Shane on the back.

“Don’t be so mean, if it wasn't for your drunk ass then he wouldn't have needed to do any fighting.”

Shane finally stepped away, heading away from Carl. Carl heard the fridge door open, more laughter from the two adults as they exchanged more insults. Returning his attention to the dishes he worked on cleaning them. Aching for any distraction to their voices echoing in his ears.
“Goddamnit, we need to hit the grocery store.” His Dad’s voice slammed back into focus. His heart dropped into his stomach. Shit.

“Groceries? I thought Carl got some for you?”

“He got mugged on his way, didn’t get a chance to get any.” Rick answered for him.

“Riiight.”

Carl could practically feel his eyes burning into the back of his head. He grabbed the towel next to him and quickly dried his hands.

“I’m gonna go see if Mom wants to go shopping.” He left the room before anymore was said, running up the stairs. His Mom was unpacking the suitcases in their room.

“We need to go to the store. Pick up some things.”

“I suppose your Dad’s gonna stay here with Shane?” She huffed.

“I dunno, probably, I think they’re going to work together.”

“Great.” She left the suitcases where they were on the bed and walked over to him. “Let’s go now then. Get it over and done with.”

Carl followed her down the stairs, his Dad and Shane had moved into the lounge.

“We're gonna head out to the store. Won't be long.” His Mom said, throwing her coat on. “You guys stay and have fun.”

“Great, aren't ya gonna stay here too Carl ?” Shane questioned him, a pointed look on his face. He had that anger shimmering in his eyes that sent shivers up his spine.

“No I'm good, Mom needs the help.” That courage from the other night plucked up, Carl stared the man down, almost daring him to say something else.

“Let’s get going Carl or I’m gonna starve like this.” His Mom interrupted the tension. He walked with her to the door not bothering to look back. He didn’t care if he paid for it later, right now he was safe and he took pride in the strength he had to say no to Shane.

***********

His Mom filled the ride to the store with ramblings about having to do the shop on their own, she had to work later and hated having to do anything beforehand. Carl didn’t mind so much, the more she spoke the less he had to. The encounter with Shane had freaked him out, the man had never been so brazen before. His flesh still crawled where he’d placed his hands on him. He wondered whether his Dad would actually have a talk with him about his excessive drinking, the realist in him figured that he wouldn’t.

He followed his Mom into the store but quickly left her to her own devices, she was a pain when she was in this mood. Nothing he said or did mattered, all that counted for her was getting in and out of the store as quickly as possible which involved getting Carl out of the way as quickly as possible. So Carl headed off at his own pace, heading over to the gaming section of the store. He wasn’t a huge gamer, the memories of playing with Shane too prominent in his mind, especially after their last gaming encounter. Still it gave him something to do whilst his Mom powered around the store. He hated Shane for forcing him out of his own home, especially when he looked like this, he could feel
other customers stare at his bruised face. Hiding away in amongst the games he managed to find some peace and quiet or so he thought.

“Well, if it isn’t lil Carl Grimes.” His heart froze at the voice. Fucking Simon. He hadn’t spoken to him in months, not since Negan had scared him off.

Heaving a sigh he turned to face him, his day clearly wasn’t going to get any better. “What do you want Simon?”

“Jesus fuck what happened to your face?”

“None of your damn business.”

“Fucking rude Carl, here I am being all concerned about you.”

“What do you want? Surely you’ve got better things to do?” He snarked at him. He really wasn’t in the mood for this shit.

Simon just laughed at him. “True, then again you are so much fun to play with. It’s not like I get to do it much with Coach Negan constantly looking over my shoulder.”

“Sorry he took away your favorite toy.” He spoke sarcastically.

“It’s alright, I’m sure I’ll get my own back some day, y’know when you two slip up and someone catches you at it.”

Carl’s heart pounded at that. “What are you talking about?” He asked casually, trying to play it cool.

“Oh c’mon Carl, the whole damn team knows you two are fuckin’ around. Why else would he throw us off the team for beating you around a little?”

“Because you’re asses?” Carl offered.

Simon rolled his eyes at him.”No one gives a shit about that, any coach in their right mind wouldn’t give a shit about what we do as long as we win games.”

“Well you don’t seem capable of doing that.”

Simon’s jaw clenched, took a few steps closer. Carl stood his ground, he knew Simon was too much of a coward to do anything in a packed store. “One of these days Grimes, Coach is gonna get bored of you, then your ass will be free game and, personally, I can’t wait till that happens.” Carl skin crawled as Simon dragged his gaze up and down his body. “Maybe then I’ll get to find out what got the Coach so hot.”

“You’ll be waiting a damn long time. There’s nothing going on between the Coach and I, he’s just a decent guy.”

“I’m sure he’ll make a damn move soon, then he’ll be locked away, and I can finally get back to doin’ what I like.”

Carl pushed him away, putting some distance between them so he could collect himself. He didn’t want him to see how much his words had affected him. People finding out about him and Negan was one of his biggest fears, he hadn’t realised how many people actually paid attention to them. He thought they’d hidden under the radar.

“He’s not going anywhere because nothing will ever happen. He’s a great coach, you should feel
honored to have him coaching you. If he treats you like shit then it’s because you damn well deserve it.”

“You are so-” Carl’s phone rang out, breaking him from their talk. It was his Mom, she must have finished up with the shopping. “Booty call from the Coach?”

“Shut the fuck up.” Carl bashed past him, walking away quickly before he answered the phone. His Mom was paying, she’d been quicker than he thought. He helped her pack the groceries into the car. They didn’t talk much, both of them caught up in their own thoughts. His conversation with Simon had shaken him more than he’d thought. His mind racing with the possibilities of what would happen if he and Negan were caught. He’d been so selfish letting it get this far, kissing him had been a dumb idea. Friendship was one thing, but a relationship took more, there was more of a risk of being caught. More horrific associations with romantic entanglements with students. He let his head rest against the window, watching the scenery pass, wishing he’d had more strength to stay away from him.

*********

Rick waited until Carl and Lori had left the house before confronting Shane. He wasn’t wrong, there was something up with the two of them. Things had been weird for months, a strange tension filled the room whenever they were around each other. Sure Carl had been acting weird for weeks but he would’ve thought that his and Shane’s relationship would be fine, they’d always been so close. At least he’d gotten somewhere with Carl today, he finally admitted why he’d been so strange with Shane. Even Rick had noticed that Shane’s drinking had been getting worse, the comments he’d made to Negan at Thanksgiving had been bad enough, but now he was thinking that something had happened whilst he’d been away.

He did wonder if they’d fought, it seemed too much of a coincidence that Carl had come home with bruises only for Shane to turn up with a strange limp and Rick swore he could see the hint of a bruises on Shane’s collarbone where his shirt popped up.

“We gonna head to work?” Shane spoke, meeting him by the door.

“Just a sec, I wanna ask you somethin’”

“You know you can ask me anything.”

“Did… did something happen with you and Carl this weekend?”

“Whaddy’a mean Rick?”

Rick moved away from him, not quite sure how to continue. “I mean, did you guys have a fight or somethin’?”

“No, of course not, it’s me and Carl, we just hung out like usual. Did Carl say somethin’ to you?”

“No, no. Just… somethin’ felt off with you two earlier.”

“Things seemed normal to me. Maybe you’re too addled from your vacation.” Shane joked.

Maybe he was, maybe he was making a big deal out of nothing. Still, as much as he tried to rationalise it, his instincts were screaming at him that something was off. “Maybe, anyways we still need to talk about your drinkin’ Shane, you’ve gotta cool off man.”

“What are you talkin’ about? I don’t drink that much.”
“My son got the shit beaten out of him because you were too damn drunk to drive him home. That’s not okay Shane.”

Shane sighed, sitting down on his usual chair, head in hands. Rick felt bad for him, he knew Shane had it rough sometimes, knew he struggled with the fact that Rick had a wife and kid whilst he was still living the bachelor life. Maybe it got to him more than Rick realised. “Look Shane, it’s alright, we can figure it out I just need to know that you’re gonna start being more responsible. This shit can’t happen at work.”

“I know, I know. I don’t know, it’s just easier to drink sometimes y’know.”

“Yeah.” Rick sat on the armrest, placing a comforting hand on Shane’s shoulder. They’d been through so much together, they’d get through this as well. “It’ll be alright, I can help you through it. Just promise me you’ll let me help you.”

“I promise. I’ll stop.”

“Good. Good. We’ll go to yours after work, get rid of all that shit. Maybe you could move in for a bit, keep you away from temptation.” He knew what he was saying was against what he’d told Carl but if the problem was Shane’s drinking then he’d be alright here. It might give them a chance to sort out their relationship.

“Alright, that’d be great, maybe I need some time with other people. I go crazy when I’m on my own.”

“I know, it’ll be fine, you can stay as long as you need.”

“Thanks Rick.”

“Anytime buddy.” He clapped his hand on his back. Just as he was about to speak again the doorbell rang. “Wonder who that is.” He rose to answer the door.

Needless to say he was surprised by the figure on the other side. “Negan, hey, it’s good to see you.”

“Hey Rick, mind if I come in?”
Chapter Notes

Sooo here we go! The chapter we've been waiting for :) Hope it's as good as we've all been imagining!

Thanks for all the lovely comments and kudos on the last chapter, sorry about that cliffhanger they're oddly fun!

*So revenge is obviously a deeply messed-up expression of vindictiveness. It is hard to even call it evil. It is just plain insanity. A result of deeply messed-up thinking.*

—Venkatesh G. Rao

Negan can’t quite remember how he got home, he’s surprised he even made it back in one piece. He’d blown through the roads full throttle, knowing if he slowed down for a single second he wouldn’t be able to stop himself from turning the car around and heading back to Carl. It took all his strength to drive away from him, every single particle in him protested, his soul screamed in pain as he drove. He’d hardly been able to watch the small figure limp down the street, the sight breaking his heart. He nearly jumped out of the car, wanting nothing more than to grab him and carry him back to his house where he could keep him safe.

Fucking selfish prick.

He had to respect what Carl wanted but he’d be damned before he was alright with his decision. There wasn’t much more that Negan hated than feeling helpless and right now he was fuckin’ drowning in it. The urge to park up near Carl’s house and keep an eye on him was nearly overwhelming. As he drove his mind filled with images of Carl’s bruised body, his hands tightened on the wheel as he thought about what Carl could be walking into right this second.

Don’t go back. Don’t go back. Don’t go back.

He had to trust Carl, had to show Carl that he could trust him. If he said that he’d call if he needed help then Negan had to trust in that no matter how much it killed him. He tried to ignore the knots in his stomach, the instinct to go back, he’d gritted his teeth and kept on driving. The car skidded as he arrived back at his cabin, he slammed it into park, leaning his head on the steering wheel as he fought with himself. His better side won, he wouldn’t get anywhere by forcing his presence on Carl, he’d certainly ruin everything if he forced him to tell his parents before he was ready. The snow crunched under his feet, the harsh wind struck at his face, even the short journey from the car into the house had him shaking. He slammed the front door shut behind himself, pacing back and forth in the living room, trying not to think about the kid that had occupied the room less than two hours ago.

Negan could still feel him in the house, everywhere he went he was faced with ghosts of Carl, the
mussed up pillows in his favorite spot on the couch, the plates from the breakfast they’d hurriedly eaten. He’d hardly lived in the cabin yet he found memories of Carl everywhere, each sight adding to the yearning in his heart. This had to stop. He needed to stop thinking about him, just for awhile. He so desperately needed a break from the conflicting emotions that swirled within him.

Running up to his bedroom Negan’s eyes adamantly avoided the bed, he didn’t need that reminder that Carl had lain there, warm and safe. He stripped himself of the clothes that he’d been wearing for far too long, tossing them into the ever-growing pile in the corner of his room. He really needed to do some fuckin’ laundry. Throwing on his jogging bottoms, he exited the room and ran out to his own gym. He practically froze without a shirt but he knew that would soon change. The anger inside was burning for an outlet and it was about time he gave it one.

With the bandages wrapped tight around his hands, he unloaded on the hard bag, picturing Shane’s smug fucking face in place of the beige material. His mind filled in delightful details of what it would be like to actually hit the man, how his bones would feel breaking under his fists, how much he would cry and beg for mercy that would never come. He’d want him to feel every fucking second of it, make him feel some of the damn pain that he’d inflicted on Carl. Negan wanted to look him in the eye, see the pain explode in them as he broke him apart. He lashed out harder, the ache in his fists egging him onwards, the pain was almost addictive, sending sparks of pleasure to his brain. He was stupid to believe that this would ease his anger, it just fueled him on, reminded him that he would never be satisfied until he actually got his hands on Shane.

He lost track of time, he just kept hitting harder and harder, fists thudding against the bag ignoring the pain that shot through his body with each punch. It wasn’t until he saw red marks appear on the bag that he realised he’d bled through the wrappings.

Fucking Shit.

He stripped them off his hands, he’d hardly noticed the pain of peeling dried blood off raw skin. The top layer of skin had been grazed off his knuckles, he clenched his hands experimentally wincing as the new skin stretched, that was gonna be fun to heal. Tossing the bloody wrappings to the floor, he left the gym, braving the bracing cold to get back to the house. As short as the journey was the icy wind had him shaking inside the kitchen.

Fuckin’ bullshit, he thought as he slammed the freezer door shut, no fucking ice, in a place full of goddamn snow he had no fucking ice. He kicked out at the fridge, grunting at the pain that shot through him when his foot made contact with the unyielding object. His blood boiled under his skin, he turned to brace himself against one of the counters, breathing hard as he tried to calm himself. It wasn’t fucking working. His skin itched with the animalistic urge to hunt down Shane, tear him fucking limb from limb. He eyed the car keys that he tossed onto the table, it’d be so fucking easy.

He had to stop thinking like this. It was a damn dangerous line to tread. He couldn’t do this again, couldn’t fuck his life up, more importantly he couldn’t fuck it up for Carl. What use to him would he be if he was rotting in jail?

Making up his mind he grabbed the unopened bottle of whiskey, stupid logic but if he got completely fucked then he couldn’t do anything stupid, not in this weather. The couch creaked under his weight when he threw himself onto it, he stared blankly at the corner that Carl had occupied. His favorite corner it seemed, in the few hours that he’d spent there Carl had made that corner his own, the thought of anyone else occupying it was almost as painful to Negan as no one occupying it.

He shook himself of those thoughts, now wasn’t the time to get melancholy. Taking a long chug of the bottle Negan basked in the slow burn of the whiskey trickling down his throat. The liquid eased his muscles, made him sink back further into the soft cushions. It may have eased the tension but it
hadn’t helped with the fire that licked at him, one of these days he was gonna burn to dust under the pressure. He took another swig, thinking back to all the damn times he’d let it get the better of him. He’d fuckin’ hospitalised a guy just for looking at Lucille in a bar, he’d been so fucking drunk and stressed from the week it seemed damn logical. His inability to control himself like that had been a big reason behind his split from Lucille, she’d admitted that sometimes he scared her. He’d never want to do the same to Carl, he’d tried so damn hard to shield him from that side of him. Ever since that first meeting he'd been so careful to conceal it from Carl, kept it tucked away deep inside of himself only letting him peek at it. He never wanted him to be afraid of him, especially now.

His hand reached out to grab his phone, he tossed it around in his fingers, trying to decide how pathetic it would be to call him. He wanted to check on him, but he didn’t want Carl to feel smothered. Carl had said he’d be fine and he’d ring him if he needed help, he had to respect that. He had to trust him like Carl had done with him. As much as he reminded himself of that it wasn’t any easier to accept it. He took another swig, and another, and another. Tossing the phone away from him to remove the temptation he settled back and resigned himself to an evening of drinking and seething.

**********

A shrill ringing woke him from his drunken slumber, his hand fumbled on the couch trying to find the damn noise. The screen light was almost painful to his eyes, he squinted hard trying to decipher the words on the small screen. Carl. He quickly sat up, hands fumbling with the phone, trying to hit the accept button as quickly as he could.

He spoke as soon as he got the phone to his ear. “Carl. Is everything alright? Are you okay? Is he with you? Did the fucker touch you? I swear to fucking god I will kill him if he's near you. I'll wring his fuckin—”

“Negan!” Carl interjected, breaking up his ramblings. “I'm fine, honestly. I just—I needed to hear your voice.”

Negan's heart warmed at his words, the anger edging away each moment. Relaxing into the conversation he spoke again. “Huh, never thought there’d be anyone that liked hearing my voice more than me.”

“I don't think it's possible for anyone to like your voice more than you.”

“You might be right there.”

“Did I interrupt anything?”

Interrupt? Only the pathetic slumber of a drunken ass. “No no, I'm just… doin’ the usual.”

“Drinking or hitting on your bat?”

“You know me too well.” God he really was open book with Carl.

“Maybe.” That beautiful laugh, it never failed to bring a smile to his face.

“What are you up to?”

“Trying to sleep, not having much luck.”

“Ah, want me to read you a bedtime story?”
“Nah I think I'm good.”

“Shame I know a few good ones.”

“I'm sure you do.”

There was a pause.

“I miss you.”

His heart ached at the words, he damn well fucking missed him too. As pathetic as it was, they’d only been apart a few hours. “I miss you too.”

“At least we’re back at school next week, back to normal.”

“Yeah…” He hated the thought of being back at that fucking school. Hated the sense of propriety that he'd have to follow around other people. Pretending that Carl was nothing more than another student to him.

“Negan?”

“Yeah?”

“Why were you drinking?”

“I…” He let out a heavy sigh, how exactly could he tell Carl why? He didn't want to lie to him but his earlier fears plagued him. Before he could speak again Carl's quiet voice filled his ear.

“I’m sorry.”

Sorry? Why did he have to be sorry for? Another surge of hatred for Shane enveloped him, he was the damn reason that Carl blamed himself for everything, piled so much on his own shoulders. “It’s not your fault Carl, I’m not drinking because of you so don’t think that for a second.”

“So why are you drinking then? Cos you don’t sound like you’ve had one glass for fun.”

Yet another heavy sigh escaped him. He knew he would hate himself for it but he had to tell the truth. Carl had been so honest with him, he deserved the same.

“I’m drinkin’ because… because I can’t get the thought of Shane touching you out of my head, or the thought of me beating the shit out of him. I...God Carl, I had to drink to stop myself doing somethin’ really fucking stupid. I want to kill him for what he’s done to you and I was scared that I would actually do something. That’s why I was drinking Carl, not because of you but because of myself.”

The lack of response from Carl was enough of a reply. He'd freaked him out. Great. Well fucking done Negan.

“Negan…”

“It’s fine Carl, don’t worry about it.” Get him off the phone now so he didn't have to make up some bullshit about not being freaked out.

“But-”

“You should go to bed Carl.” Negan interrupted. “It’s late, and you need to get your rest.”
“Okay, goodnight.”

“Night.” Negan threw the phone away from himself, vaguely aware of it clattering to the floor. Why did he have to make such a goddamn mess of things?

************

The next time he woke he had a banging headache and a throat drier than the fucking Sahara. Damn, he was too fuckin’ old for this shit. He stumbled blindly into the kitchen, not quite ready for the bracing sunlight just yet. Swallowing down a couple of aspirin was harder than he thought it would be. Last time he was ever drinking again.

Rolling his eyes at his own lie, he walked back into the lounge, adamantly ignoring what whiskey was left from last night. No point in wasting another day drowning his sorrows, or anger in this particular instance.

The phone on the floor drew his attention, the cracked screen glaring up at him a reminder of his failure to control himself. He wondered if Carl had tried to get in touch with him since they’d hung up, couldn’t stop himself hoping that he had.

No notifications.

The disappointment hit him harder than he thought it would, doubt niggling at him. Maybe he’d gone too far telling him everything, Christ, he’d been through enough without having to think about his anger-driven Coach. Negan just hoped that he hadn’t scared him off too much, he wanted Carl to call him if he needed him. He shoved the phone into one of the drawers, he’d still be able to hear it if Carl did ring but it would hopefully stop the temptation to phone him. At least today anyway, he’d give Carl his space.

Sitting back on the couch he clicked the TV on, flicking through channel after channel trying to find something that would quell the thoughts in his mind. He tried to focus on the images on the screen, some fucking shitty action movie played out. His eyes drifted from the screen over to the bat that hung next to it.

His beautiful baby.

He’d nicknamed it once after his ex-wife, Lucille, she’d nearly kicked his ass for it. God it had got him through a lot. He walked up to it, brushing a finger along the cool, smooth wood. Curling his hand around the handle, he plucked it from the fixture, giving it a few swings. In truth he hadn’t picked it up in awhile, no need for his baby really, up until recently he’d been able to drink away his stress. Not now though. Now he needed something more. His gaze fixed on the wood he thought about it thudding into Shane’s head, adding to the blood that had already stained it. The thoughts almost making him lightheaded the more he imagined bringing it down on that smug fuckin’ grin.

His hand curled tighter.

The fucker deserved it. Deserved worse. Maybe it was time for karma to pay him a fuckin’ visit.

************

He must have gotten in his car and got out at least a dozen times. Each time he returned to his front door he changed his mind and returned to the car. Rejoining the main road wasn’t a problem, the snow had melted somewhat overnight, making the drive easier. Almost like fate was urging him on with his plan.

Negan knew he had to be smart about it, he couldn’t just show up at the bastard’s house and bash his
head in. Although he was prepared to go to jail if it came to it he wasn’t gonna make it easy for them to figure it out. He had a vague plan, Carl had mentioned to him that Shane was good with construction so he’d go to Rick, ask for his help, he’d inevitably pass him along to Shane. Then he’d have all the info he needed without having to ask Carl. The less he knew about it the better. The only risk would be if Carl was at home when he arrived there, as much as Negan wanted to see him it would make it so much harder.

Before long he found himself outside of the Grimes House, staring at the white door, waiting for the doorbell to be answered.

“Negan, hey, it's good to see you.”

“Hey Rick, mind if I come in?”

“Of course, c’mon in.” Rick gestured for him to enter.

He nodded gratefully, walking into the house his mind flickered back to the first time he’d walked into it. Things were so different now, instead of the joy he’d felt at the prospect of spending the evening with Carl he was filled with anger. The anger only intensified when his eyes caught sight of the man sat in the lounge. Their eyes locked on each other, he had to remind himself that the town Sheriff was right over his shoulder to stop him throwing his weight at him. His hand curled into a fist, nails dug into his flesh as he tried to resist the urge to smash it into his face in the way he’d been so longing to do so.

“Negan what a nice damn surprise.” The fucker spoke, each word grated on him like nails on a chalkboard. He forced a charming smile on his face.

“Shane, good to see you again.”

“I’d offer you a beer but Shane just took the last one.” Rick clapped a hand on his shoulder. “Can I grab you some water or somethin’?”

“No no I'm good, thanks.”

“So what can I help you with Negan?” Rick asked.

“Well I-uh need some help with my cabin, I wanna build an extension but I have no idea what to look for.”

The laugh that erupted out of Shane made him want to throttle him.

“Nah, Rick doesn't know jack about construction. Never took to it.”

“Yeah, I gotta admit Shane's your man for that sorta thing, he practically built his own house out here.”

“Wasn't just me, lil’ Carl helped.”

Negan clenched his jaw, his blood boiled under his skin at Carl's name falling from his lips, he was so sure it was about to burn through his flesh.

“God yeah, he enjoyed himself that week.” Rick’s voice was filled with nostalgia as he spoke.

“What can I say? Carl always has a good damn time when he’s with me.”

That nearly did it, his body shifted forwards urging him to just fucking take the man out. Now wasn't
the time. Inhaling deep he refocused himself, not now.

“I know a place that has decent materials, I just need some help picking out the best type and gettin’ it back to my cabin.”

“Well I’d be happy t-” Rick started.

“I’ll do it.” Shane interjected. Good boy thought Negan.

“Great, when are you free?”

“Tonight.”

“Tonight?” He hadn’t planned on it being so quick, thought he’d might get a couple more days to plan.

“Yes, after my shift. Get’s it all done for ya.”

Negan couldn’t help but feel slightly suspicious, the man had agreed far too quickly for his liking. There had to be more there, he knew Shane hated him too much to want to be helpful. The conversation he’d had with Carl filtered into his mind, Shane had threatened to have him arrested. Maybe he was thinkin’ of doing the same to him as he wanted to do to Shane. Good. He’d love a fuckin’ fight.

“Sounds good with me. Where shall I pick you up?”

Shane gave him his address and when he’d be back from work, not long but it’d give him some time to figure things out.

“Alright, so I’ll see ya then. Talk to ya later Rick.”

He left the house feeling lighter than air, the anger now happily bubbling away instead of tearing up a storm in him.

Soon he’d get his justice.

Soon he’d get his blood.

**********

As it turned out Shane didn’t live that far from the street that he picked Carl up from. The image of Carl curled up on the sidewalk haunted him as he drove past that spot. It fueled his drive to make this night one to remember, give Carl the closure that he needed. Even if it meant losing him forever at least he would be safe. He’d never have to worry about someone crawling into his bed at night to hurt him.

Shane was leaving the house as he pulled up, clearly he was just as eager to see him as he was. He unlocked the door, allowing him to slide into the car. Negan was immediately taken aback by the strong smell of whiskey that filled the small space. Was that what he smelled like to other people when he’d been drinking? The smell strengthened his reserve to give up drinking as much as he could, especially when he was around Carl.

They gave each other a quick greeting before they set off. Not many people knew but part of the reason he’d moved to this particular spot was because of the factory on the outskirts of town. His uncle had left it to him when he passed away a few months ago, it was a shithole, been abandoned
for years. Negan had come down to try and sell the land once or twice before the move but now he
had a better use for it. Carl was the only one he’d ever told about it in town, it had come up in one of
their many conversations about his life. Funnily enough Carl told him that he’d used to sneak into the
place with his friend, Rod, or Ron, some shitty ass name like that.

“How was work?” He asked Shane, he was always polite.

“Yeah, s’Alright. Puttin’ the bad guys away.”

“Can’t imagine there are many around here.”

“You’d be surprised.” Somehow Negan didn’t think he would be. Contrary to what he said he had a
feeling the worst sort of people lived in towns like this, hiding away under the guise of normality.

He could see Shane looking him over out of the corner of his eye. Not for the first time he wondered
what was going on in that head. He wondered how drunk he was.

“Y’know Negan I think we got off on the wrong foot.”

This guy really was fucking crazy. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, I uh...was a bit of an ass to you when we met. M’sorry for that, the drink gets too much for
me at times.”

Was this what Carl was talking about? Shane’s way of getting to people? Charm them so much that
they glazed over all his negatives. Unfortunately for Shane, Negan was far too good at doing that
himself that it didn’t work on him. “That’s alright, happens to the best of us. What’s passed is past
with me.”

“Good, m’glad.” There was a pause before he continued. “Y’know Carl always talks about you.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, always goin’ on about how good you are to him. It’s easy to see how close you two are.
What’s up with that?”

“There’s nothin’ up with that. Carl’s a great runner, I’ve been helpin’ him with it. That’s all.”

“Oh yeah? Out of the kindness of your heart or are you gettin’ anything else out of it?”

“Like what?” Negan spoke through gritted teeth. The fucker really knew how to get under your skin.
Having the damn balls to insinuate something was going on with him and Carl when he was doin’
much worse to him.

I’m a lil protective over him, if anyone even dreamed of touchin’ him I’d fuckin’ kill them.”

Negan didn’t fail to notice how much emphasis he placed on ‘my’. Carl wasn’t a damn possession to
be shifted around. He also hadn’t failed to notice the threat that was littered in there. He was pleased
to notice that they weren’t far from the factory now. The tall, grey brickwork appeared in the
distance. Nearly showtime.

“Look Shane, you don’t have to worry ‘bout that I’d never go near him. He’s a student.” Complete
fuckin’ lies but he’d never go near him if Carl didn’t want him to.

“Good to know.”
The conversation turned to easier topics, Negan wanted him as relaxed as possible, no point in making him suspicious beforehand. It was only when they pulled up to the gates of the broken building that Shane started asking questions.

"What happened to your knuckles?" Shane asked, his eyes fixed on them.

"That? Just did too much boxing, didn't wrap my hands properly enough."

"You a fighter then?"

"Only when I have to be."

“Huh, I thought we were going to a workshop? What are we doin’ at this old place?” Confusion littered the man's face as Negan pulled up in front of the old gates.

“We are, I got a message sayin’ someone had broken in recently. Just wanted to check up on the place.” Negan explained, getting out of the car to unlock the gates. He was almost relieved when Shane stayed in his seat. He just had to get him off the road and into the factory, then he could finally let some of this anger out. Not without his Baby of course, he’d left the bat tucked up under a blanket in the backseat. All ready for him.

“You own the place then?” Shane asked as they drove through the rickety gates.

“Yeah, my uncle left it to me.”

“This place caused us alotta hassle over the years, kids always breakin’ in, dealin’ drugs. Never thought I’d actually meet the person who owned the place.”

“Yeah, sorry ‘bout that. My uncle was never one for takin’ care of things.”

The car slowed to a stop, etching a path through the snow that still coated the ground. The factory was it’s usual eerie self. Negan had only been up here a few times, As creepy as it fuckin’ was he had a strange affection for the place, he felt oddly at home within the decaying walls. Now it would become the place where he took out a monster.

It felt right.

“Good thing you got me with ya if we’re checkin’ out a break in.” Shane remarked. “You coulda just called the cops.”

“Nah.” Negan said grabbing his bat out of the car, he slammed the door shut, giving Shane a smirk. “I like dealin’ with this shit myself.”

Shane just followed him, nothing but the groaning of aching metal filled the air. The casual conversation from before nothing but a faint memory for the two of them.

“So Shane, you and Carl, what's the deal with you two?”

“Why’d’ya ask?”

“No reason.” Negan swung the bag around in his hand as they walked. The light weight a comfort, something grounding him down. His body was alight with adrenaline, the anger coursing through his body. He could practically taste the blood in the air. “Just wondering. He doesn't talk about you much is all.”

“He and I have a special relationship, he probably doesn’t like talkin’ about it with strangers.”
“Hmmm, what kinda ‘special relationship’?” Negan pushed, he wanted to hear what the fucker had to say.

Shane’s chuckle nearly had him swinging around to shove his bat into his face. Fucking smug ass. “Y’know he’s got a thing for me, hot for daddy’s best friend and all that. I’ve tried puttin’ him off but he just can’t take no for an answer.”

Fucking shitting fuckin’ bastard. Of all the answers he thought he’d get Negan had never considered that the ass would come out with that bullshit. As if Carl would ever go near a guy like him. “Huh, so you tappin’ that then?”

“Once or twice. Couldn’t help myself y’know, big ego boost havin’ a hot young thing like Carl all over you.”

Negan gave a low chuckle at that, he quickened his pace so he could stop in front of the man, turning to face him. “I bet you fuckin’ couldn’t. See now I’ve heard a different fuckin’ story, one where you’ve ‘helped yourself’ more that a coupla fuckin’ times.”

Shane stared him down, Negan could see his jaw twitch at his words. Clearly he wasn’t expecting that. “Now where’d you hear that?”

Negan cocked his head. “Where’d ya think?”

“Carl?” Shane scoffed at him. “Never thought he’d brag about that typa shit. You must be a bad influence on him.”

“Oh I think there’s only one bad thing in his life and it’s not fuckin’ me.” Negan took a step closer. “What’s tha’ supposed to mean?”

He’d gotten under his skin, Negan could practically see his defences going up. “It means I know exactly what goes on with you and Carl.”

“Look man whatever he's told you is bullshit. He lies to get whatever he fuckin’ wants, he's always been like that.” Shane tried to sidestep him but Negan merely lifted the bat to halt anymore movement.

“Now that is fuckin’ bullshit.” Negan lashed out, landing a solid punch across his jaw that sent the fucker tumbling to the ground.

“You fuckin’...” Shane mumbled scrambling to his feet to punch out at Negan who dodged it, using the momentum to grab his arm and push him into the wall near them. He pinned Shane using his bat against his neck, cutting off his air. Each sputtering gasp from the man inciting Negan onwards. He pushed harder, the flush spreading over Shane’s face as he fought to breath.

“You...” He pressed the wood harder against his throat, the red on his face darkened, such a perfect fuckin’ picture. “...are a sick piece of fucking shit.” He let Shane’s body fall to the floor after delivering a hard kick to his balls, watched as he curled up on himself, groaning out in pain. One of the best views he’d ever seen. Negan circled around him, landing a swift kick to the man’s ribs, right where Carl had been hurt. “You must’ve known that this would come back around to you. That you wouldn’t be able to keep this shit a secret.”

“I don’t know what you're fuckin’ talking about.” Shane groaned out, getting to his feet once more.

“Oh I think you do.” Negan smashed his bat against his face, blood splattered the wall he fell against.
“I think you know exactly what I’m fuckin’ talking about.” Grabbing the back of Shane's collar Negan slammed him back down to the floor, stomping down on his ribs, thrilled by the scream the tore out of Shane's throat. “But just in case you needed some clarifi-fucking-cation I'm talkin’ about the fact that you’re a sick fuck who gets off on raping people.” He delivered the last words up close to him, practically spitting on his face as he ground out his words.

“I'm not...I don't…”

“Don't what?” Negan taunted, shoving Shane's face to the ground. “Don't get a hard on thinkin’ about causing pain? Don't beat the shit out of Carl every goddamn chance you get?”

He put some distance between the two of them, breathing in the crisp winter air. He knew he had to cool it down or this would be over far too quickly. Shane was still writhing around in the ground trying to get back to his feet. That was gonna fuckin’ happen anytime soon, he had him right where he wanted him. On the ground, in pain, like a pathetic fucking snake.

“Carl told me everything you've done. I've seen the fucking bruises, the bite makes, all the goddamn pain you've caused him.” Negan stalked back over to him, letting his anger burst out again with a hard hit of the bat on Shane's shoulder. “You can fuckin’ stay down there. On your knees. It's where you belong.”

“He wanted every single bit of it.” Shane sputtered out. “He's fuckin’ lying.”

Another punch, it jerked Shane back to the floor. Negan had to laugh at that, almost maniacal. “Carl lied? Nah, I don’t think so.” He brought the bat across Shane’s face, delighting as another tooth shot out of the man’s mouth. His body tingled, heart raced in pleasure and anger. “You wanna know what I fuckin’ think? I think you’re a sick. Fucking. Fuck.” Each word was accompanied by a hard kick to Shane’s stomach, he’ll break his damn ribs just like the fucker hurt Carl’s.

“No…” Shane cried out.

“No? I’d beg to fuckin’ differ. The fucking bite marks I saw on Carl beg to fucking DIFFER.” He hit down with the bat again, feeling bone break under the pressure. “You raped him. You spent years torturing him, destroying him, without a goddamn care and I’ll be damn if I let that happen again.”

“You think you’d get away with it?” Shane managed to say. “You- you think you can kill a cop and get away with it? Rick’ll come after you, I’m his best friend, he’ll get you for this.”

Negan crouched down next to him, grabbing his chin forcing him to look him in the eye. “You think I give a shit about that? He can do what he fucking likes I don’t care. With you gone Carl will be safe, that is all I care about.”

Just as he was about to bring the bat down for one last deadly blow a loud bang pierced the silence of the night.
Chapter Notes

Soooo I know I said I wasn't going to take as long but this chapter kicked my ass! Seriously wrote a whole chapter then once again decided it was awful so I wrote a new one. I might actually do an side story on here for all the original chapters that I wrote so you can see how awful they were haha. Big big big shoutout to Thewalkingdead178 on tumblr for helping me with this chapter <3 Hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"No love is greater than that of a father for His son."

- Dan Brown

January 2018

The file landed hard on the desk, merging with the existing pile of unwritten paperwork that was currently collecting dust on the hard surface. Rick tried to rub the tired out of his face, gulping down another mouthful of the now cold coffee, his mouth turned up at the bitter taste. They really needed to invest in better machine. Almost as much as he needed to finish up these damn files, he'd naively thought being Sheriff would mean less paperwork, clearly he was wrong. He glanced over at the clock when had it gotten so damn late? He'd hoped to have been back at home by now, spend a bit more time with Carl before he had to go back to school. The last day had gone so well, it was almost like having the old Carl back, he'd missed hanging out with him. It seemed like every single time he managed to get any time alone with him Carl would make an excuse to leave. Trying to get any time with the three of them as a family was damn well impossible. Especially if he had to keep working late like this. He spotted Shane at his desk through the small office window. He smirked, at least he wasn't the only one suffering, Shane had an even bigger pile on his desk and judging by the familiar tick in his jaw the man was about ten minutes away from sweeping them onto the floor.

Making a decision he switched off the small desk light and stood, it was time for him to go home. The paperwork could wait, time with his boy couldn't. He grabbed his coat and walked out of the office, clapping Shane on the back as he said goodbye, that earned him a ball of paper on the back of his head. Still he couldn't feel bad he was headin' home, Lori was out working that evening so it'd just be him and Carl and of course Shane had his own evening plans with Negan to look forward to. Christ, Negan must be just as crazy as Shane to go out looking for wood in this weather. He shook his head at the thought before turning his attention to the snow-coated road ahead of him.

Getting home was more treacherous than getting out to work, at least there was daylight to show the road now all he had was the dim silver moonlight and his car lights that seemed to show jackshit. It took twice as long to reach the familiar white house, only the lights in the living room illuminating
the building. At least Carl wasn’t sat up in his room, it was much easier to get him to stay than it was to convince him to leave the sanctuary of his bedroom. His heart warmed when he saw him curled up on the couch reading a book, he was so proud of him, he’d really turned a corner with his grades recently.

“Hey Dad.” Carl greeted, looking up from his book. The purpling on his face was finally going down, ebbing off to a lighter red. It made his blood boil to think that Carl had been attacked in his own damn town and there was nothing he could do about it.

“Hey, your face’s looking better.”

Carl gave him a quick smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes, it sent a dull ache through him, he missed that smile. Ever since he was a baby Carl had a smile that would warm the coldest of hearts, or so Rick thought, even on his worst days that smile made him feel like everything would be alright in the world. He couldn’t even remember when he’d last seen it, then again there hadn’t been much of a reason to smile recently. He always wondered how much of his issues with Lori affected Carl, they’d always tried to keep him out of it but everyone always says kids pick up on these things. Carl running out on him before he’d gone away with her had been a wake up call for him, he’d promised himself to try and be there for him more. Even if it meant taking a hit at work for reducing his workload, hell, even if it meant not spending as much time trying to fix his damn marriage. He’d get that smile back on his face one day.

“What d’ya fancy for dinner? I’d say we could get take out but I don’t think anyone’s deliverin’ in this weather.”

“It’s fine, Mom made a pasta before she went to work, I’ll heat it up for us.”

Rick followed him out to the kitchen, tossing his jacket off on the staircase as he went. “I’ll help.”

“Dad, honestly it’s fine it’s just pasta.”

“I know, I’ll cut up the bread whilst you wait.” He caught him rolling his eyes, at least he was still a typical teenager in that respect. They worked around each other getting the food ready, Rick’s stomach growled almost continuously despite the chunks of bread he’d snuck into his mouth.

“Y’know if you keep eating it we’re not going to have any left for the food.”

“I thought I was supposed to be the parent here?”

“Obviously not.” Carl joked. “Anyways the pasta’s done so let’s eat.”

Despite there being on the two of them they sat at the dining table, his suggestion that they eat at the kitchen counter was almost desperately rejected by Carl. He didn’t see what the problem was, they use to eat there all the time when it was just the two of them, still he didn’t want to rock the boat now that he and Carl were having an actual conversation.

“How was your day?” He asked around a mouthful of pasta.

“Yeah, good. Did some reading for class when we got back from the store.”

“Ah, fun. Is all your schoolwork done?”

“Yeah. How was your day?”

“Borin’ as hell. Loads of paperwork that just won’t get done.”
“Sounds fun.”

“Always is.” He hesitated before asking his next question. “How have things been recently Carl? You okay?”

“Yeeeah. I’m fine, why’d you ask?”

“Just…” Rick paused trying to find the right words in his head. Maybe he’d been going about this the wrong way, ignoring the situation and hoping that it’d get better. Maybe it was time to be outright, it was the two of them, no distractions. “Carl, you’ve just…changed. I know you’re a teenager and change is normal but I worry. You don’t seem as happy as you used to be, I know things are weird with your Mom and I but I want you to know you can talk to me about it. About anything. If there’s something going on with you I want to know.”

“So you can lecture me about it?”

“No, so we can talk about it. I don’t say this enough Carl but I love you, you’re still my baby no matter how old you are and I wanna know you.” Rick caught his eye, reached his hand out to grab his. “Whatever it is I’m here alright? I’m tryna sort things at work so I can be home more, you’ll be off to college soon and I wanna spend as much time with you as I can before you leave.”

“Really?”

Carl seemed to perk up at that, it was subtle but it was there. “Yeah, I mean it Carl. I’ve been lettin’ you down recently but that’s not gonna happen again.”

Another small smile crossed Carl’s face, Rick felt him give his hand a quick squeeze. Progress, he thought. Baby steps.

“So what’s been happening? Is it girl stuff?” He quickly added “Boy stuff? Cos that’s fine too Carl I don’t want you thinking that you can’t tell me if that’s the case.” Rick’s mind wondered if that was it, Christ why hadn’t he considered that before? Maybe this was all due to some sexuality crisis? Had they even given him the talk on that sort of thing?

“No…no stuff. Of any kind. Look Dad why are we talking about this?”

Carl seemed on edge, suspicious. Had they really gotten to this point? “I wanna make things right Carl, I be there for you. I want us to go back to how we were, talking about whatever, just hanging out.”

“There’s really nothing going on Dad.”

Rick sighed, the same old answer, he’d thought they were getting somewhere, that Carl might open up a bit more. Just as he was about to speak again his phone buzzed in his pocket ruining the moment, Carl let go of his hand and picked up his fork again. Rick was relieved to see that it was just a text from Shane rather than an urgent call for him to get back to the station. He recognised the paperwork on the floor in the picture as being the ones from Shane’s desk, so he had tossed them out, the guy really had no patience. Attached to the photo was a message telling him he’d be over after he’d met with Negan, great, maybe he could help him with his conversation with Carl.

“Work?” Carl asked brusquely.

“Nah, just Shane.”

“Of course it is.” Carl mumbled back.
Just what on earth did he mean by that? This whole situation with the two of them was just getting ridiculous, on the one hand Carl seemed to be hating on him more and more, on the other Shane said they were getting on better than ever. Why on earth did things have to be so damn confusing? As if he didn’t get enough of that kind of shit at work.

“Look, Carl if there’s something going on with you two you need to let me know.”

“I’ve already told you Dad there’s nothing going on. It’s just his drinking.”

There was something more, Rick had spent enough time in the force to know when he was being lied to, he knew Carl enough to know when he was lying. “Carl? C’mon whatever it is you can tell me.”

“Dad, there’s nothing.”

“Would it help to talk about it with Shane here?”

“There’s nothing to talk about, he doesn’t need to be here.” Carl protested.

“Well he’s coming over after he’s done with Negan so-” He stopped when Carl’s fork clattered onto the plate, Carl turned so pale he looked like he’d seen a ghost. There was a reaction he hadn’t been prepared for. “What? What is it?”

“Shane….Shane’s with Negan?”

“Yeah, they were gettin’ together after work.”


“Negan came over earlier, wanted some help with some construction work on his cabin, Shane offered to help him out. They’re lookin’ at some wood from Negan’s supplier. Why is it such a problem?”

Carl didn’t answer him, he just grew more pale, staring into space like he was trying to work something out.

“Carl?” Rick prompted and just like that Carl sprung into action, leaping out of his chair to shove his coat on. Rick managed to grab him just as he reached the door, gripping hold of his arm to stop him moving any further. “Carl what is going on? There’s no way you’re going out there.”

“Dad, let go, you don’t understand I’ve gotta go.”

Rick held tighter as Carl tried to pull away. “No way, not until you tell me what’s going on. Why do you have to go? Is this to do with Shane?”

“Dad please…”

“No Carl, this isn’t happening. You tell me now.”

“Dad…” Carl’s voice was almost desperate now, pleading for him to let go. Rick was tempted to do so, he hated forcing his hand like this but he needed to know. This wasn’t normal and he wasn’t going to let his son go charging out in this weather.

“Carl, you need to tell me. Maybe I can help, whatever this is you don’t have to do this alone.”

Hope flared in his when he saw the resignation pass over Carl’s face.

“Negan…I-I think he’s gonna hurt Shane.”
“What?” Of all the things he’d thought Carl would say that’d be last on his list. He knew the two didn’t get along, Shane hadn’t exactly made the best impression at Thanksgiving dinner but hurting him? That just didn’t seem right. “What makes you’d think he’d wanna do that?”

Carl sighed, reluctance dripped from every word. “Because… he told me that he wanted to hurt him.”

“When?”

“On the phone, last night.”

“Why were you on the phone with him last night?” Rick gritted his teeth, what kind of relationship did this man have with his son?

“It doesn’t matter right now Dad we have to stop him.”

“It does matter Carl, is he being inappropriate?”

“NO! God no Dad. He’s… he’s just being a good friend.”

“Look Carl it might seem like that but he could be-”

“Dad, no, just no. He’s not like that.”

“They why does he want to hurt Shane? Did Shane find out about the phone calls? Threaten him? I can’t blame him if he did Carl this is sick.”

“No!” Carl practically shouted at him this time. “It’s not Negan. He’s pissed because he knows…”

Carl broke off.

“Knows what?” Rick pushed, they were finally getting somewhere, he wasn’t going to drop this now.

“Dad, I can’t…I don’t want to do this now.” Carl begged.

Rick could feel him trembling under his hand, his stomach twisted with dread, what was Carl keeping from him? “Carl you gotta tell me now. I don’t care what it is but if Negan’s gone to hurt Shane I need to know why, not just as your father but as a cop. I need to know what we’re going into.”

Carl didn’t look at him, just stared longingly at the door. Rick tried another tactic. “This isn’t just about Shane getting hurt, it’s about Negan. Shane’s a trained cop Carl, he might have his gun on him, he could hurt Negan.” That seemed to work, Carl brought his eyes back to him, he was shocked to see the tears in them, the trembling under his hand increased. Rick swallowed down his nerves, “So what does Negan know?”

“He…he raped me Dad, Shane raped me.”

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He didn’t think he’d ever be able to describe how he felt in that moment. His body went numb, he dropped Carl’s arm, his own limply falling to his sides. He stood there, shock filling him to the core, his body tensing trying to figure out just what the fuck to do. His first instinct was to laugh, pass it off as a stupid joke, this couldn’t be right. His brain told him that there was no way Shane would ever do anything like this, his gut told him otherwise. He knew Carl, knew when he was lying. He knew
rape, knew how it affected people, knew that rapists could be anyone. Hell he’d seen enough rape cases fall apart because people were too ignorant to believe certain people could be rapists.

His mind went into overload in that moment, snippets of the past flew through them as he tried to find anything to support or dismiss what Carl was saying. The cop in him analysed the evidence piece by piece, connecting the dots. Carl’s weird behaviour, Shane’s at time inappropriate comments about him, that morning when he’d walked in on the two, maybe he hadn’t imagined Shane’s hands being that low on Carl’s body.

How had his missed this? How many times had it happen? How long had it been going on for? Each question wanted to fall out of his mouth but none would. He was frozen until a small trembling voice broke him out of his mind. “Dad?”

He looked back at Carl, looked into those blue eyes, it hit him harder. Like a punch in the gut. His baby, he was hurting badly, he looked so scared. Rick wanted to make it better, wanted to pull him into his arms and protect him. He tried to speak, nothing would come out. What could he say?

“Carl…”

“Dad, please, I’m not lying, I swear I’m not.” Carl was almost frantic with his words, Rick was confused as he watched him pull at his shirt.

“Carl, what are yo-” He was stopped by the marks revealed to him. Were those...bite marks?

“He did this Dad, you have to believe me.”

Rick nearly threw up his dinner as he caught sight of more marks, a glimpse of gauze appeared on Carl’s chest, just what was under there? Shane had done this? “Carl...I… do you even have to ask ” Christ, did Carl really think he wouldn’t? Is that why he hadn’t told him? He cursed himself for being so blind. The silence answered that question. Now wasn’t the time to focus on his own failings, he had to focus on Carl. He gently gripped his shoulders, looking him in the eye as he spoke with conviction. “I believe you Carl, I will always believe you no matter what.”

Carl nodded, he didn’t seem quite ready for words.

“So Negan knows?”

“Yes.” A small voice replied.

Rick nearly hit himself, Carl felt like he could tell a stranger over his own father. He’d never felt like such a failure than in that moment. “That’s enough of an excuse to want to hurt Shane, let’s go find ’em before he does anything stupid.”

Another nod from Carl had him grabbing his coat and keys. Once they were seated in the car Rick realised he had no idea where to begin looking. “Any ideas where Negan might take Shane? He’d need somewhere quiet, out of the way, where he wouldn’t be caught.”

“I...uh… I don’t know.”

“Where does he live? Would he take him there?”

“No no, he lives in the middle of nowhere but it’s like sacred to him, he wouldn’t do anything there.”

“He mention anywhere else in town? Anywhere he knows about? Likes to go?”

Carl went quiet for a moment, then a look of realisation spread across his face.
“The factory?”

“Factory?”

“Yeah the abandoned one on the outskirts of town. Negan’s uncle passed it down to him, I don’t think he’s told anyone about it.”

That would be the perfect place, dark and secluded. Hardly anyone went there and those that did weren’t the type to report anything to the cops. With a speed he didn’t know the car possessed they shot out onto the snow covered roads and began the journey to the factory. Silence fell between the two of them, Rick couldn’t think of what he wanted to say. He wanted to know more, understand what had happened to Carl.

“Can we talk about it?” He asked.

“If you want…”

“How...what happened Carl?”

There was a deep pause then it all came out. Every. Single. Detail. All the rapes, the beatings, the sordid comments. Every single occasion where Shane had hurt his son, every occasion where Rick had failed to see what was going on under his very eyes. New Years, the camping trip, Christmas, birthdays. Lori… their affair… that stung but nowhere near as much as the knowledge that he’d regularly handed his son over to that monster. He’d played a part in what was going on, ignoring all the signs that were so clearly there. He slammed down on the breaks, rushing out of the car to the grassy banks on the side of the road where he threw up whatever there was of his dinner. It wasn’t enough, not to clear the sickness he felt. The images of Shane hurting his son, his baby, swirled around in his mind. He wanted nothing more than to not exist in that moment, he’d failed so badly, failed his baby. The one he’d sworn to protect no matter what, he let him get hurt, let his friend hurt him.

Getting back in the car, he looked over to Carl trying to figure out what the hell to say to him. How could he even begin to apologise?

“Dad, we don’t have to talk about this now. It’s not really the time.”

Carl was right, they had to find Shane and Negan before anything happened, he had a duty to protect the both of them even if he wanted nothing more than to join Negan with whatever he had planned.

“We’ll talk later though Carl, I mean it, about everything.”

“Sure Dad.”

The rest of the journey was filled with a tense silence, both of them worrying about what they’d find at the factory.

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“Looks like you were right.” Rick said, noting that the rusted gates were wide open.

“Yeah, that’s his car.” Carl pointed out.

Rick parked next to it, the car was empty, he couldn’t see the pair anywhere near it. When he opened his door he could hear nothing but the sharp wind in his ear. There was an ominous feel in the air, like the calm right before a thunderous storm. The wind prickled at his flesh, his anger and
determination held him firm against it.

“I want you to listen and do as I say Carl. You stay behind me, no matter what. We have no idea what's going on here. Shane's just as dangerous as Negan and I don't want you gettin’ hurt. I'd tell you to stay in the car but God knows you won't listen.”

Carl nodded back at him. Good, he didn’t want to have to worry about him getting hurt anymore. Together they walked onwards, hearts racing with anticipation, following the footprints they found in the snow. It led them to the deeper part of the factory, as they got closer to the main building Rick heard the sounds of a scuffle. The hit of flesh against flesh, soft grunts of pain mixed in. Rick drew out his gun, approaching the corner of the building. As they neared the noises voices became clearer.

“....I’m his best friend, he’ll get you for this.”

“You think I give a shit about that? He can do what he fucking likes I don’t care. With you gone Carl will be safe, that is all I care about.”

Rick peaked around the corner, eyes widening when he saw Negan raise a bat above his head. Leaping into action he jumped out from behind the corner and fired quick warning shot at the pair, the bullet diving straight into the bat, splintering the wood. It dropped to the floor, the noise echoed in the derelict area. Their eyes fell on him, Negan’s shifting between himself and Carl who had darted around the corner the second he heard the shot.

“Rick…” Shane’s voice was hoarse, Rick was pleased to see the blood caked on his face, Negan had done a good job by the looks of it.

“Step away from him Negan.”

“Look-” Negan started, stopping the second the gun was aimed at him.

“Do what I say now, step away from him and get over here. Now.”

Negan did as told, walking towards him, he offered out his hands when he got there. “Do what you gotta do Rick.”

He was surprised by the man, he didn’t even try to defend himself, he could’ve easily told explained why he did what he did. It was a relief to know that Carl had placed his trust in the right person, even if the man did try and kill Shane. Looking at the pathetic excuse for a human being Rick couldn’t blame him. Just seeing him knelt there had Rick ready to finish the job.

“I’m not here to do that Negan. Stay here with Carl.” Looking him in the eye, he continued. “Keep him safe.” Rick saw the understanding flicker in his eyes before he turned his attention back to Shane who was trying to get back to his feet.

Rick walked over to him, lowering the gun down.

Shane looked up at him in confusion. “Aren’t you gonna arrest him Rick? Look what he’s fuckin’ done to me!”

“No, Shane I’m not gonna arrest him.”

“Fine then I’ll fuckin’ do it, gimme your cuffs.” Shane walked up and tried to grab at them. Rick merely pushed him away, putting some distance between them as he tried to quell the urge to keep pushing.
“Not gonna happen Shane.”

“What the fuck’s goin’ on Rick?” Shane caught sight of Carl behind him. “What’s he been tellin’ you? The same bullshit that he’d told that fucker over there?”

Rick’s jaw clenched at his words, the anger threatening to bubble over. “It’s over Shane. I’ve seen the bruises, I know exactly what you’ve been doin’ to my son.”

“C’mon Rick, he’s a fuckin’ liar. You know me, we’ve been through everything together I wouldn’t do somethin’ like that.”

A part of Rick desperately wanted to believe him, he wanted this to be some kind of sick joke, or a nightmare that he’d soon wake up from. The brutality of his reality was torturous. “How can you say that?” He asked him desperate for some damn answers.

“Because it’s the truth.” Shane, crept closer. “It’s me Rick, I would never do something like that. If there’s bruises and bites on him then it’s probably because of that damn Coach over there. I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s been hurting him all year.”

Rick let him get closer, almost allowed himself to believe him, fall into the safety of the story that Shane crafted. It would be so much easier to believe that Negan had done it, had somehow brainwashed Carl into accusing Shane, he could arrest him then they could go back to their normal life. His heart knew it wasn’t true. His brain couldn’t deny the facts. “If that’s the case then how did you know about the bite marks?”

“Bite marks?”

“I didn’t say anything about the bite marks. How’d you know they were there?”

“Rick… c’mon don’t get caught up on the shit.”

Rick shook his head, Shane wasn’t gonna explain his way out of this one. “You’ve got a chance here Shane, admit what you did. You’ll get a easy sentence then you can stay out of our lives. Start new somewhere else.”

“No…No.”

“Yes. This is it Shane, no more bullshit, admit what you did to my son. I deserve the fucking truth.”

Shane just scoffed at him. “You’re so full of shit.” With a quick motion he grabbed at Rick’s gun, twisting it around to face them.

Heart pounding, Rick stepped back. Instinctively looking for Carl, Negan had him tucked away behind his back, standing between the gun and Carl.

“Shane put it down.”

“No, not until you listen Rick, until you see goddamn sense.” Shane’s hand was shaking as he pointed the gun, flicking between Rick and Negan. “It’s not me, I wouldn’t hurt Carl, it’s that fucker over there twisting him against me. Can’t you see it Rick? There’s somethin’ going on there.”

Rick had to admit he could sense something more there, no gym teacher would put himself in front of a bullet for a student. “No Shane, what I see is you tryin’ to get yourself out of this. It’s not gonna happen, you hurt my son I’m not gonna let you get away with it.”
“Yeah, well it’s too damn late for that. I will get away with it, I’ll shoot you and your new best fuckin’ friend over there and I’ll take Carl. Tell the cops you got caught up in some shoot up with that bastard and you both ended up dead. It’ll be bad for a few months but I’m sure I’ll win Lori around. Move in and have them both to myself. God knows you don’t fuckin deserve them. You never have. Christ, I was fuckin' them both right under your nose and you didn't even know.”

Rick’s blood boiled with each word, anger surging beyond control within him. He’d rather burn in hell that let that happen. Just as Shane moved the gun back towards Rick, he jumped at him, shoving him to the floor. The gun went off, the bullet shooting into the air. Rick didn’t care, he was too lost in the red haze that surrounded him. They struggled on the floor, Rick took advantage of Shane’s injuries so he could straddle him on the concrete. He punched out again and again. Each pained groan urging him on. He couldn’t stop. The sharp pain in his fists a punishment for his own failings.

He failed him.

He failed Carl.

A pained roar escaped him, he hit harder and harder.

Too soon he felt arms grab around his own, he desperately fought against them as they hauled him backwards. He had to punish him.

“Rick, Rick, it's over. You've gotta stop.”

“No no no he's gotta pay.”

The voice returned to his ear. “It's over. You need to calm down for Carl.”

Carl.

His son.

His baby.

The fog cleared, he glanced through blurry eyes, finding Carl in the darkness.

“Carl?” He croaked out.

The figure came closer, kneeling down beside him. “I'm here. I'm here.”

“M'sorry, I’m so so sorry” His hand reached out to him.

“It’s alright, Dad, it’ll be alright.” Carl’s hand squeezed his own. Grounding him back into the moment.

What the fuck had he done?

He’d killed someone.

His best friend.

Shock hit him hard again, numbing him through.

“Rick? We’ve gotta clear all this up before…” Negan let the sentence hang.

His words spurred him into action, he stood on shaky legs. Surveying the scene in front of him, eyes
adamantly avoiding the bloody body on the floor. He had to stay calm, he could fix this. He’d worked on enough crime scenes to know how to cover them up, if they were lucky then the crime scene wouldn’t even be found.

“Right...okay...” He tried to pull his thoughts together. “Negan, take Carl back to your place. Both of you shower when you get there, put your clothes in a bag with the bat. Have you got any bleach at your place?” Negan nodded. “Bleach them before you put them in the bag. I'll be there as soon as I can. You got the keys to this place? I'll lock up as I leave.”

“Alright, you know Beckett’s Ride? I live in the cabin up there.”

“Yeah I know it.” Turning to face Carl he cupped a hand on his neck. “It'll be alright Carl, we'll get through this.”

Carl nodded back at him, pulling him into a quick hug before he left. Rick watched Negan lead him back to the cars before returning his attention to the scene.

He had to focus. There was no room for any fuck ups.

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Carl was still shaking when they made it back to the car even the warmth of Negan's arms did little to quell the coldness that seeped through him. His mind was in disbelief about what he'd just seen. Negan had tried to protect him from most of it, telling him not to look but he couldn't help himself, he wanted to see it. He was almost sickened to remember the sharp tinges of pleasure he felt at the sight of Shane so beaten. He only wished he'd been able to do it himself.

He was fucking sick.

The night was a complete mess.

Negan didn't say anything as he drove, just kept a hard grip on the wheel. A wave of anger flared inside him the more he looked at the man. He'd caused this, his damn reckless anger caused this whole damn thing. He'd nearly lost him. His heart almost stopped when the gun landed on Negan. Thoughts of losing him were like a dagger in his heart. How could he put himself at risk like that?

“What the fuck were you thinking?” Carl ground out.

“What?” Negan asked.

“What. Were. You. Thinking.” He repeated. “Going after Shane like that. Hanging up on me?”

“Carl...I-I don't know. I just did what I thought I had to.”

“Had to? You had to? What kind of bullshit answer is that?”

“Carl-”

“No. I’m talking now. How could you do that to me? Do you have any idea what would have happened if you got caught? If Shane had beaten you? You could’ve gone to jail, you could’ve died.”

“I didn’t care, fuck, I still don’t give a shit Carl. If it meant you were fucking safe then I’d jump off the nearest damn cliff.”

“And how the fuck do you think I’d have felt knowing that you’d thrown your life away for me?”
“You’d have gotten over it eventually.”

“Is that what you really think? No, I wouldn’t have Negan because goddamn it I cannot stand the thought of not having you in it. Don’t you get that? I can take all the beatings, the rapes, the stupid fuckin’ comments, but I could not take losing you. You… Negan… Christ… I need you around. I need you here.” His voice trembled over the last words, his rising emotions getting the better of him as he thought about a life without the man in next to him.

“Carl…”

“When didn’t you talk to me? We could’ve talked about it.”

“Because… I was fuckin’ scared Carl.”

“Of what?”

“Of you and how you’d react. Jesus those thoughts I had were fuckin’ crazy as shit. I thought after that phone call I’d freaked you out. I thought you wouldn’t want anything to do with me.”

“I don’t care about that shit. It doesn’t bother me, God, it probably should be I don’t care. You’ve got a good heart Negan, that's all I care about.”

“I-I’m sorry Carl.” He flicked his eyes over to him. “I didn’t think. I didn’t realise…”

“Seems to be a lot of that tonight.”

“Yeah.” Negan sighed, shoving the car into park. They’d arrived back quicker than he thought they would. “Shit Carl.” The man hung his head. “I fucked up and I’m sorry for pissin’ you off but I won’t apologise for goin’ after him, someone had to stop him Carl. Just the thought of him being in the same room as you was fuckin’ torture.”

Soft brown eyes met his own, the sorrow in them burnt at the anger inside of him, melting it away. “...Negan...” Words just weren’t enough, not now. He leaned forward placing a soft, lingering kiss on his lips. Taking a moment to just exist with the man, forget the horrors of the night. They pulled apart, leaning their foreheads together, eyes closed to the world.

“We should go inside, don't think kissing was included in your dad’s orders.” Negan spoke.

“That's a story for another day.” Carl replied stepping out of the car “Do you think we'll be alright?”

“Your dad’s the best in town right? If anyone can cover this up then it's him.”

“What if they find Shane?”

“They won’t. Even if they do it's not gonna come back to you Carl. We'll make sure of it.”

“I don't care about that I want you guys to be safe.”

“Well all we care about is keeping you safe. Guess we'll have to protect each other.”

“Yeah.” He wasn’t quite convinced.

“You hit the shower first, put your clothes in the tub, I'll grab the bleach.”

Carl nodded, leaving Negan alone downstairs. For the first time in his life the shower wasn’t a comfort to him. He stood there, skin getting pounded by the harsh flow of the heavy water, his eyes
fixated by his own trembling hand. It was all too much. Everything that had happened overwhelmed his body and mind.

His Dad knew and he’d believed him.

He felt so stupid. He could’ve told him sooner, then he would have avoided so many years of pain and suffering. Things could’ve been so different.

“Carl?” The voice was accompanied by a knock on the door.

“Yeah?”

“You nearly done?”

“Okay, I’ll be out in a sec.” He quickly finished up, he hadn’t touched Shane but nevertheless he scrubbed himself as hard as he could just in case. Stepping out of the shower was a bitch, even with the steam the air was cool, it made him shiver as he dried himself. He almost dropped his towel when he bumped into Negan outside the room. He looked damn ragged, like he’d aged a decade in the space of a day. All Carl’s fault. It pained his heart to think that he’d done this to him.

“All done?” Negan asked.

“Yeah.”

“Good, grab yourself some clothes from my room, I’ll see you downstairs in a bit.”

If he kept taking his clothes like this Carl was gonna have a whole wardrobe at home dedicated to it. Still the reassuring warmth that settled over him as he pulled one of his shirts over his head was like nothing in the world. The sharp pain and guilt inside of him was quickly replaced by a longing to be back in Negan’s arms, he craved the safety of them. He wrapped his own around himself, trying to ease the vulnerability that he felt, rubbing his arms he began pacing anxiously waiting for Negan to join him. He didn’t want to go downstairs, not on his own.

The second he walked into the room Carl raced over to him, throwing his arms around him, he held on tight as he buried his face in his shoulder. A sigh of relief left him when he felt Negan’s arms curl around him, one had stroked up his back to cradle his head against him. Soothing murmurs were whispered in his ear, Carl tried to focus on them instead of the emotions coursing through him. As much as he wanted to stay there with him they had to finish cleaning up, so he stood back, letting his arms fall away from him.

He didn’t know how long they stood there like that, lost in each other’s arms, judging by how Negan’s hands trembled against him Carl figured he was just as shaken up by the events of the night. Still, as much as he wanted to stay there with him they had to finish cleaning up, so he stood back, letting his arms fall away from him.

“You should..uh get dressed.” His cheeks flushed when he realised that he’d thrown himself at the practically naked man. “I’ll wait downstairs.”

“Alright.” Negan reached out an arm to rub his shoulder. “It’ll be okay Carl.”

“Will it?” Carl wasn’t sure if he quite believed him, especially when his question wasn’t answered.

He sat himself in his usual corner on the couch, curling up against the soft material. It was still his favorite place in the whole cabin, his own little space in Negan’s house. It gave him a certain feeling of calm amongst the uncertainty about the future. He wished his Dad were here, he wanted to know
that he was alright. Carl had never seen him look like that before, so out of control angry. He almost felt sorry for Shane. Almost.

Negan’s footsteps on the stairs had him turning around to face him, he watched as the man tossed a black bag on the floor.

“That everything?” He asked him.

“Yeah, all of it. Even the towels.”

“What do you think he’ll do with it?”

Negan rubbed at the back of his neck. “I don’t know. Burn them or somethin’.”

Carl stood, body itching to do something more than sitting around. He knew he wouldn't be able to rest until his Dad was with them. So much had been left unsaid there, things that they wouldn't be able to talk about when they got home. Lights appeared on the snow outside, making it twinkle. He recognised his Dad’s car pull up by the house. Carl slammed the door open, running outside to greet the man. He’d changed, instead of his uniform he wore old jeans and a sweater.

“Dad! What happened? Are you okay? What’s going on?” He knew it was unfair to bombard him with questions but he wanted answers.

“Let’s get inside first Carl. Did you pack those clothes?” Rick asked Negan once he entered the cabin. He couldn’t help but marvel at the place, it really was damn gorgeous. Such a stupid thought to have in the midst of that night.

“Yeah, it’s all in the bag over here, bat’s still in the car.”

“OK, we’ll have to take it all out and burn it, clear up all the evidence.”

“What happened to…” Carl let the question hang in the air.

“I’m not tellin’ you that. The less you know the better, I’m not havin’ you lie if it comes down to it.”

“Will it come down to it?” He asked him.

“It shouldn’t do. Everyone knows how flakey Shane is, it won’t be too hard to convince them that he’s run off with some dumb bimbo. The plan is to let it sit for a few days then start hinting at him disappearing, thankfully they’ll come lookin’ to us for answer seein’ as we’re the closest thing to family he’s got.”

“So we just tell them that he’s left?”

“Yep, keep it simple. Anyone asks where we were tonight, you and I were at home. Negan you went out to the factory to check up on it but came straight home. Nice and simple.”

It sounded too simple to Carl, it felt unbelievable that they could kill someone and get away with it like this. Even if the person they killed was Shane. They stood in silence, taking in the gravity of the situation, they’d all have to live with this.

“Negan, d’you think I could get a minute with Carl? His Mom might be home when we get back and I need a word with him.”

Negan looked to Carl for approval and at the small nod he walked back upstairs. “Give me a shout if you need me.”
He and his Dad took one another in, Carl waited for him to start talking.

“Carl… I don’t…” Carl was surprised to hear his voice cracking, he'd never seen his Dad look so in pain. “I don't know what to say. I'm just… I'm so damn sorry. I'm sorry I failed you.”

“Dad you didn”’t”

“Yes I did Carl. I failed you, you were hurtin' and I didn't see. I was so busy caught up in my own shit that I didn't see you. You're my son, my sweet baby boy, I always promised I'd protect you and I failed. You should've been able to come to me, it never should've gotten to this and that's on me for making you think that I didn't care or that I cared about that monster more than you. I was so fuckin’ blind and I'm sorry and I'm gonna be spending every last breath I have on this earth trying to make it up to you. I'm so so sorry Carl.”

It was like he broke after that, Carl watched him sink to his knees, tears springing up in his own eyes. He had his Dad back and that was everything. “Please forgive me, I'm sorry, so sorry.” He kept repeating it over and over, begging him through thick sobs. Carl's heart broke for him, for the two of them, for the relationship that had been wrecked by the monster that had laid between them. He rushed over to his Dad wrapping himself in his arms. They sat there on the floor, clutching at one another as they tried to mend what had broken.

Chapter End Notes

...and there we go! Bye bye Shane I'm sure we're all gonna miss ya. I hope that lived up to expectations! I cannot say how many times I wrote this chapter out, there were so many ways this could've gone but Rick just made sense. He's the guy that tore a man's throat out for threatening his son, and even though we haven't seen much of him in this fic that's how I still perceive him. I wanted to give him that redemption. The other way this could have gone down would be Rick walking in on Negan killing Shane and help him cover the crime up for those who want an alternative. There will be more discussion with Rick and Carl coming up! Hope you guys enjoyed!
After it all

Chapter Notes

Y’know everytime I update I look at the date of the last one and I’m like ‘seriously! Has it been that long?!’ The days are just flying past. Sooo we’ve got a lil angst here, some dark!Carl (cannot get enough), spacey!Rick, and Negan being Negan.

I hope you enjoy the update, it’s back to the usual 8,000+ that I started with :D

Thanks as always for your lovely comments and kudos <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Only those willing to walk through the dark night will be able to see the beauty of the moon and the brilliance of the stars."

- Archbishop Socrates Villegas

January 2018

The harsh chime of the clock striking midnight jolted them apart, the events of that night had them both on edge. They gave each other sheepish smiles at their paranoia, both of them slightly embarrassed by their sudden show of emotion. Carl couldn’t recall ever seeing his Dad cry, he couldn’t even remember the last time he’d been the one to cry in front of him. Usually their emotions were limited to brief flickers of joy, the occasional hug here and there to show that they did in fact care for one another. The intimacy of the moment was new, Carl wasn’t quite sure how to handle it. Apparently neither did his Dad for all he did was awkwardly help him to his feet, and clap him on the back, clearing his throat all the while.

“Carl?” His voice was raspier than usual, all that shouting must have taken his toll on him. “I’m gonna ask you somethin’ now and I don’t want you to get mad, or pass me off with any excuses, think it’s safe to say we’re past lyin’ to each other.”

Carl awkwardly nodded in acknowledgement, he’d thought his Dad knew all the he could ever want to know, more than he should ever want to know.

His Dad sighed gathering strength. “You and Negan… there’s somethin’ goin’ on there.” His voice
was matter of fact, no room for arguments, not that Carl would think of arguing after everything they’d been through that night. “I can’t say that I’m happy about whatever is happening, if it is what I think it is then it’s inappropriate and not just because he’s your gym coach Carl but... he’s obviously been there for you and I can only assume that the reason you’ve been more like your usual self recently has something to do with him. So I’m willing to ignore the more illegal part of whatever it is you two have I just have to check and you know why. He’s not hurting you is he?”

“God Dad no he’s not definitely not.” Carl exclaimed. He did get it, after everything with Shane it was understandable but the man could not be more wrong about Negan.

“Okay good I’m glad. He’s not coercing you or anything though? Using what’s been going on to get close to you?”

“No, absolutely not. He’s just...” He had to pause, how on earth could he put into words what Negan was. “He’s just been there for me Dad, he’s never forced me to do or say anything that I didn’t want to do. He lets me be whoever I want to be without having to make excuses for it. He made me feel normal when I never thought I would again. We just are, y’know, it’s hard to put into words.”

“So you two you’re not... you’re not y’know...” Rick was going an alarming shade of red.

“Oh god no, we’re not no none of that.” It was Carl’s turn to go red, not that he hadn’t thought about it but his Dad really didn’t need to know that.

“Okay, okay.” His Dad was doing that awkward thing again, just standing, trying to look anywhere but at him. Not that Carl was doing any better, after everything he’d told him that night this was the conversation that was actually painful to have. “I’m not gonna ask anymore. You two... like I said I’m not happy about it but I’m glad you’ve got someone right now. Especially given the fact that he was willing to take a goddamn bullet for you.”

“Thank you Dad.” He felt a surge of appreciation for him, this conversation could’ve gone so badly, he sensed that this wasn’t the end of it but at least he wasn’t trying to keep them apart.

Rick gave him a quick, sad smile. “Thanks for bein’ honest Carl.”

Carl flicked a smile back at him. “Speaking of Negan, we should probably let him back downstairs now, it’s not really fair to keep him out of his own living room.”

“Shit, right.” Rick yelled up the stairs for him, almost immediately his heavy steps fell on the staircase.

“All good?” Negan asked as he arrived on the bottom step, almost disconcerted by the identical pairs of blue eyes that landed on him.

“Yeah.” Carl replied, giving him a sweet smile.

“Negan.” Rick grabbed his attention. “I wanted to thank you, for everything you’ve done for Carl. For being there when I damn well wasn’t, it’s good to know that he has you looking out for him.”

Carl was amused to see a blush spread across Negan’s face, he’d never seen the man look so bashful.

“Anytime Rick.”

“Good. Now where’s the bat you had tonight? I’ll need to keep it with the rest of the things, get rid of them as soon as possible.”
Pure horror spread across Negan’s face. “No way, no way in hell am I gettin’ rid of Baby.”

“Baby?” Rick asked.

“His bat.” Carl explained.

“The bat is called baby?”

“It’s a thing.” Carl tried to pass it off.

"What kinda thing?"

"Gettin' off-topic Dad."

“She’s stayin’ right here with me. It’s bad enough you put a hole in her you’re not taking her away from me.”

Rick rolled his eyes, there’s no way anyone could be so sentimental about a damn bat. “Negan, if anyone finds it with Shane’s blood on it there’ll be questions.”

“Yeah, well it’s just my fingerprints on it so if anything happens it’ll happen to me and that’s a risk I’m damn well willing to take.”

“There’s no point arguing with him Dad, the bat’s not going anywhere.”

Rick sighed in resignation, throwing his hands up defeated. “Alright, at least clean it up okay? We’ll take the rest of the stuff home, I’ll burn it in the BBQ.” Rick looked down at his watch. “We should get goin’ Carl, your Mom will be home soon.”

Carl hadn’t even thought about leaving, he hated the thought of leaving Negan here on his own after what had happened. He didn’t even want to be on his own in his room, he knew he’d spend the night going over and over the events. At least here he’d be away from the constant reminders of Shane. “Uh, Dad, could I have minute with you?” He flicked his gaze over to Negan, silently pleading for some privacy. Negan nodded and walked away into the kitchen. “Could I stay? Negan shouldn’t be on his own tonight, none of us should.”

“Jesus Carl, I know I said I wasn’t gonna protest about the two of you but there’s not way in hell that I’m leaving you alone here. Before you even think it I’d do the same with anyone that you were seeing, it’s not appropriate.”

“Dad, c’mon nothing like that’s gonna happen, I just wanna be here for him.”

Carl heard the groan from Rick, saw the exasperation across his face. “I’m not gonna win this one am I?”

“Nope.”

“Fine, but I’m stayin’ too.”

“What?”

“Yeah, I’m not letting you out of my sight.”

It was Carl’s turn to roll his eyes, it was what he deserved he supposed after several months of wishing his father would step up and be a dad to him again. “Okay, you call Mom, I’ll go check with Negan.” He left the man to join Negan in the kitchen.
“Everythin’ alright?” Negan asked, putting down the glass he’d been playing with.

“I think so… he knows, about us.”

Negan’s eyebrows shot up in surprise. “You told him?”

“He figured it out. Apparently we’re not as secretive as we think we are.”

“Jesus, how am I not dead?”

“Must be that charming personality of yours.” He joked. “Anyways is it alright if we stay here? Don’t think any of us should be on our own tonight.”

“I’d be fine Carl.” Negan tried to placate him. “You don’t have to stay here for me.”

“It’s not just for you. I don’t even want to be at home right now. Too many memories. I don’t think Dad’s really ready to see Mom yet either.”

Negan nodded at him. “Fair enough…” He was interrupted by his Dad walking into the room.

“So it’s all good with your Mom, is it alright with you Negan?”

“Yeah, it’s fine, I’ll put you up in the guest room.”

Guest room? All the times Carl had slept on the couch when the man had a perfectly good guest room for him to use? He was gonna have to have a little chat with him about that whenever they had another minute alone.

“Thank you.” Rick replied gratefully. “Think we could all do with a good night’s sleep.”

“Hell yeah. C’mon I’ll show you up there.”

The room was nice and simple, a large double bed filled the centre of the room. Not much thought had been put in but it was cosy enough. Negan left them to it quickly enough, probably eager to escape his Dad’s accusing glare. As much as he said he’d be alright with it Carl figured it’d be some time before he truly was.

“You alright with sharing?” Rick asked. “I can sleep on the floor.”

Carl thought back to the last time he’d slept in the same place as someone, how he’d freaked out at Negan first thing. In all honesty he wasn’t sure if he was alright with sharing the bed considering how his only experience of sharing a actual bed with someone was with Shane. This was his Dad, he reminded himself, he’d killed a guy for hurting him he wasn’t going to do anything. It was just one of the many hurdles he was gonna have to get over. “It’s fine, just… m’sorry if I hit out at you.” No point in hiding the truth.

Another sad look flitted across his Dad’s face, Carl had a feeling he’d be seeing that sorry look a lot in the days to come. They didn’t talk after that, just slid into bed and laid there in silence. Soon enough his father’s heavy snores filled the room, Carl rolled over to face away from him. It was gonna be a long night.

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The snores woke him up a few hours later, he rolled his eyes in frustration, filled with the temptation to stuff the pillow over his Dad’s face. There was no way that he was gonna be able to sleep again with that noise in his ears. Looks like it was back to his couch, he grabbed a pillow and headed out
the door. Negan’s was left open, the bed was empty but it looked like it had been slept in, the glow that lit up the staircase hinted that he’d also decided to go downstairs that evening. Carl followed the light, finding Negan sat in his favorite spot on the couches. “You’re in my spot.” Carl smiled as he spoke. He almost melted at the soft, sleepy smile that appeared on Negan’s face in return.

“Sorry, forgot you owned the damn place.”

“So you should be.” The man looked so damn tired, Carl doubted that he’d gotten any sleep that night. “Couldn’t sleep?”

“Nah, too many thoughts bashing around y’know?”

“Yeah I get it.” His body gave an involuntary shiver at the cool air.

“Cold?”

“Mmhmm, as much as Dad’s snoring woke me up the bed was nice and warm.”

Negan lazily lifted his arm, gesturing him over. “C’mere.”

They curled in around each other, legs intertwining as chests met, Carl basked in the warmth of Negan’s arms. He closed his eyes and snuggled in closer, taking a moment to indulge himself, this is what he needed. For the first time that night he felt himself relax, the knots that had been twisting in his stomach since this whole nightmare began finally started unwinding.

“Better?” Negan asked, his breath fluttering against his hair.

“Much.”

“Good.” The man stroked comforting circles on his back, warming his body up again.

“So you have a guest room?”

Carl felt the smile form against his head. “Yeah, I have a guest room.”

“So all those times I had to sleep on here there was a perfectly comfy bed for me up there?”

Negan’s chest vibrated with a low chuckle. “It’s not my fault you fell asleep before I could say anything.”

“S’rude.” Carl yawned out.

“You’re not falling asleep on me again are you? I’m gonna start taking it personally.”

“Nooo, I’m totally awake.” Even as he spoke he felt himself drifting off.

“Nuh-uh, you’re not falling asleep on me.” Negan started shifting around, dislodging him from his slumber.

“Why not?” He pouted at him.

“Don’t give me that pout. Your father’s upstairs if he finds you all spread out on top of me it’ll be my balls that get cut off and turned into meatballs”

“Thanks for that image.” The man really had a great way with words. “I’ll be good, no more sleep.”
“Good.” Negan settled himself again, stroking a hand up and down Carl’s arm this time. How on earth did something so simple feel so good? “How’re you feelin’? Is it different? Knowing he’s gone?”

Carl hadn’t really thought about it, there had been too much else to consider before he’d even thought about the fact that Shane was really gone. He’d never have to deal with him again, never have to deal with those haunting touches. “It’s a… relief. I dunno, it doesn’t feel real yet. Part of me thinks he’ll walk through those doors any second and drag me away.” Negan’s arms tightened around him.

“I’d never let that happen.”

“I know.” He meant it, he’d never felt more safe that he was right in that moment, secure in Negan’s arms. “It does feel different, think it’ll take awhile to feel real though.” He hesitated before continuing. “Is it different for you?”

“A little, still feel like he’s gonna take you away from me, guess that’s something we’ve both gotta live with. Was nice to get a few good hits in though.” His voice almost had a nostalgic tone to it.

“Looked like more than a few good hits.”

“Yeah.”

Carl rolled his eyes at the dreamy pride in his voice, he couldn’t really blame him, Carl was pretty damn proud of him too. Hell, not just proud, the sight of him standing over Shane’s bloodied body had filled him with thoughts that he was reluctant to admit were his. It tapped into a darker part of his soul that had laid dormant inside of him all those years. He’d wanted nothing more than to kiss him in that moment, taste the blood of that monster mingled with the delectable taste that was so Negan. It was sick, he was sick. “Did you like it?” He blurted out. He needed to know if it was just him or had Negan felt the same lust strike through him. When his eyes locked with Carl that night had he wanted to kiss him, share in the victory with him as much as Carl had wanted to? “When you hit him? Did you like it?”

He felt Negan shift uncomfortably beneath him. “Carl…” There was a reluctance in his voice that told Carl all he needed to know.

Carl shifted back to face him, their eyes locking together in the dim glow, he swallowed hard before speaking. “I liked it.” He confessed hoping to urge Negan on. “When I saw you standing there above him, saw his blood on your face, I liked it. More than I thought I ever thought I would.” It was a time for honesty, in the sanctity of the dark room, just the two of them. Their own private confessional. He felt Negan’s breath hitch at his words, swore he could see his pupil dilate slightly. It was getting harder to breath, the air turning too thick in the room to reach his lungs.

“Yes…” Negan’s voice rasped out. “I fuckin’ loved it Carl. Every single second of it, everytime my bat hit him was like a fuckin’ rush Carl.”

That was enough for Carl he slammed his lips down on Negan’, a muffled moan escaping him as he felt his lips move against his own, returning the passion with equal fervour. It was all too much and not enough, he inched himself closer to Negan, hands gripping at any part of him that he could get at. The kiss wasn’t like the others they’d shared in the past, it was raw, there was no time for gentle caresses just an urgency to feel as much of the other as possible. Carl knew it was stupid, inappropriate even, but with the first sweep of Negan’s tongue in his mouth he couldn’t find himself caring. He just pushed himself up and over the older man, swinging his leg over to straddle him taking what he’d been secretly longing for the last few hours. He wanted him so badly, wanted him
to know just how much his actions had affected him. He wanted to revel in the darkness that lurked inside of them, allow it to seep out into the other so they could twine together. Negan’s hands roamed over him each touch lighting up his skin sending sparks of pleasure that made him feel light-headed. He let his own hand dip under Negan’s shirt, running his palms across the hair on his chest following its trail down muscles that he’d been thinking about for so long. Another jolt of pleasure raced through him at the low moan vibrated from Negan’s mouth, the kiss growing more frantic with each brush of their bodies against each other. Teeth tormenting plump lips between gentle sucks that had his heart racing. Negan’s hands shifted lower, they grabbed at his ass dragging him tighter against the muscled body under him, the first brush of a hardness against his own had him breaking the kiss. His head swirled with the pleasure, it was all too much, he held himself still, air heaving out of him as he tried to catch his breath.

“Shit.” Mumbled Negan against his lips. “We...should stop.”

“Yeah.” Carl breathed out, they couldn’t do this, not know. As much as his body screamed at him to continue it was far too soon. “Okay... you should...um... go.” His body still shook with wanting, worsened when he opened his eyes to see just how disheveled Negan was. His hair even more mussed up from Carl’s grabbing hands, lips swollen and red. He looked so damn good. Carl quickly clambered off of him, pushing himself into his corner in an attempt to stop himself doing anything stupid.

“I’ll see you in the morning then.” Negan spoke, his breathing just as staggered as Carl’s.

“Yeah, night.”

“Night.”

Carl didn’t watch him leave, just shoved himself down into the couch, arms flinging over his face as he willed his body to calm the fuck down.

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Two weeks later

The days since that night had been hell. The initial shock and relief at losing Shane was quickly replaced by the paranoia of the role he now had to play. Word had spread quickly about his disappearance, that type of thing was always a hot topic in towns like this. As his Dad had said everyone had turned to the Grimes family for answers on his whereabouts, every single trip out involved some kind of conversation with someone about Shane. It made Carl hyper-aware of every word that left his mouth, he usually let his Dad do the talking but on the days when Carl was alone it was hard to remember exactly what to say. It was remarkable how calm and collected his Dad was whenever he spoke about Shane, nothing like the mess he was at home. The questioning was slowly easing off as the days passed, people seemed to accept what they had said about Shane running off with a girl. Most of them expected Shane to be back within the month anyways Carl just hoped that there weren’t anymore questions when that month passed.

It didn’t help that he was suddenly the centre of attention at school because of it, people gossiping in the corridors, pestering him for more information. It made it harder to spend time with Negan at school, their encounters had strictly been limited to brief flickers of eye contact in the bustle between classes. Carl hadn’t risked going for his usual runs after school, that conversation with Simon made him more scared of doing something that would get Negan in trouble. He missed him so much, the hushed evening phone calls just weren’t enough. They hadn’t been able to set up a time to see each
other, his Dad choosing to keep him occupied each evening and weekend since. He wasn’t sure if it was because he wanted to keep Carl close or if he wanted to keep him away from Negan. Either way it was getting more and more frustrating to spend his evenings sat awkwardly on his couch whilst his parents avoided having the conversation that they desperately needed to.

They hadn’t told Lori yet, his Dad had wanted to, he was more than ready to have it out with her about the affair but Carl had asked him to hold off. He needed more time to build himself back up after telling his Dad. It didn’t help that she’d been distraught by Shane’s sudden disappearance, she’d locked herself in her room for two days, even when she left she barely spoke to either of them. It had been clear that she’d been crying, her eyes were red, face puffy. It was disconcerting how badly she was taking it, Carl wondered whether that supposed ‘one night stand’ with him had actually been more than that.

He shook his head, those thoughts would lead him down a dangerous path and now really wasn’t the time for that. The library was practically empty at this point, it was late on a Friday most students had already gone home but Carl wanted to finish off the homework for that weekend. He’d hoped that if he finished it off early then he might be able to sneak over to Negan’s that weekend. His Dad couldn’t keep him locked away forever no matter how much he might like that. His pen tapped on the sheet as he tried to focus on the textbook in front of him, it was just so boring, even the promise of a few hours with Negan weren’t quite enough to stop the yawn escape him.

“Boring right?”

He jumped at the light voice that appeared in his ear, spinning around in his chair to see Enid standing awkwardly behind him. “Enid? Hi.” He most definitely did not expect her to be talking to him, the surprise increased when she shuffled around to take the seat opposite him. It was just the two of them in that area, Carl had chosen a table hidden away in the stacks for the precise reason that he knew he wouldn’t be interrupted.

“How’s it going?” She asked, playing with the textbook that she’d placed in front of herself.

“Y’know...uh....same as usual.” Why on earth was she talking to him? He was almost alarmed to see her make herself more comfortable in front of him. Was she planning on staying?

“Yeah, same.”

Awkward silence sat between them. “Is there something I can do for you?” Carl eventually cracked, he couldn’t handle the uncertainty considering everything else that was going on. He needed to know what she was up to, they hadn’t spoken in nearly two years now, she’d barely even glanced at him as they passed in corridors. Frankly he just wanted her to leave, he wanted to get on with his work so he could get out of the damn place.

“I just… I heard about Shane…”

So that’s why she’s here, he should’ve known. “So you want the gossip then? There’s nothing to tell.”

“NO.” She blurted out, looking around to make sure she hadn’t drawn anyone’s attention with her noise. “No, this is coming out all wrong.”

“What is?”

“I never wanted to stop being friends with you Carl, you were my best friend, the closest thing I had to a brother.”
“They why’d you do it?” It was unfair of him to ask her that, it’d been mostly his fault that they’d stopped talking. He’d stopped caring, he’d taken all his anger and despair out on her, it was only right that she left him.

“Shane… he… after that time at your house, y’know when he yelled at me.” She mumbled. “He saw me after school one day, threatened me, said if he ever saw me speak to you again he’d make me disappear. I was so scared I just couldn’t risk it.”

He’d had no idea, Shane had never mentioned anything like that. Although he couldn’t say he was surprised, Shane was the only one to know how close he and Enid really were, it made sense that she’d be the first one he’d get rid of. “Enid, I’m so sorry, I had no idea.” He genuinely was, no one should have to deal with that monster.

She gave him a tight smile. “It’s not your fault, that guy was crazy. He’s gone for good right?”

“I-I don’t know.” He wanted to tell her yes, that she never had to be worried about him anymore but he couldn’t do that to his father. “I think so, he seemed pretty in love with the girl he ran of with, always talking about her.”

“I can't believe anyone would fall in love with him.” Venom filled her voice. “He was vile.”

“Yeah.” He tried to ignore the pain that washed over him, he wished he could’ve protected her from him. It was yet another part of his life that the man had taken away from him, how much would’ve been different if Shane hadn’t forced her way? Did that mean she would’ve stayed? Maybe he’d have told her what was going on sooner, things could’ve been so different. It was becoming apparent that he was going to have to get used to burying these alternative realities before he went crazy with it.

“Could we try again? I’m not saying we have to be what we were but I’ve missed you Carl. It’d be good to just hang out again.”

“Uh… sure.” He knew they wouldn’t talk again, deep down he knew that bridge had been long burned between them. Too much had passed since they were friends they’d both changed, it was unlikely that they’d even have anything in common anymore. Still, he couldn’t keep pushing people away just because it was easier not to deal with them, he’d tried that before and it had turned his Dad into a damn murderer.

She gave him one of her bright smiles, almost instantly relaxing. “Great! Want some help with the homework? Maybe between the two of us we could stay awake for it.”

It was nice studying with her, the occasional joke passed between them amidst awkward silences. He just didn't know what to say to her anymore, he couldn't even recall the conversations they used to have. He couldn't get over the persistent thought that she was only there for information, what she'd said about Shane might very well be true but did she really care about him after all this time? It made him uneasy. He wasn't unhappy when the librarian ushered them out at the end of the day. Enid was insistent on giving him her number, he didn't want it, almost certain that he wasn't going to use it. It wasn't that he didn't like her company but he hated not being able to be free around her, watching every small thing that he said was exhausting.

The tension seeped out of him when she finally walked away. He could relax.

His decision to walk through the football field instead of around it had nothing to do with the fact that Negan should still be training the baseball team for the new season. At least that's what he told himself, he definitely wasn’t going so he could catch a glimpse of Negan before the weekend.
Clearly it was a lucky night for him, the baseball team were just making their way off the field as he arrived, leaving Negan on his own to tidy up once again.

“Don’t they ever help you clear up?” He called out, dropping his bag to the grass.

A butterfly-inducing smile spread over Negan’s face, those dimples making Carl’s heart skip in his chest. Yet that all had nothing on the lust that pooled in his stomach at the sight of the man holding a baseball bat again, not covered in blood but apparently that didn’t matter to his body.

Sick, fucking sick Carl

“You gonna come up with a new pick up line?” The smile stayed on his face as he swaggered over to Carl. At least that night hadn’t changed Negan at all, the man seemed to resort back to his usual ways straight after.

“Eh that one’s been workin’ for me just fine.”

“Oh yeah? Hittin’ on many people?” He cocked an eyebrow in a way that made Carl want to jump on him all over again.

Bad bad bad Carl.

“Just one, he seems to like it.”

“Lucky guy.”

“Mmm, I’m more inclined to say I’m the lucky one.”

A shit-eating grin spread across Negan’s face and Carl just knew what he was going to say. “Yeah I’d say so too.”

Carl rolled his eyes at him reaching down to grab one of the bats. “You want my help?”

“Nuh-uh, you’re way to distracting.” He plucked the bat out of his hands. Carl pouted at him. “None of that. Need I remind you what happened last time you pouted?”

“Definitely not.” He sighed out, licking his suddenly dry lips. The air crackled between them as they both recalled exactly what happened after his last pouting session.

“Exactly.” Negan cleared his throat, looking away from Carl. “You can help if you stop with the pouting.”

“I’ll be good.”

They returned to their old routine, moving around each other to finish up as quickly as possible, the understanding that the quicker they finished the quicker they could actually have a discussion.

“So how’ve you been?” Carl asked as they finally returned to their spot on the bleachers. He had a quick look around, it seemed to be just the two of them nonetheless he put a few more inches between them than he usually would. Just in case, although he was more at ease talking with the man, he didn’t want to push it when everything else in his life seemed to be hanging on tenterhooks.

“Me? I’ve been fine, keepin’ busy.”

“Really?” Carl pushed, he didn’t quite believe him.
“Nope, I’ve been sitting around on the couch like an idiot waiting for you to call or the cops to arrive. It’s fuckin’ pathetic.”

“I get it. Everytime I hear sirens go past I think they’re coming for Dad.”

“How’s he takin’ it?”

“Not great. He keeps spacing out, I don’t think he’s slept much. I think it takes it out of him he in public, staying on top of the lies. It doesn’t help that Mom’s taking the whole Shane thing really hard.”

“You told her?”

“No, I was going to but she was so upset about him leaving, I just… I really don’t think she’ll believe me over him.”

“She’s your mom Carl she’ll have your back.”

“You think?”

“Yeah and if she doesn’t then that’s her loss. You’ll always have your Dad and you’ll always have me.”

“Always huh? That’s a big commitment.”

“Eh I like to stick around.”

“Like a bad smell.”

“So fuckin’ rude, last time I’m nice to you.”

“Like I believe that.” He laughed.

“Look, don’t worry about your Mom, whatever happens with her will happen. If she’s willing to believe that fucker over you then she’s got bigger problems than missing her damn boyfriend.”

“Doesn’t make it any easier though. She’s my mom.”

“Well there’s only one way you’ll get your answer.”

“Yeah, guess you’re right. I’ll think about it, maybe do it this weekend. Last person I ever have to tell right?”

Negan gave a soft laugh. “You don’t have to tell anyone Carl, there’s no pressure, especially now you’re safe from Shane. Your life, you history, is yours to share with whoever you damn well want. It’s their privilege to hear it, not a right. What happened isn’t who you are, it doesn’t fucking define you as a person, it happened, it changed you, but it isn’t you. There’s so much more to you than this.”

Tears stung at his eyes the more Negan spoke, what happened to him had become such a defining part of who he was the last couple of years it was hard to imagine himself as a person again. He’d only just started appreciating that Negan wanted to be around him because he liked who he was, not because he wanted something from him. Even with his parents it felt like they only wanted him for bragging rights at times. “You really think that?” He asked.

“Hell fuckin’ yes and I’m gonna keep tellin’ you that until you damn well believe it yourself Carl.”
His arm twitched, raising halfway as if reaching out for him before thinking the better of it. Carl looked it longingly wishing he would rise it up again. He really did miss him, at times the mere thought of being back in Negan’s arms was the only thing that kept him going crazy.

“I should go.” He was on the verge of doing something stupid and if he stuck around then he’d be unable to stop himself. I’ll see you Monday.” He eventually said, the words catching.

“Yeah, see you then.” Negan gave him a sad wave before heading back into the school.

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When he arrived back his dad was laid back on the couch, beer on his stomach, watching the TV. It wasn't until Carl actually looked at the box that he realised the TV wasn't actually on. He'd been doing that a lot recently, seeming to get caught up staring into space. Carl wished he knew how to help him get out of it. “Hey Dad.”

“Hey, good day at school?” Rick sat up, focusing his attention on his son.

“Yeah, it was good. I uh spoke to Enid actually.”

“Enid? Wow, how long’s it been since you talked with her?”

“A good year or so.” He sank down beside his Dad, curling up into the corner.

“So what brought that on?”

He was reluctant to bring up Shane, it never failed to bring the conversation round to telling his Mom everything but he was trying to be more honest with his Dad. He wanted to work on their relationship, he was ready to work on their relationship, it was the least he could do considering all his Dad had done for him. “Shane actually.” He saw his Dad stiffen at the mention of his name. “Turns out he threatened her, said he’d make her disappear if he saw her talking to me. Now that he’s gone she said she wants to try again.”

“He threatened her?” Rick shook his head in disbelief. “When did he become such a monster?”

Carl didn’t have an answer for him, he’d figured that Shane always been a monster hiding away in disguise but his Dad probably wouldn’t want to hear that, so he just waited for him to shift the conversation onto it’s inevitable course.

“So…”

Here they go.

“Have you thought anymore about telling your Mom?” Rick asked.

“Uhh, yes.”

“And?”

“I still don’t know…”

“It won’t be the same as telling me Carl, I’ll be right here with you the whole time, I’ll make sure she believes you.”

“I’m just scared Dad.”
Rick shifted closer, wrapping an arm around him. “I know but once it’s done then it’s done.”

Carl nodded. “Maybe next weekend?”

“Alright.” His Dad paused. “I’m gonna talk to her about the affair tonight. I won’t mention anything about you Carl I just can’t keep this up anymore. I can’t keep pretending everything’s alright with us when she seems to be more upset about Shane leaving than the fact that our marriage is in trouble.”

“D’you think you’ll get divorced?” He asked quietly, almost afraid of the answer. He wasn’t even sure which one he wanted to hear.

“I don’t know, possibly, probably. Just know it’s nothing to do with you Carl, none of it. Our marriage problems are our own, hell they started long before any of this stuff with Shane.”

“Yeah, doesn’t make it easier for either of us though.”

“No, it doesn’t.”

Carl sighed. “I’m gonna go grab some food, Mom’ll be home soon and I’d like to be away from this conversation if it’s happening tonight.”

“Of course, I’ll see you in the mornin’ then.” His Dad gave him a quick peck on the forehead before he darted off.

Rick had been trying to be more affectionate with him, it started with small touches, the occasional hair ruffle but had now moved onto random hugs when they passed each other. As much as Carl appreciated the show of love it was getting abit suffocating. His Mom pulled up just as he was running up the stairs with his chips, the only thing he could be bothered to grab for dinner. He made sure to leave the door open, he didn’t think any child would want to hear their parents argue but he did. Part of him was just scared that his Dad wouldn’t keep his secret, that he’d blurt it out to his Mom in the heat of the moment. He wasn’t sure he’d ever be able to forgive him if he did that. The conversation started slow, just vague murmurs that he couldn’t really make out. He crept out of his room so he could sit at the top of the stairs and listen in. His Dad clearly hadn’t beaten around the bush, they were already arguing about Shane, his Mom making up excuses for what had happened with him. It was almost painful to have her reduce it down to nothing, that ‘nothing’ had caused him so much suffering the last couple of years. It had repercussions that she couldn’t ever imagine. He couldn’t quite believe the crap coming out of her mouth, she even dared to blame his Dad for the affair, how could she say that he was never around when neither was she.

“So it’s your fault he left.” She’d spat out. That was the last straw for Carl he had to do something, it wasn’t all his Dad’s fault she had to know that. They all had their part to play in it.

“It wasn’t his fault Mom.” He interrupted, faltering slightly when their angry faces landed on him.

His Dad softened. “Carl you don’t have to do this now.”

“Do what? What don’t you have to do Carl?” His Mom asked, her eyes searching his face.

“It’s about Shane, why he left.”

“You don’t have to make excuses for him Carl it’s pretty obvious what happened with Shane. Why don’t you go back upstairs whilst your Dad and I talk.” She tried to give him a loving smile, urging him to leave now.

He stood his ground, he had to do this, she had to know. It wasn’t fair for his Dad to take all the
blame for Shane’s disappearance especially if it meant that she looked down on him for it. “Shane... he didn’t leave because of Dad. He left because of me.”

She rolled her eyes at him. “Carl, please, stop it let me have a proper conversation with your father.”

“Jesus Lori can you stop interrupting him, he’s trying to tell you something.”

“And what exactly do you know that I don’t? He’s my son too Rick.”

“I know that Lori, would you just listen to him.” Rick ground out.

“I do listen to him, Rick I’m getting sick of how yo-”

“He raped me Mom.” Carl blurted out, it was getting easier and easier to say it. The nerves didn’t disappear though, the tension still held firm in his body, waiting for her response. She didn’t say anything, a confused look appeared on her face. He looked out for any sign that she was going to say something. He flicked his eyes over to his Dad, they met over her shoulder, he gave Carl a small reassuring smile that did nothing to ease the rats gnawing at his stomach.

“Lori…” His Dad started.

“Wha-” She sighed, eyes closing. “Why would you say something like that Carl?”

He felt his heart drop into his stomach, this is what he’d been afraid of, it was happening. It was actually happening. He’d been so lucky with his Dad and Negan it was a simple no questions asked situation.

“Because it’s true Lori.” Rick answered for him.

“How on earth do you know? Oh my god did you help him make this up?”

“No, Jesus Lori, it’s all the truth. I didn’t want to believe it either but it’s true.”

She just barked out a disbelieving laugh. “Look Carl, I don’t know what your Dad’s told you but you don’t have to say this stuff, it’s not gonna make things better.”

“I-I’m not lying Mom, he hurt me, for two years he hurt me. I told Dad a couple of weeks ago and he told Shane to leave. He’s just been trying to keep me safe.” He pleaded with her to see sense. “You have to believe me Mom I wouldn’t lie.”

Her face softened. “Carl, is this because of what happened with Shane and I? Some way of getting him away from me or getting back at me for it?”

“No Mom I don’t care about that.”

“Please listen to him Lori, I saw the damn bruises he left on our son, the guy’s sick.”

“Bruises? I’ve never seen any bruises on him.”

“Yes you have, we just never realised where they were from. The time he got ‘mugged’ after we got back from vacation that was Shane, Carl was just trying to cover it up.”

“Why would you need to cover it up? You know that kind of thing is wrong. If it really happened you would’ve told me before. This is clearly you two trying to punish Shane for what we did.”

“Mom-"
“No Carl, I’m not hearing anymore lies. I can’t believe you two, how could you say such awful things about a man who’s been nothing but good to you guys.”

Carl felt like he was inches away from a complete meltdown, anger vibrated through his body. How dare she say that about Shane? The sharp sting of yet another betrayal chipped at him, he’d never expected for her to be the one to let him down like this. If anything he’d expected his Dad to be the one to question anything, he almost regretted leaving it this long to tell her, at least before he had the marks to prove it.

“Are you gonna apologise Carl? For what you’ve said?” She asked.

Just as he was about to snap back at her, his Dad did it for him. “Get out.”

“What?” She turned to face his father.

“Get. Out.” He ground out again. “I’m not having you talk like this in front of my son. So grab some things and get out.”

“Are you kidding me Rick?”

“No. You can come back when you’re ready to accept the truth but while you call him a liar you’re not welcome in this house.”

Her face turned steely before she turned to race up the stairs. Almost immediately his Dad took him into his arms. “I’m sorry Carl, I’m so sorry. I didn’t think she’d react like this.”

He didn’t return the hug, he felt too numb, the walls he’d been trying to break down were slowly shooting back up. This was more painful that he’d ever imagined, he wanted to follow her up the stairs, talk to her until she believed him. Maybe he hadn’t tried hard enough, maybe he had to tell her more, make her see.

“Carl?” Rick had pulled back, trying to catch Carl’s eyes. “It’ll be alright, she’ll come around, she probably just needs some time to take it in.”

Carl tried to listen, tried to believe him. He just couldn’t see it. Had he lost his mother forever? Although their relationship had been fractured, he’d always imagined that one day they’d resume their old ways. Now that seemed like an impossibility. Even if she did eventually believe him, how could he ever forgive her for doubting him? For choosing to believe in Shane over her own son.

He didn’t look at her when she arrived back down the stairs, just focused on the old family photo that sat on the fireplace. Were they ever really that happy?

“I’ll be at Tracey’s when you’re ready to come apologise. I know I screwed up, I shouldn’t have done what I did with him but that is no reason to drag his name through the dirt like this.”

“Just leave Lori.” His Dad snapped. Carl was grateful for that he wasn’t sure if he could spend another minute in her presence.

The door clicked shut behind her. Silence filled the room, Carl sat back down on the couch, defeated by the conversation they just had. He still couldn’t believe it had really happened. This month was rapidly becoming a nightmare that he was more than ready to wake up from. “Dad?” He whispered. “You still believe me right?” Unfair doubts seeped poison through him, what if his Dad changed his mind? What if he started to believe her?
“Carl look at me.” Carl reluctantly did so. “I believe you. I will always believe you. Nothing your Mom says will ever change that. I believe you, it’s your turn to believe me now.”

Carl nodded, reaching out for his Dad to hold him. The man wasted no time in wrapping him in his arms, this time he tightened his own around him.

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He'd been watching his Dad all morning, hovering around him, looking out for any signs that he might be on the verge of a complete breakdown. His whole world had been turned upside down there's no way that he was just fine. Carl had barely been holding it together and he'd had years to adjust to the fact that Shane wasn't the good guy everyone thought he was. The only good thing was that he'd been so busy watching out for his Dad that he hadn't had a chance to think about his own feelings. Last night had been a shock to say the least and he'd spent more time that he wanted crying about it before he fell into an uneasy sleep. He kept waking up hoping that she'd changed her mind and would come rushing back in apologizing. Even now he still hoped she might come to her senses, that maybe her reaction was just an instinctive one because of the shock. As the day drew on he quickly realised that wasn't going to happen.

He went on a run out to the store, nearly slipping on ice several times but he needed the crisp air in his lungs. It was too suffocating in that house, the absence of his Mom too noticeable for him to ignore it. He came back from the store to find his Dad standing in their kitchen just staring into space. He didn't acknowledge Carl's entrance, just kept staring.

“Dad?” He cautiously approached him, not wanting to startle the man.

“Is this where he did it? That first time? You said it happened in the kitchen.”

He tentatively placed the bags down trying to buy himself some time before he had to answer the question. “Yeah, the...um...counter there.” He pointed to the island that dominated the centre of the kitchen. He didn't look at it, he hadn't been able to look at it since it had happened. It had become a habit to avert his eyes, not wanting to risk the memories springing to the surface. Even now at the sheer mention of it he could feel that punishing grip on the back of his neck, the clawing of sharp nails dragging at his clothes.

The subtle flare of Rick’s nostrils was the only indication that he'd heard him.

“I got more brea-”

“We should move.”

“What?” He couldn’t quite believe the words coming from his mouth. Move? They couldn’t just move, this was their home regardless of what had happened in it.

“We should move.” His Dad repeated, finally drawing his gaze up to look at Carl. “There’s nothing keeping us here Carl, we could go anywhere, do whatever we want. Just up and leave.” He became more impassioned as he spoke, a spark finally lighting up in his eyes.

In that moment Carl almost said yes, he thought about them grabbing what they needed then just hitting the road. Him and his Dad. They could piece themselves back together, reclaim who they were before all of this shit went down. They could just be Carl and Rick, father and son not victim and murderer. Even as he considered it he knew it could never be that way, not just because of that part of him that screamed at the thought of leaving Negan. “It wouldn’t really be us Dad.” He said softly. “We don’t run from our problems, we stay and we fight. That’s what we do. Leaving...that
would mean letting him win.”

Rick’s voice broke as he tried to talk again. “I just want you to feel safe Carl, I don’t want him to be haunting around us for the rest of our lives.”

“He’s gonna haunt us wherever we go if we let him. We could be in the middle of the arctic and he’d still be around if we think about him. We just have to let him go.”

“Do you still think about him?”

“Sometimes.” Carl admitted. It was a damn well more than sometimes, even gone Shane was still a dominant presence in his mind. The effects of the abuse still lingered at the back of his head jolting to the forefront whenever someone so much as brushed past him. Simply walking back inside the house had his heart pounding, fear trickling in at the thought that Shane might be sat there waiting for him. He often wondered if the thoughts would ever go away. Would he ever be able to handle the touch of a stranger without his skin crawling? “Do you?”

“All the time.”

Carl followed his Dad back into the living room, sitting beside him on the couch. There was no way that he was leaving the man side that evening, he was determined to get somewhere with him. He couldn’t keep this up, sure he was fine in public now but Carl was certain that it would all change if he didn’t get a decent night’s sleep soon. “What is you think about?”

“Carl why'd you wanna know?”

“Because I'm worried about you. You've not been the same since…” Carl let the sentence hang in the air. “We can talk about him y'know. He was your friend for so many years, what happened doesn’t change that, it doesn’t change your feelings. Even...even after it happened the first few times, I still loved him. I still wanted to believe the good in him, it’s okay if you feel that way Dad.”

“I hate him, so damn badly, if I had the chance I’d kill him all over again but... I do miss him, like hell. Part of me will probably always miss him and I hate myself for that.”

“I missed him too.” Carl admitted. “Missed the guy he was before it all happened. It’s like mourning someone that I wasn’t sure was even there.”

“I don’t know what makes it worse, him caring then doing what he did, or him never truly caring. That’s what I think about.” Rick sighed. “I’ve been think about everything. I think about him hurting you and me being unable to stop it. I think about all the things I missed about him, all the hints that he wasn't the man I thought he was. Hell, I think about all the hints I missed about Lori being in love with him.”

“You think Mom was in love with him?”

“Yeah...I don't know… it seems like it. How else could she possibly believe him over you? He was like a brother to me but I still listened, she didn't even try.”

“D’you think she'll come back?” Carl asked.

“I don't know, to be honest Carl I don't know if I want her to come back.” He paused. “She's your mom Carl, that'll never change and I'd never want it to change but I think, no I know, our marriage is over. There's no point in holding on any longer.”

“Yeah. Moving on right?”
“Right.” Rick wrapped an arm around Carl. “Just you and me. That's all I need right now.”

Chapter End Notes

So this one might prove a lil controversial with the whole Lori thing, I actually really wanted her to believe Carl but I live for the drama. Also it's hard to believe that someone you love could do such awful things, there's so many instances where abusers have gotten away with it because their partner couldn't believe that they'd so such a thing. I actually love Lori in the show so it was hard to write her in this way and I do want to give her some redemption if the plot allows.

I know this chappy was probably a little short on plot but I feel like we could all do with a break from supreme angst times, and let's face it they just killed someone they need some down time.
Let's talk about sex...

Chapter Notes

I'm sooorrryy! I honestly didn't intend to leave it so long! I was just super sick last week and I just couldn't focus enough to write anything decent. Thankfully I'm on the mend now and I'm stuck at home dog sitting this week so I should be able to get another chapter up even quicker :D
Thank you so much for the patience guys! Hope this one makes the wait worth it <3

“The question is not how to get cured, but how to live.”
— Joseph Conrad

February 2018

Tick Tock

Tick Tock

Tick Tock

Each tick of the clock was like nails on a chalkboard, it electrified the hairs on the back of his neck, itched at his skin like a rash. His nails dug into his palm where they met around the pen, he’d given up trying to write notes, he was too jittery, too uneasy to pay attention to whatever the teacher was rambling on about. His thoughts were sporadic, juddering through his brain at a million miles an hour. He didn’t have the energy to land on one so he just sat there watching them flicker like his own personal movie. Memories mixed with fantasies, what was real and fake intertwined and became indistinguishable in his mind. It had become far too common an occurrence for him recently. He seemed to spend more time trying to separate the two than anything else. He would lay awake at night, trying to work out if there were really footsteps on the stairs of if he was imagining it. He’d jolt awake on the nights he did sleep fighting against the phantom hands he could swear were roving over his body. It was like he was living in purgatory, caught between reality and his hallucinations.

It was exhausting .

He could hardly sleep because of it. The tiredness made it all the worst. He was so much more susceptible to that damn voice that trickled poison into his ear. He really was pathetic. Self-doubt plagued at him, forcing him to question every single thing that he did, all because of one stupid mistake.

“Carl? Carl?” The teacher snapped at him for attention.

“Oh…uh…yes?” He timidly replied.
“You gonna answer the question?”

Shit, what did the man want from him? “Could…could you repeat it?”

Sniggering laughter filled his ears creating a deep, red flush that he could feel spreading over his face. He’d never been this bad in class before. Admittedly he’d never really participated but he’d always been able to answer when he’d been called on. He really needed to sort his head out.

“Next time pay attention.” His teacher chastised him before he was saved by the shrill bell that signalled the end of class.

He scrambled out of the classroom, ignoring the pointed shoves from his classmates as they squeezed through the tiny doorway, and joined the hoard of students making their way through the corridor.

“Grimes.” He nearly jumped out of his skin as his name was called again. Heart pounding in his chest in a panic before realising exactly who was calling his name. Negan. The very person who had jumbled his thoughts so damn badly. “Grimes, get in here.”

Taunting ‘ooohs’ from his classmates were silenced by a deadly glare from Negan, as stupid as the students were, they did hold a begrudging respect for the man. The ones hassling him sauntered off at Negan’s command, leaving him to fight his way through students heading to class so he could slide into the office. He took care not to brush against Negan as he entered, pushing himself against the doorframe to avoid contact.

The door clicked shut behind him, muffling the hustle from the other side. There was a moment of pure uncomfortable silence before Negan spoke. “You gonna talk to me now or are we gonna stand here in silence like a pair of idiots?”

Carl didn’t turn around, he wasn’t sure if he was ready to face him. Guilt swarmed his stomach making him nauseous with it. He knew this conversation would happen eventually, he just thought he’d have more time to figure things out before it did.

“Carl?” Negan prompted again.

“I…what do you want me to say?” He eventually asked. He knew he’d said the wrong thing when he heard the loud sigh behind him.

“Carl this damn well isn’t about what I want to hear. It’s about you tellin’ me why you’ve been avoiding me the last couple of weeks.”

He rubbed at his face, he really was too tired for this conversation. He couldn’t think. “This isn’t the place to talk about it.” Carl offered, hoping the reminder of where they were would give him a chance to escape.

“It seems to be the only place we can talk about it.”

“We can talk another time.” Carl turned, determinedly heading towards the door. He was stopped by a soft grip on his arm that made him baulk. “I have to go.” Head focused on the wood, eyes pointedly not looking over at Negan.

“Carl?” Negan was almost desperate with his protest.

It chipped at the veil between them. He reluctantly turned his head to face him, Carl melting at the pleading look in his eyes as they finally locked together. “Negan…I....” He was at a loss for words, unable to come up with a decent explanation for what had happened.
“Carl, c’mon it’s me. We can talk about it. Please, please don’t shut me out again. What happened? Why did you go?”

His words broke Carl, he pathetically replied. “Because you confused me.”

“What?” Bafflement etched over Negan’s face.

It all started a couple of weeks ago, he had managed to escape from his Dad for a few hours and headed to Negan’s place so they could finally spend some time together. It had been perfect, they’d gone for a run together, ate dinner, it was such a relief to just to be with him. Until later in the evening, when he and Negan had settled on the couch to watch a movie that was quickly ignored in favor of a more heated way to spend the evening. Like before Carl had quickly settled himself on Negan’s lap, straddling the man as their tongues got reacquainted. Two torturous weeks of being unable to touch the man had him scrambling to grab at any part of Negan he could reach. This time, however, Carl didn’t flinch away when he felt hardness against his stomach instead he followed his body’s wants and pushed closer drawing their bodies flush together. Losing himself in hot kisses, in the blissful grind of their bodies moving together in a way that he never thought would feel so damn good. He’d clutched at Negan, whimpering out soft moans as Negan’s hands dug into his hips pulling them closer together, sparking pleasure in every inch of his body. His climax had overwhelmed him, moans turning into cries, his own nails digging into Negan’s shoulders. He shuddered in his arms, held Negan through his own orgasm, taken a moment to feel the heat of his cheek against his own. Their heavy pants twining together.

It was an unexpected and stupid mistake. A momentary loss of the tightly held control he had over himself, the blissful pleasure an irresistible distraction from all the shit in his head.

Nausea had slammed into him almost immediately after, disgust at himself filling his body in a way that he hadn’t anticipated. He quickly extracted himself from Negan’s grip, stuttered out an excuse before grabbing his keys and running out to his Dad’s car. The man’s protests and questions filled his mind through the whole drive home.

They hadn’t spoken since. Carl had stubbornly ignored all of his phone calls and texts, going out of his way to avoid seeing him at school.

He hated himself for it. It had driven him crazy, triggered this irrational uncertainty that had infected his brain. He’d become so lost without Negan and now here they were, trapped in his office, nowhere for Carl to run. No way he could possibly avoid confronting what Carl had so desperately been ignoring.

“I confused you? How?” Negan finished.

“You didn’t…I don’t…it’s hard to explain.”

“Try.”

“Negan.” Now he was the one pleading. “I’m gonna be late for my next class.” The bell had rung out ages ago, the noise in the hall had slowly dwindled to nothing. They were alone.

“I’ll write you a note. I want answers Carl. I deserve them.”

“No, you don’t.” Carl snapped back at him, it was like an echo of their previous conversation. That familiar rage building at another demand of him.

“Yes, I do.” Negan pushed back, stepping closer to him, staring him down.
Carl hated how those damn dark eyes searched him, it felt like they were piercing down into his soul. “It’s none of your business?”

“It’s none of your business?” An incredulous laugh filled the room, Negan’s voice hushed when he spoke again. “If you grindin’ on my dick makes you run away then it damn well is my business.”

Carl blushed at the blunt words, he knew why Negan was doing it. The man knew he got more of a response when he didn’t beat around the damn bush, it always knocked Carl so much that he’d accidentally reveal more than he wanted to. Not this time. “It wasn’t that.”

“Then what was it?”

He huffed at him, sick of this damn conversation, sick of himself for making it necessary to have it. “It confused me because it made me feel sick.”

Negan took a step back, visibly recoiling at his words. “Wha- shit. Did you…” The man swallowed hard, he looked like he was about to be sick. “Did you not want to…?”

“NO, no I did. You didn’t…” Carl couldn’t finish the sentence, horrified with himself for making the man think for a second that he would do something like that. “I did want it. That’s the problem-God, Negan I want you so badly all the time. That night though…after. I wanted it but after I felt so disgusted with myself. You didn’t make me sick, I did.”

“Carl…” Negan’s voice was soft, comforting, full of an understanding that Carl knew he didn’t deserve.

“I’m sorry I ran off, I just…I thought you’d be disgusted with me too.” He whispered the last words, hanging his head.

“You could never disgust me Carl.” He said the words with such conviction Carl almost believed him. “We need to talk about this, properly.”

As reluctant as Carl was to continue the discussion, he knew the man was right. He didn’t want to lose him, he needed Negan around. He’d missed him so much the last two weeks, it was like a piece of him was missing. He couldn’t take it, not after everything else that was going on. They made plans to meet that Friday, four days away, four days for Carl to sort his shit out. Great.

He left the room, ditching the rest of his classes for that day. Instead he ran, losing himself in the one thing that wouldn’t make him feel bad.

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His was surprised to see his Dad’s car parked in the drive when he arrived back home, he’d ran the whole way from school, sweat dripped uncomfortably down his back. It was a stupid thing to do, especially in jeans with a backpack but it was everything he’d needed. The air rushed into his lungs giving him more life than he’d felt in such a long time. He debated entering the house, it was way too early for him to be home from school, his Dad would know that he’d ditched. Then again, they pair had hardly spoken the last couple of weeks so he could quite easily make an excuse as to why he was home early.

Making the decision just to go inside and deal with the consequence, he opened the door and walked into a total destruction zone. His heart jumped in fear, had they been burgled? Is that why his Dad was home? Was his Dad alright? He raced further into the house, shocked when he saw his Dad hacking away at his favorite chair with a small axe.
“Dad!”

The man jumped, axe raised defensively as he twisted around, an ugly snarl on his face. The axe fell to his side when he saw Carl standing there gobsmacked. “Carl? What are you doing home?”

“I took some time off, decided to redecorate.” Was all Rick could say.

“Could say the same thing to you. What are you *doing*?” The house was a mess, furniture broken and spread about on the floor. Broken glass littered whatever carpet he could see, pictures from the mantle were smashed and lying in a heap by the fireplace. It stung at him to see so many treasured items so heartlessly wrecked.

“There’s redecorating and there’s destroying everything. Did you leave *anything* in place?” Why did all these things seem to happen in one day? Couldn’t he just have some time to get over one thing?

“Could say the same thing to you.”

“My bedroom?”

“You’ll need a new bed.”

Carl wanted to scream at him, shake him from whatever madness had possessed him to do this, whatever madness that had taken over his Dad since that night. He’d thought they’d moved pass this with their last discussion but he’d been so wrong. Things had just gotten worse, they’d fallen back into their old easy routine of ignoring each other so they wouldn’t have to talk about what they really needed to. They were miserable. Neither of them sleeping, Carl would often hear his Dad pottering around the house in the early hours when he was lying in bed awake.

“C’mon Carl, this’ll be good for us. A new start for the place, get rid of old reminders.”

“Of Shane or of Mom?” It was a low blow, he knew better than to mention his Mom in front of the man. The last time Carl had mentioned her his Dad ended up storming out of the house, and he’d spent the night curled up on the couch waiting for him to come home. When he did, Carl got nothing more than a grunt in his direction before the man stumbled upstairs, stinking of alcohol. The sudden stench of whiskey, that shocking reminder of Shane, had him vomiting into the kitchen stink.

Rick’s jaw clenched tight. “It’s not about them. It’s about us Carl, starting a new life for us. There’s no place for this old crap.”

“So where’s it all gonna go?”

“I’ve got some guys coming in tomorrow to take it away, they’re gonna help repaint and bring the new things in. I thought we could go out and buy it all this weekend.”

Carl didn’t like the idea of strangers rummaging through all their things. “What about Mom’s stuff?”

“I’ve mailed it to her.”

“So that’s it then? No need for her to come back?”

“There’s you Carl, she’ll come around.”

He didn’t answer that, he knew she wouldn’t. Two weeks had passed without a single phone call from her, nothing to suggest that she wanted anything to do with him. Another sting of pain that he had to add to the pile growing in the pit of his soul. “So where am I gonna sleep tonight?”
His Dad accepted the redirection. “I dug out the cots from camping. I’ll make some space in here for us.”

“Us?”

“Yeah, it’ll be fun. Like one of our camping trips.”

Carl didn’t want to think about what happened on their last camping trip. He forced a smile, at least his Dad was doing something, they weren’t just ignoring each other. “Great.”

“Glad you approve. I’m gonna go rustle up some dinner, use up some food before we tear the whole thing out.” Rick said before leaving him alone in the living room.

A glimmer on the floor caught his eye, he crouched down to pick up the frame the peaked out of the pile. His own smiling face beamed up at him, there he was all chubby and happy, snug between his proud parents. He could remember his Grandpa taking it on his birthday, the last one before the man passed away. The face was so different, he hardly recognized himself underneath the smashed glass. A pang of longing shot through him, infecting every pore with a desperate sadness that made him want to cry.

“Carl! Come help me with this stuff.”

Working quickly, he slipped the photo out of the frame and into his back pocket before heading into the kitchen to help his Dad.

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He arrived home the next evening to an even bigger mess. Furniture from the upstairs and downstairs were thrown together in the living room, half full boxes decorated whatever floor had been left exposed. Harsh laughter filled the house emanating from the kitchen. Carl cautiously approached the latest danger zone. The whole thing had been dismantled, counters ripped from walls, nothing more than the oven and fridge stood in the room alongside the three men. His Dad one of them, he didn’t recognise the others, ‘Dixon Bro’s’ was embroidered on the back of their shirts, the same as depicted on the large van occupying his mother’s spot on the driveway.

“Hey Carl.” His Dad spoke when he noticed him enter the room.

It was unnerving how all three sets of eyes focused in on him, Carl faltered under the attention, mouth flopping open uselessly.

“Uh...this is Daryl and Merle.” Rick stepped in. “You’re probably gonna see them around a lot in the next coupla weeks, they’re helping with the redecorating.”

They both flicked their heads up in a greeting. Not the most conversational guys but Carl couldn’t really judge. He managed a weak smile in return, taking a step back, stomach falling as he tripped backwards on an old side table. If it wasn’t for Daryl quickly reaching out for him he might have ended up impaled on one of the legs, not that he really noticed in the moment. He was too busy focusing on the hard grip on his arm and the arm wrapped around his waist forcing him against a hard body. His heart pounding, a cold sweat dragged over him as he struggled to get out of the grip, his breath crushed out of him with the force of a punch. Fear slammed into his body, muffled voices surrounded him but the only one he could hear was Shane whispering in his head. The grip on his arm turned punishing, nails digging in deep, the sharp pain that had nothing on the terrifying grip on his heart. His body screamed for air that he couldn’t drag into his lungs. His own voice cried out amongst the rest, pleading for a mercy he knew wouldn’t come.
He took his moment when the grip eased, pushing the man away from him. He tripped and stumbled on the furniture as he made his escape, he didn’t stop until he was outside again. Falling to his knees as he tried to claw breath back into his lungs. *Hesnotherehesnotherehesnothere* he tried to remind himself, Shane’s dead, he couldn’t hurt him. The mantra did nothing to quell the fear roaring inside of him. He could still *feel* him, still feel the digging grip, he dragged up his jacket sleeves and was shocked to see nothing there. Just pale skin made slightly red where the man had gripped him. Daryl. Not Shane. Not again he couldn’t hurt him again. He focused on his hands on the grass, the feel of the cold blades under his palms, the smell of the fresh air. He had to calm down, get himself under control.

“Carl?”

He tensed at the voice, body ready to run, adrenaline spiking through him.

“It’s alright Carl it’s just Dad.”

Dad. His Dad. The grass crunched near him, a soft hand tentatively rubbed at his back. He leaned into it, sitting back onto his feet.

“You alright?”

He nodded, mouth too dry for words at this point. Still trying to get his heart rate back to normal.

“The guys left, Daryl and Merle. It’s just us now.”

He wanted to deny the overwhelming relief that shuddered through him, they were alone, no more strangers. Embarrassment warred with that relief, he’d much such an idiot out of himself. How was he supposed to face them again after freaking out like that?

“Wanna go back inside?”

He shook his head. Not yet, he needed air, there was no air in that damn building.

“Alright…we can sit here till you’re ready.”

He shakily reached out to grab his Dad’s hand, clutching at it hard. His breathing still erratic but his mind was clearing, the panicked thoughts less prominent.

“Just breathe Carl just breathe.”

In and out. In and out.

Rick helped him up when he was finally ready to go back inside, practically carrying him back into the house. He felt so *weak* , not just physically, his emotions were wrecked, his mind a jumble of shit. The winter cold bit at the pair of them, he could feel his Dad’s body shake next to his own. He was hardly wearing anything the man must be freezing.

“Sit here.” Rick had led him a cot, navigating the wreckage in the living room. He wrapped a thick blanket around him, rubbing his shoulders to try and warm him up. Rick hadn’t done that in years but it was an all too familiar gesture from his childhood

“Thanks Dad.”

“It’s what I’m here for.” Rick sat next to him again, wrapping his arm around Carl, still trying to rub warmth into him.
“You don’t have to fuss Dad.”

“Yes I do, I’m your Dad it’s my job.” A pause, then the arm tensed around his shoulder. “Unless you want me to stop? You need some space?”

“No no it’s fine.” He appreciated the gesture but he was actually enjoying the comfort.

They sat together, enjoying the warmth of the house until Carl’s rumbling stomach interrupted the silence.

“Hungry?” Rick laughed.

“That obvious?”

“I’ll order take out, can’t really cook right now.”

“Not after you destroyed the kitchen.”

“Revamped, work in progress, not destroyed.” Rick pointed out.

“Whatever Dad.” He rolled back onto the cot, taking the time before dinner arrived to collect himself again.

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“So Daryl’s invited me to a poker game Friday night.” Rick said through a mouth full of pizza.

“Friday huh? You gonna go?”

“I’m not sure yet. Don’t feel like leaving you here on your own.”

Carl toyed with his food, brain trying to figure out the most tactful way of asking if he can spend the evening with his high school coach. God, even in his own head it sounded ridiculous.

“Well...actually… Negan invited me over, for dinner on Friday. If you’re gonna be out then maybe I could go…”

Rick had stopped eating, he had that unhappy look on his face, the one that usually didn’t end well for Carl. “I don’t like the idea of you two seeing each other.”

Here they go, the topic they’d been avoiding since Rick had found out about the pair of them. He had been wondering how long it would take for his Dad to get over the good side of his relationship with Negan. “Dad, you said you weren’t going to stop us seeing each other.”

“I know what I said but that was a different time. My head was a damn mess Carl I wasn’t thinking straight-“

“Oh and you’re thinking straight now? Definitely looks like it.” Carl gestured to the mess around them.

Rick scoffed at him. “I’m thinking straighter than ever Carl. It’s not healthy for you to be spending time with him. You should be hanging out with kids you own age, like Enid.”

“You mean hang out with the kids that ignored me the second things got tough? Instead of the man that saw me, liked me when no one else did.”

“You don’t owe him for that Carl, you don’t have to spend time with him just because you think you
have to.”

“I know that.” He ground out. “I like spending time with him, not out of an obligation.”

“You might like spending time with other kids.”

“Jesus, Dad, I’m not 12 I don’t need you picking friends for me.”

“I’m not tryna pick friends for you I just want what’s best for you.”

“Negan is what’s best for me...or at least part of what’s best for me. He helps Dad, it’s nothing seedy, we just talk.”

“All the time?” Rick probed.

Carl thought about lying, although he’d hinted at there being more to their relationship, he had never expressly said that they’d done anything more than talk. His Dad appeared to take his prolonged silence as an answer for he grew more impassioned when he spoke. “Carl, you can’t do anything like that with a teacher.”

“He’s not my teacher.” Carl protested, it was a weak argument he knew but he was getting desperate.

“He’s still in no position to be doing anything with a student.”

“Are you really gonna fuss about this? After everything I’ve been through don’t I deserve to have a choice in the matter?”

“Of course you do Carl but that’s precisely why I’m not exactly eager for you two to be spending time together. How do I know that he’s not pressuring you into being with him?”

“You...you’re just gonna have to trust me Dad. It’s just as bad for him if anyone finds out about this.”

“And is it worth it? Really worth it?”

Carl answered in a heartbeat. “Yes. It might not make sense, God, it doesn’t make any sense to me but it just feels right and the last thing I need is you trying to keep me away from the one thing that makes me feel normal.”

“Do...do I not make you feel normal?” A hurt look appeared on his face.

“You do...you try. We’ve just not really had time for normal.” He tried to explain in a way that wouldn’t hurt his feelings anymore.

“Carl...” He could see Rick was getting more frustrated. “I want to help, I know I haven’t been in the right headspace recently but... it’s because I don’t know how to help you feel better.”

“Dad, I’m fine.”

“Except that you’re not. I see it Carl, you may not realise it but I see it all now. I see how you flinch when I touch you or when someone brushes you in the street. I hear the nightmares whenever you do sleep. I see you trying to act normal for me Carl and I see how that’s exhausting you.”

Maybe Negan was right, maybe he wasn’t as secretive as he thought he was. Then again, he’d spent so much time knowing that no one was seeing him that he’d stopped trying to pretend that he was
“I just want to help you Carl but I need to know how. Is all this helping? Changing the house or am I making it worse? I...I need help so I can help you.”

Carl stood, pacing away from him, he couldn’t think. He didn’t have any answers to his questions, he hadn’t thought about what it really meant for him to change the house, or even how he could help him. Was there anything that anyone could do to make things better? What even was better? Less angry? Less twitchy? More capable of dealing with things? “I don’t know Dad, honestly. Things have been better, I think. It’s an adjustment more than anything, I’m still getting used to not having...Shane around, and Mom. I can’t even think about anything more than that.”

“But Negan helps? He makes it better?”

“Yeah...he does.”

“How? What does he do that I can’t?” Rick paused, standing to confront Carl. “Is it sex?”

“Dad!” Embarrassment and outrage exploded out of him. How could he ask him that?

“Is it Carl? Are you two sleeping together? Is it...I dunno... a distraction from things?”

“No... just no Dad. It’s not like that at all, we’re not sleeping together, nowhere near that.” A slight lie considering recent events but his Dad really didn’t need to know about that.

“Then what does he do Carl? How does he make it better when I can’t. I’m your father, I’m supposed to be able to help.”

“That’s why it’s harder Dad, I worry about hurting you, with Negan I don’t have to. It’s just simple, I talk, he listens. With you...it’s more complicated.”

“How can I make it less complicated?”

“Just be there Dad, it’ll get better but it’s gonna take time. Just like it’s gonna take time for you to get better.”

“I’m fin-”

“No you’re not Dad. If you keep going this way you’re gonna run yourself down. Redecorate, do whatever you have to do to erase Shane from your life but please do something normal. Go to the poker game, go out with some guys from work. Just relax, then we can work on us.”

His Dad sighed. “Alright, I’ll go on Friday. You...you go see Negan, just promise me if anything bad happens you tell me. I just want to know Carl, no more secrets.”

“I can do that, we’re already doing that now. It is better, with us, it’s better.”

“Yeah. I know. I’m just being overprotective.”

“I don’t mind it, just trust me every now and again.”

“I can do that.”

“Good, now can we finish the food? I’m starving.” It was a lie, the conversation had unsettled him too much to actually eat but anything was better than the conversation they were having.
Butterflies filled his stomach when he approached the mahogany door, taking a deep breath to calm his nerves before he knocked. It was stupid, he’d been here a thousand times he shouldn’t be nervous. He wasn’t even sure what he was anxious about, the conversation or the lingering concern that he’d once again do something stupid that would put distance between them.

“Hey.”

Carl snapped his head up at the sound of his voice, giving a small smile as a greeting. He was surprised to see the man all wrapped up, what looked like a blanket under his arm, bag in the other. “Going somewhere?”

“Yep. Let’s go.”

“Oook, where are we going?”

“Back up to the edge, c’mon.” He gestured with his head for him to get moving.

They fell into step together, it was almost unsettling how easily they walked in sync, almost as if being together was pure instinct. It was a lovely winter afternoon, a cold sun in the sky making the fallen leaves shine on the ground. They crunched under their feet as they made their way up the steep climb.

“So why are we going up here again?” Carl panted out as he hopped onto the rocks that would take them up to the clearing.

“Because we need to talk, no distractions, no phones, no easy escape route for either of us. It’ll just be the two of us. It’s what we need.”

The clearing was just as beautiful as he remembered, the air brisk against his skin, giving his cheeks a nice flush. Closing his eyes against it, he stood and just breathed. They should really come up here more often it was so freeing.

He wasn’t sure how long he stood like that for, however long it was it wasn’t long enough. Negan was standing next to him, looking at him with an awe that he’d not seen on the man’s face for a long time. Carl gave him a faltering smile, heart skipping a beat at the look.

“You ok?”

He nodded at Negan, frowning when he saw the blanket spread out on the ground, a small fire flickering near it. “You lit a fire?”

“Yep, you were standing there awhile.”

“I didn’t even notice…” Carl let the sentence trail off wondering when he was going to get a grip on his head again.

“I was hoping you wouldn’t. You looked so peaceful.” Negan stroked his knuckles across his cheek, wonderment filling his voice.

“Hard to be anything else up here.”

“C’mon.”

Carl let Negan take his hand and lead him over to the blanket. They settled down next to each other,
bodies barely brushing, sitting to face the great expanse of the forest. He waited for Negan to start talking, ready to answer whatever question he had for him. The man said nothing, just sat there with him looking out at the view, the orange glow of the fire illuminating half his face in a way that made him all the more striking. Soon enough Carl realised that he was waiting for Carl to do the talking, no doubt letting him decide the pace rather than forcing him into the conversation. It was the most annoying, perfect thing he could do. Carl took a deep breath before breaking the calm silence. “I think I’m wrong.”

Negan’s head snapped over to him before speaking slowly. “Okay, why’d you think that?”

“Isn’t it obvious?”

Negan’s clueless look told him everything.

“How I feel is wrong. Every instinct I have is wrong, everything my body does just feels wrong.” He couldn’t find the words to really explain it. “That night…when I ran… I was so sure that we did what I wanted but after… I felt so ashamed of myself, so disgusted with what I did. I don’t even know why and it’s driving me crazy. I don’t know what to do, how am I supposed to live my life when I feel like I can’t trust myself to make the right choice. How are we ever supposed to…” He took a deep breath bracing himself. “How are we supposed to ever have sex if all it does is make me sick?”

Negan sat there in silence when he finished. Carl wondered if this was it, if this was the moment when Negan reached his limit and decided he couldn’t take all this damn insanity. Knots twisted in his stomach, doubts plaguing at him once again, maybe he had said too much.

“Carl, it’s alright that you feel that way.” Negan took his time answering, wanting to consider each word before he spoke again. “It’s not your fault, it’s just your body’s instinct to that kinda thing right now and it’s no surprise given what you’ve been through.”

His instinct because Shane had made it that way, had warped his body into something that was out of his control. He’d been so hopeful that the man’s death would make him normal again but it hadn’t. The monster was just as buried under his skin in death as he had been in life. “So I am fucked up?”

“No! No, Carl. You’re not fucked up. Just…everything you know about sex is from that bastard, right?”

Carl nodded, eyes averting downwards to focus on his shoes, a deep shame about his own inexperience floated through him.

“So, your body and everything associated with it comes with all the feelings and emotions that you went through with him. It becomes a reflex, nothing more than that. It’s probably why you were so upset after we… did what we did, you were probably remembering the feelings you felt after you were with Shane.”

“How am I supposed to get over a reflex?” It seemed more impossible the more they spoke.

“Time, effort, practice. It’s all about going at your own pace, figuring out what you need and what you want.”

“And what about you? What about what you want? If I can never get past it is that it for you?”

“God no Carl. You’re more than just a body to me, I’m with you because I like being with you not because I think I’m gonna get laid. I’ll take as much or as little as you’re willing to give Carl. All I ask is that you’re honest with me, if you don’t want to do something then tell me, if I make you
uncomfortable then you gotta tell me.”

“I can do that.” Carl sniffed back his tears at the man’s words. It gave him hope again, maybe one day he’d be normal again.

“Good, it’s just gonna take some time Carl, you’ll be alright.” A large hand covered his, Carl looked down as it curled around his own, believing for the first time since he’d freaked out that he might be.

They laid down when the sky darkened, resting next to each other as they looked at the twinkling stars that littered the night. The heat from the fire nothing compared to the heat radiating off the man next to him, Carl shifted closer wanting to feel more of it against him. Owls hooted in the distance, leaves rustled as a gentle breeze blew them across the floor just brushing past their feet.

“How did you become to knowledgable about all that stuff anyway?” He’d been pondering that question for awhile, somehow he didn't have Negan pegged as a guy that would just know that sort of thing.

“Google.”

“You Google’d it?”

“You Google’d it?”

“Yup, not long after I found out. I wanted to try and understand what you might be going through. I know I never could but at the very least I wanted to know something that could help.”

“Well you did.” Carl gave him a smile, a surge of appreciation soared through him. He really was damn lucky to have him around.

“I’m glad.” He smiled at him, eyes twinkling as much as the stars above him.

“I am sorry, about before.” Carl flicked his eyes away. “I didn’t want it to be like that the first time we...did things. I wasn’t planning on just jumping you like that, hadn't planned on it being so rushed.”

“It's fine Carl, not your fault I’m so damn irresistible.”

He had to laugh at that.

“It was pretty damn perfect anyways, besides the whole running off bit.” Negan added catching Carl’s eyes again. “Besides there’s plenty of time for nice and slow, don’t worry about it.”

Carl nudged closer, leaving the sweetest kiss on Negan’s lips, lingering as he breathed the man in. He took a moment after to simply enjoy the tingles that spread through his body, at least there was one thing he knew wouldn’t freak him out.

“We should head back down, grab some food.” The voice of reason spoke out.

“Ten more minutes?” Carl asked, curling closer to Negan.

A soft kiss landed on the top of his head, before a whispered “Sure” breezed through his hair.

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Carl’s growling stomach was enough to convince Negan that it was most definitely time to leave, no matter how many pouting protests the teen came up with.

Carl gathered up the blanket whilst Negan dealt with the fire, he took one last longing look at the
moonlit landscape before taking the offered hand and allowing himself to be led back down to the
cabin. It took them longer to get back, both enjoying simply walking along together, making
mindless conversation as they made their way through the woods. Carl took their coats when they
got back, leaving Negan to start the dinner in the kitchen. It was so damn domestic that it made him
laugh to himself. He never thought he’d end up here, hell, barely six months ago he figured he’d be
dead by now, not making dinner with the school coach how happened to be his... whatever he was.

He made his way back to the kitchen drawn in by the alluring scent coming from the hot stove
Negan was currently fussing over. “So where’s my dinner?”

Negan chuckled at him. “Only here for the food huh?”

He played confused. “Why else would I be here?”

“You’re such an ass.”

“Spaghetti again?”

“It’s what I do best.”

“I dunno, you’re pretty handy with a baseball bat.”

Negan gave him a dark look. “Behave yourself.”

“I’ll be good I promise.” He leaned against the counter next to him watching the man work. It really
was beautiful watching him cook, he worked smoothly with an effortless expertise. Carl didn’t think
he’d ever get bored of watching him.

“You wanna take a picture?” The man commented, noticing the blue eyes following him.

“Nah, the real thing is so much better.” Openly checking him out now, heart racing that little bit
faster when the man swaggered closer. Placing an arm either side of Carl, forearms just brushing his
waist, he leaned in closer.

“What did I say about behaving?” His breath ghosted Carl’s lips as he spoke.

“I am! Just waiting for my food.” He gave him an innocent smile.

“You. Are. Terrible.” The words were punctuated by sweet kisses, each one lingering longer than
the last, trailing up his neck.

“Is this supposed to be a punishment?” Carl whispered against him.

“Mmmhmmm obviously.”

Negan captured his lips in another kiss stepping in closer to Carl. He was damn well gonna make the
most of having him around, of finally being able to hold him like he wanted to. The taste of his lips
was nothing like he’d felt before, it was like the sweetest fruit. He dipped his tongue in wanting more
of that delicious nectar. Carl pushed himself closer, wrapping his arms around his neck, encouraging
his movements.

The timer on the alarm had them jumping apart, almost instinctively putting distance between them.

“That’ll be the garlic bread.”

“Wow, garlic bread, pulling out all the stops for me?”
“I live to impress.”

It really was an amazing dinner, Carl was sure he could eat this every night and never tire of it. The good company was just an added bonus.

He paused when he reached the couch afterwards, Negan shunning him to the living room so he could load the dishwasher. The memories of the last time he’d been there flushing him with embarrassment, once again he questioned why he didn’t just stop himself like he had the time before? The time before when he’d….it almost hurt to think about. Getting turned on by a guy beating another guy with a baseball bat...that was a whole new level of fucked up.

Negan’s voice startled him from his thoughts. “I got you a dri- you alright?”

Carl turned to give him a smile. “Yeah, all good, just thinking. Thanks.” He gratefully took the water from him, settling himself in his usual spot.

Negan joined him. “Thinkin’ about what?”

“Just things.” He said dismissively. “Whaddya wanna watch?”

“There’s obviously more than things on your mind. C’mon sharing is caring.”

Carl rolled his eyes at his words, the man came out with the weirdest shit sometimes. “I was thinking more about the time we were here, on the couch, after Shane had died.”

Negan put down his beer, taking a deep breath. “Weird night that was.”

“Yeah, just…um…I” He paused unable to figure out the most decent way of saying how he felt.

“Whatever it is Carl you can just say it. I’m sure I can handle it.”

“Is it fucked up? What we did after… is it weird that I liked seeing you hurt him?”

“You are not fucked up. It’s not… it’s not a bad thing necessarily Carl.”

“It feels like a bad thing. I feel ashamed that I think like that.”

“Don’t feel ashamed Carl, some people like that kinda thing, it’s perfectly normal. It’s a power thing, some people get off being in control, some people get off seeing people be powerful. Neither are right or wrong, it’s just how people are.”

“Do you get off on it? Being in control?”

“Yeah, I do, I like the power kick, the trust that comes when someone lets you take control.”

“Do you like hurting people?”

“We talkin’ about sex or fighting?”

Carl was starting to feel more and more out of his depth with this discussion. “Is there a difference?”

“Hell yeah. With sex it’s all consenting, it’s not about hurting someone it’s about finding that sweet spot that just between pain and pleasure…it’s fuckin’ indescribable watchin’ it happen. Seeing that look on a person’s face when they find it, helpin’ ‘em draw it out.”

Carl shifted around in his seat, the tightness in his jeans getting more uncomfortable as Negan spoke,
that damn drawl of his drawing each word out. The jealousy he felt at Negan being with other people had nothing on the lust that simmered under his skin at the thought of Negan doing it to him. He cleared his throat, trying to clear his mind. “And with fighting?” He prompted.

“That, well that’s more about justice. Knowing that some shithead’s gettin’ what’s been fuckin’ comin’ to them, there’s a rush in that. Pure adrenaline shootin’ through ya. It’s not about hurtin’ them it’s about making them feel what they’ve made other people feel.” Negan’s eyes locked on him. “There’s nothin’ wrong with you Carl, you’re just damn curious. With sex, it’s all about trial and error, figuring out what you like and what you don’t. Everyone goes through it.”

“And if I want your help…” He let his question trail, their eyes connecting.

“Jesus, you won’t get any fuckin’ complaints from me.”
Carl swallowed, trying to get some damn moisture in his mouth. Shooting his gaze away from that damn alluring face, now was not the time to lose control of himself again. “Okay, okay.” He was saved from having to change the topic but a buzz from his pocket.

“It’s from my Dad, he’s stayin’ the night at Daryl’s.”

“How’s Daryl?”

Carl rolled his eyes, shooting a text back to his Dad. “Don’t even ask. Is it alright if I stay here? I don’t really feel like going back home.” He didn’t mention the fact that the home was currently bare, Daryl and Merle having cleared the whole place out.

“Like I’m gonna complain about that.” Negan pulled him back against him, wrapping him in his arms. “Stay as long as you like.”

Carl settled in as Negan flicked the tv on, the roaring of crowd distracting him from any thoughts still linger in his head.

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He’d nearly fallen asleep when Negan jostled him. “I’m not falling asleep on the couch again, my old back can’t take it.”

“C’mon then old man.” Carl shifted forwards, stretching out as he stood up. Offering his hand out to help him up. Laughing when Negan pouted and pushed it away, preferring to stand on his own.

“Not that old you lil’ shit.”

Carl walked up the stairs first, pausing when he reached the landing, his eyes flicking between Negan’s bedroom and the spare room. The fizzle of indecision took hold of him again, doubts about whether he’d make the right choice plaguing his head. The last time they’d slept together it ended with him in tears, kicking and screaming at Negan, would it happen again?

“It’s up to you Carl.” Negan’s voice appeared in his ear. “You can stay in the spare room, or you can crash with me. Hell, you can even go back to your spot on the couch if you want.”

Carl made his choice, stepping into the moonlit bedroom. It hasn’t changed much since he’d last been in there, the bed still looked as cosy as ever.

“I’m...uh gonna need to borrow some more clothes.” Carl asked sheepishly. “Wasn’t expecting to be out all night.”
“I’m gonna run outta clothes if you keep stayin’ here.”

“I’ll give ’em back I swear. Don’t you own any pjs?” Carl asked, looking down at yet another pair of sweatpants that had been handed to him.

“Not really.” He sheepishly rubbed at the back of his head. I...uh...don’t tend to wear clothes to bed.”

Carl flushed at the thought, decidedly ignoring the twitch in his pants. “Oh, right.” Was all he could stutter out, his mouth suddenly felt dried than a desert.


“Mmmhmm.” There was an irrefutable pang of regret mixing with the relief in his chest. His body clearly not as in sync with his mind about not being ready for any further intimacy. Although part of his mind clearly wasn’t totally opposed to the idea, that was clear from the frankly indecent images it conjured up about the things he could do with a naked Negan in bed. “I’m gonna go change.” He blurted out before darting out of the room. Taking several deep breaths when he reached the bathroom to calm his body down.

Quickly changing, he washed up a little, stealing some mouthwash before heading back into the bedroom. Negan was sat on the edge of the bed, twirling his phone in his fingers, he looked so deep in thought Carl almost didn’t want to disturb him. Nonetheless he walked back into the room, giving him a soft smile when his attention turned back to him.

“All done?” Negan asked.

“Yep.”

“Great, Be right back.”

Carl dumped his clothes on the chair Negan he slept in before, vague sounds of taps running filled the background. Turning his attention back to the bed he stood for a moment, indecision biting at him. Which side should he sleep on? Did Negan have a side? He’d only ever had a single bed, what exactly was the protocol with this? With Shane he’d slept on whatever side the man had left him on. His parents always had their own side of the bed. Jesus Christ he really was the King of overthinking things. Giving himself a shake he threw caution to the wind and just slid in the side that he’d slept in before. It was just as comfortable as he remembered, smelling so delectably of Negan.

“Comfy?”

Blushing at being caught burrowing himself deep into the bed, he tried to seem nonchalant.

“S’alright.”

“Sure.” Sarcasm trickling in his voice.

The mattress creaked under Negan’s weight, Carl shifted away from him giving him more space. He clutched at the duvet, eyes searching the ceiling as his brain tried to find a topic that would ease the awkwardness he felt.

The mattress shifted again then there was a small poke on his arm. He looked over to Negan questioningly.

“Stop thinkin’”
“I’m not.” Carl rolled his eyes at Negan’s trademark ‘bullshit’ look. “I’m all good. Relaxing and all that.” He shuffled further under the duvet to make his point, closing his eyes.

Negan just scoffed at him, flopping over onto his back to get comfortable.

Carl shuffled again, this time deciding to shift closer to the warm body next to him. He’d been waiting for this for so long it was stupid to deprive himself just because he felt a little nervous. Without opening his eyes Negan lifted an arm inviting Carl to curl up under it which Carl did without hesitation. He rested his head on his chest, lulled by the steady heartbeat under him, the gentle caress of Negan’s hand up and down his back. He felt the nerves slowly dwindle until they were a distant feeling.

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His eyes shot open, flinching slightly under the bright morning sun that radiated heat through the window. It was weird, there was no panic, no gasping breaths, no thudding heart that almost hurt. Just a delightful ache that accompanied a good night of sleep, a hot arm draped casually over his waist, soft puffs of air against the back of his neck that didn’t make his skin crawl. A burst of joyous laughter escaped him, unable to help the outburst with all the happiness bubbling through him.

“Mmm, w-what’s with all the noise?” Negan’s sleep-filled voice drawled in his ear, arm tightening on his waist as the man snuggled himself closer.

Carl turned in his arms, looking at the sleepy face next to his, he’d call it adorable but he really didn’t wanna get his ass kicked. “I’m ok!”

“That’s great Carl, now lemme sleep.”

“No no, it’s not just great it’s amazing. I’m ok! I got some sleep.” He sounded like an idiot but he really didn’t care.

An indulgent smile crossed Negan’s face. “You’re too damn cute sometimes. I’m glad you got some sleep, now can I get back to mine?”

Carl just beamed back at him, glowing with the little victory. It was everything. It wasn’t a cure but it was hope, if he could do it once he could do it again. He placed a gentle kiss on Negan, once again grateful for him. A brown eye peeked open at his actions.

“M’not gonna get anymore sleep am I?”

“Probably not.”

A huff of air crossed his face before he was swept under Negan’s body, strong arms holding the man above him, chest’s barely brushing. “Alright then, wanna see what else you’re ok with?” That mischievous grin covered his face.

He really was damn irresistible, Carl bit his lip covering his own grin. He nodded, bringing the man’s head down to join their lips together taking his time to explore the smoky, sweet taste that was just so Negan.

They filled their morning with sweet, slow kisses that shot toe-curling tingles through his body. Hands never roving below the waist, both of them pointedly ignoring the hardness that rested between them. Now wasn’t the time to rush in with lust-filled gropes and mind-blowing orgasms, they had all the time in the world for that. Instead they twined their tongues together, fingers dipping teasingly under clothing, the smallest touches of fingertips on bare flesh burned through them. Gentle
nips landed on soft skin, tongue dipping out to lick over Carl’s racing pulse, back arching when those sharp teeth nipped on certain spots. The room grew more stifling as the kisses drove the both crazy, their skin glistening with a light sweat, hushed gasps and tender whispers echoed in the space. It was their private sanctuary, just the two of them, under the covers, hot, satisfying and utterly intoxicating.

Carl protested when those lips left his skin, hands trying to lure his head back down. He pouted when they were gently tugged away from Negan’s neck, softly restraining them in his hands.

“We gotta stop, or the whole takin’ it slow and easy is gonna go out the window.”

It didn’t help that Negan’s husky, lust-filled voice sent more of those tingles through his body, skin burning for more of that touch. He knew he was right, last time he’d gotten caught up it had gone so badly wrong. “Yeah, okay.”

“You good?”

Carl nodded, part of him was still waiting for disgust to seep in, but mostly he just wanted those damn lips back on his.

“Good.” Negan slid away from him. “Now I’m gonna go take a shower, go make yourself breakfast.”

“Gonna be awhile?” Carl teased with a knowing smirk.

“After those kisses? I’m not gonna be two fuckin’ minutes.”

“Good to know I’ve got somethin’ to look forward to.”

Not rising to the bait Negan leaned back over Carl, lips teasing over bitten, swollen ones. “When you’re damn well ready it’s gonna be a lot longer than two fuckin’ minutes.” He nuzzled along Carl’s jaw, lips now brushing over his ear. “I’m damn well gonna take my time findin’ all those little spots that make you gasp and squirm under me. I’ll spend the whole night findin’ all the ways I can get you to come screaming my name.”

Just as he was about to start begging the man to do all of that right this damn second, Negan pulled away, knowing smirk now on his face. “You wanna shower first?” He asked.

Carl just threw a pillow in response, turning over in the bed to try and stop the dirty images now flooding his mind.

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Breakfast was a more subdued affair, Carl’s heart skipping a beat at the glow Negan’s face when he came downstairs from the shower. It had taken everything in him to calm himself down when the man had left the room, trying not to think about what the man was doing in the shower. He eventually dressed himself so he could go grab some breakfast.

“You got plans for the day?” Negan asked.

“I dunno, I thought about going to visit my Mom.”

“She still not been around?”

“Nope.”

“So why bother Carl?”
He really didn’t know, it was more of an instinct that a logical thought. Clearing things with Negan had left his mind open to other things he had to sort out. Maybe if he sorted things with his Mom it’d help with all the shit he had to work through with Shane. One less thing for him to think about. If things went badly then at least he could work through that, the whole uncertainty was just killing him. He wanted to know what she was thinking, wanted his chance to tell her what he was thinking. He deserved that, after all the shit he’d been through he deserved it. The hope from the morning had given him a strength he didn’t realise he had. If he wanted more then he’d have to push for it, take the risk that he might get hurt and trust that he could pull himself back together if he did.

“She’s my Mom, I need the closure, no matter what happens.”

Negan nodded, understanding where he was coming from. “Whatever happens, call me, let me know.”

“Yeah I will.”

“When are you gonna go?”

“After breakfast. Dad’ll probably be home late so he won’t miss me.” He didn’t mention the part of him that thought if he waited any longer then he’d lose all courage and run away. He needed to do this.

As always their goodbye was bittersweet, they’d see each other on Monday but it just damn well wasn’t enough. He longed for the summer when they’d be able to be together longer, ignoring the stabbing reminder that he might be leaving for college not long after. With a final kiss Carl pulled himself away from the man, giving him a wave as he drove off.

The drive to where his Mom was staying was longer than he’d expected. He’d never really been to this part of town, it was more run down, houses more clustered together. He was surprised that his Mom would cope living in a place like this, she’d always been so adamant about living in the suburbs. Then again she probably thought that she’d be back with them by now, that he’d have apologise for the ‘lies’ he told. Just the thought sent his blood boiling, there was no way in hell he was backing down. A few months ago, he might have, he probably would’ve taken back all the shit he said if it meant a quiet life. Now was different, he knew better, he couldn’t hide the truth, it’d only end in his own destruction.

Taking a deep breath, he stepped out of the car, walking up to the door that he hoped was the right one. He didn’t have a physical address for his Mom’s friend, just the memory of visiting her a few times over the years.

His heart pounded as he waited for the door to open, body freezing when it swung open to reveal his shocked Mother.

“Hi Mom.”
If you please...

Chapter Notes

Oooh I bet you didn't see this coming! It only seemed appropriate to post this one on my birthday before I go out and make myself forget that I'm one year older.

Also there's only 5 more chapters left! :O I literally can't believe it. Chapter 20, homeward stretch. I better make every single one count.

Bit less angst but hope you all like it <3

“I forgive, but I also learn a lesson. I won’t hate you, but I’ll never get close enough for you to hurt me again. I can’t let my forgiveness become foolish.”

— Tony Gaskins

Unseeing eyes followed him as he walked through the dingy, overcrowded living room, eerie china dolls decorated the floral walls, sitting uncomfortably on wooden shelves. He stared back at the small, black beads when he perched himself on the edge of the couch. His foot twitched side to side, unable to stop the jittering nerves that tensed his muscles. Chinking cups filtered in from the kitchen where his Mom was making them coffee. He didn’t really want it, didn’t need any more buzz to his already electrified body but, god, he’d needed a moment to get himself together. Just the sight of her had his heart crumbling apart, that dulled ache ripped back open into an excruciating wound that had taken his breath away. So, he let her fuss with the usual hosting duties whilst he sat there and tried to calm his pounding heart.

He didn’t drink the coffee when she placed it in front of him, just took it into his hands to give himself something to do, letting the heat burn through his palms. Lori grabbed her own cup, seating herself on the neon couch that clashed awfully with the walls. It was almost laughable seeing her sat there sipping at her coffee, an effortless grace about her that didn’t quite fit with the tacky decor in the room.

The awkward silence dragged on, both of them distracting themselves with the drinks in front of them.

“Did you get your stuff?” Carl eventually asked deciding to go with a fairly safe topic.

She seemed shocked that he knew, it took her a moment to answer. “Yeah, yeah I did.”

He nodded, not quite sure what to say next. He wanted closure, that he knew but he hadn’t quite thought about how he’d get it. What kind of closure did he even want? Could they really fix things? The more he thought on it the more he came to the conclusion that he’d made a very stupid mistake coming here. The hope from the morning dwindling away until he was left with nothing but the uncertain future of his relationship with Lori. He was startled when she suddenly stood up, walking away from the table and into the hall, returning just as quickly as she’d left. Her hands shook as they
played with the papers in them, shuffling them around with no real purpose. He was surprised by the tears he saw on her face when she finally raised her eyes to meet his.

“I…um…I picked these up for you…at the hospital.” Her voice wavered as she spoke, offering him the papers.

Brochures stared back at him, ‘sex’, ‘assault’, ‘abuse’ manifested itself across the various papers, each coming up in different ways but all conveying the same message. He flicked through them quickly, his own hands shaking as he took in the information, phone numbers, names of Doctors handwritten on some brochures. Helplines, email addresses, websites overloaded his brain. Did this…what was she… he couldn’t think quickly enough, his brain trying to connect all the pieces to see how it all came down to this conclusion.

“I asked for some recommendations for the doctors, anonymously of course, who might be able to help. I can…um…set up any meetings you might want.”

He was still staring that the papers, disbelief freezing his body as much as his brain. Of all the things he’d expected from this meeting this hadn’t been one of them. He’d been gearing up for a fight, screaming and yelling, probably some crying but not this.

“Carl?” Lori sat on the small table in front of him, he shuffled back at the sudden proximity. He needed some space, he had to think for a second.

“What…what does this mean?” He stammered out.

She closed her eyes against his disbelieving stare. “It means I was wrong Carl, I was so so wrong.” Her voice broke on the last work, tears now freely falling down, marring her beautiful features. “I should never have said what I said. To accuse you of…of lying about that, it was…unforgivable. This is, it’s my way of apologising, of saying to you that I believe you that I never should’ve doubted you.”

His first instinct was to rush over to her, wrap himself in her arms and let her take care of him, bring him the comfort and solace that she’d always done when he was a kid. He stopped himself. It meant more than anything to hear those words from her mouth, it took away some of the heartache that had been plaguing him, but the betrayal still stung at him. It just wasn’t enough. He appreciated the help, God knows he needed it, but in that moment he just knew. It struck him like a lightning bolt, he couldn’t just forgive her. He wasn’t sure if he could ever forgive her. She might believe him now but she didn’t then. Right at the time he needed her she wasn’t there. She’d taken off, put herself and whatever damn emotions she was going through before his needs. It was selfish, made his skin crawl with revulsion at her actions. She was his mother, yet that hadn’t stopped her saying those vile things. ‘Apologise’ Lori’s lofty voice entwined with Shane’s commanding drawl. ‘…apologise for calling me a rapist.’

Carl moved away from Lori, shaking his head in an attempt to shake the memories creeping in.

‘Get on your knees and apologise’

He clenched his eyes shut against the voice, he wasn’t back there. His shoulder twinged as it had before, his nostrils filled with the scent of musty body sweat and chinese take out, he desperately wracked his brain to stop the images of being bent over a rattling table from overcoming him.

“Carl?”

He recoiled, snapping away from Lori when he felt her hand land on his shoulder, she was too close.
Her sweet perfume filling his nose, he practically choked on it as it hit his throat. His skin itched again, heartbeat steadily climbing back up as he tried to breathe into constricted lungs. Breathe, breathe, breathe, please just breathe he pleaded with himself.

This couldn’t keep happening, this had to stop. He thought of his Dad, his hand squeezing his, grounding him back to the world. Opening his eyes he focused on the white swirl of a lily as it crept up the yellowing wallpaper, not like the brown wood of Shane’s kitchen, it was white and yellow. His breathing eased, air finally reaching where he so desperately needed it. He let his forehead rest against the wall, ignoring the damp smell that seeped through the wallpaper, anger bubbling inside at his Mother for doing this all to him. The darker, more vindictive side of him bit out like a snake reminding him that it was her fault, she’d been the one to start this whole shit off. Maybe if she’d kept her fucking legs closed then maybe Shane wouldn’t have done what he did.

“Mom?”

“Yeah, Sweetie I’m right here.”

“Did you know it was your fault?” It was a shitty thing to say, exceedingly shitty, a complete lie, she didn’t make Shane do anything. He knew that, he just found it hard to care in that moment, that darker part of him yearning for some sort of revenge. He turned his head to watch the expressions crawl across her face as she absorbed what he had said. A sick satisfaction settled deep in his stomach at the horror on her features. Good, he couldn’t punish Shane for what he’d done, Negan and his Dad had already taken care of that, but he could punish her for starting it, for pushing him away, calling him a liar.

“W-what do you mean?”

“Shane, the whole reason he touched me was because he couldn’t have you. The first time…hell the first few times he thought I was you. He kept calling me your name, told me to keep a secret from your husband. That time I cut my hair? It was so I wouldn’t look like you, I stupidly thought it’d put him off. God I was so wrong about that. He beat me black and blue for it, I could hardly walk for a week afterwards, told me he’d kill me if I did anything like that again.” He should shut up, he should stop spewing all the revolting things that wanted to pour out, details of what had happened to him because of the two of them but he couldn’t stop, not now it was all coming out. “That’s how I knew about you and Shane, he told me all the dirty details of that night, made me recreate it so many damn times it’s practically imprinted on my brain.”

She tried to stop him talking but he couldn’t, it was his turn.

“Then you had the balls, the fucking gall to tell me I’m lying.” Pure hate spilled into his voice, reaching out from the dark depths of his soul. “You storm out and don’t even give me a chance to explain everything, you shove brochures at me, tell me you finally believe me and what? Expect me to just forgive you? As if an apology is gonna make up for that? Sure Dad didn’t notice what was going on, he didn’t see what was happening but at least he listened when I was ready to talk.”

“Carl-”

“You wanted me to apologise Mom! Just like Shane did when I said he was a rapist.” A gutted laugh escaped him at the irony. “Of course when he told me to apologise he wanted me on my knees with his dick in my mouth whilst I did it.” He snarled at her. “D’you know what the worst thing is? That you loved him. That this wasn’t a fling that went wrong, you loved that piece of shit, you loved him so much you were willing to believe him over your own son. Hell, if you’d had the balls to just leave Dad then maybe this wouldn’t have happened, maybe we’d all have been happier. Dad would’ve moved on by now, Shane would have what he wanted, you would’ve been happier and me? Maybe
I’d be able to sleep at night not worrying about who’s gonna be crawling into bed with me.”

She was openly crying at this point, snivelling tears that wet her face, muffled sobs burst into her hands. Hurt was clear all over her, it sent a guilty pang through him, he shouldn’t have said so much, that wasn’t him. He wasn’t mean, he didn’t want to hurt people, but the years of pent up rage had warped him, disfigured him to the point where he hardly recognised himself. She needed to know what she’d done, she needed to know what her actions had caused, how much she’d hurt him with her damn accusations and lies. It wasn’t nice, or pleasant, but it was necessary.

He needed to let it out and she needed to know.

Totally necessary.

“Thank you for the help.” He grabbed the brochures, stuffing them into his jacket pocket as he headed to the door. He was done here, he’d got what he’d come for. He didn’t need her, it was a relief to know he didn’t even need her to believe him. He had his Dad and Negan. Most importantly he had the strength in himself to know that he could pull himself together, that he could face what he’d been feeling and still go on. That he could let the darkness inside out and still be himself. He could face disbelief and rejected and come through it, bruised but not defeated. Although warped and disfigured, he was still Carl and he deserved more than someone that doubted him.

“Carl!” She cried out. “Wait! Don’t go!” Rushing to block him from leaving.

“I’ve gotta go Mom, Dad needs my help.” He brushed past her.

“Is that it then? Are you ever gonna forgive me?”

He paused by the door, trying to think beyond the anger that raged inside him. “I-I don’t know. I know…I know whatever made you do what you did with Shane wasn’t…I know you didn’t make him do anything, I’m sorry I said that. You not listening though…you walking away…I don’t know if I can ever get over that Mom.” With his final words, he stepped back out into the crisp winter air, hurrying back to the car before he said anything else.

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The battered “Dixon Bros’ van was parked on the drive when he arrived home, he was surprised to see his Dad and Daryl playing pool in what was their dining room as he walked inside. They didn’t notice him at first, too busy laughing as his Dad screwed up his shot, knocking one of the balls right off the table. It wasn’t until they followed the ball’s path to Carl’s foot that they both straightened up, the smiles falling off their face in a way that made Carl feel like he’d interrupted a party that he wasn’t invited to.

“Oh hey Carl.” His Dad slipped a smile on his face again. “Wondered where you were.”

“Just out, y’know.” He nodded back at Daryl, the quiet man had kept his distance since they first met. Only greeting him with a slight turn of his head, before heading in the opposite direction. A total contrast to his brother who seemed intent on bugging Carl every second they were in the same room. He wasn’t totally unwelcome company, he reminded him of Negan in a way, all crass jokes and bolshy language, only he didn’t have the same restraint that Negan did. “How was your night? You guys have fun?”

“Yeah it was good.” His Dad replied.

Daryl adding. “Your Dad plays a mean game of poker.”
“You still kicked my ass though.”

They’d hardly known each other a week yet the two of them were bantering away like they’d been friends for years. It warmed him to see his Dad look so happy and relaxed, even with Shane there was always a competitive tension between the two of them. With Daryl he just looked...happy. He tuned back into their conversation just to see Daryl make his excuses to leave. He had a feeling that the man didn’t like being around when Carl was, probably freaked out by Carl’s reaction when they’d first met.

“I’ll see ya later Carl.”

Carl smiled back at him as he left the house. Turning his attention back to his Dad who was occupying himself with tidying up the pool table. “So, since when do we have a pool table?”

“I got it this morning on the way back from Daryl’s, thought we could put it in the garage, give us something to do that isn’t watching tv all the time.”

Fiddling with the ball that he’d picked off the floor he debated whether or not it’d be a good idea to tell his Dad about his visit with Mom.

“So where did you sleep last night?” Rick asked, disturbing him from his thoughts.

He looked at him alarmed, how on earth did he know that he hadn’t been at home?

Rick’s searching gaze relented. “The cot isn’t out so unless you slept on the floor I’m gonna assume that you stayed with Negan last night.”

“Well I wouldn’t have needed to if you’d sort me out a bed.” It was an obvious attempt at deflection but he wasn’t totally wrong, part of the reason he’d stayed was because he needed to sleep on something that wasn’t a damn cot.

“Carl-”

“I saw Mom this morning.” He blurted out, he could sense that this conversation was going down a dangerous path and he really wasn’t in the mood to argue it out.


All valid questions but too many to answer at once. “I’m alright, it was weird...seeing her in that place. She doesn’t belong there.”

Rick sighed, rubbing his forehead. “She can’t come back here Carl, not now.”

“I know, I know.” Carl said. “I don’t even think I want that.”
His Dad looked alarmed this time. “Why? What happened? Did she saying anything else?”

“No, she actually apologised. She...she said she believes me now. Gave me brochures and recommendations for help if I want it.”

“Wow, wasn’t expecting that. That’s good though right? You two getting back on track? I know things between me and her aren’t exactly good but you don’t have to hate her because of that.”

“That’s not it. She left Dad, she didn’t believe me and she left. That...that hurt more than I could ever imagine, more than any of the shit that Shane put me through. I just didn’t realise that until she started apologising, that was when I knew that no apology would ever make up for that. I dunno, maybe one day it’ll be better but right now I don’t think I can see her.”

Rick pulled him in for a hug, stroking the back of his head as he always did. “I’m sorry Carl. You don’t have to see her if you don’t want to, I’ll make sure of it, alright?”

Carl nodded into his chest, pulling back from his Dad. “I got what I needed, I finally got to say what I’ve been wanting to say for years. It’s like a weight off my chest.”

“Good, I-” A loud beep interrupted them, Rick checked his phone. “Shit, I gotta go to the station. You gonna be alright?”

“Yeah.” He replied before adding. “Y’know, you should invite Daryl over more often. He’s good for you.”

Rick nodded, looking contemplative as he left the house.

Carl supposed he should be grateful that he still had his desk and chair in his room, the new furniture couldn’t come soon enough. Sleeping in Negan’s big comfy bed made him realise just how awful those damn camping cots were and not just because they didn’t have a certain male inside of them. Thinking back to the previous night brought a smile back on his face, initial awkwardness aside it had felt so good to fall asleep in Negan’s arms, surrounded by him. It made him think about those brochures burning away in his pocket, he pulled them out, sticking them on the desk. Contemplating the words as he thought about what to do with them. It’d be much easier just to ignore any urge to get help. He had a feeling that any help would inevitably result in him having to confront everything that he’d been trying so hard to repress. Other than the involuntary flashbacks he’d been having, he had managed to keep his thoughts away from everything that had happened. He didn’t think about Shane, he didn’t think about all the abuse that he’d been through, hell he pretended that it hadn’t even happened on the days when he wasn’t triggered by something around him.

It probably wasn’t the healthiest way to be. It certainly wasn’t going to stop the flashbacks that seemed to be coming more and more frequently. Deciding to be brave for once he picked up the brochure on top of the pile and started reading through it.

He already knew most of the info, some from Negan, some from talks at school, nothing particularly helpful for him. He’d already figured out how to help with his flashbacks, the only disappointment was that there was nothing there to tell him how to stop them from happened in the first place. The only advice was to avoid triggers, he laughed at that, how are you supposed to stop something when anything could be a trigger. Most importantly there wasn’t anything in there about sex.

It wasn’t that he was obsessed with it or anything but he was a teenage boy who happened to have a boyfriend that he wanted to jump every minute of the day. Not to mention the fact that he wanted to stop anything that might get in the way of their relationship, which included him feeling disgusted with any sexual urges that he had.
So, like Negan, he turned to Google. 

He must’ve spent hours searching through the web, reading article after article, feeling slightly less normal when he read through other people’s experiences. It made him feel a little less alone knowing that he wasn’t the only one with these feelings. Most of it repeated what Negan already said, he had to teach his body new instincts rather than try and repress the old ones. A lot of it spoke about reconnecting with your body, he supposed that was true, as much as he hated how cheesy it sounded. With Shane he’d spent so much time ignoring what was happening to himself, disconnecting from it so he could make it through to the end. He hated his body the whole time, refusing to believe it was part of himself. The cold sting of betrayal everytime he found any pleasure under his hands just enforced the idea. Now he had to figure out a way of forgiving himself for it.

Carl almost laughed at the common suggestion for the best way to reconnect with yourself. Masturbation. Here he was a teenager boy that didn’t want to jerk off. He saw what they meant, understood how it would help and he supposed that it would most definitely either confirm that he’d always feel sick after orgasms or would help him. Still, it wasn’t easy to accept.

He glanced at the clock, it was late in the afternoon, if his Dad was still out then it usually meant he’d be back even later. It would be the perfect time to start the whole ‘reconnecting’ thing, even if it made him feel sick to even think about it. The anxiety after what had happened last time made him even more apprehensive. He’d jerked off before, but he’d never actually finished, his Mom was home too often and always seemed to interrupt him before he could. Then everything happened with Shane and the thought of touching his own body revolted him.

The laptop slammed shut with a loud snap. There was no way he could do it, not now. Too much too soon. He shoved the brochures into his desk drawer and left his room, settling on the floor in the living room to go over his homework as he tried to calm the nausea that still ebbed through his stomach.

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Picking out new furniture had been a lot harder than Carl had thought. He never knew it but it turned out that his Dad had very particular tastes about things, he didn’t like floral but hated modern color blocking, whatever the hell that meant. The house had at least been repainted so they had a color scheme to work with but god his Dad was being annoying with it. Although what really pissed him off was the way the sales assistant was shamelessly flirting with his Dad, shoving her chest into his gaze at any opportunity, practically screeching with laughter at any joke he made. What was worse was how his Dad seemed to be lapping it up. He’d long since gotten over the fact that his parents had a loveless marriage but seeing him flirt with another woman just seemed unnatural, especially as his Dad seemed overly keen on flirting with her right back.

He didn’t fail to notice her number scribbled on the back of the receipt when they’d finally finished picking everything out. He almost asked his Dad if he was going to give her a call before deciding that he really didn’t need to be involved in his Dad’s love life, especially if that meant opening the door to talk about his own. After their discussion yesterday, he and his Dad had made an agreement not to talk about the whole Negan thing, although it hurt Carl to leave such an important part of his life out of their conversations, he was willing to make the sacrifice in order to avoid any further arguments.

They arranged to have the beds delivered later in the day, he almost cried with joy when he got to lay down on the plump mattress, jumping onto it the second it was set up in his room. He’d had to deal with the delivery men on his own. as Rick had been called into work once again, it was painful and awkward. His legs had urged him to run the entire time they were there, nerves making his knees
weak and his hand shake when he had to sign the delivery note. He kept himself in living room by
the front door, only moving when they’d finally left the house, slamming the door shut and locking it
behind them. Watching through the window to make sure they’d actually driven off, breathing out
with relief when the van disappeared down the road.

The uneasy feeling haunted him all the way to his bedroom, he quickly distracted himself with
making his bed with the new sheets that his Dad had insisted on buying, a necessity considering he
burned all the other ones. It was all fresh and crisp when he laid back, sinking into the comforter.
Now he could finally sleep in his own room instead of being squished in with his Dad in the living
room, he just couldn't wait for the other furniture to arrive so they could have their home back. The
only thing left to do really was the kitchen, Merle had said it should’ve been done by now but
blamed his Father’s indecisiveness for the incomplete state. Carl couldn’t really disagree with the
man, his Dad certainly took his time trying to figure out what he wanted doing with the room. The
only thing left was the pick the counters and new flooring but his Dad couldn’t make a decision no
matter how much Carl bugged him to. It was weird but at least he had his new bed.

He absentmindedly scratched at his stomach as he laid there, mind drifting through all the things he
had to do for school that week. Soon enough his mind refocused on the feeling of his nails dragging
the material over his skin, suddenly hyper aware of the scratchy shirt that irritated his skin. Once
again he returned to the issue that had been plaguing him the last two weeks, recalling the
information he took in yesterday. Taking a deep breath to combat the anxiety creeping back into him
he decided to at least try . He had to start at some point.

This time he let his fingers trail lower, slipping them underneath his shirt, slowly letting them glide
along his skin as he dragged his shirt up. That was fine, no nausea there, just the weight of his fingers
against his skin. He stripped his shirt off, no point in keeping it on if he was gonna do this. He just
had to get naked, grab his prick, come and be done with it.

Shit.

This wasn’t gonna work if he kept thinking about it so damn logically.

He briefly contemplated calling Negan, asking for his help, the man never failed to get him aroused
and he was certain that he wouldn’t complain about helping in this case. No, he quickly dismissed it,
he had to do this alone, no use in getting caught up in another person when he was trying to be with
himself.

So he tried a different approach, thinking back to the previous morning, the steamy kisses and the hot
weight of Negan’s body on top of his. Oh, there we go, his dick finally started to show an interest,
twitching in his jeans. Closing his eyes against the cream ceiling he trailed his hand down again,
shivering when his fingertips brushed a nipple, the sensation pooling lust in his stomach. He thought
about Negan’s hand there, calloused fingers toying with the bud, scraping over it with his nail before
taking it into his mouth. His breathing quickened at the thought, picturing the dark hair against his
chest, the deep voice whispering sweet nothings that would brush against his skin as he trailed kisses
over his flesh. He fumbled with his belt, hands shaking slightly as he unbuckled himself and shoved
his jeans off with his boxers, leaving him naked on the bed. His first instinct was to grab the duvet
and cover himself with it, instantly feeling too vulnerable, eyes flicking to the door just to be sure that
it was in fact closed. He tried to alleviate his body’s instincts, reminding himself that he was home
alone, Shane wasn’t going anywhere near him.

Taking another deep breath he returned his attention back to his body, he was almost shocked as his
own erection, he hadn’t looked at himself in so long, preferring to ignore that the traitorous member
existed. He noticed his hardness flag a little at his thoughts so he pushed them away, refocusing on
the feeling of Negan’s lips on his, how they’d always nip at them before sucking away the pain.

Trembling fingers wrapped around his prick, it felt so foreign to him, the weird pleasure of his hand there vibrated through him. Still not too bad. He experimentally pumped his hand up and down, cringing at the dry drag of skin against skin. Quickly spitting onto his palm he returned it back to the hard flesh before he lost his nerve, the stroke was easier this time, smoothing the glide. It tingled deliciously through his body, more so when he thought about Negan wrapping his strong hand around him, his hips gave an involuntary thrust at that particular thought, imagining the man leaving wet kisses on his neck as he pumped him. He moved his hand quicker as the thoughts grew more explicit, he thought about the man doing this to himself, remembering how he’d dashed off to the shower yesterday morning. He imagined the man in the shower, water trailing down the tattooed chest, dripping off his body as he slowly jerked himself. His pulse rocketed the more he thought about the low groans that he’d make, how he’d stroke himself faster as he neared the edge, thrusting into his hand. His own tightened on himself, letting his body dictate how to move his hand, focusing on the pleasure building inside of him.

“Fuck…” He groaned out, other hand coming up to pinch his nipple adding to the sensations swirling in his body. “God…yesss..” He matched his pace to Negan’s in his head, picturing how the man would bite his lip as he came, that growl he’d made when Carl saw him come the first time made his stomach clench and his breath hitch. He moved his hand quicker, letting Negan’s voice fill his ear, telling him how good he was doing, that deep drawl husky with lust. His hips pumped faster into his hand, body tensing uncontrollably, then…he stopped. Heart now pounding in a way that wasn’t to do with the arousal that was now warring with the nausea inside of him. His hand shot away from his dick as he sat up, fisting them in the sheets beneath him.

It’s just a feeling, just a feeling, it’s alright, you’re alright he reminded himself. It’s okay to feel like this, it’s ok to get turned on. It’s ok to want this. His breathing slowed, the sickness ebbing, still there but more like an echo. He was almost disappointed to see that he’d gone soft, hating the sudden change in the mood.

At least he’d done it, he’d tried and it had felt good. He didn’t feel guilty which was a nice change, he didn’t feel ashamed of himself for doing it. It was good, he told himself, some progress. It couldn’t all happen at once, practice makes perfect and all that. So, he took another breath, dragging himself off the bed to get dressed for a run. He’d try again another day, he’d keep trying until he did it.

It took a couple of weeks of practice for him to come, thankfully Negan provided him with all the incentives to keep at it. Friday nights became their meetup night as his Dad had decided to make his poker nights with Daryl a weekly thing, and if there’s one thing that was guaranteed it was that the two of them would end up making out somewhere on the couch. Negan respected him and pulled away each time things got too hot and heavy, Carl admired his restraint as each time he dragged himself off the bathroom leaving Carl to sit there and think about what he was doing. The night he came he’d hardly reached his bedroom before he’d torn open his jeans, Negan had been louder in the bathroom that night and hearing him growl out his name as he came nearly had Carl coming in his pants. He must’ve confused the guy when he’d blurted out his excuses and raced home. He came with a few quick strokes, biting down on his hand to cover the moans that wanted to burst out of him. As he’d expected he quickly felt sick soon after, his body urging him to the bathroom just in case. It wasn’t as bad as before but it was still enough to put him off masturbating for a few days.

Eventually the sickness wore off to a small twinge after his orgasms, it was a relief. What he hadn’t expected was for it to impact on his running, he found himself unable to do half as much as he used to. Rather reluctantly he had to admit to himself that it was probably to do with the fact that he was now actually listening to his body rather than ignoring the painful aches that developed. It frustrated him beyond belief that he wasn’t able to run as much as he wanted to, it was still his outlet, it also
made it harder for him and Negan to hang around after school as he couldn’t keep up the pretence of running for as long. Still, reconnecting with himself did make it easier to hold off any flashbacks, he could feel them coming on these days, stop them from turning into a full on freak out in public. It was a small progress but it meant the world to him.

March 2018

His birthday came quicker than he’d expected, the cold winter slowly easing off as spring rapidly approached.

Eighteen.

Standing in front of the mirror as he got ready for school was a shocking reminder of how much had changed this past year. This time last year he’d been so ready for death, unable to see a future for himself beyond the pain he was in, starved of love and in a constant pit of fear. Now he was healing, a work in progress, on the way to recovering from the trauma of the past couple of years. He still felt fragile but now he didn’t quite feel like he was a breeze away from shattering into a thousand pieces. He could breathe and feel and that gave him life. Looking into the mirror he saw a person instead of a haunted shadow of one. Although he couldn’t recognise the kid that he’d once been he could finally see a himself, a new version that wasn’t necessarily worse.

His Mother’s absence was more noticeable than ever that morning, although his Dad had tried to make him some pancakes, like he had every year, he’d ended up burning them. Carl had to take the smoking pan away from him and convince him that cereal and toast was more than fine.

“Your Mom dropped off a card.” Rick spoke, dropping a light pink envelope onto the table as they sat down.

“Oh.”

“She was gonna stay but there was an accident on the roads, she had to dash off.”

“Didn’t you?”

“Nope, I’m off for the day, I’m gonna stay here and make us a nice dinner for tonight.”

“You don’t have to.”

“Shut up and open your card.”

Carl did as told, tearing the envelope open, taking out the flowery card inside. She hadn’t written much, just the usual words you’d find in a card. It was unsettling just seeing her name at the bottom, not ‘Mom and Dad’ like usual, something he’d have to get used to he supposed. “It’s nice.” He said simply, standing to place it on the newly-placed kitchen counter.

“She write much?” His Dad asked mouth full of toast.

“Nope.”

Thankfully Rick let the conversation drop there, allowing them to finish their breakfast in silence. He gave him a kiss on the forehead, holding himself there before releasing him. The man was definitely getting soppier with age, giving him a watery smile as he waved him off for school.

The day passed as they always did, dodging hits between classes, answering any questions the teacher flung his way, trying not to stare at Negan during the one class where the window faced the
school field. He was surprised to get called into his office later in the day, allowing him to skip the start of his bio class.

They stood on opposite sides of the room, not wanting to get too close in case they were suddenly disturbed. Carl looked at him quizzically, wondering why he’d called him in if he was just gonna grin at him.

“Happy Birthday.” The man eventually said.

“Did you call me in there just to say that?”

“Yup.” Negan perched himself on the desk, that shit-eating grin across his face.

Carl took a step closer, putting an knowing look on his own. “Is this part of the whole power kick thing you like?”

“Yup.” He repeated.

Carl rolled his eyes at him, the man was too dramatic sometimes. “You could’ve waited till later, I’ll be running on the pitch tonight.”

“No, you won’t.”

Now he was confused. “Why not?”

“Sorry, I’m under strict instructions to make sure you go home right after school, think your Dad’s all freaked by the whole you-turning-18 thing.”

So, the old man was getting soppy, it made sense he supposed. Just a shame his Mother didn’t feel the same way. “Oh, makes sense.”

“You alright?”

“Just disappointed, I can’t spend time with you today.”

“Me too.” Negan stepped closer, risking a quick brush of his knuckles on Carl’s cheek, leaving a trail of tingles along it. “But I’ll see you tomorrow night for our usual dinner date.”

Carl nodded, it really felt like too long, it was his special day he’d wanted to spend some of it with him. “Yeah, I’ll be there. Better get to class though, can’t miss too much bio or your favorite teacher will yell at me.”

Negan chuckled at him. “Alright, I’ll see you tomorrow then.”

“Late pass?” Carl prompted, as much as he loved seeing him, he wasn’t gonna ruin his now-perfect record by showing up late without one.

“Seriously?”

“Yup.”

They stared at each other before Negan relented, taking one out of his drawer and scribbling on it. Their hands brushed as he passed it over, Carl let it linger there, basking in the slight heat from the other man. “Tomorrow can’t come soon enough.”

Negan stepped even closer to him, almost towering over his smaller frame. The inches between them
felt like miles, longing mirrored in their eyes as they looked at each other. Carl licked his suddenly dry lips, it really had been too long since they’d been alone together. The air thickened between them, tension seeping into the tiny office. The ghost of the man’s lips on his own had grown so faint Carl could hardly remember what it was like and he was so desperate for a reminder. “I should… um.”

“Yeah—you need to…yeah.”

They both exhaled, taking a mutual step away from each other, whispering hurried goodbyes before they resumed the roles.

As instructed he went straight home after school, but not without a final longing look at Negan shouting on the pitch. Five minutes in a shitty office just wasn’t enough. Nonetheless, he didn’t want his Dad thinking that Negan was the one delaying him so he headed home, shouting out a greeting when he got there.

Rick rushed over to him, greeting him back with a tight hug and yet another kiss to his forehead. It was like the man was overcompensating for his Mother not being there, he fussed over him as she used to, grabbing his bag, forcing him to the couch where he immediately shoved a snack into his hands. “Good day at school?”

“Yeah, not bad, have you been cooking all day?” The man had a stained apron draped over himself.

Rick joined him on the new seat, handing over a bottle of water that he’d grabbed from the kitchen. “Yeah, it’s your 18th, I want the dinner to be good.”

“Huh, how long till it’s ready?”

“Coupla hours, but I got us a movie to watch.”

Weird, his Dad wasn’t usually a movie kinda guy, he preferred a quick tv show before he got too restless. “Yeah, Daryl recommended it to me so I thought we could watch it together.”

“Okaay. Sure, whatever you want Dad.” Again, weird, but who was he to say no to his Dad?

The movie turned out to be some weird motorbike documentary, so not like either of them, at best they liked the occasional hunting documentary but that was it. His Dad seemed hooked on it, hardly averting his eyes from the guys on the screen, so weird. He sat there and suffered through it, finding himself fiddling with his phone, trying to resist the urge to text Negan. His Dad obviously really wanted him around that afternoon so the least he could do was be there 100%.

That being said, he’d never been so grateful to see credits flit across the screen, he could only take so much about motorbikes. Especially when said bikes make him think of a certain biker and his bike which inevitably led to thoughts that he really should not have in front of his Father.

“Good movie right?” Rick asked.

Nodding with a fake enthusiasm. “Yeah, it was awesome. You’ll have to thank Daryl for recommending it.”

“I think I will. Anyway, will you set the table? Dinner should be finished soon.”

Carl did as told, leisurely setting the places whilst his Dad shouted expletives and, by the sounds of it, dropped several pans and burned several bits of flesh. The chime of the doorbell made him jump, they weren’t expecting anyone else or so he thought until his Dad told him to answer it. Merle’s
obnoxious grin greeted him on the other side, holding a bottle of some amber liquid in one hand. Daryl was slightly behind him, a small smile on his face and his usual nod for a greeting.

Somehow, he managed to mumbled out a shocked hello before letting them inside, watching as his Father greeted the pair, pulling Daryl into a back-patting hug, giving Merle a handshake. Of all the people to have over on his birthday, he hadn’t expected them, although his Dad and Daryl had been spending a lot of time together he didn’t realise they were that close.

“Dad why are they here?” He whispered to him, drawing him aside as the others settled in the living room.

“I just thought it’d be nice to have Daryl here, more company. Merle…well they’re kind of a two for one deal.”

“So, they can be here but not Negan?” He protested.

“Don’t push it Carl, just because I’m not stopping you from seeing him doesn’t mean I’m alright with you two being together.”

Carl huffed, pushing away from the wall to finish setting the table, he’d only planned on a dinner for the two of them so he added two more places there. It’s not that he didn’t like having the two men around, they’d quickly become a recurring feature in the house after the decorating was complete, but it was an annoyance that his Dad would invite them and not Negan.

The dinner wasn’t a total disaster at least. The food was actually good, turns out his Dad could cook when he could spend all day doing it. As much as he wasn’t exactly pleased to have the brothers there it was so good to see his Dad so animated again. He just didn’t have that when it was just the two of them, there was always an underlying reminder of all the crap they’d been through, that gaping void that they needed to figure out how to fill. They had to watch what they said to each other at all times, neither wanting to cause any unnecessary hurt to the other. Now though, now he was so carefree, joking about that damn movie they’d watched with Daryl. Although not as animated as his brother, Daryl still held his own with his Dad, he was such a quiet and calming presence that Carl still couldn’t believe he’d freaked out so much when he’d first met him. Merle, on the other hand, was an overwhelming presence at the table, shouting crude jokes, drinking far too much to make Carl feel comfortable. He wasn’t quite sure how mentally stable the man was, he seemed to be one of those weird conspiracy theorists, banging on about viruses that would wipe out humanity, or how robots would take over one day. It was a relief when he finally sent him out the front door again, thanking whatever God there was that his Dad hadn’t invited them to stay the night. As much as he liked Daryl, his brother reminded him too much of Shane when he was drunk.

He shook all those thoughts from his head as soon as it hit his pillow, relaxing his bone-tired body into the softness. He just had to get through the night and then he’d get his time with Negan, that’s all he had to focus on.

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His Dad insisted that he come home that evening after dinner with Negan, threatening all sorts if he didn’t. As much as he wanted to protest the childish treatment, he knew his Dad meant well, and there was no way in hell he was gonna say anything that might risk whatever time he did have with Negan. So he made his promises and walked out the door, practically speeding as he made his way to the cabin.

They skipped ‘hello’ and went straight in with kissing, their lips finally meeting in the doorway. He deepened the kiss quickly, not wanting to spare a moment of their time together, especially given his
newly imposed curfew. Most people got more independence at 18, he got less. Typical.

“Hi.” Carl eventually breathed out, breaking the kiss.

Negan grinned back. “Hi, you good?”

“Mhhm, completely good.” He sniffed the air. “Spaghetti again?”

“Of course, it’s a special occasion. Sit at the table, I’ll dish up.”

As usual the dinner was wonderful, perfect food with the perfect company. They took their time eating, enjoying the simple conversation that flowed, enjoying their feet twirling around each other more. It was stupid, and cheesy and he loved every second of it. The simplicity, the casual intimacy that had grown between them meant more than anything. It was an ease that he never thought he’d experience, no drama, just the two of them. Nonetheless, Carl was surprised when Negan swapped his dirty plate for a wrapped gift, placing the box down gently on the table.

“What’s this?”

“Your present, had to get you something.”

Carl carefully unwrapped the box, reluctant to completely ruin the beautiful wrapping, even with Negan huffing at him to ‘hurry up and open the damn thing.’ It was special, the first gift he’d ever received from the man he wanted to embrace it. He lifted out a bold red scarf, almost identical to the one that Negan had let him borrow at Christmas, except this one had ‘C.G.’ embroidered in gold on the bottom corner. It was gorgeous, softer than the one he remembered taking from Negan.

“It’s not much, but at least it’s your own.”

Carl hit him on the shoulder. “You’re more than welcome to get your stuff back if you really want it.”

Negan’s laughed at that. “And face your Dad? Nah I’m good, ‘sides it all looks so much better on you.”

“I know. Thank you, Negan, it’s perfect.”

Negan seemed surprised by that. “Really?”

Carl laughed at him. “Yes, I love it.” He stood and gave him a quick kiss. “Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome.” He pressed closer, eyebrows wiggling suggestively. “Wanna thank me another way?”

His laugh grew and allowed the man to pull him over to the couch.

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“Mmmm…okay, okay, I gotta go.” Negan pulled himself off Carl, shifting away to rub at his face, using every ounce of self-restraint not to jump back on the teen. He started to stand but was interrupted by a small voice.

“Can I watch?” He blurted out, freezing Negan in his movement.

“What was that?”
He spoke slower this time, eyes locking with Negan’s. “Can I watch?”

“You wanna see…see me….” His eyes widened, pupils dilating with lust as he caught on to just what Carl wanted. “You really wanna see?”

“Mmmhhmm.” Carl shuffled back into his corner, settling himself down, eyes dragging over Negan’s body. He’d been imagining it for so long, every damn time Negan rushed into the bathroom and came out flushed with satisfaction. He was more than ready to see the real thing, if Negan wanted to.

“Shit … alright then. I’m always happy to give a good show.”

Carl’s eyes took in every moment as Negan settled himself on the corner opposite him, one long leg coming up to the couch, the other spreading to splay himself open. The man really was a fucking performer, taking his time working open his belt, slooowly dragging the zipper down on his jeans, before reaching into to take out his hard cock. He licked his lips at the sight of it, thick and red, a slow trail of pre-cum dripping down the long length. Carl almost pouted when Negan wrapped his hand around it and blocking his view. He saw him use that trail to slick himself up, slowly fisting his dick.

It was damn well one of the best sights he’d ever seen, better than any of the fantasies he’d conjured up in his head the last few weeks. Arousal pooled deep in his stomach, that familiar ache pulled his attention at full force.

Watching Negan close his eyes, head falling back as he lost himself in slick glide of his hand along his cock, had him squirming in his seat, his own dick straining against his jeans. “What do you think about?” He asked, trying to distract himself from the voice that told him just to wrap his hand around his prick.

“You.” His voice now lower, that husky growl getting more pronounced as lust took over him.

“Doing what?” He was transfixed by the hand moving up and down, noting how he always squeezed the head slightly when he reach the top before twisting his hand on the way down. The man’s hips softly rocking back and forth under the movements. His own dick now twinging with jealousy.

“Shit…” Negan’s eyes flashed a warning. “You really wanna know?”

He swallowed, before whispering out a “Yes.”

“I’m thinkin’ about you…naked…thinkin’ about all the things I’d like to do to you. So many things Carl…ugh….” He let the sentence trail off, not wanting to freak Carl out.

“Tell me.” Carl breathed out, captivated by the sight.

“Oh God Carl, I think about everything… you suckin’ my dick, your hand strokin’ me, your hand strokin’ yourself, thinkin’ of me when you make yourself come.”

Carl’s breathing became more unsteady, pulse now racing so hard he could practically hear it. “And right now?” He prodded, wanting to know more.

“Right now? Now, I’m thinkin’ about your goddamn perfect ass ridin’ my dick right here on this couch.”

He couldn’t stop the whimper that escaped him, lust slamming into him at the sharp images that forced its way into his head. Unable to resist any longer he shoved his own hand down to his jeans,
quickly opening them so he could reach in and stroke along his own hardness. Eyes falling shut, his hips arched up at the touch, a soft gasp falling from his lips as he finally got the friction he so desperately needed. It wasn’t until he opened his eyes to watch Negan again that he realised that the man was watching him this time. He shivered at the hungry look on his face, his iris almost invisible around his lust-blown pupils.

“D’you like that idea Carl?” The man practically growled out his name. “Like the thought of me buryin’ myself deep in that ass of yours? Wanna ride my dick like I’m your favorite pony?”

“Oh god…yesss.” Carl hissed out, eyes falling shut again so he could enjoy the images his words provoked.

“Good boy, you’ll like the real thing so much better.”

He let out a whimper, tightening his grip around himself. “More, please.” He pleaded, he wanted to hear more of his fantasies, more filth spew from that decadent mouth.

“I’d get you nice and wet first Carl, stretch out that tight lil’ hole of yours ‘till you’re fuckin’ begging me to put my dick in you. I wouldn’t though, I’d tease you first…ugh… keep moving my fingers in and out, nice and slow” Carl’s hand matched his words, moving his hand slower on his prick. “I’d lick my way down your body, tasting every inch of your skin, worshipping you, drive you crazy when I nip and suck my way up your inner thighs, mmm I bet you taste delicious down there. I’d kiss you every damn place but where you really want it. Then, when your dick’s drippin’ like it is now, and your hole is all ready for me then I’d let you hop on, let you sloooowly slide yourself down on my dick ‘till you’ve got every. single. inch. inside of you. Christ, you’d look so damn good up there, bouncin’ on my cock, sweet moans spillin’ out those gorgeous lips of yours.”

He didn’t know what was better, the images of grinding himself down on Negan or the damn hot drawling voice that told him every little thing that he was gonna do. He could practically feel the ghost of a touch on his body, those lips tracing their way under his clothes. He tugged himself faster, focusing on the feel of his hand on his skin again satiating that hunger that had been building up for so long. He was getting closer, his hips rising to meet his hand on every stroke, body tensing in that familiar way. Negan’s voice still filling his ears with pure filth.

“…then, when you’re beggin’ again, desperate to come I’ll fuck you so hard you can’t see straight. All you’ll feel is my hands gripping your hips, my dick sliding in and out of you, and the mind-blowing pleasure as you finally come.”

“Ugh…oh god… Negan.” He gasped out as his orgasm raced through him as if on order, toes curling into the soft cushions under him. Slumping back against the couch he just about managed to open his eyes in time to see Negan spill himself over his hand, deep grunts falling from the man’s mouth that sent sparks of lust through his oversensitive body.

They laid there, feet just brushing as they caught their breath together.

“Well, that was new.” Negan said, brushing his sticky hand on his shirt. “You good?”

“Yeah,” Carl panted out. “Yeah, m’good, sticky but good.”

“No…uh…urge to puke?”

Carl scrunched his face up, he really didn’t need that image ruining his glow. “No, not really, it’s still there, just not as much.”

“That’s good, big step.”
“Yeah, well I’ve been practicing.”

“Practicing?”

“Yeah, y’know.” He gestured downwards.

Negan’s eyes neared bugged out of his head. “Jesus fuck. Now that’s an imagine I’ll keep for later.”

Carl tossed a pillow at him. “You just got the live show, keep that for later.”

“Oh I will, and all the others. C’mon tell me the details, where’d you do it? Bed? Shower?” His voice dipped lower. “Naked or clothed?”

“You are such a perv.” Carl stood, closing his jeans enough to stop them falling down. “I’m gonna go shower, leave you to your dirty thoughts.”

“Damn, if I was ten years younger I’d be yankin’ another one out right now thinkin’ of you jerkin’ yourself.”

Carl rolled his eyes at him, Christ, he really was a dirty, dirty man.

Not that Carl could complain, he loved every fucking second of it.

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The house was empty when he arrived back home that evening, he found a note on the dining table telling him that his Dad would be working till early in the morning. He almost didn’t notice the big envelope buried under all the junk mail, his name sketched across the front. He’d missed the mail that morning on his way to school. His heart skipping a beat when he recognised the big purple W in the top right corner. His hands trembled as the scrambled to rip the letter open, heart full on stopping when he read the inside.

He’d gotten in.

They wanted him.

He was going to Seattle.

Shit.
Another chapter for you all! A few days delayed but it was one of those chapters that just wouldn't come out -_-  

Little sidenote! I've started going back through the fic to redo some of the older chapters, so if you're new to reading this and wondered why the format changed at chapter 8 it's because I'm currently fiddling around with everything. It's mostly checking grammar and things that I might have overlooked. I've flagged a couple of chapters for a re-write and I'll let you guys know when I do that.  
As always thank you for the comments and kudos I love each and every one!

"One day, whether you are 14, 28 or 65, you will stumble upon someone who will start a fire in you that cannot die."

- Beau Taplin

They say a watched pot never boils, he’d never really understood that expression until he was sat on the edge of the couch waiting for his Dad to show some sort of reaction to his words. It felt like an eternity had passed with the two of them sitting opposite each other, him staring anxiously at his Dad’s face trying to discern if that twitch meant that he was unhappy, or happy, or just twitching. It was almost alarming how Rick had frozen into place, every now and again his mouth would fall open before a confused look twisted his features and he’d close it again. At first each movement had sent Carl’s heart racing, the butterflies in his stomach fluttered harder, but now it just made him roll his eyes and question why his Father was such a drama queen. Maybe if he moved away his Dad would do something?  

He knew it was big news, Christ, Negan and his shitty Guidance Counsellor were the only two people in the world that knew he’d even applied to college. The last Rick had heard was that his grades were too troubling for him to consider college this year. Now here he was telling him that he’d not only gotten into a great college, but said college was on the other side of the damn country. Carl made a mental note to stop surprising the man, all the shocks he’d given him recently it really was a wonder that he was still so coherent. Destroying the house aside, he’d coped well with the chaos of the last couple of months.

A car horn beeped outside, making them both jump. The silence was nearly deafening after that, filling the void between them. His fingers tapped at his the edge of the couch where he’d been gripping it tight, the repetitive action soothing the nerves crawling over him. Just as he was about ready to scream at him for a response Rick stood up. Carl followed, hands burying themselves in his back pockets as he tried to brace himself for whatever his Dad was about to say. There was a pause, then he found himself bundled up in a tight embrace, face smooshed uncomfortably against his Father’s chest. Smothering arms wrapped around his back, it had happened so quickly that some of Rick’s shirt had ended up in his mouth where it had fallen open in a shocked gasp. He sputtered as it clung wetly into his mouth, clawing at his Dad’s waist to get him to let go before he suffocated.
Thankfully Rick took the hint, releasing him from his grip to lightly rest his hands on Carl’s shoulders. Fatherly pride shone on his face, lighting up the room, disappating all the tension that had previously occupied it. “Carl, I’m so… damn … I’m so proud of you.” A hearty chuckle burst out of him, his eyes finally had that twinkle back in them. “You got into college!”

His laughter was infectious, the pair of them grinned at one another, clinging to the first bit of real joy they’d shared in years. It was a moment that he’d keep locked in his mind forever, giddy with the knowledge that he'd finally done something right, that even in his darkest times he could still succeed. He’d finally made his Father proud. He was thrown back into a fuzzy hug, not as tight but he could still feel the love seeping through it.

This time, when his Dad pulled back, he had a serious look on his face. “Have you told your Mother?”

His Mother, he’d hadn’t spoken to her since he went to see her, frankly his first thought wasn’t to tell her, it wasn’t even his second or third. Negan had been his second thought, the petrifying realization that in just a few months they’d be thousands of miles apart from one another had been his third. Lori really hadn’t fallen into the equation but the look on Rick’s face told him that he’d have to make that phone call soon enough. “I’ll tell her later.” He hastened to add. “I promise.”

“Good.” A heavy hand ruffled his hair. “God, Seattle , huh? Did you apply anywhere else?”

Carl shook his head, he thought it’d be enough of a miracle to get into one college let alone several. He’d quickly dismissed Georgia for college so he could be as far away from this place. It almost made him want to punch his past self, he’d really fucked him over. At the time leaving home had seemed so perfect, yet now all he wanted was to remain here with his Father, with Negan.

“Good thing you got in then. We’ll have to celebrate! Whaddya say? We could go out or stay in? Get some Chinese takeout?” Rick was already rifling through the pile of menus they kept in a drawer.

“No Chinese, anything but Chinese.” He still couldn’t face the smell of noodles without wanting to heave, even the sight of the takeout boxes filled his ears with stomach-turning grunts.

Rick shuffled the menus again. “Okaay… pizza?”

“Whatever you want Dad.” Carl’s mind was riddled with other thoughts, he tried to push them aside as the pair of them settled on the couch to talk about the college, now wasn’t the time to be thinking of his relationship when his Dad was so happy for him. He knew part of it was the man wanting to make up for his own missed opportunities and he was more than happy to let him, warmed by the knowledge that the pair of them had something to look forward to. Even if that experience carried with it pitfalls of its own.

The conversation with his Mother hadn’t gone as bad as he thought it would, he’d called her whilst his Dad was paying for the food. She’d been over the moon for him, laughing, saying how proud she was. Admittedly, he hadn’t hated the conversation, it was still tense, lots of awkward silences where he wasn’t quite sure what he wanted to say to her but at least the resentment he felt wasn’t as prominent as it had been. They vaguely made plans to celebrate together, nothing concrete, the thought of seeing her still sent tendrils of dread through him but if it let her be happy for a few hours then he’d play along.

As predicted his Dad talked his ear off about college as they ate, telling him all the things he’d have to try out, all the college experiences that he absolutely had to do. He talked and talked, it was a complete information overload, so much to do. Eventually his Dad’s voice took on a weird tone,
more melancholy, he talked but all Carl could hear was all the amazing opportunities that Rick had missed out on to take care of him. All the things he couldn’t do because he’d stepped up and taken care of him and his Mom, left his carefree youth behind to be a father to him. It made his heart sting to think about it. His Dad had his flaws, he could be oblivious sometimes, not always helpful, but it had never occurred to Carl how much he’d sacrificed for him. How everything the man had done had been an attempt to give Carl the best life possible. Even now, he’d nearly given up his life for him when he killed Shane, he destroyed a piece of his own humanity, cut away at the morals that Carl knew he clung onto. All to keep Carl safe, so Carl could go out and find his own place in the world.

He swallowed down tears of gratitude, plastering a smile on his face for him, nodding along to all the plans he was making. He’d never be able to repay him for everything he’d done for him but forgiveness seemed to be a good start. He made a promise to himself to work on it, to try and move past any underlying resentment that lingered in his body about the past.

What’s done is done. He’d already started healing one part of his life, it was time to work on the rest.

Carl spent Friday morning lying in bed listening to his alarm rage in the background. He couldn’t be bothered to turn it off, his arm too heavy to lift. The reality of telling Negan slowly crushed at him. He’d spent the whole week trying to tell him, trying to find the right moment to spill the beans. It seemed like each time he did, something happened to distract him, another student knocking on the office door, baseball students running onto the pitch after practice, even at home he’d hardly been able to find time without his Dad to phone him. Then the one time he did he’d ended up on his back, jerking off to a very detailed description of what Negan would do to him if he was in bed with him. It was ridiculous.

A knock on the door disturbed him, forcing him to shut off the alarm. “What?” He shouted through the wood.

“You gotta pack.” Rick came bursting through, reaching into Carl’s wardrobe to grab the duffel he kept there.

Carl sat up, sheer panic hitting up. “What? Why? Is everything okay?” Had something happened with Shane? Did they need to leave?

Realising he might have been a bit too dramatic, Rick slowed down. “Everything’s fine. I made weekend plans for us. A nice camping trip. Bit last minute, we’re leaving early tomorrow so you gotta pack.”

“Camping trip? Where?” Carl wasn’t keen on visiting their old spot, not now that it had been so tainted.

“This weekend, Daryl and Merle are going on a hunting trip and they invited us.”

“Us? Hunting? Seriously Dad?” The idea was ridiculous. He and his Dad had always ridiculed hunting as stupid and barbaric, now he was all over the idea?

“Yeah, it’ll be fun.”

“Fun?”

“Mmhmm, you’ll learn some new skills, get to know Daryl and Merle better, and we can spend some quality time together before you head off to school.”

Carl knew he had to go the second the man pulled the ‘school’ card. “Fine, I’ll pack.” He dragged himself out of bed, grabbing some clothes from the floor. “I’m still seeing Negan tonight.” That wasn’t up for negotiation.
“Fine. No sleepovers.” Rick pointed his finger at him. “I want you back by midnight and up by
6am.”

He wanted him dead more like, 6am start on a weekend? Maybe his Dad wasn’t as sane as he
thought he was.
He left for Negan’s early that afternoon, he usually spent time doing his homework before he headed
over but there’d be time for that later. He couldn’t focus anyways, not with the nerves fluttering in
his stomach. He was resolute, he’d tell Negan that night. Then they could talk freely until he had to
leave. Hell, he’d miss his curfew if he had to but they’d talk it out like they always do. At least if it
all went to shit then he’d have a good distraction that weekend.

He went searching when no answer came at the door, spying the yellow glow shining out from the
small building that housed Negan’s gym. His feet dragged with every step, irrational fear filled him
the more he thought about the impending discussion, he’d put it off long enough really. Too many
times he’d let himself get distracted, today wouldn’t be one of those days. Negan would be happy for
him, that he knew, but Carl wasn’t quite ready to face the reality of the conversation that they’d need
to have.

All thoughts of any discussion vanished into thin air when he caught sight of Negan, shirtless,
splayed out on the weight bench lifting what looked like a good part of his own body weight. Veins
on his arms as prominent as the muscles that exerted a ridiculous strength against the heavy weights.
Each grunt as the man lifted had his dick throbbing, hardening in his pants quicker than he’d ever
experienced, blood rushing south, making him lightheaded. Negan still hadn’t noticed him standing
there, his face focused, locked in a pain that almost reminded him of the pleasured look he’d get
when he came. For once his teenage mind took over, any ‘beyond his years’ maturity disappeared
until all that was left was the realization that Negan was just damn hot. The way he was reclined on
the bench had everything on show, the tight sweatpants, hung so low on his hips, did nothing to
conceal the firm muscle he knew was lurking underneath the thin material. Carl had never been more
grateful that the man liked to work out without a shirt, tattoos on display underneath the sheen of
sweat that shimmered on his shin. He wanted nothing more than to lick it up, enjoy the salty taste of
his flesh under his tongue, trace the lines of the skull on his pec. Biting his lip at the thought of
trailing his tongue down following the path of hair that went right under the material…

A loud clang of metal on metal snapped him from his thoughts, his eyes shot up to meet Negan’s
wide ones. If he wasn’t so aroused he might have felt a smidge of shame at being caught so
shamelessly checking him out. Instead, he took advantage of his lust-added brain to give him the
courage to saunter over to him, throwing a leg over to straddle the man on the bench. He let the man
guide his hips to settle him comfortably on top of him before he leaned down to kiss him. His tongue
lapped out, the familiar taste of Negan mixed with salty sweat, he delved deeper into his mouth,
taking control of the kiss for once. Judging by the way Negan moaned underneath him, he didn’t
seem to mind the role change a single bit, just gripped his hips harder, tongue coming out to dance
with his own.

Carl pulled away from the kiss first, smiling when Negan’s lips tried to follow his own. He leaned
back pulling out of reach, his hands were firm against Negan’s chest, he wanted him to stay right
where he was. All spread out, just for him, his own blank canvas for him to paint with his kisses.
That cocky smirk of his sent more jolts of lust through his body, tingling right down to his toes.

“Well, hello to you too.” Negan’s voice was low, lust cutting at it till it became huskier, his hands
rubbed circles on Carl’s hips, the heat burning through the jeans he desperately wished he wasn’t
wearing. “I must’ve been a very good boy to deserve that.”

Carl rocked his hips, testing out the man’s grip, it was firm but he still had space to wriggle down on
the growing hardness beneath him. “Makes a nice change.” Goosebumps prickled under Carl’s fingertips, he left a trail of them, like footprints in the snow, marking the path his hands took as he stroked along Negan’s skin. He was so warm, the heat practically radiated into Carl, spreading through his body like a fire.

“Don’t know what you mean.” Negan’s firm hands slowly stroked up and down his thighs. He leaned up, ghosting his lips over Carl’s. “M’always a good boy.”

Carl pushed down with his hands again, stopping him from taking his lips in a kiss, shoving him back against the leather. “Good boys stay where they’re put.”

Negan held his hands up in defeat, stretching up to lock his hands behind his head, if Carl wanted to run the show he damn well wasn’t gonna complain. Soaking up the sight of him on top, that gorgeous blush that trailed from his cheeks down his long neck, slipping from his view by the shirt the still covered Carl’s skin. It was beautiful watching him work out his pleasure, even if the languid, feather-like touches were driving him as crazy as the tentative rocking of his hips. He could hardly blink, not wanting to miss out on a single moment of this. Carl had never been so forward before, usually he had to take the reins, encouraging him with soft, reassuring touches. Not that he’d minded that, but this? This was goddamn glorious.

Smiling when he got his way, Carl’s hands resumed their exploration of his chest, thrilled in the way Negan’s back arched whenever his nails scratched over his nipples. He loved the way the man was looking at him, unconcealed lust that covered his face took his breath away, it hitched in his chest, made his hips rock into him, seeking more friction. Carl rewarded the man’s compliance, sinking further onto his lap so he could let his lips trace his skin. His lips burned where soft flesh met harsh stubble, the lingering sting on them urging his hips forward again, grinding against Negan’s now-hard prick. His tongue followed his lips, teasing out harsh pants that echoed in his ears, encouraging him to be firmer. He nipped out, toying with the flesh under his teeth, soon the pants turned to groans, hands that had been behaving themselves worked their way back to Carl’s hips. They gripped them tight, rocking him harder, Negan’s hips thrusting up to meet his own hesitant thrusts.

Carl let him claim back that bit of control, focusing on tugging at his earlobe with his teeth as the heat between them became stifling, he loved how heavy Negan’s palms felt on his hips. The possessive, forceful grip adding to the pleasure pulsing in his veins. They hadn’t done this recently, Carl had been reluctant to try it again given how it had ended last time, but he’d been so damn wrong. It felt too damn good not to do, the intimacy of the moment, the feeling of two hot bodies grinding together, working to reach that pleasure that would wipe his mind out of all the worries he’d been bottling up.

He was too hot, burning up from the inside, he paused his movements, chest heaving, taking a moment to strip himself of his shirt. Almost immediately calloused hands found their way onto his pale flesh, tracing along muscles, sending shivers up his spine at the rough feel on his sensitive skin. Their lips found each other in a bruising kiss, it grew sloppy as their hips ground harder against each other, tongues dipping in and out of each other’s mouths. The chests slipped against each other, slicked by the sweat to create a delicious friction. Carl’s nails scratched at Negan’s broad shoulder, trying to find an anchor in the pleasure. Their heavy pants mingled together, lips brushing, no longer a kiss, just wet heat. He hardly noticed the hands that slid down his back, creeping under his waistband, it wasn’t until they scratched at his ass, the pleasure burning at him, that he realised just where they were. He couldn’t complain, not when they guided his hips more forcefully against Negan’s, letting their cocks drag together in a friction that should’ve been painful.

“That’s it baby, c’mon.” Negan murmured his encouragement into his ear. “You’re doin’ so damn good.”
Carl let his words fill him, taking him away from any embarrassment at the keening moans that he couldn’t stop falling from his mouth. It felt so damn good, the fire in his stomach almost ready to burst out. “Negan… god…”

Negan gripped him tighter, nails digging into to his soft skin, pulling him all the closer. Shifting his hips, he could get more friction, push them closer to the edge if he just found the right...

“Oh…” Carl cried out. “There... there... don’t stop... please.” His hips stuttered, the urge for his climax knocking his rhythm until all he could do was rut instinctively against him, following the path Negan had paved for him. He wanted his jeans off, wanted to feel more of Negan’s hot flesh against him, wanted any barrier between their bodies to burn away until nothing was left but the two of them caught up in their passion.

There we go, Negan thought, he felt Carl’s hips grow more frantic, his moans coming faster and more desperate. “You gonna come for me?” He was about to burst, balls getting tighter and tighter, but there was no way in hell he was goin’ without giving Carl what he needed. A desperate whimper was his only reply. “C’mon baby… that’s it… god you’re so goddamn gorgeous…c’mon… come for me.”

That did it, Carl’s body seized up in his grip, stilling as pleasure roared through his veins. The sheer look of ecstasy, the loss of the control that kept Carl so tense all the time was enough to push Negan over the edge. He held their hips flush together, grinding out their climax.

They caught their breath together, Carl gave up any pretence of holding himself up and just let his body flop against Negan. It was uncomfortable, sticky, Negan’s hands still laid heavily on his ass, massaging gently.

Great job on starting a conversation Carl, he mentally berated himself. He really was too distractible. He didn’t tell him that evening, making up yet another excuse for himself. He didn’t want to ruin his happy glow. They’d showered, not together obviously, then settled down to eat their food. It was nice, and perfect and he really was a goddamn coward. He had so many opportunities to tell him but instead he kept his mouth shut.

Stupid stupid.

They parted with sweet kisses, Carl promising not to get shot on his hunting trip. Apparently it’s common to get in the way of a stray bullet aiming at animals. He really didn’t need that information, as if he wasn’t dreading the trip enough, now he had to worry about getting shot in the head. Knowing his luck it would happen.

The dark optimist in him pointed out that if that happened then, at least, he wouldn’t have to have that chat with Negan.

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Rick’s jovial voice woke up the next morning, light dousing his room before he’d had time to open his eyes.

Carl groaned and rolled over, burying his face into his oh-so-comfy pillow. He needed sleep, more blissful sleep. Sputtered protests screeched from his throat as his sheets were unmercifully yanked off him, exposing him to the cold morning air.

“Get up, we gotta go! They’ll be here soon.” Rick’s footsteps headed out of the room as quickly as he’d come. “Get outta bed!”

He grumbled as he dressed, absentmindedly pulling on whatever clothes were lying on the floor. They really needed to do some damn laundry, it had taken him far too long to find something that
didn’t stink to wear. In a haze he walked into the kitchen, grabbing a bagel to munch on, he didn’t notice his Dad’s eyes following him.

“Where’d you get that shirt?”

“Hmm?”

Rick gestured to his top. “Your shirt? I haven’t seen it before.”

Carl looked down, oh shit, not his shirt. He’d picked up the black one that he’d borrowed from Negan the last time he'd stayed over. Even if he could talk away the fact that it practically hung on him like a tent, he definitely couldn’t explain the Harley-Davidson shield on the front. No-one in the family had ever been into bikes, I mean he hadn’t even known what a Harley-Davidson was until Negan had given him a full-on lecture about it. One of their less-fun afternoons. “Oh… um… I borrowed it.”

“From?”

He was really gonna push this wasn’t he? “Negan.”

“Huh.”

Carl rolled his eyes at the angry tick on his jaw. “Relax Dad, you should be grateful that I’m taking clothes. It was that or sleep naked.”

“I did not need to hear you say that.”

He just shrugged at him, shoving more of his bagel into his mouth. No point in sugarcoating the truth, his Dad was gonna have to accept it one day.

A horn interrupted their conversation, it spurred his Dad into movement, he grabbed at a backpack that had been lying on the kitchen counter. “C’mon, let’s go.”

They’d split up when they arrived at the brothers’ favorite hunting ground, much to the protests of Daryl and his Father. Merle had been insistent though, grabbing his Dad to take him off into the woods. He and Daryl had stood in silence for a moment, looking anywhere but each other, the trees around them were slowly turning green again, it was a beautiful sight.

Eventually Daryl huffed and grabbed his kit from the truck. “C’mon, let’s goin’”

Carl followed Daryl’s lead, walking further into the dense wood until they were completely surrounded by the trees. He hoped Daryl remembered the way back to the car because he couldn’t distinguish any of the trees from the other, there was no way he was gonna be able to figure it out on his own. The only noise around was the cracking of twigs under his feet, it was eerie how Daryl didn’t seem to make any noise when he walked, hunched over, seemingly listening out for a noise, changing direction when he heard something. Carl tried to listen out for whatever it was he could hear but he only caught the sound of bird chirping and his own stomping feet.

After a while it became clear that he was pissing Daryl off, the man huffing back at him every so often, usually coinciding with his feet plodding down on the floor. This had been such a bad idea, the pair had nothing in common, what on earth had possessed his Dad to take him out like this?

“You ever been huntin’ before?” Daryl paused in his steps.

“Nope, fishing but not hunting.”
Daryl placed his crossbow on the floor, weird choice of weapon but it seemed to suit him, walking closer to Carl. “Okay, quick run through, you gotta be more gentle with your feet, don’t let them fall too heavily or you’ll crack the leaves, lettin’ ‘em know you’re comin’. Then listen out, it might take a while but eventually all the shit will zone out of your head and you’ll hear their footsteps, subtle but it’s there.”

Carl wasn’t quite sure about that but he’d try, better than just aimlessly following the man through the woods. So he did as told, walking more softly on the ground, listening out for any noise that wasn’t his own heartbeat. He was still stepping on twigs but it wasn’t as prominent. It was relaxing in a way, to just forget the world and lose himself in the forest. They didn’t catch anything, every now and again Daryl would stop and raise his crossbow, swearing when whatever it was he was looking at vanished.

“Alright, let’s try somethin’ different. You ever set a trap before?”

Carl just looked blankly at him, getting another huff in return before the man spurred into action.

“So you’ve just gotta lay the trap like this, and you stand a good chance of catching whatever you want.” Daryl cautiously stepped away from the intricate trap that he’d built. “Then we wait.”

Carl was surprised when Daryl sat down a few feet from the trap, leaning against one of the trees that surrounded them, that was it? “We wait? That’s all?”

“Yep.”

An awkward silence fell between them. They’d never been alone together before, Carl didn’t really know what to say to him. He thought about sitting next to him but the anxiety that haunted the back of his mind told him to stay away; just in case. The more the silence dragged the more he felt like he should say something. Recent weeks had told him that Daryl was going to be a more permanent fixture in his life. Rick talked about Daryl non-stop whenever the topic came up and, God, did the topic come up a lot. Carl felt like he already knew his life story from his Father. It took a while, the silence almost turning painful before Carl figured out a safe topic for them. He approached Daryl cautiously, taking calculated breaths to stop the urge to run from overwhelming his body.

“So… um… I realised I never said sorry.”

Daryl looked up at him, eyes piercing as Carl sat down next to him. “What for?”

“Freaking out the first time we met. It was nothing personal.”

“It’s cool I get it. Rough time?”

Carl knew what he was asking, Daryl’s eyes betrayed a wisdom that his appearance contradicted. He wondered what had happened to make him so insightful, too many times he’d caught the man looking at him with a strange sadness on his face. What did he see in him? “Things happened. Things I don’t like talking about.”

“Shit kid, I’m sorry. Whatever it is… no-one deserves to have their childhood fucked with.”

There was a hint of familiarity in his tone, an understanding that he’d not heard before. He wanted to ask him about it. It was sick, in a way he almost wanted to know how much Daryl understood what he was going through. A tendril of hope unfurling, hoping that it might have someone to reach out to. “You know what that’s like?” Guilt hit him even as he spoke, he knew he’d hate it if someone asked him such a thing but he couldn’t restrain his brain’s want to know more.
Daryl didn’t say anything for a moment but his body tensed.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have asked.” Carl backtracked. “I’ll... um... I’m gonna go sit somewhere else.”

“No.” Daryl finally spoke, his voice soft but commanding. “It’s fine. Yeah, I know. Our Dad, he was... uh... not a nice guy. Bit too quick with his fists rather than his words. Merle tried to keep me safe from it, but he wasn’t always able to.”

It was hard having to imagine a life like that. It had been hard enough with Shane and the bastard hadn’t even lived with them. If it had been his Dad? There’s no way he would’ve coped, not living under the same room as someone who could cause so much pain. He should come up with a better response than “Oh.” It was hard to know what to say. It would be too weird for him to fling into a whole spiel about how he understood that, and how he’d struggled too. Yet he felt like he should say more, he just didn’t know what.

The wind whistled past, as the seconds ticked by with no words from either men.

“Does it ever bother you now?” Carl asked.

Daryl looked over at him, scratching at his chin as he contemplated his words. “Sometimes, every now and again. Some days everything is fine, some days I can’t even look at a belt without feeling the memory of the pain striking out at me.”

Not really what Carl wanted to hear, deep down he’d hoped that one day he’d get over this shit with Shane.

“Don’t think about that though Carl.” Daryl continued. “There are good days, so many of ’em. They outweigh the bad most of the time. You’ve just gotta remember that on the days where things go all screwy again.”

He nodded back at him, he got that.

There was a loud snap behind them, dragging both of their attention back to the trap.

“Sounds like we caught something.”

Carl looked back, he couldn’t see anything, he kind of hoped that there wouldn’t be anything there, it made him sick to think he’d killed something like that.

It was a long damn day, he’d encountered more blood and death than he’d ever wanted to. Merle and his Dad had been a bit more successful than them, picking up a large deer that had a bullet in its brain. The two seemed chummier than ever, laughing and joking around.

Daryl took him under his wing that weekend, teaching him all the stuff that Merle had passed down to him. He taught him how to light a fire without a match, the best way of cooking whatever you could find in the woods, how to create a meal from the berries in the bushes.

“All the important survival shit.” Merle had said, watching the pair.

The man was truly paranoid, he was insistent that the world would go to shit at any point, constantly telling him that he had to be ready to for it. Daryl just rolled his eyes to Carl, muttering ‘crazy bastard’ under his breath with the affection that only came between family. Again that voice inside perked up at the thought of the world ending, no college talk then.

Christ, he really was fucked in the head.
The next day they split up again, only this time Daryl was the one that insisted he and Carl stay together. Rick protested slightly, pulling Carl aside to make sure he was really okay with it. That was the first time that Carl realised how much everything with Shane had disturbed the man, as close as he was with Daryl there was still a hint of distrust there. It took a bit of time for Carl to reassure him, but eventually he let up, keeping his eyes locked on them as they walked off.

It’s not that Carl hated his Dad being that way, he got it, more than anyone understood the distrust but he couldn’t think like that. What kind of life would he have if he spent his whole time mistrusting people?

It was horrible, a battle every damn day to convince himself not to run away from people, not to flinch when someone brushed past him. The alternative was worse though, easier, but worse. Living a life without people, alone in his own space. Unable to have friendships, meet new people, he didn’t want that. He needed his Dad to understand that, he couldn’t keep reminding him of how distrustful people could be. Just as he needed to remind his Dad that not everyone was like Shane, Negan wasn’t like that, Daryl didn’t seem like that. As he told himself everyday ‘it’s ok to trust people.’

He and Daryl didn’t bother hunting that day. The man had forced him to build a trap, then, instead of waiting, taught him how to identify the plants around them. It had made his head spin but it was interesting nonetheless. Daryl was so relaxing to be around, there was no expectation of conversation, he was happy just to work in silence. Every now and again he’d pick up a berry or a plant and quiz Carl on it, moving on when he got it right, explaining when he got it wrong.

It became clear that weekend that the ‘Dixon Bros’ were here to stay and Carl couldn’t deny that he was happy about it.

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Tell him. Tell him. Tell him. His brain practically screeched at him with each hit of his feet on the hard turf. He pushed his legs harder, trying to run away from the voice in his head, his legs were now burning, muscles screaming almost as loud as his brain. Not quite loud enough, he thought, pushing all the more harder. Negan’s shouts pierced through every now and again, just when he was trying to stop himself thinking of the man the voice would prick up and remind him exactly what he was desperately avoiding. Faster. Faster. Faster. He pushed and pushed, racing around the track, no matter how fast he went he couldn’t escape it.

There was that damn voice again, faster, he thought, go faster. It took him another couple of laps to realise the voice had been shouting his name. He slowed to a walk, looking over at the now-empty field, Negan’s solitary figure waving over at him. A wave of nostalgia washed over him, it was like that first time they’d spoken. Although he was still buzzing with same nerves as he walked over, there was now a lightness in his chest, a bubbling of joy that always appeared when he saw the man. He was still intimidating, tall and strong, it still sent shivers up his spine. Before it had been shivers of fear but now it was a whole different ballgame.

“Goin’ pretty hard today? Somethin’ on your mind?” Negan asked when he finally reached him.

He could hardly catch his breath but he managed to pant out a firm “No.”

Negan gave him that trademark ‘bullshit’ look of his.

“I just wanted to push a bit, see if I can get back to my old times, y’know?”

“Keep going like that and you’ll hurt yourself.”

Carl tried to brush him off, scoffing. “I’ll be fine, I’ve gone harder than that before.” His case wasn’t
helped by the sudden twinge in his thigh when he tried to move away. Negan was over like a shot, supporting him under his arm before he fell like a sack of potatoes.

He helped him over to the bleachers where he settled him down. “Oh yeah, you’re doin’ so fine.”

In that moment Carl wanted to punch him in his ‘know-it-all’ face. “It’s just a twinge, I’ll be fine.” He was taken aback when Negan knelt in front of him, hands coming to touch his leg. “Negan!” He warned him, taking a look around to make his point. It wasn’t the time or place for that, even if the thought did send pleasurable tingles through his body.

“There’s no one here Carl, all the guys were long gone by the time you stopped.”

Jesus, how long had he been running for? Those hands returned to his leg.

“I need to have a look at you, make sure you haven’t fucked your leg up with your insane running.”

“Not insane.” Carl replied, he was being petulant but he wasn’t going to admit he’d fucked up.

“Sure.” Negan rolled his eyes, the kid was too damn stubborn. “Where does it hurt?”

Carl gestured along his left thigh. “It’s alright now, it was just a twinge.”

Negan slipped his hands along it. “You’ve probably just overdone it. This should help.”

“What are you gonna d- ooh.” The words caught in his throat when Negan started massaging the muscles. He wasn’t expecting that. Firm hands rubbed at his thigh, brushing dangerously up his inner thigh, fingertips dancing underneath the hem of his shorts each time he circled around. Carl’s breath hitched on at each brush, body tingling with something that wasn’t his muscles relaxing. Now was not the time for that he tried to remind himself. Even if the baseball team had gone home, teachers could still be hanging around, the car park was adjacent to the field, any one of them could spy the pair.

He cursed himself when that thought just made the lust flare up in his belly.

“You wanna tell me what possessed you to run so fast? Don’t give me that bullshit of ‘getting back to old times’ you’ve never given a fuck about that shit before.”

Carl rolled his eyes at the man’s impression of him, he was such overkill at times. “I just thought I’d try something new, nothing to worry about.”

“You’ve said that before.” Negan pointed out, digging in deeper on his leg. “That was different.” Not really, he thought, admittedly his news wasn’t disturbing, yet it still had the potential to destroy the relationship he held so close to his heart.

Negan gave him another one of his soul-searchings looks, he nearly broke then, opening his mouth to speak before drawing it closed. He couldn’t do it. Not now, he wanted more time with the man before things went to shit. It was unfair, right when he was finally piecing his life back together this had to blow up in his face. Six months ago this would’ve been the best news possible, he’d have been jumping for joy, now the news just sunk in his stomach. It clawed at his brain, it made him lose sleep at night wondering how he was going to tell Negan, his mind racing with all the ways it could go badly wrong. He could lose him. Did long-distance relationships ever work? Would Negan even want to try?

Their relationship was so complicated, they weren’t boyfriends, they weren’t partners, they were more than friends that he knew but they were beyond labels. More like two people who had found each other in the darkness and clung together to find their way through it. Not always visible but they were there, he could feel him beside him every second of the day, plastered to his skin like a burn.
No more removable than a scar. The thought of losing him, of not seeing him everyday, the horrifying thought that the two of them might just slip away from each other was completely devastating. Like losing a part of him that had become as essential to him as the air he breathed.

“Carl?” Negan’s concerned voice slipped through his haze. “You sure you’re okay?”

Carl nodded, giving him a weak smile. Now wasn’t the time. They had plenty of time for sadness later. “Will you sit with me? Watch the sunset?”

The look Negan gave him made his heart clench, he was so downcast, searching for something in Carl’s face that the man must know he’d never find. The look was quickly replaced with a smile that wasn’t quite there, before he stood and sat beside him. Physically flush against his side, but to Carl the distance felt like miles, like he was just out of reach of his fingertips. Carl let his hand fall onto Negan’s, clenching it tight trying to bring him back, trying to remind himself that he was right there. For now at least, he was beside him.

When they separated it was with a longing stare, Carl wanted to kiss him, more than anything he wished they weren’t in the school parking lot. Things were still distant between them, Negan was either hurt or pissed off with him. He was more insightful that Carl gave him credit for sometimes, he knew something was up. He’d tried so many times to get Carl to open up whilst they were sat there before giving up.

Carl didn’t know why he couldn’t just tell him, everytime the words nearly slipped out, his mouth just gave up, his throat choked on the words and he clammed up. It was infuriating. They said their goodbyes and walked off, Negan back to his car, Carl back to his house.

More distance, less than what was to come but just as devastating.

Carl goes home to half-listen to his Dad rave on about college.

Negan goes home to chug the whiskey he’d kept hidden away under the sink. Not quite ready to give it up yet.

He hated the stabbing ache that throbbed in his chest every time he thought about Carl. It hurt. It hurt to know that Carl was keeping something from him. After everything they’d been through together did he really not trust him?

The whiskey burned at his throat, nearly choking as he swallowed it down, hoping it would bite way at the pain coursing through his veins. He could hardly stand it.

The more he drank the more he panicked. It didn’t reassure him like it usually did, it sent his heart racing, it made him want to call up Carl and demand answers. It was fucking cruel to leave him hanging like this. He wondered what he could possibly be keeping from him?

His mind pounded with so many possibilities it hurt. It could be anything, residual shit from Shane, the crap with his Mom, something new with his Dad. It could be to do with him, the devil inside him whispered in his ear. He tried to dismiss it but the idea kept coming back, maybe Carl was finished with him. Maybe whatever they were was was too much for him, or not enough. Maybe he was over whatever fetish made him want to be with Negan, the sneaking around getting too much. He might just want something normal, not whatever twisted and all-encompassing thing they had. The more he thought about it the more he believed that leaving him was plaguing Carl’s mind. It made sense, probably why he didn’t want to talk to him about it. He’d understand it.

Being with Carl was playing with fire, it made him want to call up Carl and demand answers. It was fucking cruel to leave him hanging like this. He wondered what he could possibly be keeping from him?

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Being with Carl was playing with fire, he could get fired, or worse. Not that he cared about that, every second with Carl made it worth it. Yet, every second made him more and more aware of how attached he was to the teen. He had slipped under his skin, made himself at home in his head… in his heart. Like a drowning man coming for air, he feasted on the time he spent with Carl. Hands reaching out for him like an instinct. It was like he was freezing until skin met skin, then his whole body lit up in flames, each nerve raw and exposed, feeling every single particle in the air.

It had never been like this for him before, never so consuming, never so addictive. Even with Lucille
there wasn’t a single moment where he’d thought he’d waste away without her, not like with Carl. Everytime he’d nearly lost him, when he’d nearly hit him with the car, when that fucker Shane had dared to point his gun at him, it stopped his heart in his chest.
He took another long chug. If Carl wanted to leave him, he’d let him go. As agonizing as that would be, he’d let him walk away. He’d do anything if it made Carl happy, even if it meant losing a chunk of his own self.

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They ignored each other all week, Carl didn’t bother going running, Negan didn’t bother calling him into his office like he usually would. When they found each other in the corridors they’d exchange tense smiles before letting the hoard of students herd them along.
Carl thought about calling him so many times, picking his phone up several times only to chuck it, and himself, back onto his bed. He needed to talk to him, not just because of college, but because he missed him. He missed his laugh, his stupid jokes, even that fucking arrogant smirk of his.
As he laid out in bed, watching the rain hit the window, he missed Negan’s comfort. He missed those longing looks in the corridor, he hated the awkward tension that lay between them. Carl always hated it when they fought, usually because of his own stupidity. He often wondered when it’d be too much, when he’d push Negan so far away that he wouldn’t want to come back. Even Negan must have his limits, he’d get bored of this shit soon enough.
Huffing out a breath, he rolled himself out of bed, padding over to the window. It really was a beautiful night, rain dancing on the window, clouds haunting the sky like ghosts over the land. Shoving the window open he hung his head out, letting the cold rain hit at his face, refreshing his features. Moments like this made him feel like everything might be alright, the rain would cease, daylight would come, and the clouds would turn to white. The seasons would change no matter what, he would change no matter what. Things that seemed unbearable would become bearable.
At least that’s what he told himself.

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“I got into college.”

That was how it came out, not as a meaningful confession with a grand build up full of symbolism and reassurances that their lives weren’t going to change and everything would be fine. It just blurted out from his mouth when they were in the middle of watching some cooking show on the TV. Carl had gone over to his after school, trying to ease some of the tension. It hadn’t worked, even as they sat there watching the screen, the distance between them grew and grew until he broke. Negan had paused, much in the same way that his Dad had, taking a dragging moment to take in what Carl had said. The TV flicked off in the meantime, a quick movement from Negan that Carl hardly noticed.
Once again, he was focusing on the man’s face, watching all the emotions flicker over his face. Confusion soon turned into sheer joy, which turned into a fierce hug, pulling him closer on the couch.

“Congratulations, knew you had it in you.” Negan placed a quick kiss on his lips. “Is that what’s been bothering you?”

Carl hid his face, nodding. “I didn’t know how to tell you… I wasn’t completely honest when I told you which colleges I’d applied for.”
“Okaay, which one did you go for then?”

“Well… um… you might know it.” Carl wasn’t quite sure how to say it, still unsure how the man might receive the news that he’d applied for his alma mater behind his back. “It’s University of Washington.”
His face flickered almost undetectably with surprise, just for a moment, before the joy took over again. “Udub? Carl, that’s amazing. You should be proud.”

“I am, I really am. Couldn’t have done it without your help.”

Negan shook his head, an indulgent smile crossed his handsome features. “You did it all on your own, you didn’t need help, just a nudge.”

“Well, I appreciate the nudging.”

That got him a little laugh, there was something off though. Negan had shifted away, not much but enough for Carl to lose the warmth of his body.

“So why didn’t you tell me you’d applied? I coulda helped more, talked to some people.”

“I wanted to...” Carl paused, brain flicking through to find the right words. “When I applied... I didn’t want to let you down if I didn’t get in... I didn’t think I could handle it.”

Negan’s hand found his, threading their fingers together, giving a squeeze that made Carl feel less like a jerk. “You could never let me down Carl. Ever. I’m so happy for you, you’re gonna love it there.”

“Do you think?” He hadn’t let on to his Dad but the thought of college petrified him. Not just the whole moving away thing but everything, meeting new people, learning new things, what if he couldn’t take the challenge? What if he melted under the pressure? Things could get so bad again.

“I do, you’ll be fine.”

“And if I’m not?”

“Then come home and we’ll figure it out. Whatever happens, you’ll thrive, it’s who you are Carl.”

“I just don’t know if I want to go there now...”

“Why wouldn’t you?”

So many reasons, leaving his Dad, leaving his Mom, moving far away all on his own. Most importantly, the feelings for the man stood in front of him that were bubbling up in him uncontrollably, threatening to burst out at any moment. “A big part of the reason that I even applied was to get the hell away from here, I could’ve gone to Georgia, they had the classes I wanted but I needed the distance. I fucked up.”

“It’s not a fuck up, it’s an amazing opportunity. I know I’m biased, but Seattle is damn amazing. It’ll change your life.”

“I like my life now, things are good at home, Dad and I are finally getting along again.”

Negan rolled his eyes at that. “You can’t let this opportunity pass you up for your Dad, Carl, you’ve gotta go live your own life at some point.”

“It’s not just because of that.” Carl was getting desperate now, his heart pounding away in his chest. He stood, walking away to put some distance between them. Why couldn’t he see? How could the man not know why he wanted to stay? Why he was so worried about leaving? Did he really not realise that life away from Negan just didn’t seem as appealing as one with him?

“Then what is it?”
It’s because I love you.”

The conversation stilted. The room dropped into a foreboding silence. Their breathing the only discernable sound in the room. Carl’s heart clenched in his chest, almost crippling as the vulnerability that came with those words hit him. He hadn’t meant to say it. It just came out. The feelings that he’d never cared to dwell on, preferring to live in the moment rather than think of the consequences of having such feelings, of understanding what they really meant.

Deciding to take the brave route once more, he swallowed, preparing to finish his words. “I love you Negan, the thought of leaving you, not being able to be around you for weeks on end... It’s been killing me since I found out.”

He’d stumped the older man, he was so still Carl wasn’t even sure if he was still breathing. As the silence dragged on, dread spread its clawing wings in his chest, flourishing as it settled low in his belly. He’d never considered this option, the one where Negan didn’t say it back, didn’t say anything. It shattered his heart, his face flushed, he regretted ever saying those words. So, he did what he knew to do, he shifted way, walking quickly to the door, trying to convince himself not to cry until he was far away from him. Negan intercepted him, hands coming up to cup his face, bringing their lips together in a kiss that made him melt.

It was lingering, not lustful but just as desperate, trying to convey the feelings that Negan himself didn’t want to admit. It made things more complicated, so much more fucked up than they were. He should’ve cut it off, nipped this damn relationship in the bud the second he felt himself grow attached to a student. Instead he let it grow like roses in his heart, nourished every time he saw Carl, blossoming at each smile, each kiss, thorns stabbing at the organ every time he let him walk away. Hearing those words fall from his lips was like feeling it all at once, like he was constricted yet freed at the same time, given life by this small teenager who had let him into his heart. Carl, who loved him regardless of the fucked up, twisted things he’d done. Words would never convey how much he cared, no amount of ‘I love you’s would cover the depths of his feelings for him. So he kissed him. Let his lips carry the words he’d carried so deeply in his heart for so long. There would be time for talking later, time for reality to set in, but for now he basked in Carl’s light, keeping the dark world at bay for a few precious moments.
I have my moments

Chapter Notes

Oh my days, left it a little late with my update but I do have a good excuse! I unexpectedly started my new job last week, my start date was changed around so much that it was a genuine shock to get it confirmed. The training is super super intense, 5 weeks of non-stop exams and practicals so I have to say my updates will be a bit sporadic in the next few weeks. I had hoped to have completed the fic by the time I started but my muse just didn't play that way. So please just bare with me for the last few chapters. It's also why I haven't been able to respond to any comments in the last one, it's just been so hectic but I have read and love them all so thank you so much for leaving them!

For those interested this song was my total muse for the first scene of this chapter so feel free to listen as you read:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IEszPx8pu0

“Do you know how there are moments when the world moves so slowly you can feel your bones shifting, your mind tumbling? When you think that no matter what happens to you for the rest of your life, you will remember every last detail of that one minute forever?”
— Jodi Picoult

Some moments in your life speed past like a bullet in the air, hurtling through the world at 1,000mph, one blink and it’s done, in the past, to be locked away as nothing but a sweet memory. Yet some moments linger, like the world has stopped just for this very moment, the one that doesn’t stay in your mind, it stays in your soul, it becomes part of your very core. It shapes you, it changes you, for the worst, for the better, it is irrevocably a piece of you. Carl could singlehandedly count those moments, that New Year’s, the moment his Father landed that first punch, the second Negan placed his lips on his own only a few second ago, yet it felt like a lifetime. They stood there, locked in a moment and a kiss, it had never been like this before, never so desperate, so all-encompassing.

Lips moved over lips, tongues slipped together as their bodies inched closer, not even a single breath of air could pass between them. Hands clutched at each other, never moving, just clenching tighter and tighter onto clothing, onto hair, anything that would keep them tethered together. Warm tears trickled down Carl’s cheeks, mingling into the kiss, bitter salt tainting the sweetness of Negan’s mouth. He felt Negan’s hands cover his cheeks, thumbs brushing at the never-ending stream, soft reassurances mumbled at him, ghosting over his lips before they were taken again and again.

The room was too hot, too suffocating, too heartbreaking. Something had changed, almost the second Negan had reached for him he knew something was different. There was a sadness to the kiss, one that stung at his heart even as it sang with a joy that only having a love so reciprocated could incite. The desperation doing little to conceal the inevitable storm that was about to bowl over their lives. Things were going to change, they were going to change, even if by some miracle that managed to stay together whilst Carl was away at college, would they even want to be together
after? The poison burned through his mind, each reality seeping more anguish into his bones. He let out a despairing moan, trying to push closer to Negan, trying to twine them together so he could escape the thoughts swirling around him. In his frustration he pushed at him, shoving him back into the couch they’d moved from, forcing him down onto it. The kiss broke as Negan fell, sprawling onto the cushions in an undignified heap, almost immediately Carl clambered on-top, reuniting their lips, chasing away the cold that had shattered over him at the loss of his body.

It still wasn’t enough to dampen the doubts swirling like a hurricane in his head, no matter how hard he kissed him, how tight he clutched at him, it wasn’t enough. He tugged at his shirt, pulling away from the kiss once more to pull it over Negan’s head, trailing his hands over the newly exposed skin, letting the feeling of it fill him. The now familiar shape of his torso was a comfort, a muffler to the voices in his head, he let his hands drag down then back up. His lips followed, tasting the warm skin under them, feeling it shiver and shake under his ministrations. Carl let Negan twist them over, spread his legs to let the man slip between them, wrapping them around his waist to get him closer. Their lips found each other again, softer this time, almost like the first time, huddled under their tree, in their own little world. Just like the first time, it was brief, only a skim of lips against lips. Still enough to send his toes curling, back arching as he tried to follow those lips.

His eyes fluttered open, breath catching as they met Negan’s adoring gaze, how could one simple look express so much. He could live a thousand years and never forget those brown eyes, the crinkles at the corner whenever he gave one of his devilish smirks. Nor would he ever forget the simple touch of his fingers on his skin, the way it left goosebumps as they trailed up his chest, dragging his shirt up.

It tugged over his head, leaving him bare and exposed beneath the man. The gaze turned downwards, taking in every inch of his skin. He’d never felt this vulnerable before, Carl wanted nothing more than to grab his shirt and duck back underneath it, his arm twitched coming to cover over his torso. He was acutely aware of how his ribs still stuck out slightly, the various scars that still littered around his body from his time with Shane, even with the time passed he was still convinced that Negan would be able to see every single mark that Shane had made. That maybe he’d be able to see how he’d ruined him, dirtied every inch of his body with his mouth and his clawing hands.

A hand covered over his arm, softly pulling it away. “Don’t Carl… you don’t need to hide from me.” Their fingers intertwined next to Carl’s head, laying deep into the cushions. “You’re so damn gorgeous.” Negan whispered against his skin, placing the lightest kisses along his collarbone.

The fire still crackled on in the background as Negan explored his body, doing exactly as he said he would; finding all the little spots that made his body tingle and jolt with pleasure. He squeezed the hand in his grip tight, running the other through soft hair as the man drew out pleasured moans. Hot breath steamed his skin, sharp teeth gently tugged at his nipples forcing gasps out of his throat. Carl watched him kiss lower, tongue trailing over his hip bones, lips dancing dangerously close to his waistband. He panicked for a moment, his breath catching as his body froze, before he relaxed again focusing on hands in his, the brown eyes that stared up at him with love, not with a deadly possession.

Negan’s gaze turned questioning, gesturing down at his jeans. Carl gave a jerky nod, breathing more rapidly as the man knelt up, both hands coming to work open his jeans. It was all so new, yet so familiar, dark memories pressed at his brain remembering the last person who’d touched him like this. He had to keep reminding himself that things were different as his boxers were pulled off, he worked on calming his erratic breath, trying to stop himself from running off.

“You alright? Need me to stop?”
Carl shook his head, hands reaching over for Negan, pulling him close, breathing in his scent. He was safe here, in his arms, safe and loved. Their lips met again, this time with a heat that rivaled the fire next to them. Lust pooled in his stomach as Negan’s hands grew more assertive, taking over his body with a dominance that sent shivers up Carl’s spine. A hand slipped down his side, curling behind to grab at his ass, pulling his hips up to drag against Negan’s, the harsh scratch of his jeans on his flesh wasn’t enough to quell the hardness forming there. Carl let his own hands roam over Negan, scratching lightly down his chest in the way he knew Negan liked. He was quickly rewarded with a quick tug of his lip, teeth pulling at the flesh before sucking it into his mouth. Carl moaned at the sensation, he was so distracted with the tongue plundering his mouth to notice the hand that crept over his hips, brushing lightly over his dick.

“This okay?” Negan asked, keeping his grip light, ready to remove his hand the second Carl told him too.

He didn’t, he just let out a muffled “mhmm” as the pleasure took hold of him. Carl openly moaned when the hand gripped him and moved faster, he hadn’t realised how much attention Negan had paid when he watched him jerk off, he knew exactly how to move his hand. He never thought it would feel this good to have another hand on his body, how much he wanted Negan to never stop touching him, how much he never wanted to stop touching the other man.

His own hands pawed at Negan’s jeans, he bit his lip as trembling fingers plucked open the belt, Negan helping when he fumbled at the zipper. Their eyes locked in a heated gaze as Carl reached into his boxers, small hand curling around the large hardness in there. He watched the pleasure spread on Negan’s face when he gave a few experimental strokes, the man’s eyes falling closed as his hips gently thrust into his hand. Carl grew more confident with each moan that slipped out of his lips, hand pumping more firmly, brushing over the head to collect the pre-cum gathering there before using it to slick his way down.

Negan swallowed his next moan, pushing his lips back onto Carl’s, not bothering to check himself this time as he nipped at his swollen lips, tongue slipping between them. His hand resumed his stokes on Carl’s dick, their arms awkwardly knocking together as they let their passion take over. Working on an instinct to fill the want in the body, to just forget the shit they’d have to deal with and just feel each other.

“Negan.” Carl moaned out as the hand on him quickened, squeezing harder, pushing him rapidly toward the edge. He clutched at the other man, crushing their lips together to stop more desperate moans from creeping out. Wet sounds filled the room, the kiss from more desperate, sloppy as they became overwhelmed by the pleasure that made their bodies tremble. “I... shit... ohgod... N- Negan.” His eyes rolled back as his orgasm washed through him, he jerked and shuddered in Negan’s arms, harsh pants pushing out his mouth. He hardly noticed Negan’s hand close around his own, pulling his hand tighter around his cock. Hot breath panted against his lips, quickening before halting as a heat spurted over his hand. Carl barely opened his eyes in time to see Negan’s screw up with pleasure, lost in the same waves that had taken Carl moments ago.

Carl tilted his head, giving Negan more space as he buried his face into Carl’s neck, catching his breath. Carl stroked at his hair, running his hand through the locks before placing a quick kiss on his temple. He kept his lips there, basking in the moment. The fire crackled on, the rain pattered at the window but all he could hear were the soft puffs of Negan’s breath. He let his arms tighten around him, wishing he could pull him closer, wishing he could keep him there forever. All he could do was hope that whenever the storm hit they’d be able to survive it.

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Carl watched him sleep that night, curled up on the chair beside the bed, much like Negan had before. Sleep wouldn’t come to him that evening, they hadn’t spoken much, just showered quickly before hopping into bed. All the ‘what if’s’ filled his head, the uncertainty of the future plagued at him. He needed to talk about it, he wanted to know what Negan was thinking, whether he believed in a future where they were together or if he wanted a clean break. Carl knew Negan loved him, that was more than clear now, they didn’t need words for that, but would it be enough? Would the mere thought of him be enough for Negan when he was thousands of miles away?

He gnawed on his nail, foot tapping where it rested on the soft cushion. Thousands of miles away? That was a terrifying thought. They barely coped when they had to spend a week apart let alone months.

Negan shifting dragged his attention back to the present, he watched the confusion curl up on the man’s tired face. A groggy “Carl?” fell from his lips when his hand reached out to grab at nothing.

He extracted himself from the chair and slid back into the bed, scooting over to Negan, wrapping his arm over his waist. Feeling strong arms wrap around his own, Carl settled down again, watching Negan’s chest rise and fall as he fell into a fitful sleep.

The next time he awoke he was still plagued by the same doubts that only doubled when he realized that he was alone in bed. An unease crept over him, it wasn’t like Negan to just leave him like that. Padding down the stairs he found Negan on the couch, head hanging in his hands. He hadn’t dressed, he was just sat there in his boxers, hair still mussed from sleep. “How long have you been up?” Carl asked, coming to sit opposite him, perching on the coffee table.

Negan looked up at him, eyes bloodshot, clearly it had been a few hours since he’d slept. “Awhile.”

“My snoring didn’t keep you up?” Carl tried to keep it lighthearted, tried to keep the sinking feeling in his stomach at bay.

Negan gave him a weak smile. “No, just… thinking.”

Carl was almost afraid to ask. “About?”

“Everything.” Negan sighed and leaned back on the couch, hands rubbing at his face. “Us, the future... what’s gonna happen when you go to college.”

So Carl wasn’t the only one worrying about it, the thought should have relieved him but instead it sent an anxious flutter in his stomach. “Did you come to any conclusions?”

“Far too fuckin’ many Carl. All of them as shitty as the other.”

“Which one are we going with then?”

Negan gave him a look that tore at his heart, utter sorrow laid in those brown eyes. “None of them that wouldn’t hurt like a fuckin’ bitch.”

Just as Carl had thought, he swallowed, trying to wet his dry throat. “W-what does that mean then? For us? What do you want to do?”

“It’s not about what I want Carl, it’s about what’s best.” Negan sighed, leaning forward again to place his hands on Carl’s knees.

Carl shifted away, certain now that the conversation wasn’t going anywhere he was ready for it to go. “What’s best then?”
Negan swallowed, looking down. “For us to… for us to not be together when you go to college.”

Carl knew it was coming yet no forward thinking could have prepared him for the actual words. It was like a dagger to the chest. He couldn’t say anything, he just sat there and tried to recover from the hit.

“How…how is that the best thing?” His voice shook as he spoke, trembling with tears? Anger? He couldn’t tell anymore. He saw Negan stand in the window’s reflection. “How could you want that?”

“Jesus, Carl, I don’t want that, I’d never want that but it’s better for the both of us.”

“How? How could being apart possibly be better than being together?”

“Because we won’t be together Carl. Not really. We’ll both be sat pining after each other every moment we’re away. College is a life-changing time Carl, so much happens, good and bad, I don’t want you to miss out on a single thing because you’re busy thinking about us.”

“What makes you think I’d be sat around doing that?” Carl protested.

“Because it’s what we both do now Carl, c’mon don’t bullshit about it. Whenever you’re not with your Dad you’re with me, and if we’re not together then we’re thinking about being together. It wouldn’t be good for either of us to live like that, not for four years.”

Carl wanted to point out the flaws in his argument, wanted to say that he was wrong but he couldn’t. Things with Negan was so all-consuming, practically every waking moment was spent thinking about him. Being apart would only make it worse. He didn’t notice Negan walking closer until he was right behind him, his head leaning down to rest on Carl’s shoulder.

“I don’t want this Carl, if I had it my way I’d keep you here forever but you need to go. You gotta go live your life, go to college worry-free, ready to do whatever the fuck you want.” He added in a hushed tone. “Do whoever the fuck you want.”

Carl recoiled at that, stepping away from him. “I don’t want anyone else. Not like that.”

“You say that now but what if that changed? What if you met someone there? Someone that blows your mind, you never know what’s gonna happen and I don’t want you to miss out on something amazing just because of me.”

“I-I don’t want to even think about being with anyone that’s not you.” Carl’s voice trembled again, tears springing to his eyes. He didn’t want to be with anyone else, his heart shattered at the thought that one day he might not feel this way about him. It was inconceivable that anyone else could ever make him feel like Negan did.

Negan rested their foreheads together, breathing deep. “I don’t want to either… but it could happen and I can’t… I can’t bear the thought of you missing out on your happiness because of me.”

“You are my happiness.” Carl whispered.

“And if you still feel that way in four years I’ll be here.” Negan brushed at Carl’s face with his knuckles. “M’not goin’ anywhere.”

“I don’t wanna be away from you.” Tears now openly slipped down Carl’s face.
“I know... I know.” Negan gave him a quick kiss. “But you have to. You’ve been through so much shit Carl, you gotta go have some fun. Spend some time with yourself, figure out who you are on your own, without me and your parents. We’ll all still be here when you get back.”

Carl took a shuddering breath, trying to swallow the lump in his throat. “So that—that’s it? We’re done?”

“When you go, or before, if that’s easier?”

“Neither of them are easier.” Carl said.

“I know.”

They paused for a moment, breathing each other in.

“When I go…” Carl spoke. “When I go, that’ll be it but for now, can we forget it? Be normal again? I need it to be normal again.”

Negan gave him a kiss. “Of course.” He said before wrapping him in a hug. Trying to control his own emotions as he felt Carl trembled and fall apart in his arms. His own heart shattering into a million pieces. He knew it was the right thing, knew he couldn’t put their lives on hold for four years, but he’d be damned if that didn’t kill him.

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He felt broken when he arrived home, hardly able to get ready for the day. He didn’t want to go to school, he wanted nothing more than to sink into his bed and forget the conversation that he’d just had. He didn’t want to deal with his Dad though, not with his questioning and no doubt the joy that he’d show when he found out that Negan had broken up with him.

Negan had broken up with him.

No, he’d done what had needed to be done. He was right, Carl couldn’t stop his life, not for a guy no matter how he felt about him. Just like he couldn’t expect Negan to stop living his life when he was away.

It was for the best. Even if it destroyed a part of him.

He did all that he could to avoid Negan at school the next day, even the sight of his bike in the parking lot sent an devastating ache through him. Most of his time was spent in the library reading the same sentence over and over again. Never quite getting it into his mind.

“You gonna change the page?” A light voice appeared out of nowhere.

Like before Enid sat herself in opposite him, looking at him expectantly, huffing when all he did was stare back blankly. “You didn’t text me, or call. I thought we were gonna try again.”

Her words hardly registered in his head, he barely stuttered out an answer. “I...I-uh... sorry.” He ended flatly.

A weird look flitted over her face. “You okay Carl? You don’t look great.”

Carl laughed to himself, when had he ever looked great? “Yeah, no, it’s just been a long week.” He tried to rub his head into focus.

“What’s been going on?” She asked. “I know we’re not exactly close anymore but I’m still a good
He couldn’t tell her, it was another thing he had to keep to himself. “Just college, the whole moving away thing.”

She nodded understandingly. “I get it, I got into Berkeley. It’s awesome, I’m happy but… leaving home? That’s terrifying.”

At least they could relate on that. With everything going on with Negan he’d hardly had much time to consider the reality of living away from everything he knew. “Congratulations, it’s an amazing college.”

She beamed at him. “Thanks. Where are you going?”

“University of Washington.”

“Nice! Beautiful campus.”

“Yeah. It’s why I picked it.”

“Are you gonna go see it? Check it out for real?”

“I haven’t thought about it to be honest.” He probably should, he might get there and hate the place. A slim possibility but it could happen. “I’m not sure if I wanna go.”

“How come?”

“It’s just so far away from home, kinda wish I’d applied closer.”

Enid thought for a moment. “I think everyone feels like that, anywhere that’s not home is too far really. It’ll be good though Carl. Getting outta this shitty town, going somewhere new and exciting. It’ll be life-changing for the better.”

Carl sighed, putting down the pen he’d been gnawing on. “It just doesn’t feel that way right now.”

“Go check the place out Carl, it might help y’know. Most of the open days are next month, I’m sure your parents would take you.” She said. “If you hate it then that’s your answer.”

“Yeah, I’ll check it out. Thanks.” He gave her a quick smile.

“No problem.” She stood again. “I gotta go, I’ve got practice but honestly Carl, text me. I wanna hang. You can tell me all about Washington!”

“Sure.” He meant it this time, he’d try and text her, he was gonna have to get used to the whole making friends thing again after all.

Thankfully he was success in his attempts to avoid Negan, breathing a sigh of relief as he walked up to his house. The weekend couldn’t come soon enough, even if it meant having to deal with Negan on Friday. It hurt too much to think about how he’d have to push through the pain of knowing their time was limited. For once he wasn’t looking forward to Friday, he wished he could skip it and go to the weekend but every moment was precious. He had to take advantage of it even if it mean it would hurt more later.

His Dad was lying on the couch when he walked into the room, pillow over his face. His body jerked up as the door clicked shut, the pillow hit the floor and his Father’s groggy face appeared. “Carl?”
“Yeah, you alright?”

“Yeah, m’good.” His words slurred together, he looked exhausted. Carl hadn’t failed to notice the amount of hours his Dad was putting in at work. They’d hardly spent any time together since the camping trip. “Busy day is all.”

“Work?” Carl asked, sitting next to him.

“Yeah, lots of animal attacks going on right now. Keeping us all on our toes.”

“Doesn’t sound like fun.”

“Nah, it’ll be fine. Just some wild dogs we think, keep an eye out if you’re out late though Carl. Don’t want anything happening to you.”

Carl nodded, not that he was ever out late these days. Negan really hadn’t been lying when he said that anytime he wasn’t with his Dad he was with the other man. “So, I talked to Enid today.”

Rick seemed surprised. “Oh yeah? You two friends again?”

“We’re trying. We talked about colleges. She actually reminded me about college visits, UDub are running on next month, on the 6th. You think we can go?”

Rick’s face fell as quickly as it had lit up. “The 6th?”

Carl nodded. “I’ve got training that whole week, I can’t miss it.”

Rick’s heart fell, he really needed this visit. He needed that reassurance that this place was worth leaving everything for. “Oh, no problem.”

“I’m sorry Carl, I wish I could get out of it. Maybe we could do a trip up there another time? Check the place out on our own.”

“Sure Dad.” Carl smiled at him. “Maybe over the summer?”

“Perfect.” Rick’s phone buzzed. “Work, I gotta go. There’s some dinner to heat up in the fridge. Be good.”

Carl sank back into the couch, wondering when his life would be simple again.

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Friday came soon enough, Negan greeted Carl with a small smile and a kiss that hardly brushed his lips. So much for normal Carl thought. As usual they sat down for dinner together, but this time the kitchen was filled with small talk instead of their usual light banter. A heaviness lay between them that had never existed before. A chasm that Carl had no clue how to even begin closing. The clink of cutlery was overwhelmingly loud in between silences, each grateful for the distraction of food.

“How are things with college?” Negan asked.

The forbidden topic, or so Carl thought, it hurt too much to consider it. He didn’t want to bring it up so he wouldn’t have to think about the conversation they’d had. “Nothing’s really happened. I spoke to Dad about going to an open day but he can’t get the time off so it looks like I’m not going.”
“Seriously? He can’t get time off? It’s an important day.”

Carl tried to brush it off. “It’s super busy right now and he said we’d go later, do our own little tour of the place.” “Huh.” Was all Negan said, returning his attention to his plate.

There was something else there, Carl thought. “What?” He prompted.

Negan looked up. “What?”

“There’s something you’re not saying.”

The other man scoffed. “No there’s not.” Sighing when Carl used his ‘bullshit’ look against him. “It’s just open days are important, you get the ‘access all areas’ pass, you can meet professors and others students. You should go.”

He’d said everything that Carl had been thinking. “I know. Dad really can’t get the time off, not right now anyways. So I’ll have to settle for a quickie tour later.”

“Alright then, I’ll take you.”

“What?” Carl wasn’t sure he’d heard him right.

“I’ll take you dumbass.” Negan wiped his face with a napkin, utensils cluttering to the now empty plate. “You might as well get the tour from someone who knows what they’re talking about.”

“Seriously?”

“Yup.” Popping the ‘p’.

Carl lunged at him, running around the table to fling himself into his lap. “Thankyou.” He mumbled into his neck, enjoying the vibrations of Negan’s laugh against his chest.

“You won’t be sayin’ that after a 5-hour flight with me.” Negan joked.

“I’m sure I can handle you on a plane.” Carl pulled back, a genuine smile crossing his face for the first time that week. “Thank you.”

Negan stroked his cheek, glowing at the joy on Carl’s face, Christ he’d do anything to keep it on there. “It’s fine.”

“I’ll talk to my Dad about it tomorrow, he’s not gonna be happy about it.”

“I’m sure he’ll come around when you explain how important it is. We’ll have separate hotel rooms obviously.”

Carl pouted at him. “Really? Is that necessary?”

“For your Dad it is. Can’t have him thinkin’ I’m corrupting you.”

“You are corrupting me.”

“I’m sorry, who jumped who in the gym?”

“Again, you made it seem like a good idea.”

“Suuure.”
“Shhh, just accept it.” Carl kissed him hushing any further comments from the man.

Carl quickly found himself hiked up onto the table, dinner plates pushed aside as the kiss grew more heated, both eager for a better distraction. Desperate hands pulled at clothes, Carl’s shirt tore down the front, Negan far too gone to bother with the damn buttons, simply tugged it down his arms and onto the floor. He let Carl push him away to roughly shove his shirt over his head before recapturing his lips in a passionate kiss. Negan urged Carl down, laying him flat against the hard surface so he could worship at the pale skin. Carl lost himself in every nip and suck, each touch electrifying his body until all he could do was clutch at sweaty skin, moaning out frantic encouragements.

A clatter made him jump out of his skin, his head shot to the side to see the containers fall to the floor. No, no, not containers, plates. His stomach revolted as the old smell of Chinese erupted over his senses, he pushed at Negan, shoving him away. He scurried off the table, chest heaving as he spoke. “Not here.”

Still confused Negan nodded, offering his hand out to Carl who took it gratefully, letting the man pull him into a softer kiss. It helped to calm his nerves even as Negan sent his heartrate rocketing with a firm grip on his hips.

“You alright?” The older man asked.

Carl nodded, hurriedly reaching up to drag the man down into another kiss, he didn’t want to think about that momentary flicker of the past. It needed to stay gone and it seemed like the only thing that would keep it away was Negan’s hands on his body.

“C’mere.” Negan mumbled against his lips, dipping down to grab the back of Carl’s thighs, hoisting him up against him, forcing his legs to cling around Negan’s hips.

Taking advantage of the new proximity Carl wriggled against Negan, shifting his hips to grind himself against the man, delighting in the almost-pained groans from the other man. He was impressed when Negan managed to walk them up the stairs uninterrupted, shivering at the show of strength from the man, grinding harder against him as a reward.

He hardly noticed landing on the soft bed, only realising when Negan crawled off of him, coming to stand at the end of the bed. His teeth tugged as his own lip in an attempt to calm the ache surging between his legs at the sight of the man slowly pulling off his belt, teasing Carl out of his mind when he took his time removing his pants. Carl was quick with removing his, practically scrambling out of them on the bed. Lust slammed into him at the hungry look on Negan’s face, he took the opportunity to tease the man instead, propping himself up on one elbow whilst his other hand slid down his body, grazing at a pebbled nipple before it grasped his aching cock. Maintaining eye contact, he pumped himself slowly, spreading his legs, thrusting his hips up into his hand as soft moans fell from his lips, fully expecting Negan to throw himself on-top of him and take over.

Much to Carl’s disappointment Negan didn’t rise to the bait, clearly the man had more willpower than he thought. Instead he placed one knee on the bed, crawling up, only stopping when he reached Carl’s splayed legs, lips coming down to meet the curve of his knee. Carl’s hand slowed as Negan’s lips worked their way up his leg, nipping along the soft, meaty flesh of his inner thigh. His breath quickened the closer he got to the top, that devious tongue tracing indistinguishable patterns on his skin. He had to take his hand off his cock, his supporting arm too weak to continue on its own. All he could do was watch that dark head work its way up his body, deliberately avoiding the place that Carl desperately wanted him to lap at. Teeth nipped along his hips, quickly followed by hands that massaged around to his ass, digging into the flesh there.

It was a delectable torment, by the time Negan had made his way up to his lips Carl was a trembling
mess, practically begging him for more. The man had kept himself hovering above Carl, never touching him enough to ease any of the ache in his body. Carl tried to drag him down more, enticing him down with hot kisses, harsh nips to his lips. It didn’t work. Negan just smirked down at him, letting on hand trail a feather-light caress down his torso, watching the bumps follow it down.

“Jesus, Carl the things I wanna do to you.”

“Then do them.” Carl pleaded, he was ready for anything that the man wanted to give him.

Sharp teeth scraped over his collarbone, the pain lapped away with a wet tongue that traced up to his racing pulse. “Mmm, damn you taste good. I wouldn’t even know where to start with you Darlin’.”

Carl’s grabbed the hand that wasn’t brace above his head, pushing it towards his cock. “That’s a really great place to start.”

Negan just chuckled against his neck, grabbing the hand that held his and pushing it back up by Carl’s head. “You want me to touch your cock? Make you come with my hand wrapped tight around you?”

“Mhm.” Carl emphasised with a frantic nod. “Please Negan.”

“Orr can I do more?” Negan nipped at his neck, plucking a nipple with his hand. “I wanna taste you Carl, can I taste you?”

The desperate need inside of him grew at his words, more so at the thought of Negan’s mouth wrapped around his dick. A brief flicker of doubt probed at him, was he ready for that? Another big step in such a short space of time. One look in Negan’s eyes told him everything, he could do this, fuck he wanted to do this. He so desperately wanted to feel the warm, wet heat of his mouth on him.

What surprised him was how desperately he wanted to do the same to Negan, take him into his mouth until he came, gasping with pleasure, spurting down his throat. His mouth practically watered at the thought.

“Yesss.” He eventually answered, the word turning into a sharp moan as Negan quickly made his way south. Pausing at his chest to lather his nipples with an intense attention that only had Carl anticipating his next moves all the more.

Their eyes locked as Negan finally reached his dick, giving it a few gentle tugs, before lowering his mouth over it. Carl’s head flung back at the sensation, back arching even as his hips were pinned to the bed, stopping him from thrusting up in the heat.

“Oh god…oh…oh…Negan…yessss.” He panted out, moans falling freely the faster the man worked his mouth on him. Taking him deep before pulling off him, swirling his tongue around the head, dipping into the slit at the top just to tease Carl before doing it all over again.

Carl really was delicious, not just in taste, the way he squirmed underneath him was beyond tempting. Like a fuckin’ buffet splayed out before him, ready to be eaten. He shifted his hands, moving a leg to rest over his shoulder, giving him more access to the tight balls nestled under Carl’s dick. He lapped at each one, taking his time teasing them as his tongue trickled lower, shifting Carl’s hips up.

“Wh-oh…ohmygod…what are you doing?” Carl had shot up as his tongue edged closer to his hole. His eyes widened in surprise when the tongue hadn’t stopped as his balls, persisting onwards.

“I was gonna taste that sweet, little hole of yours.” Negan glanced up at him. “Want me to stop?”
“No…I-I don’t know.” Carl admitted. Shane had never done that before, it was new territory. Nerves clustered in his belly, fighting the lust there. He couldn’t deny the intrigue at the thought, the spark of need that hit him when he thought about it. “Okay, just…go slow.”

Negan nodded back at him, reaching a hand up to squeeze Carl’s before it returned to his ass, spreading him open. He did as told, slowly working his tongue down again, keeping an eye out for any sign of distress on Carl’s face as he worked his way around tightness there. His free hand reached up to tug his cock again, working in-sync with his tongue to drive Carl crazy.

Carl’s moans reached a high squeal when he probed his tongue inside, hips grinding down on the muscle, it felt so damn good. Even as it darted in and out it rivalled the pleasure from the hand still pumping his dick. He was caught between shoving his hips hip into the tight grip and down onto the wet muscle.

“Oh god…yesdon’t stop…please…. God .” Carl begged and pleaded. Unable to stop the words that filled the room. Heavy pants mixed with wet slurs that Carl would never forget. A despairing cry left him when the all contact left his body, it quickly turned into a moan of pleasure when that heat wrapped around his dick again. Sucking hard as he took him deep into his throat. It was all too much and not enough, the pleasure flinging him over the edge, spilling into the mouth that just swallowed it all down.

He was breathless after, melted down into nothing, unable to move. Whimpering softly as Negan’s mouth pulled off his sensitive flesh.

Negan knelt up, hand frantically tugging at his own dick at the sight of Carl, flushed and covered in his own come. It was fuckin’ decadent. His moans echoed in his ears, the breathy “Negan” that had fallen from his mouth when he’d come nearly had him tipping over the edge. What actually finished him off was Carl sitting up, breath just ghosting over the tip of his dick, looking up at him with wide eyes instructing him to come on his face.

“Jesus…fuckin’…shit.” His body jerked, and tensed. Doing exactly what Carl had said, spurting pearly white cum over his face, landing in streaks over his cheeks and lips. His heart nearly gave in when he saw that pink tongue slip out to lap at the come on his lip. He slammed his lips down on him, tasting himself in that mouth. The kid really was gonna be the fuckin’ death of him.

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Carl could hardly look his Father in the eye when he arrived back home that evening, almost certain that if he did the man would know exactly what he’d been up to. It was certainly unprecedented, an insightful view into just how dirty Negan was, a teasing preview of all the things to come. A regretful pang hit him as he realised they didn’t have a lot of time to fully explore that before he left.

“How was Negan?” Rick asked, sitting in the chair opposite him.

“Good…good…” He stammered out. Jesus, Carl, mind out of gutter. “He um…actually offered to help with the whole open day thing. Said he’d accompany me up there.”

Rick froze, then laughed, a deep, almost hysterical laugh. “I bet he did. There’s no chance of that happening Carl.”

“Why not? I need to go Dad, it’s the best time to visit and you know it. He used to live there, he knows the place better than anyone, it makes sense.”

“No, Carl. I’m not having you traipse off with your school coach for a trip.”
“Dad, c’mon we’ll have separate hotel rooms, hell, we’ll stay in separate hotels if that makes you feel better.”

“It’s not appropriate, what if you get caught together?”

“We won’t because nothing will happen. He’ll just be on the plane with me and drop me off at the college, that’s all.”

“Carl-”

“Dad, please, I really need to go. I wanna see the place I’m moving to before I go.”

“And you will, when we go up there this summer. End of discussion.”

Carl glared at him before storming off up the stairs, his Dad could be an unreasonable ass sometimes. Leaving Rick to sit, stunned, on the couch, when had his damn life got so complicated? Since when did he have to feel bad that he wasn’t letting his Son go off with a guy that was old enough to be his father? He shook his head, pinching the bridge of his nose in an attempt to ward off the headache crawling over him.

A knock at the door shifted him from the couch, he’d almost forgotten about Daryl, they’d replaced their usual poker night for a quiet beer at Rick’s. It had been Daryl’s idea, he felt bad about making him drive all the way over after he’d been working so much. He’d been so relieved when Daryl had suggested it, he wanted to see the man but he was too damn tired to do much more than sit and relax.

Their relationship wasn’t like anything he’d known before, nothing like the terse, competitive friendship he’d shared with Shane. As much as the thought made him sick now, there had been such an intense love there, yet it had always been all or nothing with the pair of them. One of them had to break for the other all the time, it was a constant battle of the wills, a fight of who could get one over the other. It was like that with work, girls, hell even with Carl, they would constantly fight for his affections. Each trying to outdo the other. It had been exhausting and had left him with nothing but the burned remains of who he used to be. It had destroyed him, his family, nearly wrecked his career at times.

Daryl was entirely different, he was different when he was with him. It was carefree, not that anarchist teenager freedom but like a bird taking flight. Calm and steady against the wind, he relaxed whenever he was around him, lulled by his low, rough voice. There was no pressure, just conversations that flowed from one topic to the next. They both had their demons, issues that they’d only scratched at the surface during their talks but neither let them plague their friendship. It was just fun, and refreshing. Daryl made him feel more human again, balanced his soul out.

Just seeing him on the other side of the door forced a grin on his face, he gestured for the man to come in, grabbing a couple of beers from the kitchen before he joined him on the couch. Mindless chatter distracted Rick from the moody teenager upstairs, he hated it when they argued, especially given the progress they’d made in the recent months. Even with the distraction he wanted nothing more than to run upstairs and talk with Carl, make him see that he wasn’t trying to be an awful father, nor was he trying to keep him away from Negan because of fun.

Their relationship…it just wasn’t healthy, not just because of the age gap, not even because of Negan’s position at the school. Neither of them seemed in the right place for it, Negan clearly had his issues just as Rick had, and Carl… Carl needed to be a damn teenager. No one should have to deal with the shit that Carl dealt with, he had to grow up quicker, deal with things on his own that never should have been a possibility. Rick just wanted Carl to go out and have fun, see the world, not be stuck in a crappy town because of a guy.
“Okay, what’s up with you?” Daryl’s voice poked through the thoughts clouding his mind.

“Huh? Oh, nothin’ just thinkin’.”

“About?”

Rick sighed, he and Daryl had never really spoken about Carl, his instincts always seemed to be geared towards protecting everything about his Son. “It’s about Carl.”

“Okay, he alrig’?”

“Yeah, just pissed with me.”

“What did you do?”

“It’s complicated.” Rick rubbed at his forehead, that headache creeping back over him. “He’s seein’ someone right now, someone not exactly appropriate.”

“Right, and you wanna stop them seein’ each other?”

“Not exactly.” Rick didn’t know what he damn well wanted when it came to Carl and Negan. “This person wants to take Carl to visit the college he got into as I can’t go. I don’t want him to.”

“Why not?”

“Because… I don’t know because I don’t want Carl gettin’ too close to them before college. I don’t want anything jeopardising him going.”

“Well maybe you stopping him from seeing the place will do that? Maybe it’s better that he goes to see the place, even if he’s going with this person.”

Daryl had a point. He couldn’t even guarantee that he’d be able to take Carl up there later in the year, not with all the shit going on at work.

“He’s a clever kid, Rick. He’s not gonna miss out on his future just because of a relationship. Trust him.”

“Yea’ just wish it was easier. I just keep remembering all the times he’s lied, not that it’s his fault that he did I just can’t help but wonder what he else he might keep from me.”

“You just gotta trust that things are different now. I don’t know exactly what you guys went through, but it seems like you guys are pretty close. I’m sure he’s over lying to you.”

“Yeah, I hope so.” Rick tapped the bottle of beer nervously. “He ever talk to you about what happened?”

Daryl shifted uncomfortably. “Not really, just that something happened, kinda messed with his head for a while.”

Rick nodded, he hadn’t told him much. It stung at him to have a part of his life that he couldn’t share with Daryl. Such a significant moment in his life that he’d have to keep to himself until the day he died, not just to protect himself but for Carl, and for Negan. The reminder of just what Negan had been prepared to do for his Son was a reluctant reminder that the man wasn’t a total monster, at least not where Carl was concerned. He seemed to love him almost as much as Rick did. All the more reason that Carl should leave, he was far too young to be that involved with someone. “Yeah, things happened.”
Daryl just took another sip of his beer, waiting for Rick to figure out whatever was spiralling around in his mind.

“You mind if I go talk to him? I won’t be long.”

“Course, I’ll be down here with the TV.”

Rick gave him a grateful smile, before scampering up the stairs.

A grunt was the only response when he knocked on the door. Rick rolled his eyes, issues aside, Carl was still more of a teenager than he thought he was.

“Can I come in?”

“Whatever.”

Okay, so it was gonna be like that. Rick braced himself before entering, preparing himself for the backtracking he was gonna have to do. Carl was sprawled out on his bed, playing what looked like a game on his phone. He pulled over the desk chair, seating himself on it. “You can go to Seattle with Negan.” Jesus, that hurt to say but the glow on Carl’s face made it slightly better.

“Really?”

“Yep, with a few ground rules of course.”

“Of course.” Carl nodded, eyes wide with excitement.

Naturally he was more than cooperative now he’d gotten his own way, Rick thought. “No way are you two sharing a hotel room, that’s pretty obvious. No going out late at night whilst you’re out there, even with Negan, and if you need me to come get you then you just say the words Carl.”

“I’ll be fine Dad, it’s just a couple of days, you’ll hardly notice that I’m gone.”

“I will, I’ll be phoning you every damn second of the day to make sure you’re alright.” A slight exaggeration but it got his point across.

“Wouldn’t have it any other way.” Carl smiled at him, eyes creasing with the joy. “Thanks Dad. I can’t wait to see the place.”

“Well, I can’t wait to hear about it.” Rick reached over and ruffled his Son’s hair. “I’m gonna head back downstairs, join us if you want?”

Carl gave him a weird laugh. “Yeah, like I wanna interrupt that .”

The teen had turned over, shoving his headphones in his ears before Rick could ask him exactly what he meant by that . Shaking his head he turned to head back downstairs. Teenagers could really be fuckin’ weird at times.

Rick didn’t notice the teen creep downstairs later that evening, didn’t see him standing over him and Daryl. He’d fallen asleep during one of the shows Daryl had put on, head slumping down onto the other man’s shoulder.

Carl didn’t realise that Daryl was still awake, too distracted by the sight of pair on the couch. It was strange seeing his Dad like that, so relaxed with someone that wasn’t his Mom. His eyes met Daryl’s when his gaze reached his face.
“Your Dad fell asleep.”

“I can see that.” Carl replied.

“I better go, wanna help me move him?”

“Nah, it’s fine, stay. Unless you’ve got somewhere else to be?”

“No, I’m good.”

Carl forced a smile for him, it was weird, the whole moment was just plain weird. “I’m gonna head back to bed.” He turned and headed back towards the stairs, pausing a moment, before turning to face Daryl again. “Thanks… for whatever you said to my Dad. I appreciate it.”

“Anytime.”

Carl nodded awkwardly, spinning around again to race up the stairs. Really fucking weird.

***********

Carl was a bundle of excitement in the following weeks, hardly able to go about his day without mentioning his impending trip. It wasn’t just the thought of spending two whole days alone with Negan that had his stomach flipping and his heart skipping, it was the opportunity to finally see the college he’d been thinking about for so long. To be able to see where he’d be spending the next few years, to meet the people he was going to be spending those years with one way or another.

A secret part of him was just excited to see another part of Negan’s past, to see the place that had shaped him, where he’d set up roots. Negan hadn’t said much about the trip, beyond dealing with Carl’s childlike excitement about going. He certainly hadn’t mentioned potentially seeing any old friends, Carl wondered if he ever thought about seeing if his ex-wife was in town. He always shoved that thought aside, it was bad enough when the thoughts of Negan meeting someone when he was at college fell into his mind. He tried not to think about that, the thought sent his blood boiling in a jealous rage before it settled into an ice-cold despair that Negan might actually fall in love with someone that wasn’t him. That maybe he’d get over him, out of sight, out of mind and all that.

Those thoughts were harder to dispel and usually resulted in some kind of trip to see Negan, pushing the thoughts away with more desperate kisses and orgasms and sent his mind into a blissful oblivion.

Negan seemed just as desperate as he was, every now and again he’d call Carl into his office just to send him away again when he couldn’t keep his distance from the teen. It was becoming increasingly difficult being at school together, they seemed to gravitate directly towards one another, bumping into each other in the corridors, gaze locking in assemblies. Carl would catch him staring at him in gym class, making excuses to go into the cupboard just to see him in the gymnasium. Almost as much as Carl spent his classes watching out the window, hoping to get a glimpse of the man.

Things had gotten too much one afternoon, Carl had gone to the office after a late study session with Enid, hoping to say goodbye to the man and had walked right in on him changing after work. The sight of his sculpted torso, those damn tattoos, had Carl closing the blinds and locking the door. Practically jumping on Negan as they met in the centre of the room, he’d been shoved onto the desk, papers falling to the floor as they tugged at belts and zippers. The dark thrill of getting caught sent Carl soaring over the edge with an orgasm that kept him limp for several minutes afterwards. Laughing with Negan at their pathetically desperate actions.

Not that it was all smooth sailing between them, the stress over their impending separation had driven Carl’s anxiety up the wall. It made it all the harder to control the flashbacks when it hit, one particular
instance where Negan’s finger had trailed over his entrance as he’d gone down on him had Carl screeching at him before he ran from the room. It had taken more time than usual to calm himself, the sharp memories of all the times Shane had forced himself inside of him sent ghosting ricochets of pain through his body.

His time with Negan was entirely paradoxical, either fantastic or bad. They argued more, their own demons snapping at their heels, making them snap at each other. Lashing their anger on the other instead of directing it at themselves where they really wanted to hurt. It all came to a head one night when they’d been bickering about how to get to the airport next week, such a stupid argument that had escalated into a full-on raging argument.

“You did this!” Carl practically screamed at him. “You made this fucking happen.”

“I did this? No, Carl no fuckin’ way are you blaming me for this shit!”

They were standing off in front of the couches in Negan’s cabin, standing on opposing sides of the coffee table.

“So what? It’s my fault? I didn’t decide that we should break up! You did that all on your damn own. Sat there on that damn couch whilst I was sleeping, you made that choice.”

“You agreed that it was the right thing to do.”

“Only because you put the idea in my head.”

Negan scoffed at that. “Fuckin’ bullshit Carl, you’re a fucking adult you can make your own damn mind up. We both decided it’s the right thing to do.”

“Is it? Or is it just so you can go off and fuck whoever you want to?” It was all coming out now, all of the insecurities that he’d been trying to ignore. Everytime he’d kissed Negan, allowed him to reach down into his pants, he’d pushed away the thoughts that maybe Negan truly wanted to break up with him. That maybe this whole thing was just a damn fucking excuse for Negan to leave without feeling like a villain. Without breaking the heart of someone already so broken.

Negan visibly recoiled, hurt etched onto his face. “Is that what you think? That I’m what? Just itching to go out a fuck someone else?”

“Are you?” Carl couldn’t stop now that he’d started.

“Of course not, if I wanted to go out and screw someone I’d been fuckin’ balls deep in them right now instead of having this argument with you.”

“Oh well, I’m sorry for keeping you away from that.” Sarcasm dripped from his words.

“That’s not what I fuckin’ meant and you damn well know it.” Negan ground out. “I’m here for you. Because I love you because I want to spend every damn moment with you before you leave. That’s what it is Carl, you are leaving me. Not the other way around. Damn, I don’t blame you for that and I want you to go out there and see the world, experience all the good shit that I got to but don’t you fuckin’ blame me for this whole damn mess.”

The anger melted away at his words, giving way to the sadness that had been hiding away since he’d receive that damn letter. Tears burned at his eyes, pain tore at his chest like a blade striping through his skin. “I wish I didn’t want to go. I want to stay with you but I need to go.”

Negan bridged the gap between them, cupping Carl’s face in his hands. “I know, it’s alright.”
“No it’s not.” Carl sniffed. “It’s not fair. I finally find some happiness and things get fucked up again. It’s not fair.” He never wanted it to be like this, he didn’t want the pain anymore.

He hushed him again, bringing their foreheads together. “We still have that, we’ll always have that but your happiness? That doesn’t end with me, or your Dad, or this godforsaken town. You’ll find it wherever you go, it’s not the end Carl, it’s just the start.”

Carl knew he was right. He wanted to keep fighting, wanted to scream and shout about how they should be together. Selfishness warring with the truth that they couldn’t keep this up, not whilst he was away. It’d drive them both into madness. “I don’t want to think about a life without you.”

“You don’t have to, I’ll always be here, just a phone call away.” He tried to reassure Carl with a smile, it was a weak promise, who knew what could fucking happen in the future. It was no more certain than whoever would win the Super Bowl. Life brought them together, letting them find each other in the evils of the world, bringing the spark back for the pair of them. It could just as easily strip it away, coat them in the black tar that would drag them down to their end.
Ummmm... so all I can say is I'm so so sorry that it took so long to update! My new job's been a bit more intense than I thought it would be so I've been doing a lot of studying than I thought I'd have to. Then this chapter totally kicked my ass, I must have written about 5 or 6 versions of this before I finally picked the right tone. I just wanted this one to be perfect for reasons fairly obvious when you've read it.

This chapter is very self-indulgent, a lot of it was inspired by my own time in Seattle, only without Negan. The picture below is the view that the two look at, which will make sense later in the fic. It doesn't do the view justice but it was a sight that I'd never forget.

Thank you so much for sticking with me! I really hope the chapter was worth the wait.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"All these voices in my head get loud
I wish that I could shut them out"

- NF (Let You Down)

May 2018

He could hardly breathe, his hair clung to his face, pricking his nose with each inhale, getting lost in
his mouth, practically choking him and he was hot... too hot... sweating even without clothes. He couldn't speak, his tongue too dry, his throat raw, the metallic taste of blood lingered at the back of it. It was impossible to tell where it came from, his split lip where he’d been punched? His throat from all the screams that had been torn out of him?
More pain shot through him, strands of hair ripping out of his scalp as his head was forced backwards, the hand pinning down his hands caused his neck to arch back unnaturally, keeping him pinned down, bent forward. Even the soft mattress under him failed to offer any relief from the aching pain bolting around his body.

“Tell me you want it.” It breathed more heat in his ear.

“I don-AH.” The hand twisted his hair tighter.

“Tell. Me.”

“N-‘ The ‘no’ caught in his throat, whipped away by a pained gasp as his body was forced open. “N-AH, s-sto-“ Stopstopstopstopstop please stop.

It pulled out and he was shoved onto his back, legs pushed apart, his arms crossed over his face automatically, he didn’t want to see him, didn’t want to see any of it. He wasn’t lucky. Almost immediately they were pinned down over his head, one hand gripped painfully at his throat, nails dug their marks into the skin there.

“Look at me.” The voice rasped.

He didn’t.

The grip grew tighter, his head felt full, and he was still so hot.

“Look at me or it’s gonna get a lot worse baby.”

He didn’t. He couldn’t.

“Fine. Have it your way.”

Then came the pain again. A roaring fire that burnt every nerve. He was too hot. He was gonna burn, this whole shit was gonna burn him. This was it, this is how he’d die, burned and suffocated by the monster.

The room slammed into focus when he sat up, panting hard, trying to bring some damn oxygen back into his body. It wouldn’t come, with each heaving breath his chest just tightened, invisible hands still clutched at his throat. He scrambled out of bed, practically falling to the floor on shaking legs. He stumbled over to the bathroom, flicking the lock, before stripping out of his sweat-soaked clothes and falling into the shower.

He wasn’t there. It wasn’t real.

Ice cold water shot out of the showerhead, instantly cooling him down. He tried to breathe again, used the almost-painful feeling of the water hitting his skin to bring himself back.

“Have it your way.” He shivered, teeth chattering. His eyes squeezed shut, guarding against the memories rushing through his mind, the ones that wanted to drag him back down to that darkness. A sob erupted out of him, he wanted it gone, he didn’t want to remember any of it. His knees gave, the tiles scratching against his skin as he slid to the floor. He buried his face in his knees, arms curling around them, keeping them close. The nightmares had been getting worse, more real, more
persistent. Most nights he woke up in a pool of his own sweat, heart racing, still hearing that voice rasping into his ear. He just wanted it to stop. He didn’t want to be awoken in the early hours of the morning, forced out of bed in fear of a fucking memory. He didn’t want the restless nights, nor the struggle to fall asleep, paranoid that once more he’d be forced to revisit the memory of his abuse.

*Knock knock.*

His eyes darted to the door, he’d locked it, right? He curled tighter around himself, no one could hurt him, not in his shower. He’d be fine, right?

“Carl? You alright?”

He relaxed at the voice. “Yeah Dad, I’ll be out in a minute.”

Rick didn’t respond immediately. Carl wondered if he’d gone back to bed before a reply came. “Alright, don’t use up all the hot water, I wanna shower before we head out.”

“Y-yeah, no problem.” He reached up and flicked the water off, it had done its job, cooled him enough to make him feel like he wasn’t about to burst into flames. Taking several deep breaths, he stood, bracing against the wall, his legs still felt like jelly, he briefly wondered if he’d be able to walk back to his room. He had to leave, his Dad had to shower and he had to pull himself together before they left. He took a shaky step out of the shower, relieved when he didn’t immediately collapse to the floor. He felt exhausted, like he’d run a marathon in an hour. Those moments always took everything out of him, leaving him sick and weak, every breath felt like an extreme effort. It was his darkest time, the time when those defeated thoughts came back to haunt his mind, when life felt too hard to possibly keep going. He wondered if they’d ever go away.

Trembling hands picked up his pjs, shoving himself back into them, grimacing as the now-cold sweat plastered itself to his skin. At least they were dark so his Dad wouldn’t notice the stains, the last thing he wanted was questions from the man that he couldn’t answer.

He had his ideas about why the nightmares had started up again so ferociously, probably all the stress with moving and Negan… Things still weren’t right between them, they tried to be normal, both too stubborn to admit the pain that they were both inevitably feeling. He just hoped they’d find a way out of this hell before they both burned.

***********

“No sex. Absolutely no sex. I swear to God, if I find out that you’ve put so much as a finger where it shouldn’t be I will string you up by your balls and shoot you in the damn head.”

Carl couldn’t be more mortified than he was in that moment, he gave joking smiles to the passersby who looked appalled when they picked up on the conversation being had. If his Dad had to do this why couldn’t he have done it in the damn car? At least Negan had the sense to look scared at his Father’s words, then again if he were to be confronted with the Rick Grimes Death Stare he’d be looking that way too.

“Of course Ri-” The glare intensified. “-Sir. Absolutely no touching. I promise.”

“You better, cos if something happens I’ll find out.”

“Nothing will happen. I’ll drop him off at his room, make sure he’s safe then walk back to my own.”

“You definitely booked two rooms?”
“Yes.”

“Show me-”

Carl rolled his eyes, finally interjecting into the conversation. “Dad, we don’t have time for this, we gotta catch out flight.”

“Just makin’ sure you’ll be safe Carl.”

“I’ll be fine. We gotta go. Bye.” He’d intended on giving his Dad a quick hug before darting off, that soon changed when Rick practically suffocated him with his arms.

“Just be safe, I’ll miss you.”

“I’ll miss you too.” His words were muffled by his Dad’s shoulder, he rubbed his back hoping to reassure him. “You gotta let me go.”

“Right yeah, I’ll be here to pick you up.”

Carl gave him a quick wave, turning to follow Negan through departures. “You don’t have to carry my bag y’know?”

“It’s fine, gotta take care of you remember.”

“Oh yeah because my bag’s gonna cause so much damage.”

“Pft, I’m not takin’ any risks, not with your Dad lurking around.”

“Sorry about that.” Carl sheepishly added. “Didn’t expect him to get so…”

“Understandably protective?” Negan finished. “It’s alright, I get it.”

They walked to the plane in silence, Carl glaring at the Flight Attendant who seemed particularly enthusiastic in her greeting to Negan, completely blanking him. Negan was his. Not for long his mind reminded him. He scowled at that, it didn’t matter, right here and now Negan was his, not for some girl to hit on. At least Negan didn’t seem bothered by it, only smiling kindly before heading down to their seats. Carl was grateful that it was a quiet flight, he and Negan had the aisle to themselves. Negan had let him have the window seat, he loved watching the clouds out of the window, it reminded him of being a kid on the way to Florida for his holidays. A much simpler time.

“You alright?” Negan asked.

“Hmm? Yeah, I’m good.”

“You look tired.”

A soft hand pushed the hair from his face, warm eyes searched over his face, so obviously taking in the dark bags under his eyes. “Just haven’t slept much recently.” Carl admitted.

“How come?”

“Just… I don’t know.”

“Worrying?” Negan offered.
“Yeah… it… um… gives me nightmares.”

“About Shane?” Negan whispered, almost reluctant to bring up that bastard's name.

Carl nodded.

“What’re you worrying about.”

“Everything. Leaving…” He hesitated, he couldn’t say what he wanted to say, that leaving Negan was stressing him out above all, that the pain and anger from their frustrating situation forced him into a restless sleep. He didn’t want to lay that on the man, not when they finally had the opportunity to have a couple of days together. “Leaving my Dad. I always figured when I went to college he’d have Mom with him so he wouldn't be alone. I always thought… I always thought they’d have another kid y’know? Someone else to focus on, now it's just Dad.”

“You never know Carl, he and your Mom might work things out. Weirder things have happened.”

Carl shook his head sadly. “Nah, too much has been said and done. They were on the edge as it was, then the whole Shane thing… it ruined them. I don’t think Dad can even stand to be in the same room with her.”

Negan sighed at that. “Marriage is a damn hard thing, sometimes two people just aren’t meant to be together.”

Like us? Carl wanted to ask, he wondered if they fit into that category. He didn’t want to believe that the world could be so cruel as to bring them together, to allow them such bliss, only to take it away.

But the world was cruel, and unfair, he knew that more than anyone. Anytime you got your footing the world would sweep out from under you, leaving you scrambling for some semblance of normality in the midst of chaos. Everything in the world told them not to be together, even after he graduated their relationship would have to be kept a secret, he didn’t want to risk people thinking it had started before he’d graduated. Then he’d be off to college and they’d be over. After that, if Negan still wanted to be with him, they’d still face the never-ending disapproval about the age difference. In a town like his that shit would spread like a wildfire, and people loved to judge, they had nothing better to do.

Yet, they felt right. Negan felt right, all the cheesy shit about soulmates suddenly made sense when he’d met the man. Like he’d found another part of himself, like a puzzle piece that he didn’t even know was missing. The world was a damn confusing place but Negan was the one thing that made sense.

“… it’s a shame really, you’d have been a great brother.”

Carl hadn’t even noticed that Negan was still talking. “Yeah?” He asked, snapping back to their conversation.

Negan smiled, like he was picturing it in his head. Carl wished he could see what he was seeing. “Yeah, that kid never would’ve wanted for anything, would never have been so loved or protected.”

Carl swallowed the lump in his throat, he’d never really thought too much about a sibling since his parents divorced. Negan’s words brought home the reality that said child would never exist, that he’d never have that chance to be a brother. It was an oddly emotional thought, he’d never realised how much he’d wanted it.
Negan stroked his cheek again, wiping away a tear that Carl didn’t know had escaped. “M’sorry, didn’t mean to upset you.”

He sniffed back the rest of the tears. “It’s fine, it’s a weird time and I’m tired.”

“C’mere.” Negan shoved up the armrest in between them, curling his arm around Carl’s waist to pull him against his chest. “Sleep, it’s a long enough flight, get some rest.”

Carl nodded, curling in on the man, hand clutching at his shirt. He breathed him in, letting the familiar scent comfort him. He fell asleep listening to the man breathing, hoping that the nightmares would stay away this time.

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The next thing he knew Negan was nudging him awake and they were landing in the city that would soon be his new home. As they sped through the city on their way to the hotel, Carl finally felt the stirrings of excitement bubble in his stomach. Negan had insisted on renting a car instead of relying on public transport, now Carl understood why. The man took him on the scenic route, showing him the best sights in the city before re-routing back to the hotel. It was gorgeous, greenery everywhere that made the city seem more like his home. The trip made even more spectacular by Negan’s running commentary about his adventures in the city, “That’s where I beat up a guy.”, “I got busted for being drunk there.” followed quickly by “Ooh now that is where I hooked up with my first girlfriend.”

Carl rolled his eyes at that last one. He really didn’t need the mental image of Negan screwing someone else, it was bad enough worrying about who he might hook up with in the future, he didn’t need to think about the past as well. Still, he loved sharing in Negan’s past, the past without the ex-girlfriends, he loved seeing where he used to hang, where he grew up, it was a glimpse into another world, a reminder that they’d both had a life before they’d met.

Negan had booked them into his favorite hotel, a place he used to stay at if he didn’t want to head home after a game. It was right by the waterfront, their room had the most beautiful view of the water with the ferries. The best part was the grand bed that dominated the room, it looked so damn comfy Carl nearly threw his plans to hell and jumped onto it. Negan didn’t help with his seedy suggestion that they just spend the rest of the day in it. Clearly his Father’s warning hadn’t had too much of an influence on him.

Carl held firm, even as sweet lips trailed decadent patterns on his neck. He hadn’t come all this way just to spend it in bed, no matter how tempting that bed was. So he dragged Negan out with promises of all the things he’d do to him in that bed after he’d visited the college.

The college had a whole day of lectures and tours that he’d have to attend, no parents.visitors allowed, he’d have to face it all on his own. Just as he would in a few months when he made the move permanent. Nonetheless, Negan had insisted that he escort him onto campus so he didn’t get lost and Carl had been more than thankful to have a hand to hold.

The campus was as beautiful as the brochures, and Negan, had made out. His breath actually caught in his throat when he saw the view of Mount Rainier from the campus square, the snow covered mountain hoovered, almost floating in the clouds, in the background, tucked away by the fountain that shot water into the sky. He stopped, stood frozen in that moment, stumped by the view that didn’t seem real.

“You never get used to it.” Negan spoke softly, standing beside him. “Four years as a student, helluva lot more than that as a Coach and I never stopped losing my breath when I saw it.”
“It’s… God, Negan, it’s amazing.”

“Yeah, even more beautiful at dusk, it practically glows.”

Negan let him stand for another few moments, giving him enough time to make a promise to himself to visit the mountain when he moved. At least he’d have something to do that didn’t involve wallowing in his own self-pity. Eventually Negan nudged him, urging him onwards, taking him to the room where he’d have to leave him.

“You gonna be alright?” Negan asked as they stood in the bustling room. Parents fussing over their children, name tags frantically being applied as they looked over the schedule for the day. For a bitter moment he resented his parents not being there, that this day wasn’t a normal one for him. As grateful as he was for Negan being there and as glad as he was that he finally got to spend some alone time with him, it was another reminder of his abnormality. That he couldn’t even get his parents to come with him to something like this.

“Yeah, I’ll be fine.”

“Good, and I’m only a phone call away if you need me.”

“I know.”

“Alright, I’ll be back here at 5 then.”

“What are you gonna do?”

“Sleep, catch up with some old friends if they’re in town.”

“Oh…”

“You’ll be fine.”

“Yeah.”

Negan desperately wanted to kiss him, give him some sort of reassurance to help calm the nerves that were radiating off his body. He didn’t want to alienate him though, didn’t want him dealing with stupid comments from the other students. So he just clapped a hand on his shoulder, squeezing it softly, hoping Carl realised what he was trying to do. All he got was a weak smile in return, one that sent a tinge to his heart. He fucking hated this. Just as he was about to speak again one of the faculty spoke, rounding the students up. So he smiled back at him, stepping away to let him disappear into the crowd.

***********

Negan had hoped that the extra sleep might help, he hadn’t rested on the plane, too worried about Carl to let himself fall asleep. His irrational side thought if he slept then he wouldn’t be able to protect Carl from his nightmares. Fucking stupid idiot.

He managed to crash as soon as he hit the sheets, yet when he awoke he was just as agitated as when he’d fallen asleep. The constant nerves buzzed in his stomach, his thoughts were a swirling mess in his head. Too many to fucking focus on anything. So he grabbed his coat and hit the streets, as warm as the day was he wasn’t leaving without his leather jacket, couldn’t ruin his look not when he was in his hometown. He strode through the familiar streets, basking in the bustle of the city. He’d fucking missed the noise. It was too quiet in his cabin at times, too lonely when Carl wasn’t around
which meant there was too much time to think about shit that he wanted to avoid. That never happened in the city, there was always something to do, always a bar to sit in and get completely fucked. He was heading to his favorite one now, the one tucked away in the depths of the city. Not many people knew about it, but the ones who did were extremely loyal, most chose the place because people didn’t know about it. It was the perfect bar to get lost in because everyone knew better than to ask damn questions.

‘Dwight’s ’ the old sign looked even more haggard than he’d remembered. The namesake clearly hadn’t been bothered to sort it out, then again he didn’t need to try and lure new customers in, so what was the point? The place was closed, understandably at this hour, the door bolted, the dusty windows covered with even dustier blinds. He peeked through the door windows, trying to get a glimpse of the interior but all he could see was the hint of chairs on tables through the clouded glass. No sign of any life. Fuckin’ shit. He let his frustration out on the door, banging so hard the glass rattled. He was grateful that the streets were quiet around here, the last thing he needed was people staring at him as he tried to get the owner's attention. After several minutes of pounding the door so hard that he was certain it was about to fall off, the owner appeared in the glass. Negan could hear the croaky voice swearing through the wood, at least some things never changed.

“And just what the FUCK do you think you-” The blond bar-owner paused, halted in mid sentence when he saw exactly who had caused all the noise. “Negan?”

“The one and only.” Negan couldn't stop the damn cocky grin spread over his face. It was too easy to slip back into his old self when he was around Dwight. “You miss me?”

“You absolutely fuckin’ bastard.” Anger curled his lip, making him the disfigured face look even more terrifying. Then just as quickly the anger dissipated and a matching grin twisted his features once more, voice turning more indulgent. “You absolute fuckin’ bastard.”

Just like that Negan was hauled into a brotherly hug, hands clapping at back as they basked in their reunion.

“C’mon, get your ass in here.” Dwight stepped back to allow Negan to slip past the threshold, slamming and bolting the door behind him. He headed over to the bar, throwing a question over his shoulder. “You want a drink?”

Pulling down a couple of chairs from the tables, Negan replied. “Just a beer.” He shucked of his jacket before slumping into the wooden chair, wincing as it creaked under his weight. Dwight really needed to get new fuckin’ furniture.

“Beer? What’s up with you? You haven’t drunk beer since fucking college .” Nonetheless Dwight pop the cap off two bottles, slipping them onto the table as he sat.

“Just fancied a change from the usual.” He took a sip, suddenly reminded exactly why he hadn’t drunk this shit since college. It was fucking awful.

“Whisky no good anymore?”

“Tryna cut back.”

“What’s brought that on?”

Negan sighed, a question that could lead into so many other questions. “Just usual shit, y’know?”
“Not really.” Dwight said, blunt as ever, it was what Negan loved so much about the man. “So what happened?”

“With what?”

“Everything. I mean, _shit_, Negan it’s been like 5 months since I last heard from you then you come back banging on my door.”

“Sorry about that.”

“The door or not talking to me?”

“Both.” He hadn’t realised it had been so damn long. So much shit had happened in the last few months, he’d lost track of time. He didn’t even know how he could ever explain it, it hardly felt real to himself let alone to Dwight.

“So are you gonna talk to me now? You’re way too damn buzzed for this to be a fun social visit.”

The guy knew him too well. An instinct that came from far too many years of friendship. He and Dwight met at college, they’d been roomed together in their first year and they’d hardly been apart since. They’d join the fraternity together, had been the only fuckers in the place that actually cared about their education as much as their partying. Dwight had been his best man when he’d married Lucille, and he’d been Dwight's when he’d married Sherry. There were no secrets between them, no judgement. Dwight had been there through all the shit with Lucille, had been the one to give him a place to stay when he had nowhere. He’d been the one that had supported him when he’d decided to move, had been the family that he’d needed. Which is why he was so fucking terrified of telling him the truth, he knew there’d be no judgement, but he also knew there’d probably be disappointment.

“Negan, c’mon.” Dwight prodded.

Negan threw back the rest of the beer, grimacing once more as the liquid made it’s way down his throat. “I fucked up Dwight, I really fucked up.”

To his credit Dwight just sat there, listened, asked a couple of questions but let Negan talk. Let him reveal everything about his relationship with Carl, gave him another beer when the shit got too much for him and he needed to stop. The only thing he missed out was what eventually happened to Shane, and Rick’s involvement, as much as he trusted Dwight he didn’t want to break his promise to Rick. He couldn’t risk anything hurting Carl.

“...so I fucked it up. Instead of reassuring him that everything would be fine, I decided to break his fuckin’ heart and broke up with him. I mean, he agreed so maybe that’s what he wanted. If he doesn’t now then he will in the future, I’m too old for him, I’d just hold him back. Anyways, things haven’t been the same since, we fight, or we deny it all and pretend everything’s fine which is more fucked up than the fighting. Now he’s off on campus, probably falling in love with the place and I’m sat here almost hoping he fucking hates it just so he won’t leave me.”

Dwight sat for a moment, pensive, before he took a big gulp of his beer. “You’re an absolute fucking _idiot_ Negan. I mean there’s stupid shit and then there’s _this._ ”

“I know, he’s my studen-”

“-no not that you idiot. I don’t give a fuck that he’s your student. If it is like you’ve said, it sounds like he made up his own mind falling in love with your dumb ass. At least you’re not his actual teacher, _that_ would be more fucked up. No, what’s _really_ messed up is you being a fucking _prick_
“Hey, we did talk and he agreed-”

“Did you talk before or after you said that you should break up? Did you ask him first what he wanted?”

“Well, no bu-”

“There you fucking go then. Did you ever think he agreed because he thought that’s what you wanted?”

“It doesn’t fucking matter Dwight, even if he wants to be together now then he’ll change his mind when he gets here and I don’t want him forcing himself to be with me just because he doesn’t want to hurt my feelings.”

“That’s fucking bullshit. Even if by some crazy chance that did happen, don’t you think that it’s his choice to make? You fucked up, not because you broke up with him but because you took that choice away from him. After all the shit you’ve told me he’s been through how on earth could you possibly think that it’s alright to do that?”

“I’m trying to protect him.” Negan defended, it was all he wanted to do.

“I get it, I do but how about you let him protect himself? Jesus, Negan, if he wants to be with you then why not allow it? Sure, long-distance is fucking hard but if it makes you happy, even for those brief moments when you’re together surely it’s worth giving it a go?”

“It’s not that simple, you know how I get.”

“You got jealous with Lucille, that’s fucking different, things were shit between you two. You were considering cheating so of course you’d think she was too. If you trust Carl as much as you seem to, then trust him to not stray, trust him to tell you if he wants to end it and if he does then just accept that if it’s meant to be then it’ll happen.”

Dwight definitely made a point. He’d fucked up and he hadn’t even realised it. Guilt punched him in the gut, hitting over and over as the realisation swept through him. He had taken away his choice, he hadn’t bothered asking Carl what he wanted, he just assumed that he’d want to get away from him as quickly as possible. He’d made the choice that that Carl would be better off without him, completely disregarding what Carl thought was right for himself. He truly was a fucking idiot.

“So what the fuck do I do?” Negan asked, despair creeping into every word.

Dwight softened. “You talk to him. Ask him what he wants, beg for his fuckin’ forgiveness, promise you’ll never do that shit again.”

“Then what?”

“Hear him out, let him talk. If he wants to leave you then enjoy the time you’ve got before he leaves then call me and I’ll come get wasted with you.”

“And if he wants to be together?”

“Then be fucking happy for once Negan and make him happy cos God knows that kid deserve it after all the shit he’s been through.”
The thought made him nervous, placing himself at Carl’s feet, asking him to make a decision. Asking him to pick *them* because that’s all Negan damn well wanted. He wanted to be with Carl, and he’d do anything to make that happen. Even if it meant being vulnerable for two minutes of his life by telling Carl as such. It wasn’t in his nature to place his heart in another person’s hands but he’d be damned if Carl wasn’t worth it.

“So when the fuck did you get so insightful?” Negan questioned, when had the pair of them grown the fuck up?

“Eh, married ten years, had to happen at some point I guess.”

They both laughed at that. “Yeah, how is the wife?”

The conversation swiftly flowed onto safer topics, Sherry, the bar, reminiscing about old times. He’d damn well missed this. Sure he had acquaintances in Lawrenceville but he didn’t have any friends, no one other than Carl to talk to about shit with and even then things had been so tense recently that they hadn’t really done much talking.

“You ever think about moving back?” Dwight eventually asked, only after the few beers had taken hold of them.

“Nah, I dunno. Things were just so stressful here, I wasn’t me in the end.”

“Yeah, but that was with all the shit with Lucille, maybe without that it’d be different.”

“I dunno.”

“It’d solve your problems with Carl. You’d be away from that shithole, away from gossiping town people. You’d be right here with him, you could see him whenever he was free. I’m sure you’d be able to get a job back up here, they loved you.”

He wasn’t wrong about that, the college was devastated when he’d resigned. “I just don’t wanna crowd Carl, I wanted him to have sometime on his ow-“

“...Blah, blah, fucking blah. *You* want this for him, maybe he’d like you being there and Christ, man, it’s not like you’d be moving in with him. He’d have his independence on campus, he could choose when he wanted to see you.”

He hadn’t thought about it like that, it was something he could do. Maybe he’d even be able to keep the cabin, he could always rent a shitty place up in Seattle, then have his cabin when he wanted to escape the city.

“Ask him.” Dwight continued. “For fucks sake just have a damn conversation like an adult, don’t let your stupid pride get in the way.”

“You do have a way with words.”

“I’m a regular fuckin’ poet.” Dwight chuckled. “Seriously, just fuckin’ be an adult. God knows you’re old enough.”

“You really are a fuckin’ asshole.” He grinned at him. He really had missed the fucker.

“You too.”

All too soon it was time to go grab the topic of conversation. They said their goodbyes, much like
before, promising to stay in touch. Negan did mean it this time, he couldn't let the shit get in the way of the people he truly cared about. Dwight was right, he needed to start thinking about being happy, not just doing whatever was easiest.

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He saw Carl before Carl saw him, he was stood in the room where he’d left him, only this time he was surrounded by his soon-to-be classmates. A warmth filled him when Carl’s laughter hit his ears, he didn’t hear that enough, certainly not recently. As soppy as it was, it was one of the greatest sounds he’d ever heard, it never failed to make his heart swell. He took a step back, waiting in the shadows whilst Carl said his goodbyes, only appearing when the teen was left standing on his own.

Negan was about 99% sure his heart skipped when that smile was directed at him, full on stopping when it widened, eyes practically glowing with a joy that Negan hadn’t seen in so long.

“Hey.” Negan said when they finally met in the center of the room.

“Hey, I wondered when you were gonna turn up, thought you might’ve forgotten about me.”

“Never could.” Negan brushed an errant strand of hair behind Carl’s ear, that hair, constantly blocking his view of those beautiful eyes. “Was just waiting for you new friends to leave, didn’t want to embarrass you.”

Carl frowned, embarrass him? Considering how gorgeous Negan was compared with his scrawny self he’d consider himself to be the embarrassment in their relationship. “You couldn't embarrass me.”

“Is that a challenge?” Negan asked, cheeky grin now spreading over his own face.

“Definitely not.” He hit out at Negan’s arm as they walked. “Ass.”

“Did you have fun then?”

“It was brilliant, this place… it’s everything I thought it would be.”

“And the people? They were alright?”

“Surprisingly yeah, it’s weird to just talk to people. I spent so much time avoiding them that I’d almost forgotten that I was allowed to.”

A flare of anger sparked inside of him, he hated that, hated the reminder of Shane’s fucking power trip over Carl. He’d missed out on so much because of that bastard, all the parties he could’ve gone to, simple shit like getting drunk with your buddies when you’re 16 and you think it’s a fucking good idea. Boring teenage crap that he should’ve been allowed to go through. “Well, you can do what you want up here. You’re an adult, you won’t have your Dad hovering over you telling you what to do. You’ll be a free man.”

In more ways than one, Carl thought, one particular way that he really didn’t want to be. He didn’t mention that, just smiled and filled Negan in on the rest of the day. The last thing he wanted was another argument, not on this trip. This was their time to be them, to just be a normal couple, have a bit of fun, be out in public without fear of reproach.

“So what did you do when I was off making buddies?” Carl asked. “See any old friends?”

“Yeah actually, saw my friend Dwight, had a couple of drinks, just caught up. I haven’t really
spoken to him recently.”

“Oh, how come?”

“Just got busy with work and things.”

Carl wondered if that ‘things’ was him. He’d definitely given Negan more than enough to do in the time they’d known each other. He’d certainly taken up plenty of his time with his shit. “You two been friends long?”

“Oh yeah, since college, we were roomies in freshman year then we stuck together from there.”

“D’you miss him? Must have been hard leaving him.”

“I do, I mean I had to leave, for my own sanity I had to get out of here but I do miss him. Haven’t really gotten close with anyone since I left him. Present company excluded”

Carl laughed at that. “I should hope so.”

“Although we could be a lot closer.” Negan draped his arm around the smaller man, hand coming to rest in the dip of his waist so he could pull him closer.

“Better?” Carl asked.

“Yeah, could be better though.” He whispered in his ear.

“Maybe after dinner.” Carl teased. “Where are we going for that?”

“Ah yes dinner, don’t worry I’ve got it alll planned. Big evening.”

“Big evening? What does that mean?”

“It means it’s gonna be fun. Trust me.”

Carl narrowed his eyes at him. “Okaaay, but if we end up skydiving or something I’m gonna hit you.”

“Damn, I’ll call off that plane then.”

“Ha-ha.” Sarcasm dripped from his voice.

“Just shhh and enjoy the ride.” Negan replied, beeping the car open.

Carl slid into the passenger seat, blasting the A/C as soon as the engine was rolling. If Negan was gonna take him somewhere and do something stupid then at least he’d been cool for it.

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“I can’t believe you got me ‘Dick’s’ for dinner.” Carl spoke, voice muffled by the burger he was currently munching through. When Negan had told him where they were going he thought he was making some dumb innuendo, he certainly wasn’t expecting to be taken to a drive in diner that sold the best damn fries he’d ever eaten.

“Good right?” Negan’s own mouth full of fries.
“Amazing we need to go back and get more. God, I’m gonna get so fat when I move here, I’m never eating anything else again.”

“Just dicks?” Negan couldn’t help himself.

“Do you know what, I’m too happy to even yell at you for that.” It really as an amazing place. “Oh my god, this is so good.”

Negan couldn’t help but be jealous of the damn burger, the noises Carl was making was borderline pornographic. His dick certainly seemed to agree, twitching with each little moan Carl made. Now was not the time for that shit, no matter how much he wanted to toss him into the backseat and get him to make those noises for an entirely different reason. He’d driven Carl out to his favorite place in the city to eat the food but he wanted to wait until they’d finished to really show him the place. It was nearing sunset, the perfect time to show off the park. The perfect place to have the conversation they desperately needed to have. Sunset was their time, it was the time when they’d had their first real conversation, the time when they had been truly honest with one another. He just hoped it worked out this time.

By the time they’d finished their food Carl’s suspicions were roaring around his head. Negan had driven them up to a small area of the city, parking on the side of the road, hadn’t said where they were or why they were there. The man hadn’t said much since they’d reunited on campus, it made him wonder exactly where he’d gone and what conversation Negan had with his old friend.

“So, are we going back to the hotel?” He asked him, tossing his trash into the bag it came in.

“Not yet, I’ve got something else to show you.”

“Better than ‘Dick’s’?”

“Oh yeah.”

“Doubt that but I’ll give it a go.” Carl said.

“Trust me, you’ll love it. C’mon.”

Carl followed him out of the car, taking the offered hand when Negan walked around to meet him. They strolled together along the grass, listening to the sounds of children playing in the park, the groups of students drinking when they probably weren’t old enough. It was a beautiful place, even with the rusted, structure that was the centerpiece of the park.

“You take me to the weirdest places.” Carl commented.

Negan smiled. “It’s called Gasworks Park. You’ll probably end up here a lot. It’s the perfect place to do things you shouldn’t.”

“Please tell me you haven’t brought me here to do anything dirty.”

“No!” Negan protested. “Not unless you want to of course.”

He rolled his eyes at that. No matter where they were Negan could find a way to make something pervy.

“I brought you here to show you the view.”
Carl’s eyes followed Negan’s hand, not quite believing the amazing view in front of him. The entire city was sprawled out in front of him, separated by a great expanse of water that reflected the skyline perfectly. “Oh wow, I thought the view from campus was breathtaking but this… Negan, this is amazing.”

“Just wait until the sunsets, it gets better.”

“That’s hard to believe.”

Negan walked them closer, drawing Carl to sit next to him on a stone wall. They were far enough from other people to talk freely, he didn’t want any prying ears to their conversation. This was them it didn’t concern anyone else. “Carl?”

Eyes not leaving the view, Carl replied. “Yeah?”

“We need to talk.”

Carl’s heart froze at those words, body tensing. Nothing good followed those words, he’d watched enough TV to know that. His mind denied it for a moment, insisted that if he didn’t move his eyes from the view then he didn’t have to have whatever conversation Negan wanted them to have. “A-about what?” He tentatively asked. He didn’t want to know, he really didn’t want to know. He wanted a nice time away, that’s all he wanted.

“Us. We ne- Carl, will you look at me?”

Carl’s eyes flicked over to meet Negan’s trying to read his face. He looked solemn, ready to say something that he didn’t want to. His stomach sank, was he gonna break up with him now? Was it all over? Maybe seeing him in the city had made him realise that he didn’t want him anymore or had something happened? Had he seen his ex-wife? Did he want to give it another go with her? He could hear his heart thudding in his chest, nausea filling him. He didn’t want to know. He needed to know.

“I wanted- Christ this is hard. I wanted to apologise.”

Apologise? He certainly wasn’t expecting that. Just what had he done?

“I did something unforgivable and I didn’t even realise it-”

Shit, shit, shit. Had something happened with someone? Had he cheated on him?

“I-I took something from you that I most certainly didn’t have the right to and I can only hope that you forgive me.”

“What?” Now he was confused. Just what was the man talking about.

“When you said about going to college… I didn’t realise… I made a decision for us that I shouldn’t have. We should’ve talked, I should’ve asked what you wanted, I never should’ve said we shouldn’t be together, not without asking you. I took away that choice for you, I decided what’s best for you when it wasn’t my place to do it and I’m so damn sorry Carl. Words… they’ll never be enough, but I’m sorry. It was fucking stupid, I was an idiot and I didn’t even realise it. I never wanted us not to be together, I-I just thought it was best for you, I didn’t want to hold you back. I never stopped to think that it wasn’t my place to decide that.”

Carl took a shaky breath, brain reeling from Negan’s speech. It was like a sucker punch, he felt winded, like no breath he took would ever be able to replace it. He rose to his feet, he needed some
distance, he needed some space. He’d never thought about it like that, never considered his own feelings about the decision. He was so used to other people making decisions that he never questioned it. He’d assumed that it was what Negan wanted, and if it was what he wanted then who was he to take that away from him. He never thought for a second that Negan wanted them to be together. “S-so you want us to be together?”

“Yes, God, yes. If I had it my way I’d never let you go, but I would, if that’s what you wanted. It’s up to you Carl, I’m in it all the way. If you want to be single when you come here I’ll respect that. If you want to try long-distance then I’m fucking all in.” He paused. “If you want me to move here with you then I’ll fucking do it. Whatever you want, I’m here. I’m all yours.”

What on earth do you say to that? What did he want? He had no idea how to made decisions, God, so many of them had gone so wrong. He’d taken so many chances and they’d backfired so badly. Yet the one decision he’d made, to go and talk to Negan, to offer to help him clean up one afternoon so long ago, which had been the best decision he’d ever made. His life was better for it, through all the shit he and Negan had come out the other side. Negan hadn’t made his life better by being in it, he’d made it better by allowing Carl to find his own happiness. He’d given him the strength to fight for himself, to find his own way. He was a better person having been loved by a man with so much to give and in that moment he knew his answer. “I’m yours.” He paused, watching Negan stand, walking over to join him by the railing. “Whatever happens, good or bad, I’m yours. I want you, I want us together. Not because I can’t be without you, I could, I’d survive, it’d be hard but I would. But together we’re better, you make me better, I’m happier with you and I don’t want to waste another minute of my life being miserable when I could be happy. I love you, and that’s not going to change, no matter what you think.”

He closed his eyes when Negan came closer, hands stroked along his cheekbones, wiping away the tears once more. Their foreheads locked together, breath mingled between them, whispered ‘I love you’s’ tumbled out of their mouths, voices becoming so indistinct that Carl didn’t know who was talking. All he knew was that he never wanted to lose the man in front of him, that regardless of the hurt they’d caused one another, there was a light for them, they had their future and nothing could take that away. The railing dug into his back, not a millimeter stood between their bodies, but still Negan pushed closer arms wrapping tight around Carl’s waist.

“Turn around.” Negan spoke, his voice so hushed, not wanting to break their moment.

Carl did as instructed, reluctantly turning away from those eyes. The arms that had relaxed to let him turn tightened once more, Negan’s chest pushing flush against him, hot breath puffed in his ear.

“Beautiful isn’t it? This is what I wanted you to see.”

It really was. The perfect moment. The city lit up in the distance, the dark night became the perfect background to the skyline. The deep blue water reflected the lights back up, it was stunning, he never wanted to leave, he wanted to trap the night in his mind and soul forever so he could feel this way for the rest of his life. Leaning his head back onto Negan’s shoulder he let himself relax, allowed himself to enjoy the moment. Whatever shit they had to fight through tomorrow, or next week, or next month, they could deal with it then. Now, they were just Carl and Negan, just two people in a city of thousands.

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They took their time getting back to the hotel, not much was said, nothing needed to be said, not now. For the first time in weeks they were themselves, there was no pressure, no lingering tension, or anger. It was peaceful, like the calm after a huge storm. The hotel was quiet when they arrived back,
the previously busy lobby deserted barring the staff who welcomed them back with smiles.

“D’you wanna sleep?” Negan asked when they entered the room, shoving their jackets into the wardrobe.

“Not really, I need a shower, I feel gross.”

“Yeah, you look it.”

Carl scowled at him. “I take back everything I just said.”

Negan gave him a quick peck. “No you don’t, hurry up with your shower I want a turn.”

“Didn’t you shower earlier?”

“Nah, couldn’t be bothered.”

“Lazy ass.” He caught the towel thrown at his head. “Rude.”

“Just move it.”

Carl moved towards the bathroom, pausing when he reached the door. His fingers tapped the doorway, stomach flipping. “You, um, you could join me.” He said, looking back at the figure sat on the bed.

Negan’s eyes bugged out when the words registered in his brain. “I-join you in the-” Negan stumbled over his words.

“Yeah, if you want.”

“I do, I most definitely do. Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.” He wasn’t quite sure how he knew that he was sure but he was. His showers were his quiet place, his sanctuary from the world, Negan… he was part of that. “No reason to waste water.”

“Very environmental of you.”

“I know. You coming?”

Negan nodded, eyes locking on Carl’s as he walked over once again asking. “Are you sure?”

Carl lips twitched up, head tipping in a gentle nod. He swallowed down his nerves, taking a step closer so he could pull off Negan’s shirt. Their lips met in a tentative kiss, Carl’s hot hands ran over Negan’s chest, stroking down the hard muscles, landing on narrow hips. The beautifully slow kiss was a sharp contrast to his racing heart, he pulled away, trying to catch his breath.

Negan’s hand shifted from his neck, reaching around to tug at the collar of his shirt, pulling it over his head. He pushed in closer again, hands rubbing over bare shoulders, fingers dancing along his back, almost tickling when they traced along his shoulder-blades. They trailed lower, palm spreading over the base of his spine, thumbs circling the dips above his waist. Carl nodded at Negan’s unspoken question, allowing those fingers to pull open his jeans, let them fall to the ground with his underwear. He stepped out of them and towards Negan, helping him do the same until they were stood there naked.
Their noses nudged together, eyes fluttering closed as their lips found each other again, more passionate, heads tilting to deepen the kiss. Negan’s hands found Carl’s lower back again, tugging him closer so he could step them back, not stopping they were sheltered in the shower. He removed a hand to slide the door shut, locking the world out.

Carl’s hand blindly fumbled for the taps, flicking the shower on. They both flinched at the cold water that rained over their bodies, instinctively pressing closer for warmth. Carl flicked the switch in the opposite direction, bringing heat into the water, steam filling the cubicle. Negan flinched at the sudden scalding water lashing at his skin. “Jesus, how hot do you like it?”

“I like the tingle.”

Negan wriggled his eyebrows, hands curling around his hipbones. “I can give you another tingle.”

Carl laughed, shifting his hips closer, biting his lip when large hands squeezed his ass. “I’m sure you can, but first,” he held out the bottle of shower gel, “cleaning time.”

He watched the minty liquid collect in their palms, hardly able to believe that Negan was there with him. Such a trivial thing, something so many couples did together everyday, but it meant the world to him. To share in this with Negan and not feel a slice of fear, it was a huge step. He smiled to himself, another victory.

“What’re you smiling about?”

Carl’s head lolled back when those hands found his shoulders again, massaging the gel deep into the muscles there. “I’m just happy.”

Hot lips kissed his wet cheek, mumbling a quick “Good” against it. His hands rubbed up and down Carl’s arms, before slipping around to his back, lathering along the length of it. Lips trailed kisses down his jaw, mouthing along the long neck that arched under his ministration.

Carl’s own hands found Negan’s abs once again, covering each tattoo with soapy bubbles, tracing the muscles, eyes following his own movements. Negan was too damn gorgeous, everything from the tattoos to the lithe muscles that rippled with each sweeping touch. His stubble scratched at his collarbone when his lips moved lower, lust pooling in his stomach at the memory of that stubble scratching his inner thighs, scratching between his cheeks when he kissed elsewhere.

Negan’s hands shifted down, nails finding plump cheeks once more, squeezing the softness there. He took advantage of the leverage, pushing his thigh in-between Carl’s legs, hips shifting together. They both moaned at the friction, rocking against one another, heat building in their groins.

Hands slipped along wet flesh, the sensations mingling with the steam, making it harder to breath in the tight space. Nonetheless, Carl’s mouth pushed up against Negan’s, teeth tugging his bottom lip, sucking it into his mouth. The older man’s groans vibrated deliciously into his mouth, encouraging his wandering tongue, they met in Negan’s mouth twining together. It was decadent, additive, had Carl longing for more of him. He tugged at Negan’s hair, pulling their mouths apart so he could leave his own biting marks on Negan’s neck.

All the while Negan’s hands slid across his lower body, one stretching downwards, caressing his thigh softly before hiking it up to drape over his hip. They slotted together, hard lengths pressing against hips, friction that had Carl leaking before Negan had even touched him. Roving hands soon returned to those soft cheeks, massaging them, urging Carl’s hips to rock harder against him. Gasping moans falling out of plump red lips, when he moved him just the right way. When his hands
shifted lower, finger grazing in between, Negan paused. Shifting his head back to look at Carl, one hand coming up to cup his neck, thumb slipping along his bottom lip. “Is this alright?”

“Yeah… not here though.”

“Not here?”

“Can we… can we go to bed?” Carl knew what he was asking, his heart thudding in his chest, racing with nerves.

“Carl, are you sure?” Negan looked at him earnestly, searching for any sign of doubt. “We don’t have to do anythi-“

All he could do was kiss him, lingering on his lips, before whispering against them. “I’m sure, please?”

Negan nodded, flicking off the shower before stepping out, Carl following behind. He grabbed the towels, rubbing them over skin, drying them as quickly as he could. The older man offered his hand out when he was finished, interlocking their fingers, he led Carl out of the bathroom stopping at the bottom of the bed. His hands found Carl’s neck again, cupping his jaw, staring into his eyes. Once more he found nothing but love shining back at him, his heart throbbed once more, hoping his own conveyed as much as Carl’s.

“Negan?”

“Yeah.”

“I- go slow okay?”

He stroked along his cheekbones, hoping to reassure. “Of course, whatever you want.”

“I want you.” Came the hushed reply before Carl shifted closer, arms wrapping around Negan’s waist to pull them close once more. Their breath ghosted over one another before it stopped, their lips fitting together so perfectly that it was hard to believe they weren’t made for each other.

Negan pushed him back, encouraging him onto the bed, their lips hardly left each other as they settled on the cotton sheets. Negan shifting himself to rest between Carl’s thighs, one hand tangled itself in Carl’s hair, running through the strands. He could feel Carl’s harness poking into his hip, could feel his own urging him to rock his hips into the soft skin against it. Somehow he managed to restrain himself, this wasn’t about him, it wasn’t about mindlessly rutting himself against the nearest thing to get what he wanted. It was about Carl, showing Carl that sex wasn’t something bad, or something to be afraid of.

“How did I get so damn lucky?” Negan murmured against his collarbone, pressing kisses wherever he could reach.

Carl blushed at that, torn between dragging those lips back up to his and burrowing his face in Negan’s shoulder. He faltered under the heated gaze that met his, the hungry want so clear on the man’s face, a want matched by his own body. He rolled his hips up, watching the pleasure spread over Negan’s face, brown eyes darkening with lust.

“If you want me to stop at anything tell me, don’t even think about it, just tell me. Promise me.”

“I promise.” Carl turned his head, kissing the palm that cradled his head. “It’ll be fine Negan.”
Negan smirked down at him, that familiar cockiness sending jolts of need through him. “Oh, it’s gonna be more than fine darlin’ I’m gonna make you feel so damn good you forget your name.”

“That’s a lot of big talk, sure you can live up to it?” His words ended with a gasp, a hand wrapped itself around his dick, stroking upwards in a slow teasing motion that nearly had him melting into the covers.

“I’m sure I can, don’t you think?” He gave a sudden twist with his wrist, squeezing at the tip of Carl’s cock before slowly stroking down again.

“Ah-god, yess.” He hissed in reply, the man was a fucking tease.

“Glad to hear it.”

Carl could feel the smirk against his chest, fucking ass. His own hands found their way into Negan’s hair, tousling the dark locks. One sliding down to fruitlessly grasp at his shoulders, when that defiant mouth wrapped itself around a nipple. He used his grip on his hair to hold it firm against him, encouraging moans left his lips, hips rocking steadily into the hand still pumping him slowly. Negan’s tongue worked wicked patterns around his nipples, tormenting the soft bud until it was bright red, a beautiful contrast against his pale chest. Then he moved onto the other one, giving the same treatment, that had Carl desperate and begging. The teen hardly noticed Negan reaching over to the bedside table, he had a brief curiosity about his actions but that quickly disappeared when the mouth dipped lower, lavishing his stomach with soft licks that alternated with harsh nips. He soon realized what Negan had been doing when a cold wetness appeared between his legs.

Out of instinct his legs tightened around Negan’s waist, trying to close himself off. The fingers that had been massaging lube against his hole quickly removed themselves.

“You alright? Need me to stop?”

“No, no I’m good, just a reflex, keep going. Please.” The fingers returned and he managed to stop himself tensing up again, breathing deep when one finger pushed itself inside, slowly digging deeper.

“God, you’re so tight.” He only had one finger in him and the teen was practically strangling it. He was briefly concerned that his dick wouldn't fit.

Carl wriggled his hips, it was weird, something so familiar yet so foreign. The burning stretch was there, but it wasn’t painful, each shift of his hips eased the burn until all that was left was a dull ache that had him rocking onto the digit. His fingers clawed at Negan’s back, certain he was leaving red trails in their path.

“How’s that? Can you take more?”

“Mmmhmm.” Carl’s teeth dug into his lip, breathing deep as another finger pushed inside. Negan’s mouth covered his, pulling his lip from his own teeth and sucking it into his own mouth. It took Carl a moment to realize that it was intended as a distraction, before he realized two fingers had slipped inside him to the last knuckle. “Oh god, Negan.”

“Just wait…” those fingers slowly slipped in and out, gently stretching him more and more.

“For wh-AH… ohmygod don’t stop… don’t… OH!” Carl babbled. “What was that?”

Negan smirked down at him. “What?”

Carl glared up him the bastard, cheeks flushing a deep red. “You know what?”
Negan’s mouth formed a teasing ‘O’. “You mean that?” He moved his fingers again.

Carl’s hands scrambled across Negan’s shoulders. “Ohgod… oh yesss.” Whatever it was made his body burn, his toes curled up as a new pleasure tugged at his stomach. He rocked his hips up, fucking into the loosening grip on his dick before grinding down onto the fingers drawing out desperate moans.

“You like that?”

Carl frantically nodded his head, how the fuck could anyone not like that? The sudden loss of friction on his cock had him crying out, hips thrusting up into thin air desperately trying to find something to grind against. “Wha-oh.” The aching cold was quickly replaced by a wet heat, his head shot back on the pillow, back arching up, hips rolling once more seeking out the greater pleasure.

A gentle hum around his hardness distracted him from the third finger slipping in, only the distinct burn had he realising what he’d done. He didn’t care at this point, Carl’s brain solely focusing on the pleasure roaring through every nerve. He was so damn close to the edge he could practically taste his climax.

The mouth slipped off his dick, Negan crawling up his body, fingers still plunging deep inside of him. Carl pushed his body up, tugging Negan down with one hand so he could reach his lips. There was no preamble, no gentle teasing, just tongues meeting, teeth almost clashing as they tried to feel as much of the other as humanly possible.

Negan broke the kiss first, glancing down at the flushed, writhing form underneath him nearly had him coming. His own dick hard and aching, desperate for some kind of touch. “You feel too damn good Carl, I want you so much, fuck, I always want you.”

“Then have me.” Their eyes locked in the moment, Carl could hardly see the familiar brown, his pupils too blown with lust to reveal anything more than a tight ring of chocolate around the darkness. He wanted Negan, wanted to feel him inside, and he was damn well sick of waiting. He gave his lips a quick peck. “Please?”

“You’re sure?”

“I’m more than sure.”

Another kiss lingered on his lips, Negan took the time exploring his mouth again, trying to memorise the taste of him. He let his fingers slip out of the tight hole, wrapping his arms around Carl he quickly twisted them, flipping them over to put Carl on top.

“Whoa, why’s you do that?” Carl’s hands fumbled to steady himself above the man.

Negan rubbed his hips, thumbs stroking lightly over the sharp bones. “You decide the pace here Carl, take what you want, I’m all yours.”

Carl swallowed, his mouth suddenly dry. The man always had a damn way with words. He leaned down to kiss him, savouring the moment, it was perfect, he was perfect.

The lube clicked open again, he felt rather than saw Negan’s hand stroking up and down his own length, the cold wet hitting his rear on every upstroke. “Okay?” Carl asked.

“Yeah.” There were those dimples again. “You good?”

Carl grinned back. “Yeah.” He placed another soft kiss on him. “I love you.”
Another kiss. “Love you too.”

Adoring eyes watched him sit back up, he tried to keep eye contact when he sank down on the hard length but couldn’t help fluttering his eyes closed at the pleasurable burn. Hands smoothed over his hips, not pushing, just reassuring, helping him ease down. His breath heaved out of him, trying to quell the nerves rushing in his stomach.

“That’s it darlin’ just breathe, you’re doin’ so well.”

Carl focused on the voice, it was deeper now, growing huskier the more Carl took. With each breath he slid down, until their hips were finally flush. Only then did his eyes flutter open, hands digging into his chest as he tried to breathe through the ache.

“You alright?”

“Mnhm.” He rocked his hips, shifting around trying to adjust to the intrusion. Negan’s nails dug in with each movement until a groan burst out of his mouth.

“Jesus, Carl you’re gonna make me blow if you keep wriggling like that.”

Carl blushed at the thought before realizing how stupid that was. He literally had the man’s dick up his ass, they were well beyond embarrassment. “You need a minute?” He teased.

Negan glared up at him. “No, m’fine.”

“Good.” With that Carl started moving his hips, slowly rolling them back and forth. He closed his eyes, savoring the slick drag inside of him when he shifted up. His hands slid along Negan’s chest, feeling along the muscles that twitched underneath him. He could feel how hard Negan was gripping his hips, if he opened his eyes he was certain he’d see the internal battle going on in Negan’s head from restraining himself. God knows he was more than grateful for that.

“You alright up there?” Negan breathed, Carl really was fuckin’ gorgeous. The look of bliss on his face when he’d finally got settled nearly had Negan tumbling over the edge. The deep flush on his face trailed down over his chest, he wanted nothing more than to chase it with his tongue. Yet he didn’t, he didn’t want to do anything that would disturb those hips undulating on top of him.

“Yeah, fuck yeah I’m good.”

“Goo-fuck, oh fuck.” Negan growled out when Carl finally started moving faster, practically bouncing on his dick. It was better than any fuckin’ fantasy he’d had. As much as he wanted to keep watching his eyes slammed shut, head arching back into the far-too-soft cushions. “Fuck, Carl, fuck yes, just like that darlin’.”

“Mpfh.” Lips hit his hard, Negan’s hand curling around the back of his neck to keep them locked together as his body rocked harder against him. His own scratched into Negan’s hair, gripping the short locks, surprised when the gentle tug elicited a deep groan from the older man. “Negan, uhn, yesss… Oh my…” He panted against Negan’s lips, using his hair to tug that mouth to his neck, grinding down faster when teeth attached to it. It was incredible, he squeezed closer to Negan, moaning incoherently when the new position allowed his dick to grind against hard abs.

He felt ruined, so full, so split in two by the hard dick that was slowly driving him crazy. He couldn’t get enough, it’d never be enough, he couldn’t tell where he started and Negan began. It was how it should be, the two of them intertwined, bodies finally matching the emotions that they’d felt since the day they met. “Negan…”
“Yeah darlin?” The words, hot and wet against his pulse.

“I… more… please more.”

This time Negan growled, the vibrations shot through Carl’s body, inciting his hips to rock harder against him. Hands gripped his hips impossibly tight, he’d bruise in the morning but right now he didn’t care, they shifted him, Negan’s own hims rocking up until… “OHGOD…ohmy… yes… again…”

Negan did as told, bouncing Carl in his lap, ensuring to hit that sweet spot that made Carl squeeze so hard around his dick. He was fucking incredible. “You gonna come for me?” He couldn’t resist nipping out at Carl’s swollen lip, toying with the flesh. “Gonna come on my cock sweetheart?”

“Ugh, Negan.” Carl rocked his hips faster, chasing the pleasure that had roaring in his veins since Negan had first touched him. He wanted to memorize every second of this moment, wanted the sight of Negan so lost in pleasure to be etched into his brain. The man’s words barely registering his his head as the heat built in his stomach, slick sweat making it easier for his dick to glide along Negan’s abs.

“That’s it baby…ugh god you're so fuckin' gorgeous... keep going.” Negan was certain he’d die if Carl stopped moving, his own hands slipped around to grab his ass. He fuckin' loved that ass, so perky and soft, so tight around his dick. If he moved his finger right he could feel himself slip in and out of Carl, could feel the muscle so stretched around his length, it had his eyes rolling back in his head. Face twisting with pleasure, he wasn't gonna be able to hold out much longer. They'd been teasing this for so long, his body too taunt with anticipation. "C’mon, come for me.”

“Oh god… shit… there… ohmygod… yes yes…” Carl’s body seized, hands clutching at Negan’s shoulders as he finally came hard. Hips grinding down to take as much of him as possible. His mind went blank, clinging onto Negan, pulling him closer, wanting to feel more of the man.

Finally Negan thought, letting his body take over, he gripped Carl’s hips harder, rocking his own up to keep him moving in and out of that blissful heat. Soft groans puffed in his ear with each thrust into Carl’s pliant body, sweet “yesyesyes” a mantra that followed. It didn’t take long, a few more thrusts before he buried himself deep, grinding their hips together almost painfully as he spent himself inside Carl, filling him with a sticky heat that had Carl twitching harder around him.

Carl followed Negan down, breathless, his muscles were like jelly, all he could do was collapse on his chest, nuzzling the warmth there. He was grateful for the palms that stroked up and down his back, the reassurance presence of Negan’s heartbeat under his ear.

“You good?”

He nodded, not quite able to form words yet. His mouth too dry from the heavy pants that fell out his mouth. One of his hands found Negan’s shoulder, squeezing softly, as he placed soft kisses on his chest. His heart almost bursting with love for the man underneath him. He let himself be drawn up, met soft lips with his own. This kiss was sloppy, too wet but neither cared, it was perfect to them.

Carl broke away first, fingers trailing along the stubbled cheekbone, he contemplated Negan, lips twitching up at the soft, sleepy smile that crept over the man’s face. “I love you.”

Hands slid up to cup his own face, tucking hair behind his ears. “I love you too, Darlin’”

Arms wrapped around Carl’s waist when his tucked his head in the crook of Negan’s neck. He knew he’d have to move soon, knew they’d probably need yet another shower, but for the moment he
wanted to stay there. Safe, warm, wrapped up in Negan. Reality would come crashing down again, the hurt and the pain would no doubt come again, just as certain as the nightmares would creep over him again. But for now he didn’t have to think about that, for a blissful moment he could just exist, bask in the happiness that he’d been longing for.

Chapter End Notes

Soooo how many people love Dwight right now? As if I was gonna let them be apart any long than they had to.
The Return

Chapter Notes

I'm baaacck! Only took me a month to get this chapter out. I had so much writer's block with this one and then just as it was getting it rolling the mid-season finale smashed it right out of me. I'm so heartbroken about it (won't say much in case people haven't watched it) but all I can say is that it's not gonna change anything with any of my fics. I've still got several planned and now I'm settled into my job a bit more I have a tiny bit more time to write :)

Soo this chapter was supposed to be one chapter but it kinda spiralled out of control (15,000 words like whaaat!) so I've split it in two. So there will be one more chapter then a little epilogue at the end.

Thanks so much for all the lovely messages that people have sent whilst waiting! I'm sorry it took so long I've definitely learned my lesson about posting chapters as and when I write them, next time I'm gonna try and get ahead a bit more before publishing anything.
As always thank you for the support and for reading. Hope you enjoy this one <3

"And then three became four..."

May 2018

The first time Carl awoke that evening Negan had sprawled himself over him, a strong, muscled thigh had slipped between his, and Negan's arms had twined around his waist keeping him snug against the other man. Carl looked down at the peaceful face that had nestled against his shoulder, gently stroking his fingers across his cheek. Stubble pricked at his lips when he placed a kiss against it, nonetheless he let them linger, indulging himself, breathing in the spicy musk that accompanied the man wherever he went.

It was selfish indulgence that drove him to place another kiss on his cheek, then another higher up, thumbing across where his lips had trailed. There was only a brief flicker of guilt when Negan stirred at his actions. His breath caught when those brown eyes flickered open to land on his. He gave a sheepish smile, lips barely turning up in the corner, before whispering a quick “sorry.”

“You can wake me up like that anytime darlin’” The other man's sleep-heavy voice sent shivers up his spine, so similar to that gravelled tone that whispered the dirtiest things into his ear.

He hardly noticed their noses nudging together before Negan pressed closer, lips joining in the dark room. It was only a brief kiss, a slight taste of the other before they withdrew back to themselves.
They sighed almost in unison, hands trailing soft touches along skin.

“You alright?” Negan asked, voice hushed, not wanting to break the blissful tranquillity between them.

Just as quiet Carl replied, “Yeah, just… I can’t believe we’re here.” He rested his forehead against Negan’s. “Never thought I’d feel this happy again.”

Negan gave him a warm smile “I’m glad.”

Carl’s eyes fluttered closed when Negan’s lips found his again. He let the man take control of the kiss, allowed his tongue to slip between his lips, slowly letting his own stroke along the muscle. He could definitely get used to this, he could easily spend hours in bed with this man. He wanted to spend every waking moment exploring his body, learning every inch of it until he knew each freckle and scar better than his own.

“That will never get boring.” Negan mumbed, nuzzling along Carl’s neck, whispers of kisses echoed against his skin.

Carl threaded a hand through Negan’s dark locks, smiling at his words. He hoped they were true, he hoped they’d never get bored of this, more than anything he hoped that Negan would never get bored of him. He knew he was too young for him, probably a lot more immature than the people that he’d been with before, there was a constant worry that he’d get over whatever it was about Carl that held his attention and move on to someone else. Someone less.... damaged.

“Stop worrying.” Negan said, brown eyes coming up to meet Carl’s, his face taking on that stern look that he usually kept for disciplining the kids at school. “Whatever it is you’re thinking about, stop it.”

The man was certainly more intuitive than Carl gave him credit for. “I’m good, no more thinking.”

“Good.” Negan kissed him again, before rolling onto his back, eyes fluttering shut as he settled down again.

Carl watched him for a moment, contemplating the man, he’d never stop surprising him. His mind recalled their earlier conversation, brain fumbling over all the things that he’d said before pausing on one particular sentence. He mulled it over for a moment, hesitating before asking, “Did you mean what you said earlier?”

One brown eye cracked open, focusing on Carl in the dark, his face the picture of confusion. “Which part?”

“The part about you moving to Seattle with me?” Carl clarified.

Negan shifted back onto his side, turning so he could return Carl’s gaze. “Of course, I meant everything I said Carl. I’ll do whatever it takes for you to be happy, for us to be together.” He stroked along Carl’s smooth skin, rubbing reassuringly at his shoulder. “It’s whatever you want, if you want me to move up there to be with you then I’m down for it. I can get a job, rent a place, hell I could sell the cabin and buy a place up there. But if you want me to stay, if you want some space to get your feet in the city then I’ll stay, I’ll wait, however long it takes.”

Carl pondered his words, what did he want? He wanted to leave his shitty town, that he knew, even with his Father there he still wanted some distance from all the memories that haunted every corner of the place. He wanted Negan, he always wanted him around yet… he wanted to try being independent. Maybe he was being selfish but he wanted that chance to experience college on his
own, he wanted to know if he could survive on his own, without any backup. “Don’t sell the cabin, not that I don’t want you to move but that place… it’s too special to give up.” He paused. “I wanna try being there on my own, for awhile anyways. I want you there. I just, it sounds stupid, I just need to know if I can do this on my own.”

Negan shook his head, dismissing his last words. “It’s not stupid, it’s normal. Most people head to college for that precise reason. We’ll figure it out, one week at a time. When you’re ready I’ll look at joining you, that’ll probably take some time anyways.”

“I really don’t deserve you.” Carl spoke, the words falling out without thought.

Negan scoffed at that. “What are you talkin’ about? After all the shit I pulled I don’t deserve you Carl.”

“Don’t…” Carl whispered, hushing his words. “We both fucked up, but it’s in the past, we’ve gotta move on or we’ll just keep repeating mistakes.”

“When did you get so damn wise?”

“Eh, one of us has to be.”

Negan settled against him again, curling his arms around his waist, nuzzling his face into his neck. “Good point, I’ll leave you to it.”

Carl shifted to accommodate him, his own arms finding their way around Negan’s shoulders before an unpleasant weight in his bladder reminded him exactly why he’d woken in the first place. He sulked a moment, balancing the pressing urge to relieve himself with the sheer contentment he felt in that moment. Unfortunately his body won out, he reluctantly pulled himself away from Negan, lavishing several apologetic kisses against the man’s cheek as he left the warmth of the bed.

He shivered at the cool breeze from the air conditioning, it had seemed like a good idea when they’d been accosted by the summer heat but now it forced him back into his boxers and the shirt he’d pulled off Negan the previous night. It was beyond a habit to steal his clothes back home, why not continue over here?

Negan had fallen asleep again by the time he returned, lost in a dream that judging by the faint grin on his face was entirely enjoyable. He slipped back under the covers, a warm joy filling him when Negan reached for him in his sleep. Carl allowed himself to be enveloped in his strong arms again, nestling himself against his body. He could most definitely get used to this he thought before returning to a peaceful sleep.

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A shrill ringing woke him the second time. A pained groan rumbled behind him, the warm arm left his waist to answer the wake-up call, slamming the phone back onto the receiver when he was finished before returning his arm to where it had settled around Carl’s hip. Carl arched his neck, smiling at the mouth nuzzling along the length, stubble almost tickling his flesh.

“Mornin’” Negan’s voice was husky with sleep, purring in his ear.

“Morning,” Carl wriggled back against Negan, burrowing his face back into the pillow, it was waaay too early to be awake. All he wanted to do now was spend the rest of the day in the warm bed, Negan wrapped around him, the two of them hidden away from the world.

“Keep wrigglin’ like that and there’s no chance that we’re leavin’ this bed today.”
He wriggled again, his grin hidden away. “Maybe that’s my plan.”

Negan chuckled against his shoulder-blade, a low, dirty chuckle that had Carl’s heart racing that little bit faster. “You lil’ tease.” His palm slid along Carl’s waist, fingers sliding under the shirt, his shirt he noted with a flash of heat, Carl had put on to trickle along his all-too-prominent ribs. Making a brief note to feed the teen more, he let the digits wander down to tease along his hips. “What on earth am I gonna do with you?”

Carl arched his hips back in response, bottom rubbing against the hardness growing behind him. “I can think of a few things.” He breathed out.

Another anguished groan, “Jesus, you’re fuckin’ evil.” The palm lowered, slipping over soft cotton on it’s path down Carl’s thigh. A sigh huffed against Carl’s back. “I damn well wish we had more time.”

Carl pouted, flipping around to face Negan. “Can’t we stay? One more night?”

Negan nipped at that delectably plump lip, kid really was evil. “I wish, but we gotta get you back to your Dad.” He went visibly pale, leaning back. “You don’t think he meant what he said about knowing…”

Carl rolled his eyes, his Father wasn’t that scary. “You’ll be fine, he’s not gonna know.”

“You don’t know that, he’s a cop he might have pull in this area. Little spies that’ll tell him I didn’t go to my room last night.”

“Oh yeah, I’m sure he has pull in a city that’s thousands of miles out of his jurisdiction.” He rubbed a hand soothingly over his shoulder, tracing down to the tattoo on his pec that never failed to draw his attention. “Don’t worry, you and your balls are safe.”

“They better be, can’t be depriving the world of them.”

“The world?” Carl asked incredulously, no fuckin’ chance. “Thought they were all mine.”

Negan cocked a brow at him, smirk creeping over his face, “Someone’s possessive.” His hands found the sweet curve of his bottom, yanking Carl closer. “I like it.”

“Damn straight, nearly lost you once, not happening again.” He nudged their lips together, sighing softly, melting at the contact. His lips opened, welcoming the tongue that slipped between them, twirling around his own. Carl’s hand played with the soft hairs at the base of the other man’s neck, leg sliding up to rest on his hip, drawing them closer together.

A trail of fire followed Negan’s hand as it roved over Carl’s body, each gentle scratch, each sweeping caress, sent sparks of lust through him. He rolled their hips together, a sense of urgency seeping into the kiss, hands growing more persistent, more desperate for the feel of skin. Negan’s hands shoved at Carl’s shirt, pushing it up to his armpits, running them down along his chest, nipples pebbling under his touch.

Soft sighs left Carl’s lips between kisses, he just about had time to draw more breath before Negan’s lips found his once again. “What happened to the whole ‘don’t have time thing’?” He mumbled before his lips were taken again. His back arched, hips involuntarily grinding forwards when nimble fingers plucked at his sensitive nipples.

“Mmmm…” Those hands shifted to push at his boxers. “...if we’re nice…” another kiss “...and quick…” he was pushed on his back. “...then I’m sure we’ll be fine.” Negan covered his lips once
more, using his knees to spread Carl’s legs, settling himself between them. Both sighed in satisfaction when their lower bodies finally made contact, hips rocking slowly against each other, taking a moment to savor each slow grind.

Groans spilt into the other’s mouths, erections dragging back and forth over each other as they ground together, the blissful friction forcing their bodies to move harder, and faster, chasing that indescribable pleasure. The slow, languid pace from the previous night disappeared completely, replaced by a feverish need, a animalistic hunger for the other that wouldn’t be sated with sweet kisses and slow touches.

“Ugh, Negan, yess, there.” Carl’s hands scratched a path down hard muscle, reaching around to sink into Negan’s ass to shift their hips even closer, forcing him to hit the angle that made his back arch and his dick throb. His toes curling at the pleasure that flooded every vein, that made his heart pound, and head light. “God, Negan, ohgodohgod.”

Kissing became pointless, it was more a clash of tongues and teeth, nipping and sucking whatever they could reach, heavy breaths swapped between their mouths. Exchanges of “oh fuck” and “yesyes, ohgod, yes” melted away as breathing became more difficult, desperate groans and growing in pitch moans replaced them.

Negan’s hand found Carl’s leg, hiking it further up his hip, pushing their groins that little bit closer. He buried his face in the crook of Carl’s neck, mouthing at the sweat gathering there, biting at his racing pulse. Lust tugged at his stomach, heart racing as he soared towards his climax. “Fuck, baby, shityes.” His body tensed, thrusting against Carl’s one last time as he spilled between them, his climax tearing through him. Carl followed closely, whimpering as his legs tightened around Negan’s hips, pushing upwards, chasing the blissful waves.

They lay in silence, chests heaving as they tried to catch their breath. Negan broke the silence first, shifting his head out from Carl’s neck to look him over. He really was beautiful, face flushed pink, glistening with sweat, his lips swollen and red from all the attention he’d lavished on them. Negan would’ve felt more guilty about it if it hadn’t made Carl all the more irresistible. He placed a soft kiss on him, before whispering against them, “You alright?”

Carl licked at his lips, chasing the taste of Negan’s, his eyes fluttered open meeting those warm brown eyes. “Yeah, I’m good.”

“Sure?”

Carl nodded.

“No regrets?”

Carl frowned, he didn’t think he could ever regret this. He most definitely didn’t regret last night, it had been perfect. “None, absolutely none.”

“Good.” He kissed him again, facing curling up when the movement shifted his body, reminding him of the sticky mess between them. “Ugh, we’re gonna need another shower.”

Disgust covered Carl’s face. “Yeah, I’m so going first.”

Negan pouted this time. “First? What happened to saving water?”

Carl pushed Negan off him, rolling to sit up. “We’ve got a flight to catch and something tells me if I let you in that shower we’ll definitely miss it.” Rising from the bed, he padded over to the bathroom, stretching as he went.
“But who’s gonna wash my back?” Negan protested at the moving figure.

“There’s a loofah.” Carl called back, locking the door behind him, leaving Negan to pout at the overly white ceiling.

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June 2018

The return from Seattle had been a larger comedown than Carl had ever thought. It had hit him harder than he’d anticipated, the return to the home so filled with memories, both good and bad, had sent the anxious gnawing swarming back to his stomach. A sensation that had all but disappeared whilst they’d been away, he wasn’t sure if it was being so far away from the place that had damaged him so badly, or the fact that he no longer had to concern himself with worrying about someone catching onto his relationship with Negan.

Even though it had only been two days away from this awful place, he never realised how much concealing their relationship had impacted on him. Not just the constant worry about people finding out about them but the mountainous effort of having to keep himself away from Negan at all times. He missed him so intensely all the time. The return to adamantly ignoring each other in the corridors pained him, even more exacerbated by the fact that he’d become so busy with studying for finals that he hardly had the time to see him. In the three weeks since they’d returned they’d only seen each other properly twice. Their weekly dinner had been postponed several times because of the insane study schedule that Enid had drawn up for him.

Another change in his life, the teen had barrelled back into it and set herself as his appointed study guide. Not long after his return from Seattle had she thrown herself into the seat opposite him in the library and shoved a load of organised papers at him. She’d explained that she couldn’t stand looking at him dig through his badly-written notes every afternoon so she’d copied her own to give to him. It was embarrassing to say the least that someone had noticed just how unorganised they were, half the time he was fumbling through them trying to find pages that matched each other. More often than not he’d find himself having to separate notes from completely different classes that had somehow gotten tangled together.

 Needless to say he’d been extremely grateful for her intervention, even more grateful when she’d given him her study timetable and demanded that they studied together. He never studied as much when he was alone, hell he hated being on his own in general, too many unwanted thoughts would creep into his mind without someone there to distract him. He frequently fell into old habits when he was studying on his own, the words blurring together as his mind fought to dispel the memories that wanted to drown him. Inevitably the effort would exhaust him and he’d fall into bed for yet another restless sleep filled with nightmares.

He should really talk to someone about it, or at least figure out a better way of dealing with it. He couldn’t spend the rest of his life relying on others for his own sanity but it was tiring enough dealing with all the other shit in his life without having to drag another person into the mess. He most definitely wasn’t going to talk to his Dad about it, the man had been far too distracted recently.

That worried him more than anything, the man was slowly returning to the person he was right after everything with Shane went down. He was so withdrawn, he’d hardly spent time with Carl since he came back, too busy with work. Carl had tried to ask about it, he’d been curious to know exactly what work had kept him away from his trip but the only response had been a tight smile and a dismissive, “Nothin’ to worry about.” Which, of course, had made Carl worry about it at every
opportunity. He couldn’t tell if it was work-related or something else. It hadn’t escaped his attention that the man hardly mentioned Daryl anymore, such a stark contrast to how he was prior to the trip. Anytime he wasn’t with Carl or at work the man would be with Daryl, or at least making plans to be with him. Hell, Carl had thought something a little more than friendship was going on there and now it seemed like Daryl was nothing more than a faded memory.

He hasn’t asked his Dad about it, not quite sure exactly how to ask him what was going on with his friend/maybe-more-than-friend. It wasn’t really his place to ask either, Rick respected his relationship with Negan, he never asked about it so he deserved the same treatment. He wasn’t even sure if it was the cause of his Father’s sudden mood change, it might just be work, or the reminder that Carl would soon be leaving him. All Carl could do was spend as much time with the man as he allowed, even if that meant abandoning Negan for a couple of weeks.

The feat was easier said than done.

He’d just about lasted the three weeks before things got too much. He and Enid had spent the usual three hours in the library after school. It was late, the whole school was closing up and they’d been kicked out the library. He always accompanied her back to her car when they left each other, much to his surprise he actually enjoyed her company again. It was like the three weeks had healed some of the rift that had developed between them, they joked and laughed, stressed about the future and exams. She’d asked him all about his trip to Seattle, which he happily told her, leaving out all mentions of a certain person. There was an ease with her, although he had to stay on his guard about his relationships, it was nice to talk with someone that didn’t know about Shane. It almost reminded him of being with Negan before he told him everything. Not that he regretted telling him, he was grateful that there were no secrets in their relationship but it made things harder at times, certain moments would fill with an awkward heaviness, he could tell that Negan would often watch what he said and did. He knew the man only did it because he didn’t want to upset him but he hated those moments.

So he made the most of his time with Enid, trying to forget how much he missed Negan. That particular afternoon, as they made their way back to her car, his eyes were once again drawn to the field where Negan spent his time. Usually the pitch was empty by the time they left, having studied well past practice time. However, on this occasion he could just about make out the familiar figure clearing up, an involuntary grin spread over his face. He hid it from Enid, the last thing he wanted was questions from her.

“So I’ll see you tomorrow?” She asked, interrupting his gaze.

“Yeah, sure, see you then.”

They exchanged waves before she drove off. His body hesitated a moment before he turned and snuck back into the school. He walked through the deserted, dark corridors, avoiding the janitor as he made his way to the office. It was stupid of him to do this, a reckless risk for him to see Negan in the school, the smart thing would be to turn around and leave.

He was never one for doing the smart thing and he’d be the first to admit that sneaking around the school made his pulse race that little bit faster, and sent lust tingling through his veins. He wasn’t sure if it was love or lust that tugged him closer to that office, drawn to the man inside it like a moth to a flame.

Negan was shrugging on his jacket when Carl arrived, covering his tight, white shirt with the well-worn leather jacket that Negan loved so much. He made Negan jump when he closed the door behind him, an angry look appeared on the man’s face before he realised who it was that had startled him.
“What are yo-” Carl hushed him with a finger on his own lips. He turned to flip the blinds shut, settling the room in darkness, the dim light from the computer screen giving the room a slight glow. He quickly locked the door before turning his attention back to the man now leaning against the edge of his desk.

They looked at each other for a moment, everything halted for Carl, the world outside the door faded as he focused on those brown eyes. It only took a few steps for them to meet, the shortest second before their tugged each other closer, clashing together in the middle of the room with teeth and tongue. Finally was silently spoken between them as they found each other in the darkened room, hands reacquainting themselves with skin, slipping under clothes, clutching at whatever flesh they could reach. Their bodies in sync with their yearning need to be with one another, hearts beating together, breath coming in desperate pants between longing kisses.

Carl pushed at Negan, lips remaining locked as he shoved him back towards the chair. The kiss broke when he pushed him back into it, a small ‘oof’ leaving the other man when he hit the seat, he almost followed him down, nearly straddled him so he could find his climax in the hot grind of their bodies. He managed to stop himself, he could wait, he wanted to try something different.

Ignoring Negan’s confused look, he let himself fall to his knees, his jeans were harsh under his palms when he placed his names on them. He let his eyes lock with Negan, icy blue meeting the warm brown that was slowly disappearing under widening pupils. His palms slid up Negan’s thighs, spreading them as they went, slipping himself between them. He kept his pace slow, enjoying the impatient look that was forming on Negan’s face, he could feel the muscles twitching under his touch, could practically see the restraint that Negan was imposing on himself. Carl wondered what was going on in his mind, what he was thinking of doing, what he wanted to do. His own raced with ideas of all the things he could do to the man, three weeks of hardly seeing one another had him ready to burst.

Still, as fun as all the other ideas were, he had something else in mind for that particular afternoon.

“What’re you up to?” Negan asked, one hand coming down to stroke at Carl’s cheek.

“What do you think I’m up to?” Carl asked innocently, his fingers deliberately stroking along the hardness he found on their way up to the man’s buckle.

Negan inhaled sharply at the teasing touch, he had to clear his throat before replying. “Somethin’ that’s gonna get me in trouble.”

Carl grinned up at him, fingers now working on the man’s zipper. “Probably.” His hand slipped inside of his open jeans, raising an eyebrow at the man. “No underwear?”

Negan gave one of his own wicked grins, his reply cut short when a firm hand wrapped itself around his dick, plucking a deep groan that rumbled out of his chest.

“Makes it easier for me I guess.” Carl mumbled to himself. He watched in fascination at the thick hardness in his hand, he could barely wrap his fingers around it, the head was already wet with precum, he used it to ease the glide of his hand down his dick. His strokes were slow, teasing the man with a tight grip before loosening it to a feather-light touch. Carl withdrew all touches when Negan’s hands made towards him. “Ah, ah, no touching.” He dragged his eyes away from his flushed dick to look into brown eyes.

“You touch me and I’ll stop.” He warned. Negan’s eyes flashed with lust, his hands twitched towards him before they obeyed, clenching hard on the armrests.
Carl smiled sweetly at him, keeping their eyes locked as he brought his head forward, tongue slipping out to lap at the moisture gathering at Negan’s head. He saw the shock on Negan’s face, witnessed the pleasure that glazed over his eyes when he lapped at it again, hips shifting forward in an attempt to follow the retreating tongue. Carl bit his lip, using his hand to tug at Negan’s cock again, taking a moment to consider the man.

He’d never had any inclination to do this before, he’d never really considered it to be something he’d ever enjoy but the reactions from Negan made him crave it, they urged him to do more, to take more of him. So he leaned forward once more, adjusting his hand so he could lick up from the base to the leaking tip, tasting the man properly for the first time. The taste of come was unpleasantly familiar, he had to push the thoughts of where he’d tasted it before out of his mind, focusing on the deep, husky groans that were falling from Negan’s lips. There was still the distinct taste of Negan, the familiar, intoxicating smell of the man. He paced himself, settling for kittenish licks against his skin that had Negan’s melting under his hands. He dipped his tongue down to lavish his balls with the same attention, using his saliva to wet the man’s cock as he stroked up and down.

He traced around his balls before trailing his tongue along a thick vein that travelled up his cock. He paused at the head, licking once, twice, then spreading his lips to take the spongy flesh into his mouth. Negan jolted under him, he felt the breeze of a hand moving, he glared up at him in a warning

“Shit, sorry, sorry, don’t stop.” The hand returned to dig into the armrest.

Carl continued, sucking gently at the tip, surprised by the rush of come that drenched his tongue in the salty liquid. He swallowed it down, moving his mouth further down the length before sliding back up. He used his hand to stroke the parts he couldn’t reach with his mouth, letting the two meet in the middle before dragging apart. He let his spit drip down the length, keeping his dick nice and wet, making it easier to drive the man crazy with his touch.

His head bobbed back and forth, jaw starting to ache from the constant pressure, he was so big inside of him. He let the head slip out of his mouth, still connected by a trail of spit that was absurdly hot. Carl looked up at Negan again, licking his lips to break the trail. “You taste so good.” He spoke, voice heavy with lust.

“You’re gonna be the fuckin’ death of me.” Negan replied.

Carl grinned, resuming his strokes on the hardness. “What a way to go huh?”

Negan grinned back at him. “Fuck yeah baby.”

He took him back into his mouth, eyes closing once more, he was enjoying himself far too much. His own dick throbbed in his pants, pleading for any touch, hips shifting back and forth in an attempt at friction. He ignored it, focusing on the feel of Negan slipping in and out of his lips, the sound of him moaning his name so desperately.

“Fuck...Carl...Can I-oh fuck. Can I touch you?”

“Mmmmhmmm.” Carl’s assent vibrated on his dick, sending outrageously pleasurable tingles up his spine. His hands moved immediately, shifting to wind themselves into long hair, encouraging his bobbing head to move faster. He tried not to force him, tried not to push too hard, the last thing he wanted was to scare Carl off when he was so fucking close. A particularly deep suck pushed his restrained, all he wanted was to fuck into the sopping heat, come deep inside his throat. He pulse raced at the thought, the images sending his body racing towards the edge.
“Oh yeah darlin’, that’s it… fuck…” His hips thrust up involuntarily, pushing himself deeper into the wet heat. He was more than grateful that he didn’t choke him, impressed that Carl just took it, slipping more into his mouth. Negan practically jolted out of his chair when Carl took him even deeper, swallowing around him, his throat fluttering around his cock. He let his head fall back, the indescribable pleasure seeping through his veins erasing any pain from hitting the hard chair back. His eyes shut against the beige ceiling swirled with damp marks. His world fell away, his mind disappeared, his everything became the slickness around his dick, the deviant tongue that wrapped itself underneath the length, stroking along it with every backstroke. “Christ, Carl…”

He was so close, so ready to release himself. He tried to warn Carl, he didn’t want to force him to swallow if he didn’t want to. His warning went ignored, Carl merely hummed once again and took him back into his throat. That was all it took for his climax to rip through him, hips thrusting up as he spilt into Carl’s mouth.

Carl rode it out, pulling back slightly to swallow down the salty liquid that flooded his mouth. It wasn’t pleasant, in hindsight he probably only did it out of habit. He pulled away when Negan stopped twitching, releasing the man from his mouth. He sat back on his knees, taking a few moments to catch his breath, his own hard-on pressed uncomfortably against his zipper. Just as he was about to reach in and pull it out Negan spoke again.

“Jesus, Carl, where did you learn how to do that?”

Carl knew it was a joke, something that people say all the time. In another life he’d probably consider it a compliment. In this one it just stung, he recoiled from the man like a wounded animal. His own arousal disappearing as disgust poisoned his stomach. “Take it deeper, all the way down.” “Lick the head.” “Fuck you know how to suck a dick baby.” His mind flooded with that monster’s voice, flashing images of all the lessons he’d given Carl. Memories of being choked, forced to take him as far down his throat until he felt like he was going to die, all those times he’d practically begged to go down on the man in the hopes that he wouldn’t force him to take it elsewhere. He’d never really thought of things like that. He’d managed to keep Shane out of his thoughts for the most part whenever he and Negan were together like this. He’d never stopped to think that almost everything he did was because of that man, everything he knew came from him. The way he kissed, the way he stroked Negan’s dick, the way he… nonono. He had to stop thinking like that, he pushed himself off the floor, rubbing at his mouth trying to ignore the familiar, bitter taste still lingering in his mouth.

Negan’s satisfied chuckle stopped dead when his own words sunk in, eyes widening at his own comment. They frantically looked towards Carl, the small figure slowly putting some distance between them. “Carl,” he spoke faintly, why the fuck did he say that? He stood, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to…” What the fuck could he say? I’m sorry Carl I didn’t mean to remind you of the bastard that raped you? The fact that you were forced to learn how to do these things. Nausea bubbled in his stomach the more he thought about it, he was sickened to think that he’d found pleasure in the same way that Shane had done. No, not the same he tried to remind himself, Carl had wanted to do this. He hadn’t forced him, he’d never force him to do anything he didn’t want to. He was fuckin’ idiot.

“It’s fine.” Carl’s voice was terse, body as tense as the words he spoke. “Don’t worry about it.”

“Carl-” Negan started again.

“It’s fine.” Carl’s voice was more forceful this time, more pleading for the man to stop. He grabbed his bag from the floor, slinging it onto his back, this had been such a stupid idea. “I gotta go, I’ll see ya later.” He dived out of the door before Negan could speak again, almost racing down the corridor in an attempt to get as far away from that office as possible.
“Carl!” Negan’s voice chased him down the corridor, followed closely by the man himself. “C’mon, I’ll give you a lift home.”

Carl stopped, turning to face him. “I can walk.”

“I know but you don’t have to, I’ll give you a ride, then we can talk.”

“We don’t need to talk.”

“Yes we do.”

“No we don’t.” Carl argued, the last thing he wanted was to spend the entire journey home talking about the one thing he wanted more than anything to forget.

“Carl please?” Negan was close to begging, he needed to make it right, he couldn’t let Carl go like this.

Carl huffed for a moment, a reluctant nod shifting his face, melting slightly at the relieved smile that crossed Negan’s face.

“Okay, okay, good. Wait here, I just need to grab my shit.”

Carl watched him jog back to the office, debating whether it’d be a good idea just to walk away. He quickly dismissed the idea, Negan would simply follow him. So he waited, pacing the hallway mentally hitting himself for being so stupid. He shouldn’t have let himself get into that position, fuck, he shouldn’t have let Negan’s comment get to him. Now he’d have to deal with feeling guilty that Negan felt guilty and it just made things more complicated.

“Ready to go?” Negan panted at him, arm full of the gym bag that he carried around with him, Carl often wondered why he did it, he knew that the only thing in the bag was the crappy jacket he had to wear for work. Nonetheless, he followed the man out to his car, taking an obligatory look around to make sure no one was watching before he slipped into the passenger side.

He stayed quiet as they drove off, watching row after row of houses slip past them. He could feel Negan’s eyes flick over to him whenever he could. He could see the man shift uncomfortably in his seat, fingers tapping the steering wheel. Carl sighed before speaking, “It’s honestly fine Negan.”

“No it’s not, it was a fuckin’ stupid thing to say and I’ve upset you.”

“You haven- you didn’t upset me.” Carl paused, trying to figure out how to explain why he’d darted out of the room. “I just- I’ve never thought about things like that before. I never really connected the two, I know how to do things because of Shane…” Negan’s hands tightened on the wheel when he spoke his name, his jaw clenching. “...I can’t avoid that, it’s a habit, I can’t unlearn it. It’s just something I have to live with.”

“I fuckin’ hate it.” Negan confessed. “It shouldn’t be that way.”

“I know but it is. It doesn’t bother me, it’s was just a shock, you know?”

“Yeah, shit, I’m sorry.”

Carl put a reassuring hand on his thigh. “Stop apologising. It’s fine, I’m fine.”

Negan covered the hand with his own, bringing it up to his lips in a quick kiss. “I’m sorry.” At Carl’s pointed look he continued. “I’ll stop now.”
They sat in silence, hands still linked now resting on Negan’s thigh, he’d missed doing this, in the time since returning from Seattle Carl had been plagued with regret over not taking full advantage of being able to touch the man whenever he liked.

“I’ve missed you.”

Carl’s lips twitched up into a smile, at least he wasn’t the only one keenly feeling the distance between them. “I’ve missed you too.”

“Any chance of our usual Friday night dinner this week?”

“I think I can make it work.”

“Good.” He squeezed his hand again. “How’s studying going?” Negan asked.

Grateful for the move onto safer topics Carl filled him in on his progress, not that there was much to report. He was plodding along nicely with the material and with Enid’s help he’d been doing alright in the practice exams that they’d done.

“So you and Enid are getting on alright?”

“Yeah, it’s nice having her around again.”

“You guys were close huh?” Negan queried.

“Oh yeah, we’ve been friends for years. Sorry, it’s weird thinking there was a time before you, I forget you don’t know these things.”

Negan waved it off. “I’m just glad you two are back on track.”

“Me too.” It was strange thinking back to how things were, who would’ve thought he’d end up dating his high school coach? God, back then his Dad had been so certain that he and Enid were destined to be together. Just the thought made him chuckle.

“What’s so funny, Chuckles?”

“Dad, he-uh, he used to think that Enid and I were gonna be together. Always used to push me to ask her out.”

“Huh, did you ever do it?”

“God no, she was only ever a friend, I mean we kissed once but that was just to get the whole ‘first kiss’ thing over and done with but that’s all.”

“She was your first kiss?”

“Yeah, ages and ages ago.”

“Huh.”

Carl noticed the jaw tick again, fingers tightening on the steering wheel once more. “What’s up?”

“Nothin’”

“Doesn’t seem like nothing.”
“It is. So anyway, you think she’s interested?”

“Interested...?”

“Y’know, in dating you. Now.”

Carl almost burst out laughing, was he really jealous? It was adorable. So completely unnecessary but totally adorable. “Are you jealous?”

“About what?” Negan asked, the reply coming way too quickly to be considered as anything but defensive.

“Enid.”

“Pft, no, why? Do I need to be?”

Carl did laugh at that, a deep belly laugh that only Negan could bring out of him. He was almost hysterical by the time they reached his designated drop off point. Even though Rick knew about them, the last thing he wanted was people in the neighbourhood gossiping about who was dropping him off.

“Alright, you can stop the laughing thing now.” Negan spoke, shoving the car into park.

“Okay, okay okay.” Carl said between laughs, he had to wipe the tears from his eyes several times.

“I’m not jealous.” Negan spoke again, more to himself than to Carl.

“I know.” Carl spoke, reaching up to brush his hands though Negan’s hair. God, he’d missed him so much. “You have no reason to be. I’m not even remotely interested in her, not when I’ve got you.”

“Good.” Negan smiled at him, leaning over to give him a soft kiss that lingered longer than he’d planned, unable to resist the sweet taste of his lips.

Carl sighed as they pulled away. “Friday?” He asked.

“Friday.” Negan affirmed.

They exchanged sad smiles before they parted. Carl slipping out of the car to make the short journey back to his house. The sun pounded down on him as he walked, he regretted wearing the long-sleeved shirt over his top, although his usual attire it really didn’t help in the Georgia heat. He was sweating by the time he arrived back at the house, wiping his brow of sweat as he walked into the cool air conditioned living room.

His Dad was home, sat on the couch, elbow on his knees, head in his palms. He had the look of a man that had lived thousands of years, that had seen far too much. Carl wished there was more he could do to help.

“Hey Dad.” He spoke, walking further into the room.

Rick’s head snapped up, gaze focusing on Carl. “H-” He cleared his croaky throat, how long had he been sat there? It was drier than the Sahara. “Hey Carl, how was school?”

“Yeah, it was good. Did lots of studying.”

“Good, good. How’s Enid?”
Carl smiled, recalling his conversation with Negan. “She’s good, working hard.”

“That’s good.” Rick nodded, letting the room fall silent for a moment. He had to tell him, better to have the conversation now than later so he took a deep breath. “Carl, would you sit for a minute?”

That didn’t sound good Carl thought, he slowly edged further into the room, perching on the chair opposite his Father. “What’s up?”

“Uh, well I had a call earlier. From your Mom.” He paused, taking a minute to gauge Carl’s reaction. So far nothing bad, no screaming, no running from the room.

“Oh,” was all Carl could say. He didn’t know what to make of it. They hadn’t really spoken recently, a few stunted conversations on the phone but they’d always been the result of Rick pushing Carl to get in touch with her. It was the first time she’d actually reached out to them since she’d left. “Sooo, what did she want?”

“Graduation. She wanted to know if you still wanted her there.”

“Of course.” His answer was instantaneous, more of an instinct that a conscious need to have her there. It was just how it was, your parents came to your graduation, it’s what they’d been planning for years. His response must have been what Rick had been wanting to hear, the man visibly relaxed, leaning back against the couch with a relieved sigh.

“Great, I’ll let her know.”

“Okay, good.” It was Carl’s turn to pause. “Do you think she should come for dinner before then?” Rick looked at him confused. “Why?”

“Cos we haven’t really spent time with her since… y’know. Might be good to clear the air before the big day.”

“Oh.” Rick scratched his head. He hadn’t thought about that, he’d been too busy thinking about Carl and his reaction that he hadn’t considered the fact that it had been months since he’d been in a room with her. “Yeah, we should probably do that.”

They sat for a moment, lost in their own thoughts.

“Um, what do we cook?”

They looked at each other. Neither were particularly good at cooking and Carl was certain he wouldn’t be able to get Negan to teach him that damn spaghetti recipe in time.

“Maybe we invite her for lunch?” Rick suggested.

“Yes! Lunch is perfect.” No cooking, just sandwiches, super easy sandwiches.”

“Alright, I’ll give her a call, invite her on Saturday.”

“Awesome, I’ll be home after Negan’s.”

Rick’s face turned serious again. “Negan’s? On Saturday?”

Shit, he’d planned to be a bit more tactful about asking his permission. “Yeeehh, I thought I’d go see him Friday night, y’know, for our usual dinner?”
“Annd you thought you’d stay the night?”

“Yeah, well it saves me driving home late at night.”

Rick gave him a ‘bullshit’ look. “So it has nothing to do with you wanting to be with Negan all night?”

“Nothing’s gonna happen, we sleep in separate bedrooms.” Such a blatant lie, he had several plans for the events of that evening and none of them involved the pair of them being apart from each other.

“I’ve got the night off, thought we could spend it together.”

Rick really knew how to make him feel guilty, he had a damn puppy look on his face. “I thought you’d be out with Daryl? You haven’t seen him in awhile.” Carl pointed out.

The other man changed noticeably, sitting up straight again, eyes lost in a panicked moment before settling on Carl. His face twitched weirdly before he answered, “Oh, haven’t I?”

“Not that I’ve seen.” Carl said. “Everything alright between you two?”

“Yeah, it’s fine. He’s just been busy.”

“Too busy for you? You guys were like joined at the hip.” Carl found it hard to believe that the pair of them would just stop hanging out.

“No we weren’t. We just hung out a bit that’s all. Anyways, haven’t you got studying to do? I’m gonna phone your Mom.” Rick was up and off the couch before Carl had a chance to question him further. He stared after the man, wondering for the thousandth time what was up with him.

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The drive to Negan’s seemed to take forever, his fingers tapping at the wheels as he sped along the roads. Thoughts of his Dad and Daryl had occupied his thoughts the whole journey. He’d asked his Dad about it again, curious to know why they weren’t hanging out again but he’d been dismissed quickly enough, practically shoved out of the front door with the car keys. It was a puzzle, he wondered if something had happened whilst he’d been away. Romantic or a fight? There was definitely a hint of something more there, or at least Carl thought anyways. They were definitely closer than most friends, definitely closer than Rick had ever been with Shane he was glad to say.

Thoughts of his Dad and Daryl slipped away with each mile, he couldn’t wait to get back into Negan’s arms, back to the cabin that he loved almost as much as he loved the man that owned it. He grinned the second the cabin slid into view, Negan’s favorite bike parked out front, the lights making the cabin glow in the darkness. He breathed in the fresh summer air when he stepped out of the car, a wave of ease fell over his body, every step towards the house was like stepping away from the stress he’d been under. He could feel his face light up when the door opened, the lights inside illuminating the figure standing in the doorway.

The figured stepped towards him, meeting him just as he reached the last step on the porch. He vaguely heard Negan mumble out “bout damn time” before his mind went blank and his lips were caught up in a kiss that had his knees weak and his hands clutching at strong shoulders. He sank into it, letting Negan push him back against the pillar that framed the porch, his palms burning a heat through his clothes into the small of his back.

It became apparent their last encounter had only just taken the edge of the tension that had been
building since they returned from their trip. It wasn’t long before Carl was hard in his jeans and desperate to get the other man as naked as possible in the shortest time. He pushed harder into the kiss, tugging at Negan’s lower lip with his teeth, lust surging at the animalistic growl from the other man. Hands clutched at his ass, yanking him closer before roving to tangle in his hair. Carl’s hands met Negan’s skin with the same feverish passion, pushing under clothing to scratch lightly over flesh. His hands went everywhere, unable to focus on one part of the man, they scraped down his back, caressed over his hips, trailed the hair that dipped teasingly under his waistband.

They broke for air, chest heaving as they dragged breath back into their lungs. Their eyes met in a heated gaze, lips teasing back together before withdrawing, needing air but unwilling to lose complete contact with one another.

“Hi…” Carl breathed out.

“Hi.” Negan grinned down at him, pulling him in for another breathtaking kiss.

“Mmmm, you planning on letting me in the house anytime soon?” Carl asked when his lips were released.

“I dunno, I kinda like you where you are.” He looked damn well edible. Blue eyes lit with a fire that did nothing to quell the urge to take him right there, those deliciously pink lips that were beautifully plump at the best of times now looked even more decadent, it threw his mind back to exactly what those lips had been doing only days ago. Just the thought nearly had him bending Carl over the porch fence. He inhaled sharply, stepping away from the teen, “Let’s get you inside.”

Carl pouted, body protesting the sudden loss of Negan against him. He had more self-restraint than Carl ever gave him credit for.

“Stop with the pouting.” Negan called over his shoulder. He knew better than to turn around to look at Carl, that damn pout got him every time and the last thing he wanted was to freak Carl out by throwing him down and taking him right there on the porch.

“Why? It usually gets me what I want.”

Carl’s voice followed him into the kitchen, Little shit, of course he knew what he was doing with those tempting lips of his. Kid was more deviant than he fucking thought. “’Cos we gotta eat before I fuck your brains out.”

Carl swallowed around the lump in his throat, lust jolting through his stomach at the man’s blunt words. “How responsible of you.” He tried to cover the effect those words had on him. The wicked grin on Negan’s face did nothing to stop the lust that tugged at him.

“I try, now sit that lovely ass of yours down.”

He did as told, taking what had quickly become ‘his seat’ at the table in the kitchen. He loved these little moments of domesticity, loved watching the ‘hard-ass’ persona fall away from Negan to be replaced by the gentle, funny domestic God. In the past it had made him melancholy, jealous of all the lovers in Negan’s past that had seen him this way. He was bitterly jealous of Lucille who had been able to call the man her husband, had been able to celebrate their love so publicly in front of the people they cared about. He, on the other hand, had to settle for hurried meetings whenever he could squeeze him in. The only thing that lifted his spirits was the new reality that he and Negan would soon be able to have that. There was the new hope that he and Negan would be able to do this every night, that there was a future for them that had them together.
“Allright, I hope you’re ready for this, might taste like pure shit.” The man said, placing the plates of his latest creation at the table.

Carl wrinkled his nose at the analogy, not a great way to inspire an appetite. “Looks great.” He forced an enthusiastic tone. It most definitely looked like shit, he couldn’t quite make out exactly what it was supposed to be.

“It’s risotto.” Negan filled in.

“Huh.” Carl scooped some onto his fork, bringing it towards him for a close examination. “Are you sure?”

Negan flipped him the finger. “Just eat it.”

It tasted as bad as it looked. Clumps of sticky rice tinged with a bitter, burnt flavor that almost had him gagging. He forced down the bite he’d taken, face turning up in disgust as it made its way down his throat. Negan had the same look on his face, his handsome features crinkled at the taste of his own creation.

“That’s fuckin’ vile.”

“Yeah, not your best work.” Carl admitted. “Not the worst thought.” He added thinking of the crisp turkey that they’d attempted on their first Christmas together. His stomach tingled at the thought of them having more Christmases together, more kisses under the tree, cooking dinner together.

“So I know that little smile ain’t about my risotto, what’re you thinkin’ about?”

“Oh, nothing.” Carl covered, cheeks flushing, the last thing he wanted was to admit the incredibly cheesy daydreams that frequented his mind.

Negan cocked his eyebrow, tongue poking into his cheek. “Nothin’? Really?”

“Yep.” His eyes shot down to his plate, toying with the food.

“Huh.” Negan’s chair screeched as the man pushed it back. Carl heard his footsteps inch closer to him, before his nose filled with the smoky, cologne Negan wore. Hot breath steamed his ear, heat pressed against his back. “What’s it gonna take for me to get that outta you?”

“You’ll never get it out of me.” His breath hitched at the lips that ghosted across his earlobe. Breathing harder when they slipped over his neck.

“You sure about that?”

His resolve weakened the more those lips flickered over his skin, eyes fluttered closed when teeth nipped at the base of his neck. He allowed his head to fall back, resting on Negan shoulder, giving him more access to the pale skin. “Ye-yess.” He breathed.

Taking his words as a challenge Negan decided to up his game, bringing his palm down to dip under Carl’s neckline, fingers slowly plucking each button open on it’s way down Carl’s body. “Hmmm, I’m sure I can think of something... ” His palm splayed possessively across the flat of his stomach, small finger teasing underneath his waistband. He felt the sharp intake of air when he slid his hand lower, barely brushing over Carl’s cock through his jeans. “This workin’?”

“It’s definitely doing something.” He hated how breathy his voice was, hardly audible amongst his
puff’s of air. Such a simple touch that had his pulse racing, body tingling with an impatient need. His teeth dug into his lower lip, the pain only adding to his excitement. He watched as the large hand flicked open the button on his jeans, breath heaving in anticipation as it slid the metal zipper down.

Brrrrriiiing

Carl nearly threw his phone across his room.

Negan chuckled in his ear, removing his hands from Carl. “You better get that.”

“Hey Dad.” Trying his bed to keep the shaky quiver out of his voice. “What’s up?”

Negan resumed his seat whilst Carl talked with his Dad, as much as he wanted to finish what he’d started even he wasn’t as perverted to continue whilst he was on the phone to his father. So he watched the conversation play out. He was disappointed to see the beautifully pink flush leave Carl as the conversation went on, he’d have to work on bringing that back. It was a quick conversation, Carl only mumbling a few “okays.” and “sure, Dad.” before the phone clicked off and it was just the two of them again.

“So, my Mom’s coming to visit tomorrow.” Carl said.

Negan cocked a brow at him, “Really? What brought that on?”

“Graduation, she wants to come and I thought it’d be a good idea for us all to get together before the big day.”

“Wow, big step, how are you feeling about it.”

Carl sat back in his chair, rubbing his hands through his hair. He really had no idea. “It’s weird, I’ve missed her but…I dunno, I think I’m more worried about my Dad. However hard this is for me it’s gotta be worse for him.”

“Yeah, can’t be easy to see her after everything.”

“Did you see Lucille much after your divorce?” Although his parents hadn’t mentioned the D-word, he was fairly certain they were headed that way.

Negan gave a heavy sigh, remember those days wasn’t the easiest thing to do, not just because he’d been drunk outta his mind for the most part. “A few times, it was never easy. All those emotions that were still between us made it harder.”

Carl swallowed before asking, “Are they still there?”

“No, God, no. I mean, I’ll always care about her, she was a huge part of my life but it’s all said and done. If I saw her tomorrow it’d be more like seeing an old friend.”

“Do you think it’s still there for my parents.”

“Probably.” Negan admitted. “I don’t know much about them but I’m gonna assume they loved each other, that doesn’t just go away in an instant.”

Carl wasn’t sure if they did still love each other, even when they were married there was a hint of coldness between them, a falsity that they all ignored in favor of pretending that they were still normal.

“It’s gonna be awkward as fuck Carl, I’m not gonna lie to you, just be there for you Dad, that’s all
“I don’t even know what to talk to her about, I mean, yeah we’ll talk about school but then what? What if she wants to talk about what happened with Shane? We’ve not really spoken about it.”

“If you don’t wanna talk about it then just tell her that. No one, not even your mother, has the right to force you to talk about it.”

“I guess. It’s just a stress I didn’t wanna deal with right now.”

Negan stood from the table, pushing his chair back before moving around to join Carl, he held his hand out to him. “C’mon, let’s go.”

Carl grabbed his hand and followed him to the couches. He considered settling himself in his usual corner but his softer side won out and he ended up snuggled up against Negan, settling under his arm.

“Let’s talk.”

“About what?” Carl asked, absentmindedly playing with Negan’s hand, a nervous habit that he hadn’t managed to kick.

“Whatever it is you’re stressed about.”

“It’s just school.” Carl said.

“Uh-huh, you sure about that?”

Carl shifted out from his arm to turn and glare at him. “What do you think I’m stressed about then?”

“I dunno, you just seem a lot more stressed that school can cause. Especially given the fact that you keep saying that you’re getting on alright with the work. So what’s really goin’ on in that brain of yours?”

“I really hate how insightful you are at times.” Carl huffed, falling back to settle against Negan again.

“It’s a real burden.” He poked Carl. “So spill.”

“It’s… it’s hard… studying on my own. God, being on my own is hard.”

“Why?”

“The memories.” Almost too simplified a statement, he couldn’t describe it. It was more than a memory, more like being haunted by the past. Memories faded, he could hardly remember things that had happened a month ago, but everything with Shane… it lingered inside of him. He felt everything again, the ghost of the pain, humiliation and betrayed still occupied a part of his soul, left it blackened and decaying. “They creep in when I’m on my own. I can’t think of anything else at times, I just keep reliving it all over and over. My bedroom, my house, this whole damn town, it’s a constant reminder of all the shit that happened.”

Negan inhaled deeply, taking in his words. He hadn’t realised how much Carl was still suffering, the teen was too good at covering things up. “Have you told anyone about it?”

Carl shook his head. “Just you. Dad’s been acting weird lately, I don’t wanna bother him with another reminder of what happened.”
“How long has it been goin’ on for?”

“I dunno, might just been the stress of exams.”

“Probably, stress fucks with your head but… it might be worth talking to someone about it Carl.”

Carl tensed against Negan. “Someone professional?”

“Not necessarily”

Great, now he thought he was fucking crazy. “I don’t need help.”

Sensing the tension, Negan added. “I’m not saying you need help, I’m saying it might make things easier. To talk to someone else, someone who isn’t so involved in the situation.”

“Maybe, I’ll think about it.”

Negan kissed his temple. “Alright. Wanna talk about it with me?”

“Not really.” Carl admitted. “I don’t like tainting our time together by talking about that shit. It ruins things.”

“Carl it doesn’t taint us, I want you to be able to talk to me about these things.”

“I don’t mind talking to you but… we spend so little time together I don’t wanna talk about shit, I wanna focus on us.”

“Okay, but if you do wanna talk-”

“Yes yes, I’ll talk to you. It's really nothing, just stupid thoughts every now and again.”

“Good.”

Carl sunk into his body again, relaxing once more. “I’ll be glad when these finals are over, they’re doing my head in.”

Negan brought his hands up to Carl’s shoulders massaging the tension he found there. He felt Carl melt into his hands, his head rolling back to rest on his shoulder. He left a trail of barely-there kisses along to porcelain skin, just ghosting his lips along the surface, the teen shivered at the touch, arching his neck further. He watched Carl’s chest rise and fall, breathing coming harder when he found that spot at the base of his neck that always had Carl moaning. As if on cue the teen let out a soft moan with his teeth toyed at the spot. “Want some distracting?”

“Yes please.” He just about managed to sigh his words out before Negan’s lips found his. His body twisted, turning to face the other man, hands coming up to cup the stubbled chin, holding his lips firm against him. Each kiss chipped away at the darkness that had sunk into him with their conversation, it floated him away from the nightmare of his exams. He lost himself in the slow caress of tongue against tongue, allowing Negan’s to slip between the seam of his lips.

The distraction worked, all he could think about now was the feel of Negan against him, the way his hand covered half his neck, thumb smoothing over his jaw, the way the other tangled in his hair lightly tugging to shift Carl’s face to where he wanted it. He could tell Negan was holding back, taking his time drawing soft moans from him with lingering kisses, exploring every inch of his mouth with his tongue. His own hands found purchase against Negan’s chest, steadying himself against the torrent of need that was making him dizzy.
He just about managed to draw a quick breath as their lips split before Negan’s assaulted his again, this time with the voracity of a man starving, as if the kiss prior was a mere appetiser for what he really wanted. The onslaught had Carl clutching at broad shoulders, the lust that had slowly been burning in him sparked up into an insatiable need. He shifted himself back, pulling at his shoulders to tug the man on top of him, wrapping his arms and legs around him to lock them together.

Negan didn’t leave an inch of space between them, chests flush against one another, heat burning through the shirts that cruelly kept their flesh apart. He briefly thought about pulling them off but the thought of abandoning the soft, warm lips, the wet heat of Carl’s mouth, was unthinkable, like depriving himself of the air he needed to live. So he settled for tugging Carl’s shirt up, lifting it as high as he could so he could explore the exquisite skin beneath.

Carl shuddered under him, his own hands delving under white cotton to find the tanned skin underneath, wiry hair prickled at his fingers reminding Carl of how it felt against his own chest, scratching against him deliciously when he fucked him. He loved seeing it covered in his come, loved tasting the salty liquid on his skin. It was decadent, a filthy pleasure that had Carl growing even harder at the thought, his cock getting heavier between his legs, pressing up hard against the dip of Negan’s hip.

Negan twirled their fingers together, interlocking them above Carl’s head. He broke away from his lips, taking his time looking over the body beneath him. He’d positioned the teen’s arms to display his body perfectly, chest arching slightly to relieve the pressure on his shoulders. Self-satisfaction rolled through him at the sight of that gorgeous pink flush that spread over Carl’s face, dripping down his neck to dip underneath where his shirt had bunched up, it spread over his chest framing his nipples in a way that was too enthralling to resist.

His lips toyed with one bud, kissing it tenderly, teasing it to hardness with soft, incessant licks that had Carl mewling under him. He was unrelenting in his assault, sharp teeth nipping at each bud, alternating between the two, driving one to the point of over-sensitivity before he slipped over to lavish the other with the same attention. Each suck had Carl rolling his hips up against him, he could feel his cock leaking against his jeans, yearning for a release that wouldn’t come.

He yanked at Negan’s head, forcing his lips back up to his. They met with a ferocity, thirsty for another taste of each other, devouring the other with a ravenous hunger Negan’s own thick hardness pressed against his stomach, hips rocking into the soft flesh there. It filled Carl with a yearning, body aching to have him back inside of him, it had been far too long.

“Mmm, bed. Now.” Negan ordered against his lips, tearing away to stand in front of Carl, his restraint was falling fast.

“Thought it was a fantasy of yours to screw on the couch?” Carl panted, body not quite convinced the move to the bed was worth the delay in getting Negan inside of him. “Something about me riding your dick here?” The noise that came from Negan at that was borderline animalistic and did nothing to quell the lust raging in him. He bit his lip, leaning back down hoping to tempted Negan back on top of him.

“Fuckin’ tease.” Negan rasped out, as tempted as he was by the damn evil tactics he’d left the lube upstairs and there was no way in hell that he was doin’ anything without that. Sensing that Carl wasn’t gonna move himself he reached down and grabbed the teen, hoisting him up and over his shoulder. The sputtering protests had him laughing as he headed towards the staircase.

“Seriously? Are you a caveman or what?” Carl blurted out, trying to keep steady as he was jostled around.
“I like to think I’m a bit more well-groomed than a fucking caveman.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure of that.” Carl retorted, eyes widening when his comment earned him a sharp slap on ass. The burn resonated through his body, he was shocked by the thrill the smack sparked inside of him, lust flaring as the not-entirely unpleasurable pain faded away. He really was warped in the head. Why on earth would he enjoy something like that? Then again Negan wouldn’t have done it if he didn’t enjoy doing it and he had said before that people enjoyed that sort of thing. Surely he wouldn’t though, not after everything. When Shane had hit him it made him feel nothing but the fear and pain, it definitely didn’t make him want to beg for more like Negan had. Just one simple spank had him harder than he’d been in his life, had him craving more of that burn.

Unaware of the turmoil fluttering through the teen, Negan replied. “Don’t be rude.”

Carl was still arguing with himself when he was tossed onto the bed, the sudden drop forced his mind back to the present. His thoughts disappeared as watched Negan strip himself at the edge of the bed, dick twitching as more tanned skin was revealed. He licked his lips at the sight of his muscular body, eyes following the man’s hand as he unbuckled his belt. A brief thought of removing his own clothes disappeared as quickly as it came, mind going blank at the magnificent sight before him. He was like a piece of art, sculpted muscles on his arms, black curls covered his chest, trailing down to the hard cock that stood thick and proud between his thighs.

Negan’s cocky grin only exacerbated the hunger inside him, eyes catching on the hand that wrapped itself around the hardness that Carl coveted so badly. He was envious as he watched it stroke up and down the hard flesh, mesmerised by the droplets of pre-cum that appeared at the head. He didn’t notice the other hand wrap around his own ankle, only realising when he was suddenly tugged down the bed, bringing him closer to the man. His jeans were pulled open before being yanked down his legs, the sudden cold on his legs spurred him back into action. He quickly pulled his shirt over his head, arms reaching out to welcome Negan back on top of him.

He let him slip between his thighs, meeting his lips in a languid kiss, letting their tongues twirl around each other slowly. Negan’s mouth diverted down to his neck, eliciting decadent moans from Carl’s kiss-swollen lips at each harsh suck, each gentle nip. His hips twitched involuntarily as Carl tugged at his hair, pulling the strands to direct his head towards his collar.

“What do you want?” Negan’s voice was hot against his cheek, mouth working its way along Carl’s jaw to hover over his lips. The man’s eyes flooded with a daring glint, he wasn’t going to give in that easily.

“You, always you.”

“How do you want me?” His hands dug into Carl’s hips, stopping the undulations against his.

“Negan...” Carl pleaded, just what did the man want from him? He was already starved for any touch and he’d already made it very clear exactly what he wanted.

Negan’s lips covered his again, teeth nipping at his lower lip, suckling on it softly when he was finished. “Tell me Carl, tell me what you need and I’ll give it to you.”

Carl flushed, stomach twinging with something that wasn’t totally embarrassment. “I-I want you to touch me.”

“Where?” The question came quickly.

“You know where.” Carl replied, hips trying to wriggle out of the tight hold on them. He was so
hard, so aching for any kind of friction between his legs. “Please Negan.”

The begging nearly did him in. Nearly. He wanted Carl to admit it, wanted him to own his own pleasure, let him take control as he had done when he’d accosted Negan in the gym. “Tell.” He tugged Carl’s lower lip. “Me.”

Carl’s eyes flickered up to Negan’s, wavering under the fierce gaze, he felt himself flush. He broke when Negan allowed his body to dip slightly, offering the briefest pressure between his legs. “M-my cock, please Negan.”

A pleasurable victory danced through Negan, he rewarded Carl with a harsh kiss, grinding a bit harder between those gorgeous thighs. “Good boy.” He shifted his weight, one arm propping him up next to Carl’s head, the other wrapping around the hardness that had been pressing against his hip.

The praise had Carl tingling harder than the contact on his cock, he shuddered under the deliberately slow strokes, eyes closing to bask in the pleasure.

“Is this enough?” Negan teased, he wanted to see how far he could push this.

“No.” Carl murmured, “Faster, please.”

Negan did as told, moving his hand faster on the flesh, curving over the head to collect the moisture gathering there, using it to smooth the friction. “Better?”

“Yes, yes, god yes.” Carl rocked his hips faster, fucking himself into the tight grip.

“Is this how you wanna come?” Negan asked, watching the pleasure contort Carl’s face. “With my hand around your cock?”

“No, n-oh.” The hand tightened, drawing out a sharp gasp of pleasure.

“Then how?”

“I wan…” He could hardly speak, his mouth dry from the heavy breaths, the pleasure soaring through his body driving him crazy. It’s so good, as always, just the feel of his hand against him drove him closer to the edge.

“C’mon baby, tell me.” His teeth nipped at Carl’s earlobe, his own breath coming faster at the sight of the teen writhing so beautifully underneath him. He’d never get over the sight, no fantasy could ever match up to the glorious image.

He dragged Negan’s head back to meet his eyes, flashing dangerously in a warning to stop the teasing. “Fuck me.” He spoke out between clenched teeth before arching up to take Negan’s lips again. A pleased sound rumbled through Negan, he kissed him harder, wanting to erase the smugness, wanting to make him as desperate for him as he was.

It took more strength that he thought he had to pull away from Carl, reaching up to grab the lube he kept in his side table, fumbling several times as Carl lavished wet kisses along the side draped over him, nipping lower to drag his tongue over his hip bone. He almost shouted in victory when he finally grasped the small bottle, shifting his weight back to kneel between Carl’s legs. Squeezing a generous amount of the cool liquid onto his hand, he chucked the bottle to the side, using the same hand to firmly grasp a slender thigh, hiking it up to expose the tight hole nestled under full balls.

The flush on Carl’s chest darkened to a passionate red, matching the shade of his abused nipples. He wanted nothing more than to hide away from the penetrating stare, Negan’s hungry eyes fixating
between his legs. He flinched away from the cold lube when it hit his overheated skin, he closed his eyes when one wet finger probed his hole, teasing around the edge before easing inside. Air rushed into his empty lungs and for a moment Carl thought that it was all gonna be over in a matter of seconds when Negan dragged said finger over that spot inside of him that made him see stars. A embarrassingly high-pitched whine left his mouth when he did it again, hips grinding down hard trying to force that finger back into place. He was bereft when the digit left him, only consoled by Negan’s hushing and the soft lips that met his again.

The second Negan’s tongue plundered inside his welcoming mouth, two fingers found their way between his cheeks, pushing inside with the same veracity as his tongue. Carl cried out at the sudden stretch, breathing hard at the pleasurable burn from his muscles.

“You alright?” Negan asked.

“Yes, yes, don’t stop.” Carl moaned back. It felt too good, the burning mingling with the addictive pleasure of having Negan back inside him. The fingers scissored again, getting him ready to take what he’d been begging for.

“You want more darlin’?” Negan teased a third finger around the rim.

“Mmmm, please, more.” He begged, gasping when he got what he asked for. Three fingers worked their way inside of him, spreading the wetness. He tugged at Negan’s hair, drawing him down to his neck, wanting to feel that hot mouth on his skin once more. He knows he’s babbling at him, vague mumbles of yesyes god Negan yes, fuck me, fuck me, fuck me spill from his lips over and over again. It impossible to imagine anyone else driving him this crazy, making him feel so many things at once.

“Orr…” Negan dragged out, licking a long line from his clavicle to his chin, nipping at the skin there. “…did you want something else.” He pointedly pressed his hips against ass, dick pressing hard against him.

“Yesyeyesyes.” Carl moaned at him, clutching at his shoulders, nails digging in wherever they could reach, hips canting up to grind against Negan’s abs. “I’m ready, so ready, please.”

“Please what?” He couldn’t help himself, he loved how utterly wrecked Carl was, loved hearing his desperate pleas for more.

There was no hesitation this time just a quick, needy, “Please fuck me.”

A possessive growl left Negan, he sat up, fingers leaving the warm body below him. Carl’s bereft wail nearly had him sliding straight inside him. He had to take a deep breath, jaw clenching, as he tried to control his impulses. He quickly grabbed the lube again, pouring a more than generous amount over himself, slicking his dick with the wetness, his eyes nearly rolled back at finally getting some friction on his dick. He’d been so good, trying to make it all about Carl he’d almost forgotten about his own raging need.

Carl couldn’t look away, watching the hand strip his cock, it was obscenely wet, the head a darker red than the rest of him. He licked his lips, mouth watering as he remembered how it felt in his mouth, so hard and delicious. It had barely fit, only the pleasurable buzz from Negan’s reaction encouraged him to fit more in his mouth. He couldn’t wait to do it again, he started sitting up so he could wrap his lips around the lenght but Negan quickly pushed him back. His wet hand immediately slipped back between his legs, spreading the liquid inside of him, making a sopping wet mess of him as he quickly dipped his fingers back inside.

They left him as quickly as they came, he felt Negan shift himself before a bigger pressure appeared
at his hole. His eyes flickered open, gazing into Negan’s lust-blown pupils, their breathing was almost in-sync, both panting hard. Negan’s brow cocked up, tilting his head in a silent appeal for consent. Carl quickly nodded, hands slipping on sweat-slicked biceps as he dragged his arms up to Negan’s neck, pulling him closer as the man slipped inside of him.

Negan went insufferably slow, hips shifting in small circles to work his way inside Carl. It was insufferable, as much as he appreciated the care the man took, Carl just wanted him inside him, wanted to feel every thick inch fill him. He shifted, a desperate moan escaping his lips, trying to appeal to the man to move faster.

Negan hushed him, “Easy, I’m not rushing this.”

Carl pouted, hands slipping down his back to clutch his ass, squeezing the firm flesh in his palms. He held it firm, rocking his own hips up to push him inside that little bit faster.

“You little fuckin-oh”

This time Carl smirked when his actions inspired the man to shove more inside of him, before a hard moan was forced out of him as he was finally filled.

“That better for you darlin’?” Negan questioned, panting heavily as he tried to control the urge to just pound into the wet heat.

“Fuck yeah, finally.” Carl replied, satisfied that he’d finally gotten his way.

“Can’t help that you’re so desperate for my cock.”

Carl moaned at his words, he was such a bastard tormenting him. “Then you better give it to me.” A weak attempt at a come back but it was all his mind could think up.

Negan smirked down at him, eyes glinting at the challenge. “Don’t worry you’ll fuckin’ get it.” With that he withdrew from the tight heat, body bemoaning the loss of heat before shoving himself back inside.

Each hard thrust drew fervent moans from the teen, the ridges of Negan’s cock dragging against his hole brought an indescribable pleasure. His legs spread wider, desperate to take more inside of him, he’d never get enough of him. Every inch inside of him felt right, like it was filling a void that he didn’t realise existed. He clutched frantically at Negan, holding on as the pace increased, the man fucking him harder than they’d done before. He felt as if his world was shattering around him, the world fell away until all that was left was the pair of them in this bed.

Negan’s lips teased over his own, breath puffing hard against his lips, their foreheads pressed together, eyes locking. “Christ Carl.” His eyes squeezed shut, pleasure rolling through him with each deep plunge into the tight hole. He shifted his head to bury in the crook of Carl’s neck, fucking harder into him, each feverish moan drove him on. “You’re so fuckin’ tight. I love you, fuckin’ love you.” His own mumblings were halted by groans but he couldn’t stop, he wanted Carl to know how good he felt, how perfect he was.

“Fuck, fuck fuck.” Carl moaned, the teeth biting at his neck doing nothing to quell the heat building inside him, his balls tightening as he was thrust towards his climax. He scratched his way down Negan’s back, digging them in deep against the smooth flesh of his ass. He used his grip to push his hips harder against his, encouraging the punishing thrusts that made his body soar with pleasure. “God, Negan, I’m gonna come.”

“That’s it baby.” Negan’s thrust turned rougher, pounding all the harder into Carl, spurring him on.
He knew he wasn't gonna last much long not with the way Carl's body was squeezing his dick. “C’mon darlin’ come for me.”

Carl tugged his lips back to his own, smashing them together as his climax roared through him. He moaned desperately into his lips, body squeezing a tight grip on the hardness still thrusting inside of him. He came harder than he’d ever done, mind lost in the pleasure that only increased when he felt the other man tense, deep groans vibrated against his lips as he filled him with his own release.

He wrapped an arm over Negan’s shoulders as the man recovered, heavy breaths puffed against his sticky neck, tangling a hand into his hair. He basked in the glow, the sheer contentment of being so surrounded by the man he loved. “Love you.” He rasped, throat too dry to talk normally.

A muffled reply came into his shoulder, he felt hot kisses press against him before Negan slowly pulled out. Just about shifting his weight from Carl to flop against the teen’s shoulder, keeping his face buried in the crook of his neck.

“Ugh, why’s it so messy?” Carl mumbled, shifting uncomfortably as he felt come leave him.

Negan chuckled in reply, murmuring against Carl’s neck, “All the best things in life are messy.”

“Easy for you to say,” Carl retorted, “you don’t have a gallon of come dripping out of you.”

“So overdramatic.”

“Shut it.” Carl said, slipping out from Negan’s arms, grimacing as the sticky fluid trailed down his thighs. “I’m gonna go wash up.”

“Want some company?” Negan asked, burying his face into the pillow Carl had just left.

Carl rolled his eyes, as if it wasn’t completely obvious that he was gonna fall asleep within two seconds. He let him off the hook. “Nah, you sleep, I’ll be back in a sec.”

“Mm’kay,” came Negan’s sleepy response.

Carl gazed at him adoringly for a moment before another trail down his leg had him racing into the shower.

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The hard thud of something hard and boney hitting his chest woke him up, it dug into his pecs, sharp and painful. His eyes burst open, arms instinctively reaching out to grab whatever was hurting him, his hands encircled something, arms? He fought the sleep out of his brain, trying to figure out what was going on in the dark room. Carl? The moans reached his ears second, desperate, distressing cries emanated from the figure next to him. “Nonono, leave me alone, please.”

Negan pushed himself away reaching out to flick the light on, his eyes landed on Carl in the bed, pale as a ghost, sweat glistened on his face which was twisted in as if in pure agony. He shuffled closer, arms reaching out to wake him, the second his fingertips touched him Carl lashed out again, hands hitting out at Negan’s arms, pushing him back. Negan grabbed at them, hating himself for the tight grip, he had to stop him from hurting himself. “Carl…” He tried.

“No, LET ME GO.” Carl shouted at him, hitting out as much as he could. He had to get away, he couldn’t do this, not again.

“CARL.” Negan shook him hard.
His shout broke through, Carl stopped, frozen in the moment. His eyes, wet with tears, finally looked at Negan, recognition filling them. “Oh,” was all the teen could say before he pulled himself free of Negan’s grip. He threw himself out of bed, walking fast into the bathroom. He walked straight to the basin, the ice cold water stung at his face as he splashed it over himself. It was a welcome wake-up from the nightmare that had gripped him that evening.

“I thought you said it was nothing?” He confronted Carl in the bathroom.

Carl looked at him in the reflection of the mirror above the basin, still panting hard as he tried to calm his racing heart. He didn’t want to do this right now, all he wanted was to stop the images from seeping back into his mind. “It is nothing.”

Negan scoffed at that. “Bull-fucking-shit Carl, that wasn’t nothing. How long has this been going on for?”

He didn’t want to lie to him just as much as he didn’t want to admit that the nightmares still tormented him most nights. He’d been lucky so far, Rick had been out working nights a lot recently so he hadn’t had to deal with his Father’s concerns, and until this point he’d only ever slept peacefully when beside Negan.

“Carl?” Negan prompted again.

“Awhile.” He begrudgingly admitted. “But it’s nothing, just a nightmare.”

“A nightmare? Carl, you were freaking out there.”

“It’s fine, don’t worry about it.” Carl pleaded. “C’mon let’s go back to bed.” He approached Negan, offering his hand with a hopeful smile.

“No way, not until you tell me the truth.”

His hand dropped, defeated. “I haven’t lied to you. It’s been going on awhile, but it’s nothing, just a few nightmares here and there.”

“Why didn’t you tell me earlier? We could’ve talked about it?”

“Talked about what?” Carl could feel the anger building in him, the man was all about talking. Didn’t he understand there were some things that he couldn’t talk about. Some things that pained him so much that he just wanted them buried. “About the guy that used to rape me? All the horrible, degrading things he used to make me do? About the fact that I can’t escape seeing it all over again every damn night? Is that what you wanna talk about?”

“Maybe it would he-”

“Help? How on earth would it help?”

“I don’t know Carl.” Negan was shouting back at this point. “I don’t know what the fuck I’m doing here, I’m just trying to help.”

“Well talking about it isn’t going to help.”

“How would you know we never talk about it.”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“It’s not always about what you want Carl.”
“You don’t need to remind me of that.” Carl pointed out.

“Car-”

“I’m gonna go sleep on the couch.” Carl interrupted, the angry tension crackled between them. He was done with this discussion.

“Carl-”

“No, can we not do this now? I’m exhausted, I just wanna sleep.” He was practically begging by the last words. His body ached as much as his mind did, he needed to just sleep.

“Fine, we’ll talk in the morning.”

Carl nodded, stepping past the man to head back down the stairs. The couch didn’t bring him the usual comfort that night, he fell into an uneasy sleep thinking of the man sleeping above him, hoping the nightmares would stay away for a few hours.

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He left before Negan was awoke, leaving a small note on the kitchen counter to let him know that he’d left. It was cowardly, he should’ve stayed and talked things through but he just couldn’t, not right now, not with all the other shit going on.

Stepping out of the car, he heard the sounds of arguing before he’d even reached the front door. A familiar sound that he’d been so sure that he’d never hear again after his Mother’s departure from the house. How wrong he’d been. He unlocked the door, readying himself to play mediator in this argument, stopping short when he caught sight of his Mother.

Shock couldn’t quite cover how he felt in the moment, there the world went again, shifting out from under his feet leaving him falling into the abyss. He blinked, eyes trying to focus on exactly what he was seeing. His mouth flopped open uselessly. “Y-you… uh… you’re…” Words just wouldn’t come. His mind racing at a thousand miles an hour yet unable to formulate any kind of thought that would help him.

“Carl…” Lori spoke.

His eyes flicked over to his Father, resolutely turned away from the pair of them, hand covering his face like he always did when he was deep in thought. It usually happened when Carl had something that had pissed him off and confused him simultaneously. At least he could rule out his Dad knowing, he was clearly as stumped as he was. He returned his gaze to his Mom, eyes drawn down to the bump that hadn’t been there last time he’d seen her, or had it? Had he missed it? How far along was she? “W-what… how...who…” the questions fell as quickly as they came. The room filled with an tense silence, the clock ticking away in the background.

“I’m about 6 months along,” Lori broke the silence, eyes darting to the ground as a protective hand rested on her swollen belly. “That vacation on New Years…”

New Years… he slammed his eyes shut on the memory of what he’d been doing during that vacation.

“So it’s mine?” Rick questioned, even Carl could hear the anger littered in his voice.

“Yes.” Lori replied. “There’s not been anyone else, not recently.”
Carl flinched at the guilty look she sent his way, stomach churning harder with each second. He didn’t need all these reminders. He was tired, he wanted his bed, he wanted to curl up and forget the last 24 hours. He wanted to be back in that hotel room, in Negan’s arms, wanted to feel that semblance of normality again. “I-this is just- I don’t…”

He backed away, stumbling out of the door to the familiar sound of his name echoing behind him.
Running from myself

Chapter Notes

Ooook, so some of you might have seen this when I uploaded it last week but I noticed a few errors so I took it down to deal with them. So here's the updated, slightly better version! I know I said this would be the penultimate chapter but there's actually one more (I promise!) then it'll be the final chapter. That should be up fairly soon. Can't believe we're nearly at the end!

Thank you so much for all the lovely comments and kudos, they keep me going!

“Love is supposed to be based on trust, and trust on love, it's something rare and beautiful when people can confide in each other without fearing what the other person will think.”

- E.A. Bucchianeri

He ran until he couldn’t. He could see the houses blur in his peripheral, a white stream of tile and plaster gushing past, the grey sidewalk rushed out from under his feet, pounding his soles hard with each step. Sweat was pouring off him, his shirt clung to his chest, his jeans chaffed painfully against his thighs. Twinges of pain from the previous night's activities stabbed at him but he kept running, one foot in front of the other, running and running until all he could think about was the ever-increasing needles jabbing at his lungs. It was only when he tripped and hit the floor that he stopped, panting hard on his hands and and knees, chest heaving under the strain of trying to drag air into his lungs. The dry, yellowing grass was painful under his scratched palms, clinging uncomfortably to his sweaty skin, it blurred under his gaze, marred with black spots that wouldn't leave his vision. His entire body ached, chest heaving under the strain of dragging air into his lungs, knees throbbing from the impact of hitting the floor so hard. He hadn’t run like that in so long, needles stabbed at his side, each breath digging them deeper. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. His palms clenched, gathering fistfuls of dirt and grass in them, jaw clenching as he tried to manage the roaring in his head.

This day was just fucking shit.

His Mom was pregnant. The cackle that burst out of him was unnatural, an assault on his own ears, violent in how it scraped up his throat, more than a drain on the lungs that were still so desperate for air. Of course the universe would come up with another reason to fuck him over. She was pregnant.

A baby would soon be making its way into a family torn apart by lies, and betrayal. It was a shock to think he’d soon be a brother. Fuck, he was going to be a brother. Poor child, he thought, what a shitty brother you’re gonna have.

“ You’d have been a great brother.” Negan’s rough voice floated in his head. He scoffed at that, he was gonna be terrible, what kind of brother can’t handle a fucking conversation? Twice now he’d run in the face of conflict, too cowardly to deal with reality.
His palm thumped down on the dirt, a guttural cry leaving his throat. How did it even get to this? It was like his brain froze, his body taking over, the primitive instinct to fight or fly decided by something that was so out of sync with what he truly desired. The irony didn’t escape him. How his body was so quick to flee on occasions when he should stay, yet times when all he wanted to do was run his body froze up, leaving him a docile doll for the very thing he wanted to run from. He thought things were getting better, thought he was getting better, his brain and body finally starting to reconnect, the wires melding together after being severed for so long.

Clearly not.

The tremble in his arms told him to move, the ground shaking underneath his gaze, muscles too weak, too abused to hold even his slight weight up. He fell back onto his knees, squinting under the harsh glare of the sun at his surroundings. The large rusted swing set told him all he needed to know, he’d recognise it anywhere, it was from the old park he used to play in as a child. Right on the outskirts of town, miles away from his own house, but it was fairly close to Enid’s place, not too far from his Dad’s work so they could meet him for lunch. The perfect place to take him when his Mom wanted a break from chasing after him, he always had friends there. The place was a wreck now, Carl remembered it to be a hustling place when he was a kid, there was always someone around, always children playing there, waiting for the ice cream truck to show up in the winter. The familiar jingle sparking almost identical pleas for ice cream from all the children. It was a nice place, it almost hurt to see it so abandoned, so wrecked, destroyed from years of neglect.

He supposed he could relate to that on some level.

He gave a weighted sigh, considering his options. He could go home? Go back and face the music, sit down with his parents and discuss what they’re were gonna do, how they could move on as a family. The incessant buzzing from his pocket was most likely his Dad trying to figure out where he was, he was probably worried sick about him. He knew he couldn’t go back there, not right now, he needed to process it on his own, without worrying about what his parents thought. Most of all he needed some space, some time away from the drama. Maybe that was the problem, other than his trip to Seattle, he hadn’t had a chance to be away from things, to give himself time to heal. All it’d take was something that reminded him of Shane and it was like tearing a scab off a healing wound, never to fully heal over with the constant scratching. Even with Negan he pushed himself too hard at times, trying to give the man a normal relationship, trying to keep up with his own raging hormones that wanted him to jump the man every second he got regardless of his more rational side that told him to slow down. Not that he regretted a single second of it, but maybe he could’ve spent more time talking with the man, letting him in when things got rough instead of glossing over it. It was easy to see that he’d taken the good parts of the relationship without a thought for the bad. Looking back on the last few weeks he could see all the places he fucked up, the times when he should’ve stood his ground and fight his own corner. God, only two weeks ago he let Negan break up with him, did nothing to stop it, hardly fought for them, thought so little of his own opinion to actually speak it.

Negan deserved better than that. It was a show of his immaturity that he couldn’t handle a simple conversation, that he hadn’t had the courage to talk with him about things that were bothering him. He most definitely didn’t deserve to have Carl running out on him like that when he was only trying to help. His stomach sunk the more he thought about it. That conversation from the previous night haunted his thoughts, the man had seemed so hurt, so angry with him. He deserved the anger, more than deserved it after his actions this morning. He rubbed at his face, if he could go back he wouldn’t have left, he would’ve stayed, talked it out with him, let him in for a change.

His phone buzzed once more, with a heavy sigh he took it out his pocket, ‘20 missed calls’, glared back at him, accusatory, all from his Dad. None from Negan he noted, maybe he wasn’t up yet? More likely he was either too pissed to even try and talk to Carl or he was being his usual decent self.
and giving Carl time to sort his head out. *Fuckin’ asshole,* it would be easier if Negan yelled at him, if he gave him a single reason to distrust him, not to confide in him. *Something* that would make him feel justified in his reluctance to talk with him. No matter how much he thought on it he couldn’t, every single time he’d faced his fears and confided in Negan, the man had stepped up, supported him, gave him his love and his strength in the face of everything. A heavy wave of guilt swarmed him, *he* was the fucking asshole not Negan.

He unlocked his phone, fumbling a quick message to his Dad to let him know he was alright, that he should talk to his Mom on his own. It felt like abandonment even to him, but it was his kid, there was so much they had to talk about without adding Carl to the mix. Almost on instinct he flicked through his contacts, heart contracting when he landed on Negan’s name, the number he knew better than his own staring up at him. His thumb hovered over it as it’s owner debated whether to call him. For the first time in months he wasn’t sure if the man would answer, he wondered if maybe he pushed it too far this time. After all there’s only so much back and forth a person can take, he gnawed at his lips, thumb waving back and forth before it flicked the number away, scrolling up again. Blue eyes caught on a certain name, *Enid N,* a number that he’d never used, not recently anyways. His thumb hovered over his phone once more, she had mentioned wanting to hang out before, maybe he could call her, give him something to occupy himself for a few minutes that didn’t involve his recent fuck up.

He inhaled sharply, summoning up a little courage before pressing the call button, bringing the phone up to his ear just as it started to ring. It only took two more rings for him to consider hanging up, one more for Enid to pick up, her light, lofty voice greeting him down the phone. “Hey Carl, didn’t think I’d hear from you.”

“Hey, Enid, yeah, just thought I’d give you a call, if you’re not busy or something?” He hadn’t even thought about that, he was an idiot, she was probably busy having breakfast at least, and it was the weekend, she probably had plans.

“No, no, I’m good to talk, it’s nice hearing from you. What’s up?”

“Uh, not much. I’m just hangin’ out, in that park y’know? The one we used to play in as kids?”

“Oh my god, I haven’t thought about that place in *years.*” She giggled down the line. “God, that takes me back, I loved that place.”

“Yeah, it’s pretty awful now.” He surveyed his surroundings again, even with the beautiful sun illuminating a golden glow on the park, it still looked… sad.

“Mmm, they stopped using it when drug dealers started selling there, parents got freaked out.”

“Oh.” When had *that* happened? Was he really that out of the loop? Not surprising, he had other things on his mind in the last few years.

“Yeah, sooo what are you doing out there? Random place to be.”

He was glad they were on the phone so she wouldn’t see the blush on his face. “My parents, they-uh, they had a fight at home. I didn’t really wanna be around that so I ran out here.”

“You ran?!” She exclaimed. “Carl you live miles away! That’s crazy.”

“Not my best idea.” He admitted.

“So you’re there on your own?”
He looked around again, not a person or animal in sight. “Yep.”

“Oh god, I’ll come over.”

“No, no, I can’t ask you to do that.” He hadn’t intended on dragging her out of her home.

“It’s fine, you’re not asking, I’m telling. It’ll be fun to hang out, and I’ve got just the thing to keep us entertained.”

That sounded ominous. “What’re you thinking?”

“Ah, ah, just wait and see.” She teased. “I’ll be there in 20, don’t go anywhere.”

The phone clicked off, leaving him to wait. He took the opportunity to sort himself out, the sweat was still dripping down his face, coating his skin, stinging at his eyes. He still hadn't made it off the ground, his knees now screaming under the pressure on the sore flesh. With a grimace he pulled himself off the grass, bones creaking on his way up. He almost stumbled again, his body stiff from remaining in the same position for so long. He slipped off the shirt he wore over his top, using it to pat the sweat off his face, before tossing it into an abandoned trash can. The old, weary metal crashed to the floor at the impact, clattering loudly in the air, echoing through the park, harmonising with the eerie creak of the old swings swaying in the summer breeze.

At least the picnic tables were in a decent state, only the vulgar graffiti littering the dark wood hinting that they hadn’t been used in some time. The wood creaked under his weight, nonetheless it held when he sprawled himself over the top, letting his feet swing under the edge. He stared up at the sea-blue sky, not a single cloud was in sight that day, the summer heat blazed down on him, licking his pale skin with a light burn. All turned quiet the longer he laid there, the breeze in the air disappearing as the day wore on, it was the first bit of peace that he’d had in so long. Pure silence, both inside and out. It was everything he needed, peace inside his head, no thoughts, no feelings, just his heartbeat in his ears, his breath in his lungs. It was all he longed for, he simply wanted to feel his heart beat in his chest without the ache, he wanted the heavy weight in his body to evaporate, he wanted to walk with an effortless ease, never hindered by memories that wanted to overwhelm every muscle in his body. He wanted to feel what he felt in Seattle again, the sheer joy, the freedom of being who he was, the freedom to love who he wanted to love, not being the outcast, abused teen who was in a secret relationship with his school coach. Soon, he thought to himself, he’d be back there soon enough, there was a light at the end of the tunnel. He just hoped he had Negan to see it through with him.

“You gonna lie there all day?”

He shot up at the voice, heart leaping out of his chest, he puffed a breath of relief when he saw who it was. “Shit, sorry Enid, I didn’t hear you coming.”

“Obviously.” Her laughter echoed in the park, so reminiscent of the children’s laughter that surrounded the area. It didn’t help with the nostalgic yearning inside of him. Her laughter hadn’t changed since they were kids, he still remembered it as clearly, she was always laughing, a light infectious laugh that still brought a smile to his face. "You alright?"

"Yeah, yeah, just enjoying the sun."

She turned her face, the glow from the sun illuminating her delicate features, an effortless beauty. "I don't blame you, it's gorgeous. You might even get a tan." She teased.

"What? On this pale face?"

"Maybe not, haha." She looked around, surveying the place with the same nostalgic look that
wouldn't be out of place on someone three times her age. "God, it's wrecked here isn't it? So sad, we used to have so much fun here."

"Yeah." He stood to stand by her, looking out at the place that had brought them so much joy as children, a stream of memories flowing through his head like reels of an old movie. Friends that had come and gone in the years, children that had grown into teenagers on the brink of adulthood. Many of whom would soon be leaving this town forever, present company included. An end of an era for him, the thought tugged at his chest, as happy as he'd be to leave the place he did have some happy memories here. It was a reminder of a life that he often forgot he had, the happy childhood that his parents had worked so hard to craft for him. In that moment he made a promise, to the sweet unborn child that he'd soon call his sibling, that he'd make sure they had the same. That their childhood would be filled with the same joys that he had, and that they'd never feel the cold sting of abandonment that he endured, that they would always feel that someone out there loved them. Most importantly, he made a promise to ensure that they'd never go through the same pain he went through, he'd kill anyone that would dare hurt them. He'd live up to Negan's expectation, that child would never want for anything, that they would always be protected.

A shoulder nudged at him. "Lost ya there for a minute."

"Yeah, sorry, got lost in thought."

She gave a soft laugh at that. "It's fine, I'm used to it with you."

He blushed at that, was he really that obvious. "Didn't realise it happened that much."

"You've always been a dreamer, always lost in another world. I always used to wonder where your brain would go off to."

"Nowhere interesting."

"I bet that's a lie." She said, with a pensive look on her face. "C'mon, let's get outta this sun, I don't know about you but I'm about to burst into flames."

He followed her along, slipping in step with her. "It's not that bad."

"Pft, with your pale skin you'll be a tomato in minutes. Anyway, what I've got planned is best done with a little more privacy." She patted the bag resting on her hip.

"Just what have you got planned."

"Just a bit of fun, bit on something to help us unwind before all those finals."

She hushed his next question, leading the way to the woods that decorated the back of the park. The air was immediately cooler as they stepped under the protection of the thick, bushy trees. Birds flew from their nests as they walked, twigs snapping under their sneakers as they moved deeper, winding around trees that stood in their way. He stopped when Enid did, sinking to the floor to join her at the base of a tree, leaning back against the thick trunk. "So what d'you have that's gonna relax me."

"This." She proclaimed, whipping out a glass bottle, filled to the top with a clear liquid.

His eyes widened when he realised what it was. Alcohol? How the hell did she get her hands on alcohol? "Just what is that?"

"Vodka." She revealed with a proud smile on her face. "Snagged it from my parent's cabinet, they're out this weekend so I thought I'd make the most of it."
"Wow, that's wow." The sensible Sheriff's son in him told him to walk away before he did anything stupid, the rebellious teenager in him told him to grab the bottle and start chugging away. 

"Yep. Just what we need I think. It'll definitely help with that mood of yours."

"What makes you think I'm in a mood?" He asked, was he really that transparent?

"Your parents just had a fight and you stormed out. Of course you're in a mood. Wanna go first?" She offered the bottle out to him.

He looked at it for a moment, flicking between the offending liquid and her earnest face. It was against everything he'd been taught, and he knew first hand the negative effects of drinking, he'd been on the receiving end of it far too many times. Yet he found himself reaching for the bottle, throwing caution to the wind as he took a swig. The burning took him by surprise, forcing a choking cough out of him, sputtering as the bitter taste took hold of his mouth. "Oh my god."

“You like?” She asked, taking a swig of her own. Clearly she’d had more practice than he had, taking the mouthful with a little more than a grimace on her face. 

“Yeah, yeah I do.” The burn quickly faded to a nice warmth that, with deep regret, was disappearing far too quickly. He grabbed the bottle from her, not bothering to wipe the neck before taking another large swig. God knows he could do with a bit of a de-stress.

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“I’m just a fucking idiot.” He slurred, slurring? He wasn’t that drunk...was he?

“Guys are just fucking pricks tha’s the problem.” Enid clearly was, she was slumped against him, arms waving frantically to make her point. “You guys need to be better.”

“I kno’ I kno’, I just don’t know how. How do I stop running from anything?”

"I dunno, get some glue on your shoes?" She suggested. "Why d'you run?

"Pft, I dunno. It's like, like, y'know, when your body does a thing but your brain is like nooo. S'like that."

"Oooh, I get it. So you need to get your body to do the thing your brain wants?"

"Yes! Tha's it."

"Tha's hard. Really hard."

"I know, and they're gonna leave me cos I can't fucking talk."

"Yep, I left Ron cos he didn't wanna talk, just wanted to screw around."

"He didn't?" A more sensible part of him wasn't surprised, he always seemed like a bit of a fuckboy to him.

"Yeah, he was an ass. Just to talk to her Carl, talk or she's gonna leave."

"I just don't wanna talk about it." He sulked, it was the last thing he wanted, drunk or not.

"Why not? Can' be that bad."
"It's bad, really bad."

"Wanna tell me about it?" She asked, "I probably won't remember"

She had a point there, God, he probably won't even remember telling her. "Nah, I've gotta tell her." He quickly corrected, even drunk he knew better that to say who he was dating. "I need to talk to them about it, they deserve it."

"Boo! Fine, but, c'mon, tell me something, I told you everythin' about Ron."

"Yeeah, but I already knew everything about Ron."

"You didn't know about the tongue thing."

His face scrunched up at that. "I didn't want to know about the tongue thing. I'm traumatised about it, gonna need therapy."

"Pft, I'm sure you'll live." She ruffled his hair with affection. "C'mon, tell me something then. S'all about the whole bonding shit."

His mouth turned into an 'O' he hadn’t realised that. Even his drink-addled mind knew better than to talk about Negan, and there was no way in hell he was tellin’ her about that fucker Shane. What could he talk about? “Oh oh, ok so my Mom is pregnant.”

She scrunched her face up. “So? That's nothing on my drunk Mother at dinner thing.”

“No buut her and my Dad are separated cos she cheated on him.”

Her mouth dropped. “What?! No wonder you had to get outta here.”

“Yeah.” He nodded, emphasising his point.

“Shit, is it your Dad’s?”

“She says it is but…” He did wonder if that was the case, a dark part of him wondered if there had been anything more with Shane and his Mother. Just because he was raping him every other day didn’t mean he wasn’t screwing other people and God knows they’d have enough opportunities to do it. Not that he’d ever ask her, he wouldn’t want to know, he’d never want to know.

“But, you'll always wonder?” She filled in, the playful atmosphere disappeared. Both sitting in contemplation for a moment. "Does it matter? If it's not his?"

"No." His answer came quick enough for him not to doubt it. It wouldn't matter, whether it was his Father's, Shane's, or any other guy in the world, they'd always be his family.

“Good, cos it doesn't matter. Family is family.” She spoke with such certainty that it made him wonder what she'd been through. "I'm sorry you have to deal with it though. Shitty timing too, right before finals, just before you leave for college. Can't be easy."

It really hadn’t been, on top of everything it had been a shit-show. “Thanks.”

She gave him a hug, arms flopping around him in a clinging grip. He shifted uncomfortably, suffocated by the curtain of brown hair that surrounded his face. It’s not that he didn’t appreciate the gesture but he wasn’t exactly the biggest fan of random acts of physical contact, not really. If she picked up on his discomfort she didn’t let it show, she just pulled away with a soft smile, leaving him surrounded with the smell of her flowery perfume.
“You deserve a bit of happy Carl.” She pushed the hair back from his face, the drunken glaze leaving her face for a minute. “Talk to your girl.” She urged. “Sort that shit out, cos the way you talk about her…” She shook her head with a wistful smile. “I wish some guy would talk about me like that.”

A strange impulse compelled him to reach out and grab her hand, squeezing. “Someone will.”

She gave a sad laugh. “Could’ve been you…” Her fingers curled around his, locking them together. “If things had been different, my parents were always saying you’d be the one to date.”

“My Dad always said the same.” His eyes fixed on their hands together, it just looked wrong, it felt wrong. Her hand was too small, tanned but not quite the golden brown that he loved. Her’s was too soft, too delicate for him to feel anything more than the urge to keep her safe.

“Could’ve been fun.” She stated simply.

He burst out laughing, the idea suddenly more ridiculous that ever. He and Enid? Even back then he knew they’d never work out, they were too similar, it would’ve been too boring to contemplate. It was probably the reason he never asked her out before, that kiss between them sparked nothing but feelings of disappointment, and inspired a disinterest in kissing all together. Fun? It would've been the total opposite and they both knew it.

“What?” She was laughing herself, the moment shattered into pieces.

“Just funny to think about it.” He choked out.

“Ooh, whatever.” She jokingly pushed him. “I’m too good for you anyways.”

“Suure you are, drunky.” He joked.

They both laughed at that, the screeching laughed echoed through the woods, scaring the birds out of the trees.

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“Mmpf, I should go.” She said, stumbling to her feet. The empty bottle rolled away from her lap, settling on the twigs. “I gotta get back before my parents get home, sober up a lil.”

“Yeaaah, I should get goin’ too.” He let her pull him up, nearly crashing them both back to the floor when he overstepped. "Ooop, sorry.”

She giggled again, helping him straighten up. "S'fine. How’re you getting home anyways? You live ages away.”

“Shit, I hadn’t thought about that.” Fuck, he was fucked, he couldn’t call his Dad he’d kill him if he knew he’d been drinking. “Um, don’t worry I can call someone.” He wasn’t sure who just yet but he’d figure it out, hell he’d rather run home and sober up than face his Father drunk.

“You sure? Want me to wait for them to turn up? Don't want you getting murdered by the dealers.” She teased.

“Yeah, you go, I’ll see you later.”

“M'kay, text me when you're safe.” She grabbed her bag, slinging it over her shoulder.

“See ya.”
He watched her disappear through the trees, fumbling to grab his phone from his pocket. There was only one person he could call, only one person he really wanted to talk to right now. He just hoped he wouldn’t be tooo pissed at him. It took him several minutes of stumbling through the trees to finally get a cell signal, he quickly pressed the call button before it disappeared, swaying with each ring.

“Neeegan!” He screeched down the phone, inhibited joy soaring through him at the sound of the gruff voice on the other end. "Oh my god, I’m so happy to hear your voice!"

“I wouldn’t have guessed by the way you stormed outta here this morning.”

Carl pouted, stupid man with his stupid buzz-ruining comments. “Stop ruining my buzz.” He whined in the mouthpiece. “S’not nice.”

“Buzz? What buzz? Jesus, Carl are you drunk?”

“Nope.” He giggled. “Maybe, s’little bit.”

“Why the fuck are you drunk?”

“Ummm, Enid had vodka, I think, might have been gin I dunno, can't remember, anyways, I’m alone in this park and there are dealers selling somethin’, Enid doesn’t know what, so I wondered if you could pick me up?”

“Why are you alone?”

“Enid had to go home, n’ I live too far away, and no one comes to this place but the drugs.”

“How did you get there if you live so far away?”

“I ran again, cos that’s all I do I just fuckin’ run and m’not even that good at it, I nearly died comin’ here and I’m such a fuck up Negan, an-”

“Okay, okay Carl, calm down, where's the park?”

He filled him in on the location, hoping it made some kind of sense to the man. “Okay?”

“Yeah, Jesus, Carl just don’t go anywhere, don’t go with anyone. Just stay put.”

“M’kay, I’m gonna sit by the road and wait.”

“Make sure you do.”

“Sitting and waiting.” He sang down the phone, pouting when it clicked off. So so rude, he’d have to teach him not to hang up on people.

He was just finishing up a message to Enid when the familiar car appeared, the passenger door popping open right in front of his face. His face broke out into an uncontrollable smile when he saw the driver. “Hi!iiii.”

Some of Negan's anger faded when he saw that smile, warmth spreading through him at the joy on Carl’s face. He wished he looked like that all the time, he wished the teen didn’t need alcohol to look that carefree. “Hi,” He said slowly. “You think you can get up?”

A look of pure puzzlement crossed his face, features scrunching up in a heavy thought. “Ummm, I think so.”
It was like watching fuckin’ Bambi take his first steps, several attempts were made before he actually made it to his feet, then a quick stumble had him practically falling into the passenger seat, landing with his face on Negan’s chest, arms not doing much to hold him up.

“Hi.” Carl repeated, stupid grin reappearing on his face. He loved looking at Negan, he was so pretty, and hot, and pretty, and God he wanted to crawl all over him.

Negan indulged him with another “hi” before rearranging him properly in his seat, buckling him in. “Christ, it’s a good thing no-ones around. Can’t even think of the trouble I’d be in having a illegally, drunk student in my car.”

“Better than a naked student.” Carl pointed out, drunken optimism coming out.

“Don’t get any ideas.” Negan warned, the last thing he needed was Carl stripping off.

"I'll be good, Scout's promise." He held his fingers up, was that right? It looked weird.

"Like you were ever a Scout." Negan scoffed, shoving the car into drive before setting off, it really wasn't the place to be hanging around.

“Yes I wa-whoaw, watch it you’re going so fast.” Carl eyes bugged out the window.

“I’m doing under 30...” Negan pointed out.

“So, so fast.” Carl was astonished at the trees fluttering past them, big, big green blurs. Amazing.

“Jesus Christ.” Negan mumbled under his breath. How much drink did he have? His hangover was gonna be fun. God, how the fuck was he gonna tell Rick that he had to pick up his drunk-ass kid from a druggie park?

“M’so glad you’re here.” Carl flung his face away from the distracting greenery to look at Negan. “I’ve missed you.”

“You saw me less than 12 hours ago.”

“Yeeah, but you were pissed with me. I don’t like it when you’re pissed with me.”

“Well I don’t like it when you run out of me." He snarked back, rolling his eyes at the pout he received in return, the damn pout. "Stop with the pouting.”

“M’sorry, I didn’t mean to run, my feet just do that stupid thing where they go and stuff. I don’t even know why, I tell them no but they go anyways”

Even out of the corner of his eye he could see the breathtakingly sad look on Carl's face, almost lost in himself. It put the surge of anger in check, now wasn't the time for being pissed, nor was it the time to talk out their shit. He placed what he hoped was a comforting hand on Carl's thigh. "Don't think about it, we'll talk later.”

“Yes, we will!” Carl exclaimed. “We’ll talk as much as you want, whatever you wanna talk about. Enid said talking is best, or you’ll leave me and then I’d be so sad. I'll even put glue on my feet so I don't move.”

Glue? Wait, hang on, did he say Enid? "You talked to Enid about us?”

“Yeah, but not you, she thinks you’re a girl from another school, don’t worry.” He wasn’t totally stupid.
His heart stopped pounding in his ears, God, that was fuckin’ close. “Riight, she say why it was a good idea to get so drunk?” It was a stupid question to ask, he’d been 18 once and God knows he’d been out drinking a helluva lot more than Carl did for a lot less of a reason.

“Dee-stressing she said.” Carl replied. “Oooh look we’re home.” He jostled in his seat, leaning forwards to get a better look.

The cabin came into view in front of them, just as he’d left it. A strange glow came over him at Carl calling it home, nothing felt more right. “Yep, home, sweet, home.”

He was first out of the car, Carl was still fumbling with his seat-belt by the time he made it to the passenger side. He snapped the door open. “You need some help with that?”

“No, I’m good, so good.” A few more minutes passed, his hand slapped out of the way when he tried to help, before a big victory yelp screeched in his ears. “I did it!”

Negan had to laugh at the sheer joy on his face, “You sure did Darlin’, I’m proud of you.”

He beamed up at Negan. “Thanks.”

The next challenge was getting him on his feet, each time he tried to leave the car, he’d fall back in, almost knocking himself out on the roof of the car. In the end Negan had to pull him out, supporting him with one arm under his shoulders, coercing him towards the front door. It was more of a struggle than he thought, Carl was a surprisingly strong drunk, stumbling this way and that, he nearly had them both on the floor when he suddenly exclaimed, arms flinging wide before using Negan as leverage to push himself away. Negan could only watch his little Bambi stumble over to his beloved bike, heart stopping when he draped himself over it. He wasn't quite sure what he was more worried about, Carl falling over and hurting himself or his beautiful bike falling over and getting scratched up.

“Ooh the biiikee.” Carl stroked over the handles caressing down to the seat. “I looove this bike.”

Negan walked over to collect him, trying to pull him away before he pushed it to the ground. Plucking Carl's hands away from the smooth leather seat, practically forcing him up and away from it. “So do I, and I'm not havin' you hurl all over it now, c'mon let's get indoors.”

Carl didn’t help him with that, clinging to his neck as they walked, feet only moving when they caught awkwardly on the ground. “Nooo I reaaally loove the bike.”

“I'm sure you do.” He rolled his eyes at his drunken dramatics.

“I used to think of you fuckin’ me on it allllll the time.”

His body stopped at that, pausing in an attempt to catch up with his racing mumbled. He fumbled with words that raced away from him in favor of the blissful images assaulting his brain. "W-wh-what was that?” Had he heard wrong? He knew Carl wasn't exactly a vanilla, missionary kinda guy, he’d definitely shown a liking towards the less than normal shit but he never thought he’d ever consider something like that.

“Oh yeah, all the time after I saw you on it. Espec...especially when you said about riding your dick that time? You remember?”

Negan nodded dumbly. "Mmm, all I could think of after that was riding your dick whilst you were straddling it, all hot in your leather, or without it, God, it didn't matter to me.”
Negan winced as his jeans became uncomfortably tight the more the teen spoke, zipper cutting in to his flesh, he was torn between asking for more details and begging him to stop just so he could focus enough to get them into the cabin. He shook himself, mentally slapping himself so he could continue pushing the pair of them forward.

“Mmmm, God, I thought about it so much, jerked off thinking about it. Before we went away, I saw you cleaning it and I thought about what I’d do y’know?” Carl snuck his mouth right under his earlobe, warm breath huffing over the sensitive skin. “How I’d go over to you, make you sit on it, then I’d climb on you, kiss away that stupid cocky grin that you get on your face. You’d pull down my jeans, just enough so you could get to my ass, I’d already be ready for you, I’d be so damn ready. I’d have fingered myself open on your bed whilst you were outside…” Jesus-fuckin’-christ he was gonna blow his load if he continued, the images racing through his mind at 100mph. “...then you’d fuck me, so hard and so deep, your hands gripping my hips, moving me how you wanted, making me scream. Then I’d come all over that leather jacket of yours right before you come inside of me. I’d fuckin’ love it Negan.”

He wouldn’t be a red-blooded male if he didn’t contemplate dragging Carl back over to the bike to do just that, thankfully his morals won through reminding him that screwing a drunk person never worked well and he’d never want to disrespect Carl like that. “C’mon, enough of that.”

“Don’t you wanna do that?” That evil voice whispered in his ear, errant hand burning a trail down his abs, Negan had to pluck it off his belt. Morals Negan morals. He propped the teen against the wooden door, digging into his pocket for his key. “C’mon...” Carl practically purred at him, hands yanking with a surprising strength to pull Negan back to him.

“Oh I do,” He answer, understatement of the fucking year, "and if you weren't so drunk I wouldn't think twice about dragging you back over to my bike, bending you over it and sticking my dick in you till you fuckin' beg for more.” Carl moaned at that, hips rolling against his own. “Buut, you are far too drunk for that. All you’re getting is a bed and some water.”

Carl pouted at him. “Tha’s no fun.”

“Well, drinking isn’t always fun.” Negan retorted, finally getting the door to open.

“Blah.”

This time the teen held his own weight, still stumbling, but managing to walk through the door without breaking anything. His pouting kept him quiet, only fumbling out mumbled protests when Negan tried to help him up the stairs. “Don’ need it.” He pushed the man away, turning his focus onto the mountain ahead of him.

Negan huffed, exasperated, it had taken them nearly ten minutes just to make it up two steps, it was gonna take all fucking day if he continued like this. Just as he was about to toss him over his shoulder again Carl managed to find his footing, crawling on hands and knees up the stairs.

Was he this bad when he was drunk? How the fuck did people put up with him?

Carl finally let him help when he reached the top of the staircase, arms reaching out to let him pull him off the floor. He helped him stumble into the bedroom, only letting him go when he was close enough to fling himself onto the bed. Which he did with a surprising grace.

“Mmmm, finally.” Carl sank into the squishy mattress, arms winding around the plush pillow that stunk of his favorite guy. "You comin'?" He asked, patting the bed next to him.
"Nope, i'm gonna get you some water and a few aspirin, God knows you're gonna need 'em in a few hours."

"No I'm not. I'll be fine." Carl shifted himself the other way. He wasn't a wuss, he could handle a few shots of gin-vodka-whatever it was. He didn't need Negan babying him.

Ah, the ignorance of youth, Negan thought, he could remember those days, thinkin' no drinking session would ever result in the inevitable mind-numbing hangover. "Sure you won't." He draped a blanket over the teen, indulging his stubborn streak. "Get some sleep."

"Pft, don't need sleep." Carl mumbled with a yawn, maybe a nap, just for a few minutes. He was sooo comfy he might as well make the most of it before he had to leave again. A loving hand stroked through his hair, blissfully cool against his flushed face, he leaned into it, encouraging it in its movements.

"Wish I knew how to help you Carl." The voice murmured, just registering in his brain before everything fell dark.

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"Oh my god," He just about managed to get out, his voice muffled by the pillows. "I'm dying."

"You're not dying." Negan replied to the mound of pillows on his blankets, the teen was curled up into a tight ball, only a few tufts of dark hair visible in the pile. He shifted himself over to the bed, warm hand seeking the cold, clammy forehead beneath the pillows.

"I am." His stomach rolled again, sledgehammer pounding away at his brain, certain there would be nothing left by the time it was done. "This is it, the end."

"So you're not feelin' too good?" Negan asked, slightly teasing tone in his voice. As annoyed as he was with Carl for the last 24 hours, it was always fun to play with drunks, especially when they were as adorable as this one.

"I'm dying, definitely dying. Oh god, my head." It wouldn't stop throbbing at him, he wanted to rip his brain outta his head just to get it to stop. "Oh God."

"C'mon, up you get."

Carl shivered as the blankets were stripped away from him, curling up even tighter to conserve warmth. "Nooo, I can't move."

"Yes you can, and you damn well will cos I know what's comin' next and you're not doin' it in my bed."

Just as Carl was about to ask him what came next his stomach lurched, more forcefully than before. It was enough incentive to lunge out of the bed, just about making it to this bathroom before he hurled.

He was coherent enough to feel a wave of embarrassment when Negan followed him into the room, he wasn't keen on him seeing him like this. Just another cliched wreck of a teenager. As embarrassed as he was, he was also grateful when the man pulled his hair away from his face when another wave of sickness hit him, his other hand rubbed softly at his back, soothing words falling from his lips.

Carl practically hit the tiles when he finished, legs collapsing under his own weight. He flopped himself against the wall, just about muscling up the strength to curl his legs. up. God, he was such a
fuckin' idiot. Tears burned at his eyes, cheeks flushing as he watched the other man clear up after him. Couldn't he do one thing without putting the man out? He was such a damn mess, he bit at his lip, trying to stop the sob wanting to creep out of his throat. He was a pathetic mess.

"Y'alright?" Negan's voice was like silk to his ears, so soft and gentle against the pounding that raged in his head. A cold flannel pressed against his head, easing the heat, wiping away the sweat that had stuck there.

Carl gave a weak nod in reply, teeth digging in deeper the pain doing little to quell the emotions bubbling in him. "It was stupid." Carl sniffed, voice breaking under the tears begging to escape. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have left. I'm so sorry." He didn't know why he said it. It was the only thing that popped into his head, he wanted him to know how sorry he was. For everything. "M'so sorry." He repeated.

Negan's heart cracked all over again, love tugging him down to Carl, pulling him closer with his arm, tucking the small frame underneath it. "Shhh, it's alright Carl, don't think about it. It's fine."

"No it's not. It's not fine. I can't keep doing this to you. To us." Carl was vehement in his protests, pushing Negan away from him. "How can you want to be anywhere near me when I'm like this all the time?" He gestured to himself, everything about him was a mess, his hair was greasy from sweat, his clothes drenched in it, he was fairly certain there was a hint of vomit on his shirt. He definitely stunk of it, that and the cheap vodka that he and Enid has drunk. That wasn’t even mentioning what a fucking mess he was inside. He hated the look Negan gave him, that love-filled adoring gaze that usually made him feel like he could do anything but now made him feel like an awful monster.

"I do it because I love you-" 

"No." Carl interrupted, no, no, no. How could anyone love this? He was a wreck, a ghost of a human being, a pathetic creature hardly worth the attention. "How can you still love me?"

How? How could he not? How could he not see the pure beauty and strength in him? "Because I see through the shit. Everyone has their demons Carl, we all have shit to bear, yours is just heavier than most. Anyone would be a mess after what you’ve been through but you haven’t let it bring you down. Of course I have moments when you’re being such a lil’ shit that I wanna strangle the life outta you but most of all I just wish you’d talk to me. That you wouldn’t run away when it gets hard."

He was such a fuck-up. "M'sorry." It was a pitiful whine even to his ears.

"Don’t be. We can work on it, you just have to trust that I’m not gonna run when things get hard. I’m in it for the long-haul Carl." He took Carl’s hands in his own, brown eyes searching blue for any indication that he was getting through to the teen. "I’m with you Carl. I love you, no matter what you tell me or what you do."

Tears flowed openly now, trickling a salty trail down his flushed cheeks. "I love you too."

Negan brushed the tears away, smiling softly at him. "Good. You think you can get up?"

Carl nodded, reaching his hands out to take Negan's. Together they stood, Carl bracing himself against Negan’s shoulder. They fell into an awkward embrace, his knees felt like jelly, muscles trembling at his own weight. The nausea still rolled in him, he still wasn’t sure if it had passed, why the fuck did people drink? He felt like pure shit.

"Think you can move?" Negan asked.
Carl groaned a reply, head burying himself in Negan’s shoulder. “Maybe when the room stops spinning.”

The vibration from Negan’s chuckle didn’t help the vomit still threatening to spill up. “Alright, I’m gonna put you in the shower, a bit of water will help sort you out.”

He manhandled Carl over to the shower, struggling to strip him of his clothes as Carl swayed in the room. He’d never been more grateful that he picked a place with a walk-in shower. He shuffled Carl in, propping him against the wall. “You alright sorting yourself out?”

“Mmmhhmm,” Carl murmured at him, bringing his hands out to brace against the tiles. “Can you turn the water on?”

“Sure darlin’. There’s a towel out here, I’ll be in the bedroom sorting you some clothes.”

A muffled “thank you” came through the pelting shower. He left Carl to it, chucking his dirty clothes in the laundry basket on his way back to his room. He chucked some of his own clothes onto the bed, ready for the teen whenever he emerged from the shower. The mattress sunk under his weight, his head was heavy in his hands. Just when he thought they’d turned a corner, they got tugged back five steps. It was infuriating, it pushed his own limits, tested his love for Carl in more ways than one. He hated to admit there were moments when he nearly gave in, when his old self perked up and told him to get away from that shit. The coward in him wanting the easy route rather than the hard-one. Look out for yourself and leave everyone else, that's how he always lived his life. Until he met Carl that is, the one person that made him care about someone other than himself. Maybe it was because he saw himself in Carl, or the inexplicable connection he had with the teen, that unseen link that drew them together time and time again. The thing that made him ignore all that was rational within himself, everything that told him to walk away before they both got burnt, and burnt they got. In the short time they'd been together they'd been dragged through the dirt, ridden highs that he never thought were possible, they'd broken each other down to the very core of who they were, exposed their raw center and let the other scrape all over it.

The only thing he knew for certain was that Carl was worth every ounce of pain that he'd felt, and every single second of doubt that he had about them disappeared the second he laid eyes on him. He'd never felt so vulnerable yet safe, his trust in Carl was unrivalled, he'd been the one person who knew every inch of him, every single part of the darkness that laid inside him and still welcomed him with loving arms, still trusted him with his body and his soul. Negan only wished he trusted him so implicitly with his mind. He knew he only knew the bullet-points of what Shane had done to him, just as he knew that he'd never, in a million years, be able to fully comprehend the effect that he had on him. His only hope that he'd be able to share some of the burden, that maybe one day Carl would be able to tell him what happened, how he was feeling. He wanted to take the nightmares away from him, to help him move on and get past the things that haunted him in his sleep. He wanted to kill that fucker Shane all over again.

"You alright?" Carl's hushed voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Yeah, you feelin' better?" He looked better, there was more color in his cheeks and he seemed steadier on his feet. The teen's head bobbed, shuffling closer to Negan, taking the offered clothing with a grateful smile.

The room rested in silence, only the rustling of clothing as Carl dressed himself echoed in the space. Negan's head found his hands again, rubbing the exhaustion from his eyes, he'd hardly slept the previous night, accosted by the sight of Carl twisting in agony beside him. The empty space next to him him only reminding him of the teen that was downstairs.
"Negan..." A faint hand cupped his cheek, drawing his chin up. "I'm sorry." He knew he'd apologized several times already, knew they were meaningless because Negan had already forgiven him, yet Carl needed to say it just once more.

"Carl, c'mere." He pulled his hips closer, seating him on his lap. "It's alright, you don't have to keep apologising."

"I don't know how you put up with me." Carl whispered.

"You know why." He tucked his hair behind his ear, revealing the soft blue eye behind it. "That's never gonna change, no matter what."

"Even if I'm a stupid drunk?" Carl asked. It was the last time he'd ever drink, the hangover, the inconvenience he caused just wasn't worth it.

A deep laugh rumbled out of Negan, jostling him on his lap. “It’s fine Carl. Jesus, it’s the most normal thing you’ve done so far.”

Carl blushed at that, as if he needed reminding about all his abnormalities.

“Don’t look like that. You know I don’t care about all that normality shit.” Negan spoke.

"Still, can't be easy being with me." Carl looked him over, watching every speck of emotion slip across his face, waiting for a little hint of doubt.

Negan rested his head on Carl's shoulder, choosing his next words carefully. "No relationship is easy Carl. They're all difficult in their own ways."

"I'm just particularly difficult right?"

"No, God no. It's easier with you."

"Now that has to be a lie."

"No, it's easier because it's you and because I love you. The highs are more than worth the lows, no matter what." He looked at him earnestly. "I mean it, Carl. Whenever you decide to tell me what happened, whatever's been gettin' to you recently, I'm here. All I ask is you stay, that you be there with me, if I can't help you with the cause of it then let me be there for the pain, let me help."

"I want to tell you." Carl replied. "I just... I don't know how to explain it."

"Then whenever you figure it out, I'm here, alright?"

"Yeah." Carl shifted, placing a gentle kiss to the corner of Negan's mouth. "Thank you."

"Anytime." He nuzzled Carl's neck. "Just promise me something?"

"Whatever you want."

"Don't get drunk for any reason other than fun please? Don't drink to forget things, alright? It's a damn slippery slope."

"Pft, I'm never drinking again, not with this headache."

"Aww, poor baby." Negan mocked.
Carl slapped his shoulder. "Shut it."

"C'mon, let's get you some food, it'll help with the hangover."

Carl groaned, "I don't think I can eat."

Negan slipped him off his lap, coming to stand before him. "Yeah you can, let's go." Then he dragged him from his room.

"So what got you to drink, illegally might I add, in broad daylight, in a park frequented by drug dealers?"

Carl stopped eating, swallowing down the remnants of his sandwich. The dark, shock from yesterday settled over his body once more. "Mom's pregnant."

"What?" Negan's own food dropped to the plate. He most certainly hadn't been expecting that. Lori pregnant? God that woman moved on quick.

"Yep." Carl pushed his plate away, nausea settling in once again. "6 months. Their New Year vacation..." He let the words tail off much like his Mother had.

"Wow, and your Dad knew?"

"I dunno, I don't think so, he seemed pissed but... I didn't really stick around to find out."

"Ah, well at least it's not just me you run from." Negan joked, it didn't go down well. Carl's face fell again, eyes flickering to the floor. "Shit, Carl, I didn't mean it."

"No, no, you're right. At least I'm consistent with that." Carl laughed.

"Wait, so you ran out?"

"Thought we'd already established that?"

"So your Dad doesn't know where you are?"

"I dunno, he's probably figured out I'm with you."

Negan's eyes bugged out. "You should call him, let him know you're alright."

"Seriously? He's got you that scared?"

"He's a cop, with a gun, and I know he's not afraid to beat the shit outta someone, so yeah I'm scared. Get callin', I'll give you some privacy."

Turns out privacy was the man walking over to the couch to flick the TV show on. Carl took a deep breath, reaching over to grab Negan's phone, bracing himself for the impending shouting that would come.

"You goin' home?" Negan asked Carl, pausing the TV when he returned to the room.

"Not tonight. He and Mom are gonna talk more, make plans and things." Carl perched next to Negan
on the couch, curling his leg underneath him.

Negan exhaled sharply. “Can’t believe they’re having a baby, it’s fucking crazy.”

“Yeah.” Crazy being the understatement of the whole damn year, it was beyond comprehension. Just the thought of them seated at home, talking like adults was enough to freak him out.

“You excited though?”

“I haven’t thought about it really. I guess, I dunno, I’m sad that I won’t be around much when they baby’s born.”

“True, but there’s still holidays, and the whole summer next year. Besides babies are boring when they’re young, by the time you’re done with college it’ll be at the fun stage.”

“Didn’t think you had loads of baby experience.”

“Eh, a few of my friends had kids, Lucille had a few nephews and nieces, kinda had to deal with them.”

“Huh, at least you can help me with that.”

“Whatever you need.” Negan rubbed at Carl’s arm.

Carl took a deep breath, reaching over to grab the remote from Negan’s hand. With a quick push the TV went blank, he started into the black for a moment, hoping to find some clarity into the darkness.

“You alright?” Negan asked, slightly concerned by the eerie silence that engulfed the room.

“Yeah, I’m just…” He let his words trail off. “Are you tired?” He asked.

“Not really no.”

He couldn’t ignore the disappointment at his reply, his last hope of evading the conversation disappearing at the words. “Oh.”

“Should I be?” Negan enquired.

“No, no.” He dismissed it. Time to be brave Carl. Time to give back some of the trust that Negan had placed so unquestionably in him. He could do this. They’d been through so much together, they could get through this. If not now, when?

“Carl?” Negan placed his hand over Carl’s. “You sure you alright?”

“No, but I will be.” He affirmed, maybe if he kept thinking it then he would be. Just the hand on his was enough to give him that little bit more strength, just a bit more reassurance that they were in it together. “Just promise me something?”

“Anything.”

“Don’t interrupt?”

“Interrupt what?” Now he was all the more confused and the way Carl was looking at him was more than disconcerting.

“Until I’m finished.” Carl clarified.
“Ookaay, I promise. So, what are you starting?”

“The story, my story, everything that happened, and I mean everything. There was so much I didn’t tell you, things I didn’t think I’d ever tell anyone. I thought I could handle it, that if I buried everything deep enough then it would leave me alone. Obviously not.” He paused, taking a breath. “So I’ll try your way, I’ll tell you. Then you can ask anything you want.”

“You don’t have to Carl, if you don’t wanna talk about it with me then I’d never force you to.”

“I know, I do know.” He gave a flicker of a grateful smile. “But I want to.”

“Okay, then I’ll listen.”

“Okay.” Carl nodded, closing his eyes, trying to figure out the best place to start. “It wasn’t the physical things, I mean it was but there was so much more…”

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He was grateful when Negan kept his word, he just sat and listened. Held his hand when things got too much, when his voice cracked and his breathing halted. He didn’t show pity, didn’t show amusement, just listened, let Carl talk it out. The words tumbled out of him, falling from his lips like a waterfall. He didn’t think he’d ever get to the end, had no idea how to explain how it felt, how he felt even now.

“He made me feel like nothing. At first anyways, he treated me like nothing more than a replacement for my Mom. He destroyed everything I cared about, just took and took from me until I honestly thought nothing was left. My parents didn’t exactly do anything to change my mind, then my friends left, and my grades dropped and everything in my life just matched what he said. Then something changed in him, he started being more possessive, more demanding. He’d go on and on about how he was the only one that cared, that without him I’d be alone.” Carl looked down at his restless fingers. “At times I believed him.” He dragged another heavy breath into his lungs. “Sometimes I still do.” He admitted.

He could hear the denials forming in Negan’s mouth, he silenced them with a pleading look. “I know it’s not true, I know you care and I know my Dad does too, even my Mom in her own special way. I just… it’s like you said the other day, if you feel a certain way for so long it doesn’t just change. It hits you again and again, in those dark moments when I’m alone, I think back on it and I question everything. I question our relationship, every moment we spend together because it feels like a dream to me.” He let his words settle in the air. “I love you so much, you brought a joy back into my life that I never thought I’d feel again. You made me feel like me for the first time in years, you gave me strength when I didn’t have any. I can’t even start to pay you back for that but I hope you understand now.”

“Can I talk now?” Negan asked, his voice trembled, throat filled by a swollen ball that wouldn’t leave no matter how much he swallowed.

Carl nodded, waiting patiently for the man to speak.

“You never have to pay me back, you understand?” When Carl nodded again he continued. “You don’t owe me anything, I did everything I did because I loved you, because I cared, not because I’d ever expect you to give me something back.” Negan grasped Carl’s hands again, cradling in his own as he leaned closer. “I can’t even imagine what it’s like going through that Carl. I can’t begin to understand how you must feel with all that going through your head but what I do know is that I’m here through it all. When you have those moments, call me, whatever time it is, wherever you are,
just call me. If you can’t call me then just remember this, I love you. Nothing you said, nothing you ever say will change that. Remember me saying that, and know that there’s someone out there who thinks that you’re everything.”

Carl felt his heart swell, tears finding trails down his cheeks once more. Gratitude for whatever brought them together flooded him. He squeezed Negan’s hands, shifting himself closer to the man. “Thank you.”

“You don’t have to thank me.” Negan whispered.

“I know, but thank you anyways.” Carl gave him a weak smile.

“C’mere.” Negan tugged him closer enveloping him in a warm embrace.

Carl sank into it, puffy eyes closing against the world. He felt Negan lean back, settled himself closer to the man, holding on with everything he had. A firm hand rubbed his back soothingly, the other strokes through his hair. It wasn’t long before Carl felt himself doze off into a deep sleep, cradled in the arms of the man he loved.

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The silence in the house was deafening, a stark contrast to the previous morning when chaos reigned in the small living room. It was almost like before, he found his Father sat at the dining table, head in hands, steaming cup of coffee in front of him. He looked exhausted, that was all Carl could think when brown eyes met his, the bags all the heavier under his them. Probably didn’t get much sleep last night. Out of instinct, his ears twitched listening out for any sign of his Mother in the house.

“She’s not here.” Rick answered, sensing his thoughts. “She went back to her place.”

Carl didn’t even know she had a place. Made sense, she couldn't stay with her friends forever. “So how was it?”

Rick exhaled sharply, hell, excruciating, depressing, a soul-stabbing betrayal that he really didn’t need right now. “I don’t even know where to start.”

Carl perched on the chair opposite him, he didn’t say anything, there wasn’t much he could say. Nothing he said or did would change what had happened, nothing could ever mend the gaping chasm in their family. Nothing would change the inevitable fact that they’d be welcoming another member of the family soon, and his Mother would irrevocably become a significant person in their lives again.

“We talked.” Rick continued. “Tried to make plans for the future, figure out how the hell we ended up in the mess to start with.”

“What did you decide?” Carl was almost afraid to ask.

“Not much, I didn’t wanna decide anything without you.”

“Does it really concern me?” Carl asked, he was leaving after all.

Rick looked at him with a helpless desperation, “Of course it does, whether you like it or not Carl you’re a part of this family and you have a right to have a say in what happens in the future.”

“I know that, I just mean, I’m leaving soon. You’ll have to deal with Mom and the baby, it’s more about what suits you.”
“Honestly? I have no idea.” Rick’s head found his palms again. “I want to be around the baby, I’m not gonna be some deadbeat Dad who’s never around for his kid.”

Carl brushed aside the stinging reminder that he had been the Dad who’s never around for his kid, for a few years anyways.

“Not like I was for you.” Rick’s eyes were apologetic, a deep regret reflected back to him. “The problem is your Mother…”

“Yeah, we can’t go on like this, pretending she only exists when it’s convienient or when we feel obliged to talk to her.”

“Easier said than done.” Rick mumbled.

“You don’t have to tell me.” Carl commented.

“I always see him when I look at her.” Rick said, his voice hardly audible, a ghost in the room. “S’not her fault, I know that, but I can’t help it.”

“I know.” She was nothing more than a reminder of everything for him, no matter how much he told himself it wasn’t her fault, she had no control over the man’s actions, he still couldn’t get his body to believe it. He couldn’t help that stabbing pain when he saw her, the echoes of her voice calling him a liar ringing in his ears. It’d take a bit more than a few apologies to get that to go away.

“I worry that I’m gonna see the baby like that.” Rick confessed. “Some part of me, I dunno, I guess I’ll always wonder if it is actually mine.”

What do you say to that? It wouldn’t help for Carl to agree with him, it would only encourage the man’s feelings by giving him some kind of confirmation. So he took from Enid’s approach. “Does it matter?” He asked. “If it’s not yours? Does it matter? Isn’t it still part of the family?”

He’d stumped the man, his eyes wavering on his own. The room paused for the moment, a tense silence fell between them.

“No. it doesn’t.” Rick eventually admitted. “They’d still be your little brother or sister, and if it is Shane’s… I guess it’s only right that I take resposibility for it.”

“I don’t think it is.” Carl said, a lie, he truly had no clue one way or the other. “Shane’s, that is. I think he’d have told me, bragged about it.”

Rick’s jaw clenched, hands forming fists on the table. “I hate that bastard.”

“Well he’s all gone now, it’s time we look a the future instead of lingering on the past.”

“Easier said than done.” Rick echoed Carl’s earlier words.

“I know but what’s the alternative? We spend out lives dwelling on something we can’t change?” It was no way to live.

“No, you’re right.” Rick straightened up. “No point in that.”

Carl nodded, glad he seemed to be getting through to the man. “So, what’re we gonna do about this baby?”

“You’re not gonna like this.” Rick stated. “Your Mom and I did talk about a few options.” He hesistted once more. “One particular option seemed like the best.”
“What?”

“Your Mom moving back in.” He hastened to add. “To the spare room of course, just for the pregnancy, and the first few months, then we’ll figure it out again.”

“You were right; I don’t like it.”

“I know Carl but I don’t like the idea of her being on her own. What if something happened to her or the baby? In times like these—” Rick cut himself off. “It wouldn’t be good.”

“What do you mean ‘times like these?’”

“Nothing.” Rick replied quickly. “Just, you know modern day America, anyways it’s not about that. How would you feel if she moved back in?”

He really didn’t know. The thought of seeing her everyday made his stomach writhe, not dissimilar to how it felt only hours ago when he was puking his guts up. *It’s not about him*, he reminded himself, it’s about that little baby. He had to stop thinking of himself and start thinking about them. “I’d get over it, it won’t be easy but I will. If you can do it then so can I.” It’d be harder for his Father, he’d had plenty of time to get over the fact that Lori cheated, Rick had only had a few months and even then he’d had a lot more to think about. There was more emotion there, she was carrying his child, that can’t be easy to live with.

“We’ll get through it together and…” Another pause, this time Rick looked more pained, face scrunching up uncomfortably.

“And?” Carl prompted.

“And… I thought you could go stay with Negan whenever you needed a break. No more one-a-week rule.”

His jaw dropped at that, the mood lightening that little bit. “Seriously?”

“Only after finals.” Rick warned. “And don’t take the piss, I do want you home every now and again but if things get too much for you… well I’m not unhappy that you’ve got someone to escape to.”

“Thanks Dad, I promise I won’t abandon you.”

“Not ‘till you go to college anyways.” Rick joked. “I’ll call your Mom in a bit, let her know.”

“Alright, it’s gonna be weird having her around again… like nothing’s changed.”

Rick hand moved suddenly, reaching over to grasp Carl’s. “Except everything’s changed. No matter what happens, it’s different. You and I we’re different. You aren’t on your own anymore and if she says *anything* and I mean *anything* to hurt or upset you then I’ll move her out.”

His lips twitched up into a small smile. “Thanks Dad.”

“Don’t thank me it’s my job.” Rick returned the smile, the first he’d seen from the man in far too long.

“You know we’ve got a lot of work to do before she moves in right? That room’s a mess, we don’t even have a bed, let alone a crib.”

Rick gave a heavy sigh, “We’re gonna have to go shopping again aren’t we?”
“Oh yeah.” Carl confirmed, not a prospect he was looking forward to. “Can’t have her sleeping on the floor.”

“That would be bad.”

“Yep. C’mon, let’s go.”


“Yup. Get it all over and done with.” Carl said, getting back on his feet. “Let’s go.” He gestured to the door, rolling his eyes when Rick’s face turned sour. “Don’t sulk, you’re supposed to be the responsible one.”

“Shut it.” Rick ruffled his hair in retaliation on his way to get his jacket. It was certainly gonna be a long day.
Summer

Chapter Notes

Nearly at the end guys! Can't believe it :D I hope you all enjoy this one! I'm still unsure how I feel about it, I just hate winding down a fic, it feels so underwhelming, but the ending will more than make up for it I promise!

Also check out this AMAZING photoset by violette-pleasures of all the locations from the fic. It's absolutely stunning!


Enjoy <3

“And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer.”

― F. Scott Fitzgerald

July 2018

Summer had always been an unusual time for him, up until he was 15 it had been filled with never-ending days of playing under the blazing heat with whichever of his parents were at home with him. Each day as idyllic as movies, bubbling laughter could be heard for miles, happy memories were made each and every summer. That was until his parents decided that he was mature enough to stay at home on his own. The first summer had been mind-numbingly boring, his parents working long hours, the only entertainment he had was the television, his friends, and the occasional visit from Shane. Then his summers had been filled with avoiding the man as much as he could, spending long days outside just so he wouldn’t be at home for any surprise visits. He hit the library, mindlessly reading the same book over and over again, taking nothing in. He ran mile after mile, the sun burning away at his skin only forced him to run faster and faster. It was a miserable time, he was constantly looking over his shoulder, hardly ever taking the time to relax, it made him wistful for that summer of boredom that he used to look back on with such disdain.

This particular summer was turning out to be much the same, for an entirely different reason, yet it still had him racing out of the door every chance he got. His Mother moved in right after graduation, a slightly bittersweet ending to an otherwise happy day. He thought it’d be easier to handle having her back, that maybe because he was in a better place he’d find it easier to tolerate her. He was so very wrong. Her mere presence seemed to pick at his nerves, it was like his senses flared up when she entered the room, he was hyper-aware of everything she did, every move she made. All he wanted was to leave the room as quickly as possible or have her leave the room, he just wanted them
to be apart. He did his best to stay, pushed his own resolve to breaking point but he had to get better, he couldn’t keep running. Especially from a person that was gonna be in his life for the rest of it, whether or not he wanted it, she was his Mother, and the Mother of his sibling and he’d do everything in his power to ensure that they never knew how he truly felt about her, that they’d never know the worst of her. So he sat there, listening to her talking, answering her questions, all with a polite smile plastered on his face. At least he knew his Dad appreciated it, it would’ve been only too easy to escape to Negan’s place all the time, God knows, the man wouldn’t have complained about having him there.

It was all the harder when it was just the pair of them when his Dad wasn’t around to break the tension. He knew Lori wanted to talk about what had happened between them, he could see it on her face, tucked away behind blue eyes that would stare at him a little too long. He never let her, whenever the topic veered too close he managed to swing the conversation around before making his excuses to leave. That afternoon had been one of those occasions, they’d been sat in the living room, drinking coffee together. Well, he’d been drinking coffee, she was drinking some weird tea that smelled like those awful mints that you get in little tins. He could see her gaze darting over to him every other second, feel it burn on his face for a moment before it left again. He’d adamantly ignored it at first, focusing on the dark swirl on his coffee in the old mug, one of his Dad’s he noted. Eventually, he’d snapped and asked her why she kept staring. She’d fumbled an excuse at him, denying that she’d been looking at him. He’d huffed at that blatant lie, taking a quick swig of his coffee before jumping off the couch. The excuse he mumbled at her was hardly worth saying, he didn’t really need to justify leaving but some semblance of a dutiful son forced him to do so. He’d made it halfway off the drive before he’d pulled back onto it, guilt biting at him. It took him half a minute to grab his cell from the pocket, dialing the number ingrained into his mind.

“I need a pep talk.” He spoke as soon as the call picked up.

“Well hello to you too sunshine.” Negan’s gravelly voice came through the phone.

Carl gave a sheepish sigh, he had been a bit too keen. “Sorry, hi.”

“Hi. So what’s this pep talk shit?”

“I just walked out on my Mom, and now I feel bad.”

“Ah, so you need me to tell you to stop being an idiot and go back in there and talk to your Mother.”

“Yes! Please!.”

“Yeah, I’m not gonna do that.” Negan replied.

“What? I thought that was your thing?”

“Only when you’re actually being an idiot. After what she did she has no right to talk to you. I’m not gonna force you to go back in there if you don’t want to.”

“Really?”

“Nope, I’m not that fuckin’ heartless.”

“So if I left here now and came to yours then you wouldn’t give me a lecture.”

“No finger wagging… unless you want one.” Negan added, spoken in such a way that had Carl blushing in the car, the faint memory of Negan’s last attempt at disciplining him still haunted his fantasies.
“I’ll be there soon.” He managed to reply.

“Alright, see you Darlin’”

He slipped his cell back in his pocket the second it clicked off, throwing the car back into reverse, he’d been good enough recently it was time he got his reward.

**********

Negan was out front when he pulled up, back turned to the driveway, crouched down to sort something on his bike. He wasn’t wearing his shirt, the sun beamed down on the golden expanse of his broad back, Carl could see specs of grease litter his body the closer he got to him.

“Hey darlin’,” Negan called over his shoulder, “be with you in a sec.”

“S’fine, take your time.” He really meant it, he loved seeing Negan work, loved seeing the muscles shift under his skin as he moved around with a cocky confidence that sent shivers down Carl’s back. Carl leaned against one of the sturdier trees that sheltered the cabin, folding his arms over his chest, he waited for him to finish, hungry gaze taking in every inch of flesh exposed to him, flickering even faster when the man stood, turning to face him. Even with grease on his face the man still looked gorgeous, the black marks only highlighting his rugged features.

“You done staring?” Negan asked.

“Ummm, nope,” Carl answered, pointedly dragging his eyes down the lean figure.

“You’re such a perv,” Negan threw a dirty rag at him. “Get your ass over here.”

Who would he be to ignore an order like that? He tried to keep his pace slow, did his best to not run over there and jump the man like his hormones demanded. His hands were itching by the time he reached Negan, begging him to just reach out and touch. He didn’t. He didn’t have to. The second he was in grabbing distance, Negan reached out and pulled him in, hands finding their usual spot cradling his neck before their lips met.

No matter how many times they did they Carl would never get used to it, each one felt like the first, his heart thudded just as hard, breath still caught in his throat. He pushed closer, palms meeting hot skin, slicked with a light sheen of sweat. The smell of oil filled his nose, mingling with Negan’s usual aftershave, it was intoxicating.

“You alright?” Negan breathed, pulling back just enough to catch those blue eyes.

Carl swallowed hard, tongue nipping out to wet his dry lips, not failing to notice Negan’s hooded eyes trailing the pink muscle. “Yeah, I’m good. You?”

Negan nodded, taking a moment to step away from the teen, jumpin’ him within five minutes of getting there wasn’t exactly part of his plan. “I’m alright’ just fixin’ up the bike.”

“Is it alright?” Carl wasn’t exactly an expert on bikes yet he let his eyes flicker over it, looking for a problem that needed fixing. He had no idea what he was looking for but it seemed like the thing people did.

“It’s fine, just needed a lil’ TLC, should be fine now.”

“Good, I’m glad.”
“Ooh, I bet you are.”

Carl eyed him suspiciously. “What do you mean by that?” There was definitely something more to that statement if the glint in dark eyes were anything to go by.

“Oh, nothin’.” Negan brushed it off, faux-innocence clouding his voice. He walked around the bike to grab one of the cleaner-looking rags, clearing his hands of excess grease. Smirking to himself, finding out just how much Carl loved his bike had certainly been an interesting conversation, even if the teen couldn’t remember it. He caught Carl just as his lips opened to speak, interrupting with a question of his own. “So how’s your Dad doin’?”

Carl’s mouth flopped uselessly, he hadn’t been expecting that change. “Uh, yeah, he’s alright, I think. We haven’t spoken much.” He leaned back against the bike, arms crossing once again. “He’s been away at work a lot.”

“Actually workin’ or trying to avoid your Mom?” He joined Carl by the bike, arms barely brushing as they stood side-by-side.

Carl exhaled, he’d tried not to think of it like that. “Working, I think, it’s been busy at the station recently, he won’t talk about it but I know it’s got him stressed.” He hoped that he was right. He’d made a promise to his Dad not to leave him alone with his Mom all the time so the man damn well better hold himself to the same promise.

“I’m sure it’ll get easier, and he’ll be home more when the baby comes.”

“When I leave,” Carl added.

Negan hesitated before he replied. “Yeah, when you leave.”

They stood in silence for a moment, the reminder of their impending separation weighing heavily in each of their minds. As voluntary, and temporary, as it was, it didn’t make the prospect any easier. Each day since graduation seemed to fly past, the time they had together slipping away faster than quick-sand.

“Still, I’m sure he’ll find some time to spend with you before you go.” Negan tried to boost the mood, jostling Carl softly on the shoulder. “And anytime you don’t get with him, means I get some time with you.”

Carl wrinkled his face. “Is that supposed to be a good thing?”

Negan barked out a laugh, “You lil’ shit.” He shifted around to stand in front of the teen, leaning in closer. “If you wanna go then you’re free to.”

“Hmmm, I dunno, depends if there’s anything worth sticking around for.” Carl baited the man, biting his lower lip enticingly.

Negan smirked, arms coming to rest on the bike either side of Carl’s waist, pinning the teen in place. “Well, I do have an idea.”

“Oh yeah?” A shiver ran up his spine at his words, mind racing with ideas of just what they could do that day. Maybe they could finally give the whole sex on the couch thing a go...

“Mmm, well, I gotta give credit where credit’s due, it’s your idea.”

He lost him there, what idea? “Huh?”
“Mmm, don’t you remember?” Negan teased. “Y’know? What you told me about the bike?”

“Bike?” When had they spoken about the bike and just what idea did he have? “What, uh, what did I say about it?”

“I guess you were pretty drunk.” Oh god, just what had his drunk-ass-self said? “You told me allll about how much you just looooved my bike. Your words, not mine.” Shit, shit, shit, shit. “Mmhmm, yeah, not the only thing you said of course.” Negan inched closer, eyes locked on Carl’s, waiting for the recognition to snap into place. “Any ideas what else you might have said?”

“No.” Carl cleared his throat, no way had he told him anything else, no amount of alcohol would have got him to tell him that.

“Hmmmm, maybe I can jog your memory.” Negan’s hands slipped onto Carl’s hips, digging in softly before he pushed him back, encouraging him to sit up on the bike. Carl’s thighs spread around his hips when he stepped closer, the teen’s hands clutching at the seat under him.

“Is this supposed to help jog my memory?” Carl’s voice was breathy, already tinged with a heavy lust that was melting a path through his veins. God the man had hardly touched him and he was ready to tear off his clothes. Hands still gripping his hips held him firm, keeping him steady on the smooth leather seat, more importantly keeping him flush against Negan.

“Isn’t it?” One hand slid up Carl’s stomach, fingertips brushing warm skin as he drew up his shirt, leaning back to tug it over his head.

“No.”

Negan’s head dipped down, nose just touching the soft flesh of his neck, nudging it’s way up the long length, breathing in the delicious sweetness that was Carl. He loved how sensitive he was, each exhale against him elicited the most wonderful shivers from the teen. “It involved you,” He placed a ghost of a kiss just behind his ear, “and me,” another kiss, right below the earlobe, “and this bike,” one more kiss, right where he could feel Carl’s pulse throb beneath the skin, he felt the teen’s breath hitch at that.

“O-oh, and, uh, what did I say we should do?”

Negan chuckled against his skin, the sound vibrating through his whole body. “Go for a ride.”

Carl’s body sagged in relief, so he hadn’t told him about the stupid fantasy that kept hounding his dreams. Stupid, fucking Negan teasing him like that. He opened his mouth to chastise him when the man’s next words stole them right from his lips.

“I say go for a ride, you meant you go for a ride...” He nipped at the soft skin of Carl’s earlobe, before finishing his sentence, letting his voice dip in the way he knew drove Carl crazy. “On me.”

Carl’s eyes bugged out, so he had said something stupid. Fucking stupid, idiot, Carl, way to make your perverted mind obvious. “D-did I?”

“Uh-huh.”

Fingers found their way into his hair, the pads massaging his scalp, Carl arched into it, head lolling back into that sinful hand. Any shame slipped away as Negan’s mouth trailed over his neck, stubble scratching at the flesh as his lips kissed every inch of skin there, alternating between barely-there pecks and lingering kisses that seared a wet heat into him. “W-what else did I say?”
“Mmmm, so many things Carl.” His words were muffled by Carl’s neck, his mouth far too busy working wicked patterns into the spot that made Carl grip the seat even harder, a soft gasp escaping his lips. His teeth sunk in gently, toying with the flesh, darkening the creamy skin to a dull red. “Never knew you could be so filthy.” The last word was accompanied by a slow grind of his hips, his hand slipped around to splay over the small of Carl’s back, holding their aching pricks together. The other hand clenched in his hair, forcing his head back so their eyes could meet. Negan’s eyes were daring, head cocked to the side as he looked Carl over, challenging him with his words. “Wanna give it a go?”

Panting hard now, his heart thudding as hard as drums in his head, Carl met Negan’s gaze with a challenge of his own. “Think you can handle it?” He reached down to palm his hardness, repaying the man’s teasing with his own. “You feel like you’re ready to blow now.” He cocked his head innocently. “Don’t wanna get my hopes up.”

Negan growled, diving in to silence him with a bruising kiss, tongue slipping through his lips to explore every crevice of his moist, hot mouth, his passion driving Carl incoherent. Carl pulled him tighter, linking his hands together behind his neck to keep him in place, allowing the other man’s hands to tug at his hair, pushing his head how he wanted it. Negan withdrew as quickly as he’d come in, stopping Carl’s lips trailing after his. They panted hard against one another, lips just brushing with each inhale that swayed them together. “Turn around,” Negan said, voice rough with lust.

It took Carl a moment to work out what he’d said, he blinked blindly at the man before his brain caught up. Negan placed some distance between them, just enough to let Carl move, not enough to let him move without shifting up against Negan’s hard form. He could practically feel every muscle as he moved, could more than feel the hardness that jutted out at him as he turned to face the bike that had started this all. Negan’s hands clasped his hips, shifting him back before one shifted up to guide him down, leaving him to bend over the seat, forearms resting on the warm leather.

He watched Negan’s shadow move, felt his hands trail possessively down his waist, flaring out over his hips. “You alright?” Negan asked.

Carl nodded dumbly, body trembling with anticipation, breath quickening when the hands reached around to unfasten his shorts, tugging them down skinny legs. He watched them fall with his boxers down to his sneakers, saw Negan crouch to pull them off, leaving him naked in the bright daylight. A wicked shiver shot through him at being so exposed, anyone that drove up would see them there, would see him so spread out over the bike he’d spent so long daydreaming about. He bit his lip, hips shunted back hoping to spur Negan back into movement, the man had spent far too long looking him over, Carl wanted to feel him.

A low chuckle was all he got in return. “Want somethin’?”

“How’s you done enough teasing?” Carl protested.

A slow hand slipped around his hip, Carl gasped as it wrapped around his hard cock. “Haven’t you?” Negan retorted, his pace agonizingly slow, gently stroking up and down.

“Ah, yesss. I’m sorry, I’ll be good.” He pleaded, hips shuffling back and forth in the grip that was too loose to do anything but drive him crazy.

“You always are darlin’,” Negan rewarded him with a quick squeeze, pumping his dick twice before letting go, leaving Carl to cry out pitifully at the loss of his touch. He reached down to grab it himself but was stopped before he could get lower than his waist, the offending hand was placed back onto the seat. “No touching till I say so, got it?”
Carl nodded frantically, lust shooting through him at the order. Negan had never been so dominant before and he'd be lyin' if he said he wasn't loving every second of it. He willed his hands to still, tries to ignore the throbbing ache that's only intensifying between his legs.

“Good boy.” Hands find his ass, massaging the firm globes, spreading them just enough to peak between then, eyeing the gorgeously tight hole with nothing but insatiable lust. “God, you’re so perfect.”

“Negan…” Carl pleaded, twisting his head around to look at Negan, flashing pleading eyes up at the man. “Please?” It wasn't enough, it was never enough. He wanted more of his hands on him, wanted to feel every inch of the man against him. His eyes watched as Negan drew a small bottle out of his pocket, was that? “Is that lube?” He questioned.

“Uhh, yeah, kinda need it, Carl, if you want anythin’ goin’ in that gorgeous ass of yours.”

Carl glared back at him, face flushing at his words. “Why do you have lube in your pocket?”

Negan flashed him a dirty grin, “Wishful thinkin’.”

“So you haven’t been planning this?” Such a fucking asshole.

“Only in my dreams.” Negan replied, distracting him for any further discussion with a quick finger trailing over the twitching ring of muscles. He wasn’t gonna admit that he’d had it all planned since Carl had said that he was coming over. Deliberately taking his shirt off before heading out to 'work' on his bike. “Relax.” He urged, massaging the flesh, waiting for Carl to do as he was told before slipping a finger inside the teen. Dragging it in and out, watching the digit disappear into the heat his dick was practically begging for. It took all his self-control to keep things slow, aided by the sheer enjoyment of watching Carl squirm on his bike. A spark of inspiration struck him, recalling another part of Carl’s fantasy that he’d slurried at him. He withdrew his finger, leaning over Carl to brace his own forearm next to Carl’s. “Wanna help?”

“H-help? With what?” Carl panted, he thought they were finally passed this damn teasing shit.

“Get you ready, of course.” He nuzzled along Carl’s shoulder blade, pressing kisses along the bone. “I wanna see you prepare yourself for me.” Negan murmured into his ear, linking their hands together.

Dear Lord, Negan was gonna be the death of him. Just how much had he revealed to the man when he was drunk? He swallowed hard, letting Negan slip their hands back, he eased his head back to watch him drizzle the lube over his own fingers, the cold liquid a sharp contrast to his overheated flesh. Well, if the man wanted a show then he’d damn well give him one. He bit his lip again, looking Negan straight in the eye before trailing his fingers across his hip, down to his entrance. He saw Negan’s eyes dropped just in time to see the finger get swallowed up by the small channel. His own fluttered shut, moaning at the feel of finally getting something inside of him. His dick twitched when he quickly added a second finger, shuffling back onto it with awkward thrusts of his hips. His shoulder ached, his wrist shifted weirdly to try and get his fingers in as deep as possible. Small huffs of pleasure left his mouth, breath steaming the seat under him.

“You look fuckin’ amazing. Good enough to fucking eat.” He couldn’t take his eyes off him, torn between watching the pleasure spread over his face and the fingers plunging their way into his body. He really was perfect. “You nearly ready?”

“Uh-huh.” Carl moaned, lost in the heat melting away at his brain. He couldn't think, all he could focus on was the feeling of being filled, of needing more. He slipped a third finger inside the soft
tissue, bemoaning the awkward angle that meant he couldn’t go deeper. Another wave of need washing over him at the sound of Negan unbuckling his belt, the slow lower of his zipper.

Negan couldn't get his dick out quickly enough, the ache nearly too much to bear. He grabbed the lube again, slicking it all over himself, eyes rolling back at the friction on his dick. He jerked himself quickly, trying to imprint the fuckin’ decadent image in front of him into his brain. Somethin’ to think about when Carl was thousands of miles away.

Carl tugged his fingers out, flushing at the humiliatingly wet sound as they slipped out of his body. He was done, he wanted Negan, and he wanted him now. Placing his forearm back on the seat next to the other, he rested his forehead on them, raising his hips enticingly. “Negan, now, please .”

“Not like this,” Negan growled, grabbing Carl’s shoulders to lift him back up.

“What? why not?” Carl asked, his body protesting the sudden deviation.

“Because that’s not how you said, and you know I’m one for following orders.” He gave Carl a wink, shifting him out of the way so he could seat himself on the bike, straddling the seat, he patted his lap. “Now you hop on.”

If he wasn’t so turned on he would’ve rolled his eyes at him. Trust him to use any excuse to drive him fucking crazy. He let Negan manhandle him into his lap, straddling the man, legs draped over his hips. It wasn’t the steadiest position if it wasn’t for Negan’s strong grip on his hips he was certain he’d fall off. He rocked his hips against him.

“C’mon, I’m ready.”

“Put it in yourself,” He ordered against his chest, lips mouthing their way along Carl’s collarbone.

Carl didn’t hesitate, just used an arm around Negan’s neck to shift himself up as the other slid between them grabbing hold of his dick before sliding himself onto it. He didn’t have the strength to take it slowly, just let gravity lower him onto the thick length that filled him so perfectly. His body fit Negan’s as if he was made to take it. He trembled, eyes closing to drink in the white-hot pleasure that zinged around his body, from the sudden pressure on his pleasure spot. His breath came in heavy pants, his hips rocking slowly, grinding himself down onto Negan.

He felt Negan’s hand’s slither down his thighs, tracing back up to grip his hips, helping him move faster. Small, sharp thrusts sent sparks flying behind his eyes, needlepoint-precision had his dick hitting that perfect spot every single time, making his head spin. He canted his own hips harder, riding him faster, trying to get more of that bliss inside of him. His hands clutched at Negan’s shoulders, curling around his neck to pull him closer, feeling their heaving chests meet.

“Oh yes, fuck me, fuck me.” His words were a mantra against Negan’s lips. He slid his fingers into dark locks, holding him to their kiss, tongues joining together. His lips never truly left the other man’s, they ghosted over one another, exchanging air in the small space. They writhed against one another, chasing their climax with a fervent passion.

Heat coiled in Negan’s body, his arms aching almost painfully with the effort of bouncing Carl in his lap, legs tense to ensure they didn’t knock the bike. Not that he cared, it only added to the mind-numbing pleasure of having Carl’s tight heat clenching down on him. Hell, someone could drive a fuckin’ ax into his head and he’d die a happy man.

“Close.” He grunted against Carl’s lips, drawing his lower body closer so the teen could grind his dick on his stomach.
“Yes, yes, yes, come inside me, fill me up.” He pushed his hips to work faster, grateful that he finally had something to press his dick against. He could feel his own climax on the tip of his tongue, all he wanted was to feel it rush over him, to feel Negan spill into him.

He felt Negan’s sweat-slicked muscles tense, felt the sharp exhale against his lips before a warm heat filled him. Carl threw his head back, a guttural moan bursting out of his mouth, muscles clenching as he found his own climax, sparked by the rush of heat inside of him. He spilled between them, slicking their already-damp chests with his pleasure, grinding into it as he rode it out.

“So, how was that?” Negan panted, hot breath steaming his already burning flesh.

“Fucking perfect,” Carl muttered, body limp against Negan, completely breathless. Lush, kiss-plumped lips caressed his sensitive throat “I don’t think I can walk now.”

They both burst into an uncontrollable laughter at his words, the afterglow of ecstasy bubbling through the pair of them. Negan’s deep rumbling laughter was enough to keep him smiling, it was a sound that he’d never forget.

Carl dragged Negan for a shower after that, unable to bear the sticky, grease any longer. It took him several attempts to get off the bike, his legs like jelly after that particular encounter. Not to mention all the times he had to hit Negan for laughing at him, chuckling away at a personal ‘Bambi’ joke. He got his revenge, he always did. He teased him with lingering touches in the shower, attacking his body with steamy kisses that had the man hard in no time before ditching him in the shower. Leaving Negan to chase after him.

They settled on the couch later, each lying in a corner, their legs tangling together in the middle. “So it’s weird havin’ your Mom at home?”

“Yes.” He said with a heavy sigh. “Kinda like before, I can’t really be around her. I try, I really try but I can’t help it.”

“It can’t be easy Carl, I think you’re doin’ great.”

“Doesn’t always feel like it.” He rubbed his face, trying to dispel the frustration that slipped over him. “I’m hoping it’ll be easier when I come back from college, maybe being away for a while will help.”

“And the baby will be there, that’ll distract you at least.”

“God yeah, weird to think that.”

“You’ll be fine. They’re gonna love you.”

“I hope so, or I’ll be over here every night.” Carl joked.

“Pft every night? I don’t have the energy for that.”

“Gettin’ too old for it?”

“I meant to deal with your whining.” Negan retorted, chuckling at the sharp jab of toes in his ribs. “I can handle your ass anytime.”

“Shut it, I don’t whine.” Carl pouted.

“No, you don’t Darlin’.” Negan placated him, holding his hands up in a surrender. “You’re the
perfect lil’ snowflake.”

“Ugh.” Carl groaned, throwing his head back onto the couch. “It’s gonna be a long summer.”

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He wasn’t wrong. The days dragged the only occasions when time flew by where the previous
afternoons that he spent tucked away in Negan’s cabin. It had been his intention to go there today,
spend some more time with the man, unfortunately, his Dad had other ideas. He’d been dragged
outta bed at the crack of dawn, no explanation was given, just the duvet stripped off him with a shout
to ‘get up!’

That’s how he found himself in his Dad’s cruiser, trying to figure out exactly where they were going.
“You gonna tell me what we’re doing?” He asked for the tenth time.

“You’ll find out in a bit.” Was the brisk reply.

“It better be worth getting out of bed at this time.” The sun was only just peaking out on the horizon,
decorating the road with a hazy gold.

“It’s important Carl, everything I teach you is important. Remember that.” Rick said with a
seriousness that Carl hadn’t heard in awhile. His body showing the same tension that had possessed
him for weeks.

“Dad, what’s going on?” It worried him to see the man like this, the light-heartedness that had seeped
into their relationship in recent months was slowly disappearing, replaced with a somber unease that
hung over them both.

“Nothin’, I just want you to be safe.”

“Is this about me moving? I’ll be fine in the city Dad, Negan told me all the places to avoid.” He
tried to put him at ease. Him moving away wasn’t gonna be easy on any of them, especially his
Father.

Rick didn’t reply, just let his eyes focus on the road.

Carl sighed, sensing he wasn’t gonna get through to him, he turned to look at the window once
more, brows furrowing when he realized where they were. “The gun range?” He questioned. “Is that
where we’re going?” A stupid question, there wasn’t anything else up here, the road ended with the
range just outside the forest.

“Yep, gonna make sure you know how to use one.”

“Dad, I’m not takin’ a gun with me.”

“You don’t have to, I just need to know that you know what to do with them.” It was a half-assed
explanation even to his ears, but appearances didn’t matter in times like this. Not when he had to
keep his baby safe.

“I know how to shoot a gun,” Carl replied, failing to mention exactly who had taught him how to use
one.

“I’m not talkin’ about the ones you play on your games Carl, I’m talkin’ about real ones that can do
real damage.”
Carl rolled his eyes, he wasn’t a child. “I know Dad, that doesn’t change what I said. S-” He
hesitated, he hated mentioning him in front of his Dad. “Shane taught me.”

Rick’s eyes flickered over to him incredulously. “Shane taught you? When?”

“A few years ago, he used to take me out back and let me shoot his gun. It was just a bit of fun
whenever he babysat.”

“I can’t believe that. Wait, no I can. Fuckin’ irresponsible asshole.”

“Yeah, well, either way, he taught me to shoot so we can go back. Go to the movies or something?”
He offered, he really wasn’t keen to go back to the range, not after his last visit.

“No, he might have taught you wrong.”

Not likely, Carl didn’t bother saying it, he could see the resolve on Rick’s face. It would be pointless
for him to try and convince him to do otherwise. So he watched the trees go past, trying to calm
himself enough that he wouldn’t think about Shane. He just hoped that he could remember enough to
make sure that he proved to his Dad that they didn’t need to come out here again.

They went outside this time, the range was dead this time of the morning, it was just him and his
Father out there. They each took a simple .22 revolver, taking enough bullets with them to last them
a day of shooting. Even with Carl’s protests, Rick took the time to explain how to load and unload.
He dragged him through the basics of shooting, all about the safety catch and the importance of a
good stance. Carl tried to rush him through it, tried to play the dutiful son and be interested in what
he was saying but he’d already heard it so many times from Shane. It was the only good thing the
man had taught him how to do.

It took well over half an hour for Carl to actually start shooting and even then he had Rick breathing
down his neck. He managed two shots before he had to step away, breathing hard at the memory of
another man doing the same.

“You alright Carl?”

“M’fine.” He spoke through clenched teeth. Don’t snap at him he reminded himself. “Just… can you
not stand so close?” He asked.

“Oh, yeah, sure.”

Carl turned back to face him. “Why don’t you practice too? I’m sure you can watch me at the same
time.”

Rick thankfully took the hint, picking up his own weapon to practice. Carl could feel his eyes burn
into him between shots, he ignored it, letting his mind float away with his own. He focused on what
he was doing, keeping his shoulders relaxed, eyes centered on the target in front of him, he breathed
with each of his shots, aiming with a precision that came from the years of practice that he’d had. It
helped to imagine Shane as his target, he got the head every time.

“Wow.” Rick walked past him, observing his shots. “You’ve got a good aim there.” He shouted over
the noise.

“Thanks.” He whipped his ear protection off. “Like I said, I’ve done this before.”

“Yeah, well, I just wanted to see.” Rick had the decency to look slightly sheepish, embarrassed by
his earlier insistence.
“It’s fine Dad. At least we got to spend time together.”

“Yeah, haven’t really done that much recently have we?”

“Not with the amount you’ve been working,” Carl pointed out.

Just the reminder of work had Rick grimacing, he didn't need a reminder about all the hours that he'd been putting in. All the reports he had to read, the things they said... no, now wasn't the time to think about it. “It’s been busy.”

“As long as it’s just work,” Carl spoke, heading back into the main building to drop his gun off.

Rick chased after him, “What does that mean?”

They walked back to the car, leaving behind the burning stench of the range. “Well, is work busy or are you just trying to get away from Mom?”

“No, is that what you think?”

“I don’t know! I don’t know what to think, all I know is you’ve been out a lot recently and all you say is that you’re working.” He pointed out.

Rick slid into the car, waiting for Carl to join him before he set off. “I am working Carl. There’s a lot goin’ on. A lot that I can’t tell you, just trust me. If I could be home more then I would be. I don’t like forcing you to be on your own with your Mom.”

“Yeah, can’t say it’s fun.”

“Is it that bad?” Rick asked.

“Not bad. It’s just hard to talk to her.” Understatement of the year but he didn’t want to make his Dad feel too bad about leaving him for work all the time.

“She said you’re around a lot though. I’m grateful for that Carl, I know it’s hard but I don’t like the thought of her being on her own.”

“I’ll do my best to stick around.”

“Thank you.”

“So what do you think of my shooting? Did I need the practice?” A shameless attempt at getting his Dad to admit he was wrong, and judging by the look on Rick’s face he knew it.

“Your shooting’s fine. You need to relax your shoulders more though.”

Complete bullshit. “Shut up.” He bit back at him, settling down in his seat to look out of the window. What was with these guys and teasing him?

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August 2018

As much as he was dreading leaving this place, he wasn’t going to miss the near-constant food demands from his Mother. One minute he’d be lying in the garden listening to his music under the
warm glow of the sun, the next he’d be under Target’s fluorescent lighting looking out for whatever it was his Mom was craving at the time. This time it was strawberry ice cream, hidden away right at the back of the store. He took his time winding through the aisles, as annoying as these trips were, at least it was a chance to leave the house without upsetting her. Just as he was wandering down an aisle with pitchforks, who knew they even sold pitchforks in here when he saw a familiar figure, white wings spread out over leather-clad shoulders. He hadn’t seen him in awhile, and certainly not like this. The man was more unkempt than usual, hair twisted with knots, leather vest more stained that it had ever been. He didn’t look happy, his usually serene face seemed twisted in an anger as he glared at the gardening gloves in his sight. It took him a good minute to figure out whether to sneak away before the man noticed him or go up and say hi. His dilemma was solved when Daryl looked up and caught sight of him. Hunter senses or something, maybe he just noticed the only other person in the aisle freeze up.

“Hey, Daryl.” Even as he said it he knew it sounded awkward. It felt like he shouldn’t be talking to him, almost like being disloyal to his Dad.

“Hey Carl, how’re you?”

“I’m good, thanks. How are you? Haven’t seen you much…” He let his words trail off, watching Daryl’s face for a sign of what might have happened with him and his Dad. Naturally, he didn’t give anything away, not even a flicker of emotion crossed his face, not that it was unusual for Daryl, he was hard to read at the best of times.

“Yeah,” He cleared his throat, trying again. “Yeah, it’s been busy.”

“Oh.” An awkward pause.

“How’s your Dad?”

“He’s good,” Now that got a response, a speck of sorrow tinged turquoise eyes before disappearing. “I mean, he’s busy with work, and Mom.”

“Your Mom?” He questioned.

Oh shit, has he not spoken to Daryl? Fucking shit, he should not be allowed to open his mouth. “Yeah, um, she’s, uh, pregnant.” He desperately looked for anything to settle his eyes on that wasn’t the heartbroken look on Daryl’s face. “He didn’t know.” He added hastily. “He only found out after my trip to Seattle, then he got kinda caught up in it. They’re not together, he’s just… helping.” His sentence ended lamely, a failed attempt at making him feel better.

“Right, well, good luck to ‘em,” Daryl said, an anger taking hold of him. “And good luck to you Carl, with college, I’m sure you’ll kick ass.” That was more genuine than the first part.

“Thanks.” What else could he say? He wanted to know the reason behind the man’s sudden absence but he couldn’t ask Daryl, not here anyway.

“Anyways, I gotta go, was nice talkin’ to ya.” He strode off before Carl could reply with his own farewell, all he could do was watch the wings on his worn wings fade into the distance. It was a sad thought that the image of him walking away might be the last time they spoke. Although he’d only been in his life a short time, it had been enough for him to want to have him in it. Not just for himself, but for his Dad, the man had been so happy around Daryl. It couldn't be a coincidence that Rick had become so tense, and miserable since Daryl's absence. It was easy to see that the two men helped each other, made the other happy. Which made it all the more infuriating that they weren't spending time together anymore, the lack of explanation was doing his head in.
He didn’t have a chance to talk to his Dad about the encounter until the next day. They’d decided to spend the weekend decorating the nursery, just the two of them, Rick didn’t want his Mom inhaling paint fumes or some crap. Carl reckoned he just wanted her out of the room. They painted side by side, working together to coat the plain white with a sunshine yellow. His Mother’s choice, she wanted it to be a bright and happy place for the baby.

“I saw Daryl yesterday.” He couldn't think of a more tactful way of telling him.

Rick dropped the brush at his words, swearing as paint splashed all over his jeans, coating the protective sheet they’d put on the floor. “Huh, did you? How is he?”

“Fine, except for the whole ‘not knowing about Mom’ thing.” He glared at Rick for putting him in that position. It would've been good to know that Daryl hadn't known about it.

“You told him?” Rick’s eyes flared with annoyance. That was not how he wanted Daryl to find out. God, he didn't even know if he wanted Daryl to find out. Not with how things were between them. The man must hate him know. He hated himself after the last time they saw each other, he'd been vile to him. The shame had kept him away from Daryl, even the thought of calling made him want to run a mile.

“Yes, I told him. Don't get pissy with me, it slipped out, I thought you would've told him by now.”

“Shit, how did he take it?” He was almost afraid to ask, the thought of causing Daryl any more pain hurt him deeply.

“I dunno, think he was upset. Probably because he didn’t find out from you.” Carl pointed out.

“I should’ve told him.”

“Why didn’t you? He’s your friend, after all, surely he’d be happy for you?”

How could he ever explain it to Carl? What he'd done, how he made Daryl feel. He couldn't explain what had happened between them, how things had gone so wrong so very quickly. “I just didn’t have the time Carl, things have been so busy with the baby, and work. I haven’t had much time for anything else.”

“Even Daryl? Thought you guys were close?”

“We are.” Rick protested, or they were until he fucked it up big time. “I’ll talk to him about it. Soon.”

“Promise?”

“Yeah, once things have settled down I’ll give him a call.” He wouldn’t, he couldn't imagine ever talking to him again, couldn’t imagine Daryl ever wanting to hear from him again.

“Alright.” Carl took him at his word. “I hope you do.” He added several minutes later after they’d picked their brushes up, lashing the wall with that lemon yellow. “He’s good for you and going by the state of him when I saw him, you’re good for him too. Don’t give that up. Whatever happened with you guys I’m sure you can fix it.”

Rick’s brush paused against the wall, body coming to a standstill. He doubted that he didn’t think he’d ever forgive himself for it, let alone Daryl forgiving him. “Maybe.” He left it at that, moving over to another side of the room, ending all discussion of the man that lingered in his thoughts.

************
As the summer faded into autumn Carl’s heart grew heavier, with each day came more worries, every time he saw a new leaf fall to the floor was a reminder of how little time he had left before he moved. Each day with Negan never felt like enough, no kiss would satisfy him, no matter how many times he gazed upon his flesh he’d never memorize enough, never be able to imprint that devilish smile, that adoring look in his eyes, the deep laughter. It was never enough. Now here he was, turning up for the last evening they’d spend together in a while. It had been pre-agreed that he’d spend his last day with his parents, a final evening together before three became four. So he had to make do with an earlier goodbye with Negan, one that would have to keep him sustained until the man came to visit. It was a cruel prospect, an entire month without him, with only phone calls and video chats to keep him going.

With a deep sigh, he stepped out of his car, locking it as he approached the cabin. His wonderful cabin, his sanctuary, the place where he’d fallen apart and pieced himself back together. He was gonna miss it almost as much as his owner. As usual, the door was unlocked when he arrived, not like anyone was gonna break in around here and anyone that might try would soon regret it when they caught sight of Negan’s bat. He found Negan in the kitchen, busying himself with a large basket on the dining table. The man grinned when he saw him walk in.

“Hey.”

“Hey,” Carl replied. “What’s with the basket?”

“Fancy a picnic?”

“At night?” Carl asked.

Negan rolled his eyes. “You have no idea about romance do you?”


Negan fixed him with a deadly glare. “Brace yourself kid, you’re about to be swept off your damn feet.”

“As long as I can eat them I’m happy,” Carl replied, his stomach rumbling at the delicious smell coming from the basket.

“C’mon then let’s go.” Negan grabbed the basket, stopping to give Carl a quick peck on the lips before heading out the door, calling behind him. “Grab the blankets by the door.”

Carl did as told, grabbing the soft wool as he walked out into the evening. It was still warm for autumn, the summer heat still lingering in the gentle breeze. The leaves crunched under their boots as they walked through the forest still thick with tall, leafy trees. Carl knew where they were going as if they’d go anywhere else. The path was as familiar to him as the street he lived in, walk for ten minutes, turn right at the big tree stump, walk again until you get to the rocks, climb for a few minutes and then there you were, staring out onto the vast trees that made the forest.

The sun was just setting as they reached the clearing, coloring the sky a deep red, coating the trees in a pink glow. The view never failed to take his breath away, it always felt like that first time he laid his eyes on it, made him feel that tingle of peace. When strong arms wrapped around his waist he leaned back, resting into the broad figure behind him.
“You alright?” Negan’s words were like the breeze in his hair, soft and gentle against his ear.

“Yeah, just thinking about the first time we were up here.”

Negan’s chuckle rumbled against his back. “God, that feels like a lifetime ago.”

“Mmm, nearly a year ago now.” How on earth could it only be a year? So much had happened since, he’d changed so much, his whole life had changed so much. Every part of him was different to that teenager that had stood up here, so scared, hurting so badly that he didn’t think he’d survive. He stood here with a man that he had no idea would flip his world upside down. How naive he’d been to ever think he could keep him out, that his walls wouldn’t fall the second he’d looked into loving, brown eyes.

“Never thought we’d end up here.” Negan admitted.

“Me either, I didn’t even know here was a place I wanted to be.”

“You mean you weren’t eyeing me up then?”

Carl laughed at that. “God no, I mean there was a moment when I thought… well, I didn’t think, I kinda felt something but I didn’t think about you like that for awhile.”

“Huh.”

“Why? Were you?”


“Really? The scrawny damaged teen?”

Negan arms tightened around him for a moment. “No, the badass teen that I couldn’t keep my eyes off of.”

“Couldn’t keep your eyes off? Really?”

“Yep, you’re fucking gorgeous.“

Carl could feel the blush burn on his cheeks, he’d never get used to the man’s compliments, no doubt it’d take even longer for him to believe them.

“C’mon, let’s eat.” He gave him a sweet kiss on the cheek, pulling away from the teen.

A small lamp lit up the blanket, the dark wool looking all the more inviting when Negan settled onto it. They ate looking up at the stars, talking about the future, of their past, both wondering how they ended up here. They settled closer when the temperature dipped, Carl snuggling under Negan’s arm, watching a plane soar over them. He’d be on one of them soon, in less than 48 hours he’d be flying away from this place, from these arms. The thought elicited a heavy sigh from his lungs, not even a flicker of excitement bubbled through him, the reality too harsh to think of any positives.

“Stop thinkin’ about it,” Negan whispered into his ear.

He looked up at him, shifting onto his side. “I can’t help it.”

“It’s not forever.”

“I know, doesn’t make it easier.”
Negan rolled to face him, arm resting in the dip of Carl’s waist, hand curling into the soft cotton. “We’ll be fine Carl, before you know it I’ll be up visiting and this time we can spend the whole time in bed.”

His eyes glinted with a dark promise, Carl couldn’t help but smile back at him. “Promise?”

“I promise.” He leaned in to join their lips, pressing them together softly. “Y’know I made another promise once.”

“Really?” Just where was he going with this one?

“Mmmhmm.” He nuzzled across his cheek, spreading kisses along his jawline. “One that I’ve yet to fulfill.”

“Oh really?” Carl’s breath caught as teeth teased at sensitive skin. His stomach tingled with excitement, the last time Negan made such promises he’d ended up on the ride of his life.

“Yup, I said that I’d spend the whole night, finding all the little spots that’ll make you scream my name.” He felt Carl’s breathing increase, saw the flush on his face, the lust in his eyes when he pulled back to look into them. “Be a shame if you left without me fulfillin’ that.”

Carl’s mouth flopped uselessly, lust roaring in his stomach at the memory. God, he’d been so hard after that, so lost in thoughts of the man doing just that after he’d left to go for a shower. He’d almost forgotten about that promise, now he shivered at the thought, pants growing uncomfortably tight. “It would be a shame.” He sputtered out.

“I thought so too.” He kissed him hard, rolling the teen onto his back, slipping himself between slender thighs. His hands found Carl’s neck, splaying down the side of his throat in a possessive way that was a strange comfort to the teen. The pad of his thumb graced his jaw with the softest touch, slipping along the soft skin of his cheek. He could feel the flutters of Carl’s eyelashes tickle his cheek, the gentle sighs that left his lips whenever Negan pulled away only to bring their lips back together.

Carl loved how he kissed, so passionate yet with such care that made Carl feel adored. The kisses soon slowed, the hurried urgency giving way to the need to cherish every second. His own hands slipped under soft cotton, pulling the material up so he could reach the skin underneath, fingertips traced hard abs, dancing over the muscles.

“C’mon, off.” Negan growled against his mouth, yanking Carl’s shirt over his head, growing impatient with the clothing still on the teen’s body. He quickly stripped his own off, tossing it aimlessly to the side.

Carl moaned at the feel of skin against his own, rough meeting soft as their chest crashed together. Almost immediately hands yanked his hair back, pulling the crown of his head flush to the wool, exposing his long neck for hungry teeth. They latched onto his pulse point, drawing the sweetest gasps from plump lips, toying with the flesh there. His back arched when they bit their way down his chest, lavishing hot, wet kisses on his collarbone, tasting every inch of flesh he could get his mouth, fixating on the spots that had Carl grinding up against him.

Negan abused his nipples with his mouth, torturing them with his tongue and teeth. He tugged at the reddening flesh, sparking a pleasurable-pain through Carl’s body. He clasped his hands to Negan’s head, holding him against his body, keeping that mouth on his skin. “You taste exquisite.” Negan’s voice vibrated against his skin, making him shiver under it.
“Negan, please.” He didn’t know what he was pleading for, he only knew Negan was the only one who could give it to him.

“Shh, darlin’ I’m here.” Hands soothed his skin, sliding up his waist, nails scratching up the skin as his lips trailed downwards.

He tried to help Negan unfasten his shorts, hands fumbling at the fastenings there, desperate to get them off his overheated flesh. He failed hard, hands flopping uselessly to the side when Negan’s lips found his hips, tongue dragging down one bone, trailing dangerously low on his waistband. He moaned the loss of that mouth when he pulled away to tug his shorts off, eyes fluttering open to plead at Negan to get it back on him. His heart thudded in his chest at the sight of the man towering over him, strong body knelt between his thighs, his own mouth watered as he trailed his gaze down, lingering on the tattoos that decorated his body. He’d never get enough of that view, of the taste of him. He licked his dry lips as large hands unfastened jeans, Carl’s body throbbed with anticipation at finally getting the man naked. He was pleased to see the man was as hard as he was, erection an almost angry red in the night, pre-cum already forming at the tip. The hand that reached out to grasp it was quickly slapped away, pinned to the ground by his head when the man covered his body again, kissing him quick and dirty.

“This is all about you baby,” Negan spoke again, voice thick with lust. “Keep your hands up here.”

“Or what?” Carl asked, breathless, eyes dancing with a dare.

Negan cocked his head at him, looking down with a dangerous lust. “Orr, I’ll have to punish you.” He dipped his head lower, teasing a kiss on Carl’s ravaged lips. “And I doubt you wanna sit on a plane for hours with a spanked ass.”

Carl wasn’t expecting the rush of lust at the man’s words, certainly wasn’t expecting his mind to blow into overdrive at the thought. He was almost tempted to push him to do it, finally get a chance to feel what he’d been thinking about since Negan had tossed him over his shoulder months ago. The more rational side of him told him to cool it, now wasn’t the time to be experimenting with the darker side of his fantasies, so he let his arms relax, spreading himself out for Negan to do with as he wanted. He shivered with excitement when lips nuzzled along his throat again, mumbling “Good boy” against the skin.

They quickly worked their way down, Carl’s breathing grew harder when they resumed their trail along his hip bones, hands itching to grasp the man’s hair and pull his mouth to where he needed it, where his aching cock was standing up from his body, so hard and wanting. His hips squirmed in anticipation when hot breath panted over the tip, making him shiver at the breeze. He cried out in despair when those lips inched closer before diverting away, shifting to kiss down hip, nipping his way along his thigh. Hands gripped his skin, moving his body how Negan wanted it, giving him more access to skin he’d yet to touch. They teased his legs, tormenting the sensitive skin of his inner thigh with bites and sucks that had Carl arching his hips up, thrusting aimlessly into thin air.

“Mmmm, don’t think I’ll ever get used to this.” Negan murmured, words hardly reaching Carl’s ears, too lost in the feel of a hand wrapping around his cock. “Nothin’ could taste better than this, you feel so damn good baby.”

All Carl could do was clutch desperately at the blanket by his head, scrunching them in his grip as lust took over him. He practically screamed with relief when he was suddenly enveloped in a scorching, wet heat, hands gripped his hips hard, stopping him from shoving himself deeper into it. He squirmed beneath him, at the mercy of the mouth that dragged along his dick, tongue slowly winding around him.
Negan shifted his grip, one hand curling around the base of his cock, his forearm draping over Carl’s hips keeping him in place. He bobbed his head slowly, keeping up a deliberate pace, sucking him hard on every upstroke, softly moaning on every down. He loved the taste of him, so sweet, and the way he moaned had his own dick pressing with a growing urgency against his stomach. He ignored it, focusing on sweet mewls of pleasure that left Carl’s mouth, focused on drawing more of them out.

Carl could feel himself rush towards the edge, the unrelenting teasing from the other man had him ready to blow before he’d put his mouth anywhere near him, now he was more than ready to tumble over into the sweet abyss. “N-no.” He moaned, tugging at Negan’s hair, urging him back up towards him.

Negan pulled away instantly, eyes flaring with alarm as he searched Carl’s face. “Are you alright? Want me to stop?”

“M’fine,” He cupped Negan’s cheek, easing the stress from it, touched by the concern. “I wanna come with you inside me, not like that.”

“Oh,” That devilish grin reappeared. “I can arrange that.” He leaned over Carl, reaching into the basket to grab the bottle that he’d placed in there first thing that morning.

“You really do pack everything,” Carl commented, marveling at the small bottle in Negan’s palm.

“Always good to be prepared. You should know that Mr. Boy Scout.” Negan commented, flicking the bottle lid open.

Boy scout? He’d never been a boy scout, where on earth had Negan got that idea from. Just as he was about to open his mouth to ask, a cool moisture slipped over his skin making him yelp.

“Sorry, it’ll warm up soon,” Negan spoke, working a finger between Carl’s legs.

“It better,” Carl mumbled between clenched teeth, closing his eyes to focus on the feeling of Negan slipping a finger inside, rolling his hips to push it deeper inside of him. “Mm, yesss.”

Negan works quickly to push another finger inside, fucking them in and out, pressing his lips against Carl’s neck, mouthing at the flesh there. He’s so warm inside, that slick heat just begging for his dick, and he was damn well ready to give it to him. He pushes a third inside when he feels Carl relax around him, spread him a quickly and gently as he can. He watches the flush spread over Carl’s chest through eager eyes, he’s so fuckin’ beautiful, face scrunched in pleasure.

“M’ready, Negan, now.” Carl pants, shoving at Negan’s hand, forcing his fingers out of his entrance.

There’s a moment when the world pauses, when it falls way to just the two of them, their eyes locked in a heated, loving gaze, so close they’re breathing each other’s air. Just as Carl lines Negan up, teeth biting into his lower lip when the man presses his hips closer, inching inside of him. Carl’s eyes close, head falling back as his body’s stretched beyond what three fingers could prepare him for. It still burns a delicious burn that has him hissing in pleasure.

Negan lets out a satisfied groan when he’s finally buried deep, hunger for more twisting in his stomach, adrenaline rushes through his veins urging him onwards. “God, Carl…” He can’t say anymore, no words could ever describe how he makes him feel. He’s simply perfect.

“Oooh…” Carl sighed, the slick drag of his cock inside him feels incredible as Negan pulls back only to push back inside, languidly, taking his time. Carl’s hips chased him each time, arching up each time his dick withdrew, hoping to keep him inside as long as possible.
He tugs at Negan’s hair, pulling it to the side so he can latch onto his neck, sucking a deep bruise where his pulse races against his skin, the urge to mark him bubbling in his stomach. He wants to leave his mark, wants Negan to remember him every time he looks in the mirror. He can feel Negan’s moan vibrate under his mouth, feels his hips jerk uncontrollably whenever he sucks harder. His free hand trails downwards, scratching a path across broad muscles, clutches at the pert ass that clenches everytime he thrusts inside.

They’re both sweating, bodies pressed so tightly together, lips locking in a kiss that is just as invasive as Negan’s dick inside of him. Carl moans each time his hips hit the right angle when his cock drags over his prostate sending him spiraling towards a blissful climax. The man never speeds up, just keeps driving him crazy with deep, grinding thrusts that make his toes curl, breath catching in his throat. “Ugh, Negan, you feel so good-yes yesss- right there.” He encourages him with breathy moans, urging him to move faster, groaning when he doesn’t listen.

“You gonna come like this?” Negan whispers so dirtily in his ear. “On my dick? Rubbing that gorgeous cock of yours on me?”

Carl’s heart rate rockets, hips torn between grinding against those hard abs and shifting back onto the dick thrusting inside me. “Oh god, oh Negan, yess, yes please-” His words are choked, panted hard against lips that tease his own. He pushes his other hand down, joining the other to push Negan’s hips harder against his own, jolting at each bone-shaking thrust.

“I wanna hear it, baby, I wanna hear you scream-” He thruts hard, eliciting a desperate whine from the teen. “-my name. C’mon baby, c’mon.”

“Ohgodohgodohgod,” His toes curl as the wave breaks, hips thrusting uncontrollably as the waves of pleasure crash over him spilling himself between them, coating their abdomens with his release. He hisses out a “yess.” when Negan’s thrusts falter, quickening erratically before pressing deep, riding out his own orgasm with a deep growl. Carl wants to tear that image into his mind, wants to remember the peaceful bliss that spreads over his handsome features whenever he closes his eyes.

He pats at Negan’s head, nails scratching at his scalp when the man buries himself in the crook of his neck, moaning softly whenever Carl’s body clenches around his oversensitive cock. His own breath races out, chest heaving under Negan’s weight. A speck of panic crosses over him, ruining his glow, he feels trapped for a moment, body tensing for a different reason. Thankfully Negan shifts, propping himself on his forearms, putting some space between their bodies. A hand strokes across his cheek, tenderly wiping the sweat from his forehead.

“You alright?” His voice is low and gravelly, it sends sparks of arousal through him.

“Mmmhmm,” Carl answers, turning his face to kiss the palm on his cheek. “M’perfect.”

“Good.” Negan’s face finds his neck once more. “Hope you’re ready for round two.” The man mumbled against his collar, lapping at the sweat gathering in the lip before trailing lower. All Carl could do was gasp and squirm as pleasure took over his body once more.

Negan certainly fulfilled his promise, taking him over and over again under the stars, making him scream his name until his voice was hoarse. It had been the perfect way to say goodbye. They hardly slept that night, just spent the time memorizing every inch of skin that they could. When the sun broke over the horizon they held each other, pressed as close together as they physically could, neither willing to let the other go. It was only when Carl’s phone rang for the tenth time that they finally parted, it wouldn’t be the last time he saw the man before he left, but it still made his heart hurt, and his feet heavy. Every mile that grew between them felt like a thousand, it took more than one reminder of his parents to stop himself from spinning the car around and driving back to the
Cabin. He had to think of them, he’d made a promise and he had to keep it.

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The house was quiet when he entered, his Mom sat at the kitchen table, drinking her tea, rubbing at the bump that dwarfed her. She looked beautiful, the morning sun giving her a soft glow, a small smile decorated her face when she caught sight of him. “Hey, baby.”

“Hey Mom,” He eased into the room, slipping a fresh bottle of water from the refrigerator. “Dad not up yet?”

“Nope, think he got home late last night.” She patted the chair next to her. “Come sit.”

He hesitated, deciding if he wanted to sit or make up an excuse to leave. Maybe it was the knowledge that he was leaving the next day but he didn’t have the usual urge to leave her. He pulled the chair out, seating himself on it, the heat of the morning sun warmed the back of his neck like a kiss. He wasn’t gonna tell her that his Dad had probably been up before she had to go by the missed calls Carl had on his phone. He definitely wasn’t going to tell her that the man had probably gone back to bed to avoid being alone with her.

“You have a good night with Enid?”

Enid? Right, she thought she was with Enid, he and his Dad had agreed to keep Negan to themselves, the last thing he wanted was any complications before he left. “Yeah, it was good, just hung out.”

“Hung out, hun?” A secretive smile appeared. “You two dating now?”

He laughed at that. “No, God, no. Definitely not.”

“C’mon,” She teased him. “You can tell me. I won’t tell your Father.”

“Honestly, no. We’re just friends Mom, spending some time together before we leave.”

“Aww, it’s a shame, you two would’ve been a perfect couple.”

“Yeah, well, things just never clicked.” He paused to sip his water, his throat still dry from the previous night. He flushed as the memories crept in, not a good time. He spoke again, distracting himself from the blood rushing south. “So, how are you? Baby alright?”

She seemed surprised by his question, her eyebrows shooting up, eyes flashing with a small flicker of joy that he hadn’t seen in awhile. Was it really so surprising that he’d ask? His stomach sank with guilt, had he really been that distant?

“We’re good, can’t wait for her to arrive.”

“Her?”

Red colored her cheeks. “It’s just a hunch, nothing’s confirmed yet, your Dad wants it to be a surprise.”

“But you think it’s a girl?”

“Mmmh, it feels different than when I carried you. It’s a silly superstition, ignore the crazy pregnant woman.”
“You’re not that crazy.”

“Feels like it,” Lori replied, slowly rubbing her belly. “Lugging around this extra weight is enough to drive anyone mad.”

“It’ll be worth it in the end though right?”

“Well, it was with you.” She said with a heartfelt smile.

Her words sparked a warmth in him, a wave of affection for her spread through his chest. It was a small step, a tiny chip in the protective wall he’d built between them but it was a much-needed start. A glimmer of hope that maybe one day they’d move past the hurt and pain that laid between them. “I’m sure it will be with her too. Can’t wait to meet her.”

“Mornin’.” His Dad interrupted, yawning as he went. He placed a kiss on Carl’s head when he walked past, giving Lori a brief smile. “You guys alright?”

“Well, just waiting for you to get outta bed,” Carl replied.

“Well if you had come home the first time I called you I wouldn’t have gone back to bed.”

“You that tired?” He asked, trying to cover his Dad’s back.

“Well, late night at work,” Rick answered. “Anyways, what d’you guys wanna do today? It’s kinda miserable outside, not much to do out there.”

“We could relax here?” Lori offered. “I can’t really do much with this bump here.” She pointed out.

A whole day with just the three of them cooped up inside the house? That was gonna be interesting. He and his Dad shared a glance, good to know he wasn’t the only one that thought it was a bad idea but they couldn’t exactly force her out of the house. So they pushed through their doubts and plastered smiles on their faces. They ended up in the nursery, finishing off the room whilst his Mom supervised, offering her opinion every now and again. It made sense, the baby was the one thing that they had in common, the one safe topic in the house. Something new to drag them out of their past. It made him all the more excited to return home at Thanksgiving, he knew it wouldn’t be practical to return home for their birth so he’d have to wait for the holidays to meet them. A whole two months away, it couldn’t come quickly enough.

They settled to watch a movie when the last picture was finally hung in the nursery. Carl had never been more proud of a room, it was the perfect little space for the baby. So bright, yet relaxing, filled with plush toys and sweet pictures. He wasn’t sure how it was gonna work with his parents, whether Lori would stay in the end or if she and the baby would move out. At least the baby would always have a home here, a room to call their own, filled with two people that loved him more than anything.

Lori picked the movie, she’d insisted on a cheesy comedy that was hardly funny enough to be called a comedy. She left halfway through, too tired to continue watching. Carl flicked off the tv as soon as she was clear of the stairs, breathing a sigh of relief when the disaster left the screen.

“God, I’m glad that’s over,” Rick said, echoing Carl’s thoughts. “I don’t think I’d have made it to the end.”

“You and me both,” Carl spoke. “That was awful.” He shifted to face his Father on the couch, leg curling under himself. “You gonna be alright when I leave? Being alone with her?”
Rick sighed, rubbing his face as he always did. “I dunno, it’s gonna be hard. Just this morning… I heard her moving around and I just couldn’t. I snuck back up to bed, waited until I heard you come home before I came down.”

“Maybe it’ll be easier when it’s just you and her. When there’s no out for you.”

“I hope so, cos I don’t think I can do this.”

Carl reached out to grasp his Dad’s hand, squeezing it for comfort. “Yeah, you can. You’ve been through worse and you made it, we both did.”

Rick looked him over, when had his son grown so much? He’d become a man without him even realizing. “I’m so proud of you y’know? Everythin’ you’ve done… you’ve fought so hard for it. I couldn’t be prouder.”

“Thanks, Dad.” He ducked his head, shifting from the hand that ruffled at his hair.

“I’m gonna miss you.”

“I’ll miss you too.” He gave him a weak smile, trying to ignore the sadness that gnawed at his gut. “You’ll come visit soon though?”

“Of course, as soon as I can. I promise.” A false promise, he doubted there would be anytime after the baby’s birth but it was a promise that brought them both comfort.

“Good.”

“You’re gonna have fun Carl, away from this place, away from all the shit here.”

“It’s not all shit here.” He replied. “I’ve got you, and Negan.”

“You know what I mean.”

“I know. A new adventure and all that.”

“You’ll be happy and you’ll be safe. That’s all I’ve ever wanted for you, Carl.” He meant it with every fiber of his being, he only hoped Carl realized that. He’d do anything for Carl’s safety, even if it meant him being thousands of miles away. “I love you.”

“Love you too Dad.”

“C’mere.” Rick pulled Carl towards him, clasping him in a hug that he never wanted to release him from. Tomorrow would be hell, he didn’t know how he was gonna let him get on that plane again but he knew he had to, for Carl. He could do it for him.

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“So this is the goodbye huh?” Carl said. It wasn’t how he pictured it, a quick goodbye in front of his Dad. They’d had their real goodbye the night before last, but Carl had insisted on seeing him the day he left. He wanted one more glimpse of the man, one more kiss before he had to go an entire month without him.

“Not goodbye, it’s a see you later,” Negan told him, cradling his face in his hand.

Carl shifted his head to breath him in, placing a lingering kiss on one palm, he held it to his face. “I love you.”
Negan pulled him close, foreheads resting together, “I love you too, won’t be long before I see you again.”

“A month is far too long.” Carl sniffed, hands coming up to cup Negan’s neck, clinging onto the man, fingers tracing skin that he wouldn’t touch for weeks. Negan gave a soft, empty laugh. “You won’t even miss me with all the partying, and studying you’re gonna be doin’.”

“I doubt that.”

“Just don’t get too drunk alright?”

“Not without you there to take care of me.” The car beeped behind them, startling them both. “I guess this is it then,” Carl spoke.

“Yeah, but only for a month.” Negan reminded.

Carl nodded, sniffing again, he was trying not to cry, the last thing he wanted was for their last moments to be soggy with tears.

“It’s gonna be fine,” Negan whispered, leaning closer, thumb stroking away the errant tears that fell.

“I love you,” Carl whispered again before pressing their lips together. Despite his best efforts the kiss grew wet with tears, erasing the taste of Negan with salt, he didn’t pull away though, in that moment he wanted to give everything up, tell Udub to go fuck itself and stay here in his little cabin with Negan. He pulled Negan closer, trying to memorize every single second of the kiss, every single thing about the man. As if he could ever forget, he scoffed at himself, he’d never forget the feel of his lips against his own, the way his hands always tangled in his hair, the soft stroking thumb that always found its way to burn a path on his cheek.

His heart ached with a deep, desperate longing when the kiss broke, Negan’s hands clenching in his hair in one last, despairing grip before sliding down to cover his neck, pushing him back slightly. “If you don’t go now I’m never gonna let you leave.” Negan’s voice was thick with emotion, hands clenching and unclenching softly on his neck, torn between letting him go and desperately longing to keep him here.

“Right, yeah, so I’ll see you later?”

“Yeah, I’ll see you later, Carl.”

He took one last gaze into loving brown eyes, attempted a quick smile before pulling himself away. His pace was quick back to the car, each step hurting like a dagger in his chest. The closer he got to the car the heavier his feet felt until he almost thought that he couldn’t go on, that he would just stop. He shoved himself back into the car, slamming the door shut, Rick immediately setting off as soon as he’d slipped his seatbelt on.

He berated himself for not telling the man to just up and move with him. Stupid, youthful optimism hoping that it wouldn’t tear him apart to leave him behind.

He watched the cabin disappear from the mirror, the structure fading away with the man standing outside, illuminated by the glow of the morning sun. It was as beautiful as it was heartbreaking. He’d see him soon enough, he should’t be feeling this distraught, tears slid uncontrollably down his cheeks. His body, no his soul, felt like it was being torn in two. His stomach churned unpleasantly, his body filling with a black dread that he hadn’t felt in a long time. It terrified him, made him want to scream at his Dad to turn the car around and take him back.
“It’ll be fine,” Rick reassured. “Nerves are normal.”

It was more than nerves that had his knee jittering, his fingers itching. “Yeah, just nerves.”

Rick covered his knee with his hand. “You’ll be fine. When you get there, the nerves will pass and you’ll be excited. Then before you know it Negan will be visiting.”

Carl nodded, turning his gaze out of the window. He wasn’t sure how it would pass but he hoped it would. Just one month he reminded himself. One month.
So here we are folks! Right at the end. Can't believe we made it this far! Considering how many times I thought about giving up I'm amazed that I even finished but here it is and I'm so proud of it. I know the updates have been sporadic and the writing isn't always that amazing but I tried my best and I feel like it's changed a lot as we've gone along with this so I'm a happy girl.

Thank you so much to everyone that's stuck with me until the end! I appreciate every single comment and kudos and hit that I get on here. I know it may not seem like a big thing but they truly do help with the writing process! Big thank you to my girl the-sanctuaryy on Tumblr for encouraging me every step of the way and giving me the courage to stick with this ending.

As for the ending I really hope you all enjoy it! It's probably not the one you're expecting but here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"And I make my bed with the stars above my head
And dream of a place called home"

- ‘A Place Called Home’ Kim Richey

The sun always burst through in the morning, illuminating the small room with a golden hue that never failed to wake its occupants. Carl squinted through reluctant eyes, pouting at the too-bright light, he couldn’t bring himself to hate it though, not when it made the room look so beautiful. More importantly, it made the room look much larger than it was. The magnificent window that overlooked the Burke-Gilman trail, allowed the light to latch onto every dark crevice of the room, reflecting off the white walls to bounce around the space. There really wasn’t much of it, just enough for the King-sized bed in the center of the room, the wardrobe built into the walls with just enough space for all of their crap, giving the room a hint of color with a deep grey.

It was tiny but it was home. Their home. His and the handsome man that rested next to him, face burrowed behind Carl’s back to protect himself from the light. In the few weeks that they’d been there, Negan had firmly established his side of the bed as the one where he could hide away from the glare of the sun. Not that Carl minded, there were worse ways to wake up than being blinded by the spring sun, cozy in the warm arms of the man he loved. He’d never been more glad that Negan had come over to join him, that the distance had been just as intolerable for him as it was for Carl. The man had arrived two weeks after Carl had left, announcing his new job at one of the local high
schools, and a new house that Carl had fallen in love with the second he saw it. Perfect timing, Carl had been days away from calling him up and demanding that he get his ass over there because he missed him too much. It was good to know that even thousands of miles apart they could still think as one.

Now, as the sun crested over the horizon he felt a contentment that he didn’t think he’d feel in this place. As much fun as he’d been having, he knew it’d never be enough, he’d always have that hole in his heart where Negan should be, no amount of friends or parties would make up for it. He could be happy, he’d laugh and smile, live his life but there was always something missing. Their small separation only confirming something they both knew, they needed to be together, like the world needs oxygen, only being complete when the other was around.

“Mmmm…” The vibrations tickled his back, sending shivers up his spine as the body behind him shifted, stretching out long limbs against him. “Mornin’ darlin’” A lingering kiss landed on the base of his neck, right between his shoulder blades before nosing up to his ear.

“Morning,” Carl sighed, practically purring at the hand stroking up and down his arm.

“Sleep well?”

“I always do with you here.”

He felt the lips curl up into a smile against his neck, was rewarded with a quick kiss under his ear. “Glad I can be of assistance.”

Carl shifted around, rolling in his arms, to face his lover. His eyes took in the rugged features, melting at the sleepy smile that spread across his face. He snuggled closer, draping a leg over his hip, “Busy day?” He asked.

“Nope.” Negan replied.

“Good.” The heavy hand on his waist put him at ease, fingers massaging over the shirt he was wearing. His shirt, the Harley Davidson shirt, the first one the man had let him borrow. Not that Carl ever had any intention of giving it back to him, he loved the feel of it, the smell of the man embedded in the material from years of wearing it.

“Got plans for me then?”

“Oh yeah, lots of them.” Carl brought their lips together, basking in the soft feel of his lips against his, his toes curling at the contented pleasure that rolled through him. He let Negan deepen the kiss, let his lips open and his tongue slip out to meet Negan’s, sending tingles through every nerve as they twined together. It was hard to believe they had all day to do this, no class, no work, no need to rush back home to be with his parents. He had all day to indulge in Negan, to luxuriate in his arms, in the feel of his hands on his body. They could do whatever they wanted, just the two of them alone in their little house, safe and warm.

It was perfect.

“I could get used to this.” Carl murmured when their lips finally parted.

Negan chuckled, low and deep. “Well, you can, we’ve got four beautiful years of this.”

Carl smiled at that, shifting to close the gap between them once more before he was interrupted by the sharp ring of his alarm. He huffed, pouting at Negan before rolling over once more to hush his
alarm. He flicked through his messages whilst he was there, a few from Enid telling him about all the boys she’d met that week, he rolled his eyes at those ones, she always had a new guy on the go these days. The others were from his Dad, letting him know about the baby and his Mom. His heart warmed at the thought of his sister, he couldn’t wait to see her again, she was too cute for this world.

“Carl?” Negan spoke behind him.

“Hang on,” He quickly text a reply to his Dad.

“Caarl?”

“Just a sec,” His fingers worked quickly since when was Negan so damn needy? A choked gasp filled his ears, he quickly turned, rolling up in bed to get a better view of the figure next to him. His heart raced at the sight, cold blood filling his veins as his muscles froze, he could only watch as Negan’s rugged features faded away, skin decaying, falling off the bone in grey lumps that landed on their white bed sheets. Negan… no not Negan that thing choked his name, groaning loudly as it’s body twisted and contorted in front of Carl. Vomit clawed at his throat as the familiar smell of decay crawled up his nose, his stomach sunk, this wasn’t supposed to be happening, not here not in their home. No, no, no, no.

“Caarrrl,” It groaned at him, whitened eyes stared vacantly at him before it moved, clawing towards him. Carl tried to push him away but his hands merely clawed at peeling skin, clumps falling off in his hands, he couldn’t stop him, couldn’t stop the stained teeth chattering at him before it lunged at him. “CARL!”

He shot up, arms flailing to grasp a figure that wasn’t there, his eyes burned with a cold sweat that dripped down his face in rivulets onto his thin shirt. He fought to catch his breath, heart pounding a hard beat that hurt his head. His arms fell limply to his side, scrunching cool leaves in his palm, trying to focus on the steady wind against his flushed face, anything but the horror playing like a film in his mind. He flinched at the hand that landed on his shoulder, blinking frantically in an attempt to focus his eyes on the small figure crouched next to him. Relief flooded him when he saw the familiar brown eyes, scouring his face with concern.

“That’s it, Carl, breathe for me.” The hand moved from his shoulder to his back, rubbing soothing circles between his shoulder blades. Carl let his eyes close, focusing on the warmth filtering his clothes. It was just a nightmare. His breathing slowed, heart finally ebbing back to its normal pace, a sense of calm flooded his body. “You alright now?”

He nodded at her, forcing a reassuring smile. “Yeah, bad dream.” He wiped the sweat from his face, rubbing it off on his jeans. He felt disgusting, too many nights of the same nightmare left his body covered in a sweat that he couldn’t wash off.

She looked him over, a pensive look crossing her features. “Been having them a lot lately…” She pointed out. The request for an explanation laid hidden in her words.

He knew that, hadn’t failed to notice that the closer they got to his home, the more frequent the nightmares came. Like his body was forcing him to remember the place he’d been trying to keep locked away inside of him, he wanted to keep them safe, couldn’t bear to think about the life before all of this. Even in his darkest moments, he couldn’t stand to think about Negan, about the gut-wrenching pain of not knowing what had happened to the man when all this shit went down.
“Here, drink this.” She offered him the dirty bottle, the one they’d been drinking for days now, only sipping at the murky liquid to preserve it. They were miles away from any town, God knows when they’d get water next. They hadn’t passed any sign of it in the last few days, they were currently tucked away deep in a forest, not far from the road but far enough to keep them safe. It was easier to hide here, easier to hear anything that might be approaching. Only now he understood Daryl, why he spent so much time listening when they went hunting, you could hear everything in the woods. Every crunch of leaves, every snap of a twig, they all meant something. It was getting easier for him to distinguish each meaning, what kind of animal was walking along, whether it was fleeing or just wandering. Hunting for food became second nature, he copied Daryl’s traps, setting them up wherever the settled for the night, he usually caught something for them. Then there were the other noises, that harder crunch, the sharper snap that told them something bigger was on the way, something that made them grab the small bundle of possessions they still had and run.

His face twisted at the metallic taste of the water, he thought he’d be used to it by now but it never got easy. It still made his stomach cramp, left him feeling nauseous for days on end but he had to drink, maybe one day it would get easier. “Thanks.” He added, focusing on the water swirling in the bottle. It was disgusting, he didn’t want to think about the bits floating in it, how those bits were now floating inside of him.

A shoulder nudged his. “We’re getting close now. A few days away at most.”

“Yeah, not far.” He was acutely aware of it, dread filled each step of the way, in a way he’d been grateful for all the detours they’d had to make, it prolonged the hope that was quickly fading. He’d originally hoped that the South had remained safe, that maybe it had escaped the worst of the outbreak. He was quickly proven wrong, every mile they walked just confirmed his worst fears. They were everywhere, every town had been taken, the stench of death greeted them wherever they went. It was why they stopped looking in towns, preferring the dense woods that kept them hidden. He wasn’t sure if they did it to stop the walkers from getting to them, or if it was so they could avoid having to face the reality of their lives now.

Walkers... such a stupid name, he knew what they were, if he didn’t know at the start then he certainly knew it now. Zombies, is more accurate, the official name given by movies, books, and TV shows. It’s what he should call them, but he couldn’t, it didn’t feel right. It made the situation feel more ridiculous, gave it an air of fiction that didn’t belong in this world. So they called them walkers, gave a new name to the monsters that chased them.

“They might be alright, you never know Carl.”

It wasn’t the first time she’d said that she was always trying to inspire hope in him. It never worked, he never let it work, he couldn’t take the hope. He always smiled though, always appreciated the attempt. Michonne… his only companion in this hell. The world brought them together at just the right moment, when they were both ready to give in. Maybe that’s why they’d been drawn together, misery loves company and all that. He’d been terrified of her when they’d first met, even after the first couple of weeks together he still kept his distance. Her fierce gaze, abrupt sentences that gave nothing away terrifed him almost as much as the blood-stained katana that she kept on her back. It was only when he’d saved her from a group of walkers, driving his own knife into their skulls that she started to open up to him. A warmth filling her words, genuine affection grew between them the more time they spent together. He hadn't expected her to follow him this far, figured she'd leave him as soon as she saw signs for other safe spaces, yet she surprised him by sticking by his side. Probably realized there was such a thing as a ‘safe space’ not after everything that had happened. He was grateful to have her by his side, not just because she knew how to use that damn katana but she helped, just having her around helped. They helped each other through the worst of it, fought by each other’s side whenever they were forced to confront the monsters. They got over the guilt.
together, told each other that it was a necessity, that chipping away at their own humanity was worth the sacrifice to stay alive.

He still wasn’t sure about that.

There was a mutual agreement not to talk about the past, to discuss how they ended up where they were. She never really asked about his nightmares, just as he never asked about those moments where he lost her to her memories, those times when her hand tightened on the blade handle and brown eyes fell flat and lifeless. All she knew was that he wanted to get home, he didn’t have to tell her who he was going home too, she’d seen the picture, the one possession that he’d never let go of. It was the one he picked off the floor a lifetime ago, taken on his birthday, he’d kept it in his wallet, then in his jeans pocket when he chucked the leather, money meant jack shit these days. He tried not to look at it much, only on those days when he felt strong enough when the sight of his parents, the memories of the past, wouldn't condemn him to days of despair.

“Ready to move on?” She asked, sensing any further discussion of his nightmares would only result in further silence.

He nodded, shifting to stand on still-shaking legs. He gathered up their shit, took another despairing sip of the water before shoving it into his backpack. Today was a day for silence, they both sensed it, in the weeks that they’d been together they’d grown to know each other too well. Carl almost knew what she was thinking at times, could tell from her body language whether she wanted to talk or not, whether the day would be filled with a strange laughter, deep discussion or pure silence. The days when they laughed became fewer and far between, every time they joked or messed around they were both overcome with such guilt that they didn’t talk for days. A self-imposed punishment for having a moment of enjoyment in a time of misery.

They’d crossed into Georgia days ago, they’d dipped out into a town on the outskirts to find food and water. They didn’t find much of either, the small town had been ransacked, store-fronts smashed, all the non-perishables cleared on the shelves. They’d had to resort to scouring the houses, focusing on the nicer neighborhoods that had better protection. They both hated doing it. Carl could practically feel eyes following him from each portrait that decorated walls, families joined together in smiles, glaring at him for invading their homes, desecrating the happiness that once filled the four walls. At least this time had been worth it, they managed to fill their bags with tins, enough food to last them the trip back home.

Birds fluttered overhead, stirring the trees with their wings, drawing his attention towards the clear skies. The sun was just rising, streaming through the gaps in the trees, as it had in his dream. He lost himself in the glow, remembering the feel of the sun warming his face, the hand that trailed along his back, adoring brown eyes… he knocked those thoughts from his head. He couldn’t think like that, couldn’t allow himself to think that way. Those fantasies should be buried, they’d never be real, even if Negan was still alive, it’d never be like that. Seattle was long gone, a charred wreck of a place.

He’d been on a trip to Mount Rainier when it all happened, there had been an unease in the air, reminiscent of the tension with his Father in the weeks before he left. Carl had ignored it, deciding to join his classmates on the weekend trip into the wilderness. When they got back everything had changed, they’d been unable to make it back onto campus, cars had blocked the roads into the city, signs had warned them not to continue. A few had chosen to ignore it, racing on foot back into the fires that they could see from miles away. Carl had stayed put, tried to get any kind of signal on his phone, quickly realizing that none of them could. Desperation had set in then, mingling with the fear that made his heart pound. He didn’t know what to do, they were all screaming at each other, tears choking at their throats. It must have been the shouting that drew their attention. He’d been the first to hear it, the low, throaty groan. He’d ignored it, put it down to the shrill ringing in his ears, then it
came again, louder, coming closer. One by one they all stopped shouting, a deadly hush came over the group, they sought each other, instinctively pulling together in a circle. Carl saw it first, edging out of the trees, stumbling towards the road. He thought it was a drunk, thought that maybe they could tell them what had happened. He’d been the one to separate from the circle, shouting requests at the figure, asking who they were. All he heard was more groans, he’d only stepped back when more figures emerged from the trees, more straggling bodies that inched closer.

It was only when he noticed the white in their eyes that true terror gripped his body, their groans echoed in his ears, arms reached out for them. He’d darted away, put some distance between them, tried to get the others to do the same but it was all in vain. He could only watch as they stood frozen in fear, could only see the horror on the faces when sharp teeth ripped through their skin. It was sight that would forever be seared into his mind.

That was the first time he’d killed someone. Whilst the remaining survivors ran for the safety of the trees he’d grabbed a kitchen knife from one of the bags and driven it into one of their skulls. The resistance had surprised him, movies made it look so easy, just dive the knife in and pull it out. There was a moment when he didn’t think he’d be able to push it through, his muscles too weak to drive it through unyielding bone, then suddenly it slipped through spearing into the brain. The thing flopped, dead once more. In a haze he’d done the same to the others, working on instinct to avoid chattering teeth.

He’d been covered in the blood for days, unable to clear it until he’d found a river. Some days he could still feel it coating him, the dark red drying on his skin, crusting over the surface. At least he’d been on his own then, no one to worry about but himself, he’d been able to avoid most of the walkers as he made his way South. He barely remembered the early days, the memories floated through his mind like a dream, blurred with no real sense of time. He’d walked, paranoid that each step would draw more of those monsters, he never stopped looking over his shoulder. The amount of times he’d suddenly change direction, certain that he was about to walk into a hoard of them. He’d seen that once, it was like being doused in cold water, he’d hidden up in a tree and waited for the herd to pass him. He hardly allowed himself to breathe, he slipped along roads like a ghost. He didn’t trust anyone, always ducked whenever a car blew past him, hid if he heard even a whisper of a voice. By the time he’d come across Michonne he hadn’t said a word in a month, just moved with his teeth gritted in a silence. In those days he’d felt a flurry of gratitude to Daryl, grateful that he’d taught him how to navigate, he’d stolen a map from an abandoned gas station, the first he’d come across, and used it to work a route back home. Nearly 3,000 miles had stood between him and his home, now it dwindled to ten. Nearly three months of walking, making detours, avoiding conflict whenever they could. It seems always poetic that they’d be arriving not long after the New Year, the time when things always seemed to change for him and he knew, God, he’d known for far too long that whatever happened when they reached Lawrenceville, it would change him forever.

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Carl didn’t even notice them arrive in his hometown, too busy watching his big toe poke out of the top of his sneakers with every step. He really needed to find a new pair, even in the warmer climate his feet still froze in the nights. It was only when the woods dwindled and they were forced out of their leafy sanctuary that he recognized where he was, like a bullet to the chest recognition shot into him. The old park… his old playground spread out before him, much like it had when he’d stumbled into the place months ago. It tore a laughter out of him, his cracked lips tearing with his smile, he could taste the blood on them but couldn’t care less. They’d made it. They’d finally made it.

“Carl?” Michonne asked, coming to stand next to him.

“We’re here.” He responded it was all he could say. He drank in the sight, desperately making sure
that this was the right place, that his mind wasn’t tormenting him with false hope.

She stepped ahead of him, taking in the view herself, checking for walkers no doubt, spinning around to check the vicinity. Her hand relinquished her katana when she confirmed that all was clear. “So where now?”

Where now? Home or his other home? Negan or his parents? Home was closer, only an hours walk from here, Negan’s would take at least two hours. On the other hand, Negan’s place is more remote so there’s a small chance Rick might have taken them there to keep them safe. He desperately wished he could see both, wished for some sign about where they were. The last thing he wanted was to drag Michonne through a walker-infested town unnecessarily, they’d had far too many narrow-escapes in towns like this where they’d been suddenly overwhelmed with walkers. *Time to be decisive Carl, you can’t just stay here.* “Home.” He said. “We’re going home.”

“Allright, show me the way.”

He nodded, swallowing the nerves creeping up his throat, before taking a step forward. In the park, it seemed like nothing had changed, but the town soon showed it’s colors. The streets were empty, filled with broken, vandalized cars. Military vans decorated the sidewalks, soldiers still in their camo hung lifelessly out of windows, the familiar stench of death overshadowing the town. It was just like all the other places they’d been, brutalized, wrecked, surrendered to the dead. They only came across a handful of walkers on their path, one perk of being a local meant he knew how to avoid the populated places, as much as he wanted to head downtown to check for supplies he knew it’d be a wasted trip. They’d both learned that places like this just led to disappointment. His own neighborhood hadn’t escaped the path of destruction, cars littered what used to be perfectly kept lawns, the grass all overgrown, flowers dead from the cold winter. Most of the doors hung open like the homes were left in a hurry, he quickened his pace when they reached his street, anxious anticipation driving him onwards. He needed to know. He had to know the truth after all this time. One way or another.

He paused at the pathway, looking up at the house that towered over him, his home. All he had to do was walk up the stone and look inside. It didn’t look that different, the door was shut, Mom’s car still on the drive where it was when he’d left. For a moment hope trickled through him, maybe they were still there waiting for him to come home.

“You ready?”

“No.” He answered looking over at her for a strength that he couldn’t find in himself. A strange look came over her, almost affectionate yet sorrowful. She looked so much like a Mother sending her baby off to school for the first time, trying to reassure whilst drowning in the knowledge that their baby would soon be devastated. It fit her features like she’d done it before, he often wondered if she had. There were so many moments where he was certain that she had to have been a parent, the way she treated him at times… He shook his head, it wasn’t time for those thoughts, he had to think of his own parents now.

She gave his arm a squeeze, taking a step closer to him. “I’ll be here Carl, right beside you, whatever happens.”

The breath filled his lungs, airing out his chest in an attempt to lift the weight that had settled there. “Alright, let’s do this.” He stepped forward, tentatively walking closer to the house. As much as he wanted to rush inside he couldn’t let himself forget what could be lurking on the other side of the door, there was always a possibility that the door had been closed to keep those monsters inside. His hand landed on his knife, fingers teasing the handle, preparing himself for the worst. Heart thudding
in his ears, he twisted the doorknob, relieved when it simply clicked open. He didn’t dare breath, he almost willed his heart to stop pounding just so he could hear. It was almost strange to see it so untouched, nothing was out of place, he’d expected it to be ransacked, like all the houses he’d dipped into. At the very least he’d expected there to be signs of a struggle, maybe even signs of a quick escape, things tossed to the floor to get access to the essentials. No… it looked the same. He felt Michonne creep behind him, saw her dip in front of him, katana raised high as she surveyed the house. He let her move through the house, saw her creep into the dining room, instead of following her he went up the stairs. Heart urging him into the nursery they’d put together, the one question that had plagued his mind since this whole thing had started; what about his sister?

He only hoped that Lori had given birth before things had gotten too bad, that maybe she’d made it to the hospital to deliver her safely. The more he crept up the stairs the more he came to accept the reality that his parents weren’t here. His Dad would’ve made himself known by now, whether he thought it was Carl or an intruder, if his sister were here the man would’ve done anything to keep her safe. Still, he persevered, checking each room, growing more desperate when each room was just as empty as the next. The nursery looked unused, dust collected all over the furniture, a brand new bag of nappies sat in the corner. He left as quickly as he came, closing the door behind him. He let himself fall in his own room, sinking down onto the still-made bed, just as he’d left it. Disappointment flooded every vein, a dark chill gripped him, some part of him always thought they’d be here, waiting for him. How was he supposed to find them? Was there even a ‘them’ to find? How on earth in this impossible world were they ever going to find each other again?

“Carl?” Michonne called up to him, urgency seeping into her voice.

He raced down the stairs, jumping the last two steps, rushing into the kitchen. Michonne stood by the fridge looking down at a piece of paper. “What is it?”

She gave him a weak smile, hand shaking as she held it out to him. “It’s for you.”

His own hand shook when he plucked it from hers, he couldn’t focus his eyes, they stared blankly at the black ink crossing the page. It took several moments for the ink to form words, even longer for it to make sense to him.

*Carl,*

*I hope this gets to you, I hope that somehow you made your way home safely. We held out as long as we could but your Mom was getting closer to her due date and we couldn’t wait any longer.*

*We’re going to Atlanta, apparently, there’s a safe space there, run by the military. We’re hoping there’s a hospital for your Mom to deliver safely. I’ve let you her car, there’s gas in the tank and there’s more hidden in the basement. I’ve locked away some guns, you know where and you know the code. Take them and come find us. We’ll wait for you there I promise.*

*Take care and stay safe.*
Teardrops dampened the white sheet, his hand trembled harder as emotions rolled through him. “They’re alive.” He whispered, hardly able to believe it. “They’re alive.”

“Looks like it.” Michonne replied, brushing the water from his face. “No need for tears Carl, we gotta go find your parents.”

He sniffed, shaking his head to pull himself together. She was right, it was time to focus, he had to go find them, no point waiting around. Even if the thought of another 'safe space' had his heart skipping a beat, he'd got there for his parents. “Yeah, God, yeah.” He smiled through the tears that burned at his bleeding lips. “We better go.”

Her face lit up in a smile that he hadn’t seen before, hope danced in her eyes, maybe this trip wasn’t just for him, maybe she needed this just as much as he did. Some form of light in this dark world. Something to think about on those days when it all got too much and the barrel of a gun looked all too inviting. They needed this, no, after everything they’d been through they deserved this.

He made sure they gathered more supplies before they took off, he grabbed the guns his Dad had left for him in the safe, in the attic, hidden under all the Christmas decorations that they wouldn’t need again. He sent a quick thanks to his past self when he found the sneakers he'd left behind before heading to Seattle. It was like walking on air after living with the damaged ones for so long. As expected the water was off in the house but he managed to find some baby wipes in the nursery, it felt wrong taking them but the need to finally clean again was more than overwhelming. They worked quickly to sort themselves out, Michonne doing what she could in a place so unfamiliar, Carl moving as fast as he could so they could move onto the other place he so desperately needed to see. The place his soul screamed at him to go to.

They hopped in the car together, Carl had never been so happy to see the tank full, he’d thought that someone would’ve drained it by now. He was careful driving out of the street, narrowly avoiding the cars splayed over the road. For the first time in so long they both relaxed, worn bodies sinking into the cool leather as they relished in a feeling of safety that they hadn’t felt since the start of it all.

“You ready for Atlanta?” Michonne questioned, speaking through a mouthful of protein bar. She’d been overjoyed when she found his Dad's secret stash, even happier when Carl told her she was more than welcome to all the peanut butter ones. No amount of hunger could ever make Carl eat that shit again.

“Yeah,” He was more than ready for that place. “I just need to go somewhere else first.”

He saw her cock her brow at him from the side. “Where’s that?”

He gripped the wheel tighter, images of the cabin flickering through his mind. It was the first time he’d let himself think about that place, his little sanctuary, maybe it would be again. He could bring his parents back from Atlanta, hole up there with Negan until… well until whenever. “There’s someone else, someone I need to see.”

“Ookay, wanna tell me who it is?”
“I don’t really wanna talk about it.”

“Alright,” She turned her gaze back to the open road in front of them. “Just lemme know when we get there, I’m gonna take a nap.”

He let her sleep, heard her breathing soften next to him. It was almost impossible to resist the temptation to go faster, he just wanted to be there already, he wanted to see that cabin appear in the horizon, that familiar figure waiting for him on the porch like he always did. His heart longed for it, as much as it longer for the man who owned the place.

Walkers bordered the road in front of them, huddled in little groups around cars that had crashed into the trees, Carl knew what they were doing, could tell from the way they buried their faces into the metal. It made him sick to think about it, nausea rolling through his belly for the remainder of the journey. It only worsened when he turned the car onto the smaller road that led up to the cabin, the gravel crunching under the heavy tires.

His heart leapt as the structure appeared in his vision, that feeling of home seeped through every bone in his body. The world fell away for a brief moment, he forgot Michonne was next to him, in his mind, it was Friday night, he was pulling up after a long day at school, ready to unwind with the man he loved. His eyes fixed on the dark mahogany of the door and he waited, breath trapped in his chest, for the man to appear. He waited and waited, minutes passed maybe even hours, but he waited. He couldn’t blink, he didn’t want to miss the moment when the door opened and Negan came rushing out as he always did, Carl would be ready. He’d greet his body with his own, welcoming him into his embrace, lips raising up to meet Negan’s. He just had to wait, his knuckles turned white, his lungs screamed at him to just take a damn breath.

Nothing happened.

The door remained closed to him, no figure emerged from the threshold, no lights appeared in the windows. The harsh light of day reigned down on them, leaving no room for mystery, no room for misinterpretation. It was clear no one was there, all the clearer when Carl’s gaze left the door to sweep over the property. The sight devastated him, the cabin hadn’t been as lucky as his home, it was a ruin of its former self. Not a single window was left intact, all of them smashed, he couldn’t tell if it was by object or hand. Graffiti covered the wooden exterior, stupid, meaningless words desecrated the space. Carl noted there was no attempt at cleaning, which meant… no… it didn’t mean anything.

“Carl?” Michonne’s voice anchored him back, drawing his attention to her. “This the other place?”

He nodded, he couldn’t speak, not with the lump growing in his throat. This couldn’t be it, it couldn’t end like this, not with them.

“Wanna go inside?”

He didn’t, he so desperately didn’t but he needed to know… he couldn’t go back, couldn’t go forward. He wanted to stay in this moment where there was still hope, where he could believe that he wasn’t about to see his nightmare become a reality. His heart raced, his hands shook uncontrollably as he pushed the car door open. He trembled on unsteady legs, each step felt momentous, he wasn’t sure if he was going to make it, almost certain that he was gonna fall. Michonne hovered nearby, waiting to catch him? He could see the katana glint in the sunlight, suddenly it didn’t make him feel as safe as it used it, instead it served as a reminder of what would happen if Negan was inside, if he was like the others. He knew she wouldn’t hesitate, not like him, she’d act quick, taking Negan from him.
“Let me go first, Carl.” She tugged him back, pushing herself in front of him.

He halted on the threshold, watched her go inside, that feeling of wrong filled him once more. She shouldn’t be here, it should just be him and Negan. It was their place. Their safe place where they could be together, where they opened up to one another, physically and emotionally. To know another person was inside was a violation. The feeling only worsened when he finally mustered the courage to step inside. The interior was wrecked, the place was torn apart, cupboards left hanging open, chairs overturned for no reason other than to cause destruction. The couch was torn, seared by a knife so the stuffing hung out obscenely, his spot ruined beyond repair. There was no sign of life, no sign anything had been there recently, dust covered the surfaces, thicker than the one at his parents. Clearly, the place had been hit first, the only occupant driven out or… nonono. He couldn’t think that, not yet, not ever.

“Doesn’t look like anyone’s here Carl.” Michonne spoke emerging from the bathroom. “I’ll go check upstairs.”

“No,” He halted her, raising a hand to stop her moving. “I’ll go.”

“Carl…” She warned he could feel the lecture ready to bubble out of her.

“Please? I need to do this.” He pleaded with her, he had to, he needed to see.

She relented, gesturing for him to head up the stairs. “I’ll be here if you need me.”

He nodded back, gripping the cold metal banister that encircled the staircase, using it to urge him upwards. Each step screamed a memory at him, the first time he’d walked up these stairs, the pain he was in then was nothing to the pain that electrified his veins now, this time he had no hand to clutch, no arm around his waist, no cheesy jokes to lift his mood. It was just him, alone, he’d never gone up these stairs alone. He'd never been in this cabin without him, somehow the place felt less like home without the large personality that was Negan. It was a realization that nearly broke him, made his knees weak, and his pace slow. The reality that this might be his life now slowly sank in, like a venom pouring through your veins, you can’t see it but god you can feel it burning through you.

He kept his gaze away from Negan’s bedroom, inspecting the bathroom and the spare room for any signs of the man. Nothing. The rooms were just as wrecked, the mirror ripped off of the wall, no doubt people looking for medicine, or drugs or god knows what. The bed was stripped in the spare room, the mattress leaning precariously over the edge of the divan base. The drawers hung open, as bare as the wardrobe at the side of the room.

There was nothing here.

Carl knew before he’d even opened the door that Negan wouldn’t be inside it, he’d have known by now. One way or another there would’ve been some indication of life inside the cabin, the dust on the floor told him that no one had stepped along this corridor in so long. Nonetheless, he opened the door and stepped inside. The room was no different to the others, it shouldn’t have surprised him but it did, he had hoped that the room might remain untouched that some power would’ve kept it safe.

What he saw on the bed was the final straw, the final dagger in his heart that had him crashing to the floor, like a puppet cut from his string. He fell to his knees by the bed, broken eyes never leaving the dried pool of blood on the mattress that had long been stripped of its sheets. There was too much blood there, logic told him that there was too much for it for a person to walk out alive. His hands clutched at the mattress, clinging to the bed like a lifeline. Their bed, the bed where he’d had the first peaceful night’s sleep in years, the bed where he and Negan had made love more times than he could count yet not enough, it hadn’t been enough. It was the bed where Negan had held him through his
nightmares, where they’d spoken with hushed voices about their future and their past. Now it was the bed where Negan might have…

He couldn’t think it, his brain couldn’t comprehend it. This couldn't be it, not the end of Negan, of _them_. He couldn’t have had his last kiss with him, he could hardly remember it, he couldn’t remember how it felt, how _he_ felt. He buried his face into the fabric, desperately breathing in, he couldn’t remember how he smelt, he wanted to remember, he wanted to smell it one more time. He needed one more time. This wasn’t how it ended, he didn’t come all this way for it to end like this.

“Carl?” Michonne’s voice was soft behind him, “Are you alright?”

“He’s gone.” He mumbled against the fabric, now damp with tears. It was all he could say, he couldn’t say the other words, he’d never be able to say it.

Michonne filled in the blanks, the blood on the mattress, the shuddering form at the foot of the bed. “It might not be his, it could be anyone's.”

“Then where is he?” He spoke again. “He wouldn’t leave here, not without letting me know.”

Michonne knelt beside him, pulling him away from the bloody mess. “He might have been rushed out, you know how these things go.”

“That’s the problem, I know how it goes. He could be one of _them_.”

“Or he could be fine. “

Carl didn’t want to hear it, couldn’t fathom it. Who else would’ve been there? Who would’ve stayed? Why wouldn’t Negan have come back for him? “What do we do now?” His voice broke with the words. What was worth doing now?

She brushed away his tears again, looking at him with a firm resolve, “We go to Atlanta, we find your parents. Maybe they’ll know what happened here. We don’t stop though Carl, not now, we’ve come this far. You and me. We’re going.”

He let her tug him to his feet, leaned on her as they made there was to the door, he stopped them halfway. “Wait…” His fingers fumbled with the scarf around his neck, pulling it out from his coat. He let it fall through his hands, the red material soft against his palms, folding it so the C.G. stared back at him. The present from the first, and only, birthday he’d spent with the man. He placed it at the foot of the bed, smoothing it down before placing the letter from his parents on top. “If he’s still alive, he might come back here. This way he’ll know where I am. He can find us.”

Michonne nodded, gesturing for Carl to get back to her. She helped him back to the car, not letting him stop for a moment, she might never get him going again. Together they stumbled through the living room, and out into the sunlight. Broken, bloodied, they had a long journey ahead and she had a teenager to protect. Whatever happened, wherever they ended up she’d have his back, she’d make sure he made it back to his parents. No matter what.

Chapter End Notes
I hope it didn't come as too much of a surprise to you all! I tried to set it up through the story, the whole Merle conspiracy theory, Daryl teaching Carl how to hunt, Rick being all weird and sketchy in the last few chapters. It was all supposed to tie into this. I just couldn't resist bringing them into this world! I nearly changed the ending when I read Leaf's lovely spin-off from this as I honestly didn't think I could compete with that but I just couldn't think of a more fun way of ending it.

If you want a more closed ending then consider the dream-sequence the actual ending, I know people like a story wrapped up but if you know anything about me then you know I like a good cliff-hanging.

As a small aside can I ask you guys about chapter length, do you think 10,000+ is too much? Just for future reference, I never know if it’s better to have long chapters or cut them in half.

That's all now folks, the sequel should be up soon as well as a new fic that I've been plotting for months! Come find me on tumblr, I'm awareslaura on there too, I'm always in need of more Cegan blogs to follow. Love you guys <3

Works inspired by this one

Never Without You by Leef

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!