Stranded in America and without his magic Harry had been captured by the Claimers. Kept as a slave for their entertainment he encounters Rick and the rest of the group. They might be the only ones that can help him to survive… And he might be just as important to their survival.

Will be very, very slow burn for any romantic action… I’m very sorry! Please have patience with me!

Notes

The story was inspired by misteeirene's Savior's Saviors. It started a bit as a fanfiction to a fanfiction and has some obvious similarities to the original in the first chapters. I contacted misteeirene when I was in the middle of writing so she could read the first chapter. I got some important feedback and the permission to post this story.

Because I like the cannon I tried to keep to the general story line using lines from the show on occasion.

I apologize before hand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.
I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

- Inspired by Savior’s Saviors by misteeirene
Prologue

This was the end.

It was officially and totally the end! The end of the world. The end of civilisation. The end of bloody and Merlin forsaken humanity.

And soon it would be the end of Harry’s life.

Not that it mattered much anymore, Harry was bone tired and just so done with all of it.

His whole body ached terribly, he felt bruised everywhere. He tried to numb his mind against what was happening to him like he had done a hundred times before. Guiding his mind to some faraway place where he didn’t have to feel, to hear or to taste anything.

Where he could pretend that he was ok, that all of it was just bad dream that he could wake up from and he would be save in his four-poster bed in the Gryffindor dorm. Ron and Neville snoring in the beds beside him. Dean and Seamus arguing about who was taking the first shower. Hermine would be waiting form them in the common room, nagging them about being late and about homework…

A sob ripped Harry out of his safe place.

The blue eyed boy a few feet away from him was crying, his cheek showed nasty scratches…

*Must have happened when Dan pushed him to the ground...* even his thoughts felt slow, muddled and distant.

It was as if Harry was watching everything from above, as if this didn’t happen to him.

As if he wasn’t the one being raped right now but another poor bruised boy with black hair and green eyes.

As if Dan wasn’t moving and grunting above him like an animal, ripping into him with each rapid and unrefined thrust.

He wished the other boy would stop sobbing…

It was really troublesome. He wanted to be able to go back to his safe place... Hogwarts…

Harry knew he would never see the beautiful castle again. His home was lost to him… had been lost to him since the beginning of the outbreak.

But maybe he was kidding himself. If he stopped deluding himself, if was honest to himself, he would be forced to admit that he had lost Hogwarts even before. Had lost it in a graveyard in Little Hangleton, he had lost a lot that night, next to Cedric’s cooling corps.

Wormtail had betrayed them all again, aiding Voldemort in gaining a new body going as far as sacrificing his own hand and Harry’s blood for it.
Harry had fought tooth and nail to get away, even duelled the Dark Lord discovering that their twin wands wouldn’t attack each other. There had been an opening for him… a chance to get away, to go back home and fulfil Cedric’s last wish. But when Harry thought he had managed to flee his hand just inches away from the cup.

**Voldemort had banished his only way of escape… he had been stuck in a graveyard full of Deatheaters…**

It had taken four weeks for Dumbledore and a group that called themselves the Order of Phoenix to find him. When they located him he had been ready to lose hope, he had been ready to die even back then…

**Dumbledore’s words echoing in his head.**

“After all to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure…”

But that hadn’t been his end…

His rescuers had come in wands blazing and it had been mayhem. Lives had been lost on both sides… Riddle had been killed by Harry in the end, but most importantly Sirius and Remus had been among the fallen.

Thinking about it still tore Harry’s heart apart with overwhelming grief, rage and shame. *Hermine had called it survivor's guilt...*  

After the events around Voldemort’s demise, after 4th year and the loss of Siri and Remus; Harry had hoped that he would be able to spend summer break with Ron and his family. He had begged Dumbledore not to send him back to his aunt and uncle. But the headmaster had been unrelenting. There were still Deatheaters on the run, out for revenge, out to kill Harry...

The bloodwards had been his best protection, so Dumbledore made it clear that there wouldn't be an alternative. Harry had to go back to Private Drive Nr. 4.

The Dursleys had been just as enthusiastic as Harry to see him there.

Only a week later everything had gone down... Vernon had to go to Atlanta for a business convention and the Dursleys had planned for a three weeklong vacation afterwards. At that point the wards and the blood protection were not strong enough to hold on their own with the Dursleys leaving for more than three weeks... not that they had wanted Harry to stay alone in the house... the horror! Miss Fick had broken her leg again and had been still in hospital.

And Harry hadn’t been allowed go to Ron’s.

The headmaster had been very frank with him... the Burrow wasn’t safe and Harry would endanger the Weasleys. End of discussion! He had nicely played up to Harry’s fears of endangering people near to him or being a burden to them. Staying at Hogwarts had been also out of question, since the school wards were in maintaining after the tournament.

That had left only one option... the Dursleys had been forced to take him with them. Harry had never seen Vernon’s face get that shaded of purple. He had screamed and raged at Dumbledore, that they wouldn't bring that ungrateful freak on their hard earned vacation. Vernon and Petunia had claimed even to be afraid that Harry would to something freaky with his magic. Dumbledore had seemed a bit troubled by his relatives’ attitude to him. But not enough to find another solution... instead he had given them money (from Harry's Gringotts account) for Harry's
proportion of the travel expenses.

Harry had watched bitterly how Vernon had greedily pocketed the money.

Their fears of magic were to be calmed by a magic suppressing ritual. An old goblin based ritual that should bind his magical core. It had been invented to sanction wizards’ crimes against the goblin nation. The binding of a core was an extremely painful process since it was the centre of a wizard’s life force and would lead to death in a matter of weeks.

It fitted goblins mentality to develop such a cruel and slow way to punish someone going against their laws.

Dumbledore had tweaked the ritual a bit. He had cut Harry off from his active magic, but had left him at least with a basic access to his latent magic by waving in runes to stabilise Harry’s core. It kept the green eyed boy alive and was theoretically saving his core from being permanently damaged.

Furthermore the ritual was keyed into the teen’s core’s maturity… Since his magic was still growing the ritual wouldn’t keep its effect forever.

Reaching the peak of his magical growth on Harry's 17th birthday the ritual wouldn’t be able to contain his powers anymore because it had been impressed on an immature core. Until then only the caster would be able to reverse the binding and it outward sign would vanish. And getting two birds with one stone the ritual would hide Harry while outside the wards of his home.

Magic could only locate Magic!

Nobody would be able to trace Harry. The ritual and the tattoos would function as a form of magical witness protection. The ritual manifested itself in the form of wristband-like Celtic tattoos riddled with runes innerving and curling in thin artistic lines around Harry’s wrists. They looked kind of pretty…

While never fond of the tattoos, by now Harry hated them and what they stood for with passion... Being blocked from his magic felt crippling. It hurt almost constantly and made him dizzy. Despite having no active access to his powers, magic was still highly emotion and intention based. The magic in his core would still fluctuate, increasing with his instincts trying to assist him and to protect him but the binding was working against that natural defence.

It exhausted Harry immensely. The worst reactions came with the protective flares of his magic. The tattoos would heat up then and forcefully slam down barriers on his core and his magic in agitation. Those moments left him grasping breathlessly in blinding pain. It felt like his magic and the tattoos were simultaneously punishing him.

In the first weeks he had fainted a lot, causing worried passers-by to admit him again and again to a hospital in Atlanta near the hotel. Although to be fair the fainting spells back then were also aided by dehydration and heatstrokes.

The Dursleys had been adamant that he didn’t disturb their vacation with his presence, pushing him as early as possible out of the hotel room, without a key or money so Harry had spent a lot of his time strolling around Atlanta in the summer heat. It hadn’t gone overly well for him.

But over the time he had become friendly with the head nurse who gave him the pin code for the back door because she got sick of him being hospitalized all the time.
The draining and weakening effect of the ritual seemed to have gotten even stronger over time. Harry had tried everything to get the tattoos off hoping it would cancel their binds effects somehow....everything short of cutting his own hands of.

Scratching, cutting, burning,... Not. One. Bloody. Scratch! Not. A. Single. Disturbance. In. The. Lines! The only thing that his failed attempts had gotten him was some pretty heavy scaring on his wrists around the tattoos.

So Harry had spent the last months getting weaker, and more and more hopeless. With the tattoos nobody was able to track him down in America, not the Deatheaters nor the Headmaster or his friends....

The Dursleys had left him behind in the early days of the apocalypse. He didn't think that they were still alive...

They were never really fit and surviving in this post-apocalyptic world relied a lot on being fast... and running. He just didn't see Vernon and Duddly doing that... maybe rolling... the thought would have made him laugh if his own situation wasn't so shitty.

He was stranded. He was alone. And he felt fucking helpless... The only defence he learnt in the last four years was bloody blocked from him.

Merlin, what a mess!

Harry had survived on his own for nearly nine months after the dead had started to walk. Running, hiding, following his instincts and his guts.

And while he didn’t faint anymore he had steadily gotten weaker. He was starting to fear that the modifications in the ritual weren’t enough for such a long term use and the binding of his core was already doing serious damage to him.

He had gotten sicker and he hadn’t been careful enough. His gut had been telling him to get moving that day...

Not to stay too long in that house, but he had been tired, had been feeling too sick to move. He had thought that one more hour of rest wouldn't matter. He had never been so wrong in his life. In hindsight he should have trusted his hunches more since they had kept him alive in this fucked up new world. When he finally wanted to move they had already been there.

Harry remembered how surprised they had been to see a teenaged boy stumble out of an abandoned house...a teenaged boy… alone...

“Claimed!”

Just one word but it changed everything. Len had claimed him that day. And after that Harry had ceased to be a human being. He became a thing, a possession. To be used as his claimer pleased.

The Claimers lived by simple rules.

First, if a member saw something they wanted, they had to shout "claimed".

Secondly, they must be honest at all times.

That meant the other men didn't rape him without Len's permission. But they would knock him around and Len would “share” him with them as good for trade.
In the beginning Harry had tried to fight, had tried to escape...

Unsurprisingly Len had beaten him black and blue for that. He punished him for every little resistance. Being not fast enough to comply when he was ordered to suck cock, even the hint of teeth when doing so, for crying to loud while fucked, for fighting back against Len or those he got lent to with his claimer’s permission.

The punishment after his fourth escape attempt had been the worst. Len had crushed his glasses, mocking Harry all the while. They both had known that taking his glasses from him was the end of his resistance. His blurry sight just bad enough that he’d be too slow, too vulnerable to run away on his own.

Joe had ordered a group punishment for ‘lying’ as Harry had been forced to promise not to run anymore after his third attempt. They hadn’t been kind to him… beating and whipping him until he lost consciousness.

But to make “the message sink in”... Len had taken a knife to Harry's back...

The wounds had nearly killed Harry. Not wanting to lose his pet Len had been less extensive but no less violent in his punishments after that.

His claimer had taken to starving him methodically... As it was Harry couldn’t remember when he last ate something that wasn't grass, herbs or cum. His Claimer preferred him to be weak and helpless.

Too weak to fight him off when he wanted to use him. Too helpless to make a run for it.

And now he laid under Dan, the stinking bald man who had leered at him for months but hadn’t found anything useful to trade for some quality time with Len’s pet.

Well he did not need to find anything to trade. In the end I threw myself at him. The part of Harry mind that was slowly going insane wanted to laugh hysterical at the irony.

Another harsh trust broke his line of thoughts and ripped a pained scream from his lips.

The blue eyed boy sobbed again. Tony held the kid at gun point all the while palming his cock through his jeans leering at Harry and Dan.

“Look closely that’s how it’s done. Will be you when Dan’s through with him.”

Chapter 1

Rick couldn’t believe it.

How could it have come to this?

He knew the boy getting raped right in front of them… had seen him before.

Under a bed in an abandoned house…

+++ Flashback++++
Rick was silently cursing while he looked into stunned green eyes.

He had just slept a little when he heard the commotion downstairs. Heard a man getting hurt, begging his boss...

*Shit! Shit! Motherfucking shit!*

He had hastily scrambled under the bed, hoping he could hide himself long enough to get out. What he hadn't expected was that one of the men would come into room with a child? A boy?!

Rick had just been able to see the thin legs in too big pants.

He had listened as the man order the child to blow him for food...

*Oh, for fucks sake...*

Rick was ashamed but he had closed his eyes then. Had forcefully clenched them shut... because he couldn't stand to see these thin knees on the floor, the thin arms with those frail wrists and hands. Whenever the boy had moved his hands Rick had seen glimpses of tattoos and heavy scaring around delicate wrists. It looked like the boy had tried to... *opt out... a few times*...

The former deputy sheriff had wanted to press his hands against his ears to block out the slurping sounds, the moans and groans. He couldn't fault the boy for trying to escape if this was his life...

Nothing he had been forced to do since he woke up in that hospital, had felt more horrible, than lying here, hiding himself under a bed while letting a child get raped... He had wanted to scream and curse.

*This is what’s left of Officer Friendly.*

*not a fighter anymore,*

*not a farmer anymore,*

*just a man, that had failed his people.*

*A man that had failed his daughter and his son.*

Self-pity and shame were cruising through Rick's body. Everything in him itched to be Officer Friendly once again, to get up and knock out the rapist... to help the child.

*Nothing good would come out of it. They’ll kill me before I could help the kid...* The ex-sheriff had tried to convince himself.

God, Michonne and Carl were still out there. He had to warn them, to protect them...

*They came first! They had to.* They were all that was left of his family.
And now the rapist lay snoring on the bed while the boy...teenager…?? - Rick hated himself even more, because that kid looked only slightly older than Carl. - The boy was looking at him huge green eyes, eyes nearly too big for his thin face. The kid seemed severely malnourished, collarbones and a shoulder peaking out of the collar of his too big shirt. The teen looked stunned, mouth hanging just a bit open. Green eyes ran over Rick beaten up face.

*Cataloguing everything. He’s observant…*

*If he notifies them to my presence I’m done for. There are at least three other guys in the house maybe more. Shit!*

Rick’s brain was running a hundred miles an hour.

He could feel sweat pouring down his back, still starring at the green eyed boy in front of him. His blue eyes trailed over the kid’s skinny features and the fighter in Rick observed all possible weak points.

*If boy proves to be a hindrance I might have to kill him. I don’t want to but I will if I have to…*

*He’s such a waif-like little thing… I could snap his neck with one hand and cover his mouth with the other…*

*It might be a little struggle but it shouldn’t be too loud… I could take him out before he alerts them and make a run for it. If I can take them by surprise it should be possible.*

Dying here and now just wasn’t an option.

*Sorry kid!*

Rick tensed even more, ready to fight his way out if necessary. He would taking the risk if he had to… Willing himself to kill the abused child if he had to…

Silence stretched...

Both of them measuring each other.

And then... the boy heaved a silent sigh. All tension bleeding out of him, made his face look softer, smoothing out.

A shaking hand brought a finger to bruised looking lips... Rick flinched inwardly when he remembered why they looked that way... signalling him to be quiet. Rick knew that the boy meant to promise to stay silent as well.

They shared a look of understanding and a tiny nod. Rick had to rest his head on the floor boards for a moment in heart-wrenching relief. With closed eyes and clenched fists he fought down a sob. He had been ready. He had been ready to kill the boy, to snap his neck if it meant to get back to Carl and Michonne.

He would have hated himself for it but he would have done it. Murdering strangers no matter how old they were meant nothing compared to protecting his family.

He had failed them at the prison. Had failed to take action and it had costed them dearly…

Never again!
Suddenly there was the sound of heavy steps coming to the room.

“Yo! Comfy?” Tony’s rough voice woke the man on the bed. The teen tense. But noticed that he carefully avoided to look under the bed.

Good, best not to draw any attention to himself or the place under the bed.

The two rough men started then to lay into each other. Their verbal sparring about the bed escalated quickly into a real fight.

“Out of ma way pet! I'm gonna show that piece a shit. Under the bed with ya!” At rapist's growling command, the raven haired kid squeezed himself under the bed next to Rick.

Together they watched wide eyed how the two men fought. Their breaths hitched when the one wearing a bandana fell to the floor and stared directly at them. Thankfully the first men had started choking the guy on the floor, because Rick had obviously been seen. It was their luck that the choked man couldn't get the words out and was already losing consciousness and couldn’t try to tell his attacker that there was a stranger under the bed.

As soon as the situation had calmed a little the boy lost no time crawling out from under the bed. His master seemed pleased to see him; smirk clear in his voice. Rick could hear the belt and fly being opened again.

“There ya are! Fightin’ gives me terrible cockstand.” He laughed cruelly. The kid must have shown some kind of negative reaction to that.

“What? Were ya hoping to be done with me fer today? Should be thankful to tha asshole, wouldna been able to go again so soon. But now I'm all fired up. Come here... Take care of it, so I can go back to sleep.”

The second time was even worse for Rick.

Now that he knew what the boy looked like he couldn't block out the pictures his brain conjured, the sounds were burning themselves into his memory.

He tried to think about Carl and Michonne being still out there. That they came first! Always!

A heavy groan from above the signalled the approaching end. The bed started to shake with heavy trusts.

Chants of “Fuck, Fuck, Fuck! .....Like that Bitch! .... Here it COMES!.... Uhrg!” filled the room.
Rick wanted to scream... and he wanted to kill the scumbag on the bed.

Soon after he felt the weight on the bed shift and snoring followed nearly immediately. The boy’s face reappeared under the bed.

Rick had never seen a child looking that dead. Big eyes were red rimmed, tears were swimming in them but not falling; lips puffy and red. His face was carefully blank.

Rick wanted to reach out to the boy, wanted to say anything to make it better... anything to take that blank look away from the boy’s face. Carefully he stretched out his hand to the kid to offer a bit of comfort.

The movement seemed to break the dark haired child out of his withdrawn state. He made an abrupt gesture clearly rejecting Rick’s attempt to touch and comfort him.

Instead impressive green eyes narrowed in irritation and a frail hand dismissively waved Rick's concern away.

The silent “*Let it be. Not important now.*” quite clear in the room between them. Again the younger male indicated for Rick to stay hush, a little more insistent than before.

The older man had seldom felt so conflicted about anything but forced himself to get a grip. Clenching his fists he sent a tiny nod at the green eyed boy holding the intense gaze trying to convey how much he wanted to help, how sorry he was that he couldn’t… wouldn’t… It earned him a small nod in return and a slightly strained but soft and sympathetic smile.

The air of apprehension between them sent an icy calm through Rick’s head and body. Hiss trembling eased by a dreadful and cold clarity. They were on the same page… knowing that there was only one way this could go in the end. Rick would have to leave soon and he could only go alone.

And while the older of the two was still at odds with this, the kid had already met reality heads on with a wry acceptance.

Downstairs they could hear the other Claimers looking through the house.

*They had found a woman's shirt...!*

The boy shared a wide eyed look with blue eyed man, who had tensed up at that information...

“*There are others with you. Others that are not here now but could probably come back at any moment*”. Was the wordless message conveyed by incredibly big green eyes. Heaven the kid was fast at connecting the dots.
Rick responded with an agreeing grimace.

*I need to leave! Now!*

Rick could see the understanding in the kid's eyes... the boy looked determined.

“*Go! Now!!*” was silently communicated.

Rick hesitated. He didn't know how to leave the green eyed teen behind. Sensing his hesitation the boy gave him sequence of facial expressions...

A resigned smile, that seemed to say:

“*Thank you but we both know you wouldn't make it with me.*”

An eye roll that looked so much like Carl's when he thought that Rick was being an idiot, the kind of eye roll only teenagers could really do...

And a scowl combined that with that determined look told him to get the fuck moving and stop wasting precious time.

Getting out of that room felt like the hardest thing he ever did.

Every step away from the boy filled him with more shame and guilt.

++++ Flashback end++++

And now his shame had caught up to him.

They had come out of the dark, silent in a way that reminded him of Daryl, holding him and Michonne at gun point.

“Today is the day of reckoning, sir! Restitution rightening the whole universe!” The grey haired leader of the group had said and he wouldn't show them any mercy, that was clear.

Rick had killed a man when he fled the house, leaving him to turn and now his comrades wanted revenge. Maybe this was karma…

A balding stocky man had pressed his body against the car, licking his lips, disgustingly excited, leering at Carl inside.

“I claim the boy!” The man with the blue eyes flinched at that, feeling Michonne doing the same.
They had both understood what was implied with that claim, it was clearly written in their
desperate and hateful expressions.

The small fat man had wasted no time and had pulled Carl out of the car holding a knife at his
throat... Rick felt nauseous. Breathing getting more and more raged the bastard was burying his
face into his boy’s neck inhaling his scent, dragging his tongue over the Carl’s ear. That pig started
to rub his crotch against his boy.

Rick built himself up for a fight. His muscles tensing, hand reaching for his weapon.

“Listen! It was me. Just me!” He argued, hoping they would let at least Carl and Michonne go.

Joe grabbed him pressing the barrel of the gun to his head.

“I don't think so, ma friend...but we're reasonable man. First we'll have the boy. Then the girl. Then
we shoot you and we will be square.” He laughed cruelly.

Rick could see the man holding Carl. He threw his son to the ground. Grubby hand were merciless
ripping at Carl's clothes. The swine then used his body weight to hold his boy - his baby boy -
down. Grunting in excitement when Carl struggled trying to free himself. Carl got visible more and
more desperate in his attempts to escape, straining to get the stinking man off him. The man was
already ripping at his pants...

Rick knew what these men were capable of... had witnessed it! Rage flooded his system. These
men raped kids. His child could end like the boy with the dead green eyes.

Rage and desperation flooded him! He needed to do something! Anything!

He just couldn't let this happen. Not to Carl! Not after losing Judith...

“Let him go!!” Out of the dark a small body literally threw himself at the rapist. Everyone seemed
startled at that sudden interruption.

The green eyed boy! Rick recognized him! The kid he had left behind... He was here. He was
alive!

Relief wasn't enough to describe his feelings. Rick had wondered if he had left the teen behind to
be killed either by the walker in the bathroom or by the living survivors for not telling on him...
Wondering if he had loaded more guilt on his shoulders.

The underfeed body didn't do any damage but brought the man out of his momentum.
When the balding man saw, who had disturbed him he seemed amused... even disgustingly delighted. Greedily taking in the other boy's slender body.

“Are ya offering ya self instead?” The man's beady eyes were glossed over in lust. He was already getting off Carl and advanced on the older teen.

The other men had pulled themselves together by now and had started laughing, mocking the raven-haired teenager.

“Playing hard to get for months and now he's throwing himself at Dan like a desperate whore.”

“Didn't get fucked since the night with the new guy. Should have said so that ya gagging for cock!”

“Always knew Len couldn't give it ta ya enough. See how easy he is.”

A long haired man growled at that. “Shut ya trap, Billy!” He looked angry enough to start a brawl.

The green eyed boy had flinched at the comments but didn't back down. He watched the approaching man warily...

“If you'll leave him alone... then yes, I'm... I'm offering... That's want you wanted, right?” Rick was surprised by the soft British accent. The voice wavered slightly but the teen stayed resolute.

The fat man groaned at that, slobbering over the thought alone.

“Oh, your such a pretty thing... such a pretty, pretty little thing!” He wasted no time. He all but jumped on the older boy, pushing him to the ground, tearing his too big trousers off.

Without further undo he was on top of the too thin teen. Licking, biting, and rubbing himself against the young body under him. Fumbling with his fly he hastily and clumsily pulled his stiff cock out of his pants. Harshly pressing the boy into the ground as he brought them both into position, his hard-on poking the kid’s ass.

Rick felt the pressure in his head building up, blood thrumming in his ears, the only sounds seemed to break through the waves of his maddening rage and desperation were Carl's sobs, those ragged hectic breaths that spoke of lust filled excitement... and the pained scream of the green eyed boy when he was breached without any care or preparation.

This scream, like a wounded animal, was like the kick-off for all hell to break loose.

*****
Like so much in Harry's life the situation had escalated pretty quickly....

Daryl was only the third day with the Claimers when the shit hit the fan. After they got on the move again Len had started a pissing contest with other archer.

Over a bloody rabbit... and maybe a bit over Harry...

Len had tried to trick Joe into punishing Daryl for stealing his claim; only to get beaten himself. Harry felt a little vindictive about this and part of him had been happy to see their roles reversed for once, a further plus was that Len had lost consciousness afterwards, so Harry had gotten around a threatened fucking.

And tonight just when Daryl had decided to scout the area for some food they had stumbled on the blue eyed man he had seen under the bed and who had killed Lou in his escape.

The bearded man was with a beautiful black woman with dreadlocks and ... a samurai sword... which looked...well...wicked! A kid seemed to be in the car.

It was without a doubt the beaten up, blue eyed man he had met under bed.

Harry could remember his own numbness that day.

He had resigned himself to his fate and gotten on his knees.

Had tried to empty his head... to do what Len expected from him. What had kept him going was that Len had quite literally dangled a carrot before his nose and promised him some real food for a blowjob.

He had been solely focused on getting Len off. He knew how to do it by now... he had lost count how often he got hurt when he hadn't done it right.

Hollowing his cheeks, building a rhythm. Up and down. Trying to breathe through his nose. Using his tongue for more stimulation. He had gotten the hang of it, knew the mechanics well enough.

He had learned to ignore Len’s low growling, his mocking taunts or a half shout “God... Yess...Fuuuuucking Bitch! ”

Harry swallowing cum had become near constant thing. He knew by now how to take a breath, relaxing his throat so he could take a cock as deep as possible, so he wouldn't have to taste the sperm. Every time feeling disgusted and detached at the same time.

The first time he had vomited on Len after a forced blow job. His claimer had beaten that out of him quickly. Harry didn't threw up any more... he just felt nothing most of the time.

Numb.
At least semen is supposed to be high on protein and it was a kind of fluid... had supplied a laconic part of his mind from a faraway place. In a fucked up way Len was feeding him on a regular basis...

Bloody fucking hell! I’m beyond messed up. He needed to stop thinking fucked up stuff like that before he couldn't hold back the hysterical giggling that was building up inside him. He was going nuts...

He had been incredible tried... of everything for the longest time by now.

Dying had sound like a better option every bloody day.

The blue eyed man from under the bed looked a lot better than the last time. Back then he had been trembling and sweating, ugly discolorations all over his visible skin and obviously unable to defend himself against the Claimers, let alone taking Harry with him.

The man had been as shocked as Harry to see him.

The blue eyed man had been afraid but ready to take on the world if necessary.

He had understood that the Claimers were bad news that he would be dead if they found him.

These people, the blue eyed man and the dark skinned woman, had to be the family Daryl talked about.

Where the hell was Daryl? Fuck!

The man and the woman hadn't noticed the approaching group yet... Harry had started to look around... there had to be something he could use to draw their attention.... Carefully Harry had moved a few feet to the side right into a leaves heap.

At the rustling both the man and the woman had grabbed their weapons, alerted!

But it had been too late Joe had already been behind the man pointing his gun on thy guy’s head. Tony had the woman on gunpoint kicking away her sword... Merlin, what a mess!

Len and the others had closed in on them weapons raised.

Harry had watched on as Dan had looked into the car, making pleased sounds...

Shit... That’s never a good sign.

Clenching his shaking fists, silently cursing Harry had gone closer to the group. Dan had found the boy... Carl, had Daryl said.
Merlin’s soggy balls, Daryl where are you?!

The boy, Dan had pulled out of the car, was younger than Harry... good looking with chestnut brown hair and familiar blue eyes. Eyes that were now wide with fear, fear for his father, the woman and himself.

Harry had felt nauseous. He knew what would follow... had lived through it himself and he just couldn’t stand the thought that it could happen to anyone else... He just couldn’t let his happened.

His saving people thing Hermine had called it once... but right then he hadn’t allow himself to think about her or the life he had at Hogwarts, his friends, the Weasleys, his magic... his home and the first place where he truly belonged....

He hadn’t been able to allow himself to think at all or he wouldn’t have been able to go through with it. He would have frozen up in fear and panic.

So he had launched himself unthinkingly and unbraced into Dan throwing the man off the other boy.

The disgusting and stinking man had taken the offered chance in a split second. Harry had heard the mocking of the other and Len’s aggression. He knew if he survived the night that Len would probably kill him for the humiliation alone.

This was the end. No doubt.

He didn’t dare to think otherwise. Hope was poison these days.

At the beginning he had hoped a lot:

That someone would find him, help him...

That he would be able to flee...

That he would be able to hold out long enough for his magic to return...but that would be still months away.

His magic would be still bound until his 17th birthday. And with his magic bound nobody from home would be able to find him. And he was too weak to flee, too handicapped without his glasses to make it on his own.
Harry spent hours on hours on marvelling his bloody bad luck. But being at odds with reality changed nothing, hoping it would get better was futile.

Hope brought him only despair and chagrin. Hope would be eating him up until there was nothing left of him.

He knew that he was giving up and thus breaking his promise to Daryl, but he had tried and it wasn’t enough.

So he chose to go out of this mess with one last good deed, sparing the younger boy pain of rape.

Harry was already feeling detached from the situation. His body moved on autopilot, his conscious thoughts coming to a halt. Harry knew what was expected from him.

Harry was distancing himself more and more from different fragments of reality... trying not to see, to smell, to feel, to taste...

Dan tore his clothes away, licked over exposed skin rubbing his erection on Harry…

*I’m not here. I can blend it all out. I’ve done this a hundred times before.*

Despite knowing what would happen the familiar pain of being penetrated with force and without any preparation yanked him out of his carefully built aloofness, ripping pitiful whimpers from his throat.

Opening a window of reality to touch him, to make him feel, see, taste and hear… he couldn’t help the groan of pain at the onslaught of sensations.

He couldn’t stand to look at Dan moving above him, Harrys own blood slicking his thrusts.

Turning his head he could see the blue eyed boy… could hear his sobs…

He really wished that he could pull his blanket of detachment back around him but it wouldn’t come to him any longer leaving him unprotected and at the harsh mercy of reality.

It was too much. All of it was too much…

*I’m sorry Daryl. I won’t be able to keep my promise.*

This is the end of the road.
Another harsh thrust had his whole body convulsing in pain, muscles locking up and he was screaming his lungs out.

All hell broke loose.
I apologize before had for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

This story will show and mention sexual violence against a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

Chapter 2

Rick threw his head back into Joe’s face, who had been distracted by the display before him, breaking probably the man’s his nose and the man’s hold on Rick, too.

Joe fired his gun in reflex, too close to Rick’s ear leaving him disoriented for a moment. Gathering himself, staggering to his feet, Rick lunged himself at the older man punching him the face.

Rick cursed.

That shot had messed with his balance giving Joe the chance to win the upper hand.

Out of the corner of his eye Rick saw that Michonne had used to commotion and kicked the weapon out of her captor's hand but another one with longer hair and a bow had stepped up.

“What cha going to do now, huh sport?” Joe taunted a cocky smirk in place.

In the background he could see Dan moving on the green eyes boy, heard his loud breathing and small pained whimpers...

That could be Carl! That could be Carl! This will be Carl, if I don't kill them!

It was like a mantra in his head. Rick felt his head getting clearer... like a flame burning hotter and hotter, changing from warm yellow and red to icy blue.

Feeling oddly calm and collected Rick didn't think or hesitate, lunging forward he sank his teeth as deep as possible into the Joe's throat and ripped a huge piece out. Feeling hot blood spraying over his face, Rick spat the flesh out. He watched coldly and detached how the man was choking on his own blood.
A deadly silence filled the night, even Dan had stopped grunting. At the sight of Rick’s blood smeared face, Dan had abruptly pulled out of the boy. His dick still hanging out he sat on his ass, mouth hanging open.

The other men had similar expressions of fear and shock on their faces.

Suddenly there was the familiar whizzing sound of flying arrows. The first one took out the man with the bow next to Michonne, spurning her into action. She grabbed her gun and killed the stunned man that had held her on gun point.

Another arrow dropped the man with the bandanna holding Carl.

And then a familiar figure emerged from the darkness, crossbow raised; nodding to Rick.

Rick couldn't believe his eyes!

Daryl!

Daryl was here! The hunter was alive... thank fuck!

Another two arrows took down another two men.

*****

Daryl cursed violently. He had caught two rabbits and had intended to give Harry a bit of meat. Only to see that when he found Joe and his men they had Rick and Michonne at gun point.

He couldn’t see Carl or Harry but he recognized the mocking and leering atmosphere of the Claimers. He had been confronted with it again and again when the bastards had made moves on Harry.

He had met this group and Harry just a few days before but he knew by now what they were capable of. It had made his stomach churn in unease.

Carefully he creeped closer, taking cover in the woods moving as silent as possible. Damn he still couldn’t see Carl or Harry. There was a car obscuring his vision and if the direction Joey and Len were looking was an indication the teens were behind it. Listening closely he could identify soft sobbing sounds that made his heart clench and bile rise in his throat.
That ain’t good… Not at all.

Rick looked tense as hell and ready to jump the gun; trembling all over and jaws clenched so hard that Daryl could hear his teeth grinding from his hiding place. There was murder in his eyes. Michonne didn’t look any better.

The sobbing got louder and then there was an earth shattering scream.

Harry!!

Time seemed to freeze for a moment. And then Rick snapped, breaking Joe’s nose in a backward headbutt and Michonne had disarmed the man guarding her but Len had immediately stepped up. In the following scrimmage between Rick and Joe, Daryl couldn’t get a clear shot on Joe, who had Rick soon enough back in a headlock.

Another scream broke through the night…

Harry!

Daryl had never seen Rick this unhinged. Shocked he watched as his friend tore Joe’s throat out… with his fucking teeth!

Motherfucking shite!

The claimers were frozen. Deathly silence filled the place.

And Daryl took aim and shot!

Rick’s head snapped in his direction. And holly hell, he looked gruesome with blood all over his mouth and beard.

Relieve shone in familiar bright blue eyes. They shared only a nod of acknowledgement but it was enough.

You’re alive. I’m glad. We’ll do this together.

Together they killed the remaining Claimers until just Dan was left.
Rick picked up Joe’s machete with a red handle and marched to the fat man, who lay whimpering on the ground, cock still hanging out, and growled. “He's mine!”

Daryl couldn't stop cursing... he hadn't been gone for long, god damn it!

*But long enough for Harry to get raped again and for Rick to tear Joe's throat out...*

*Yer really useless Dixon... Ya promised Harry protection, asked him to believe in ya...*

And now he watched as Rick advanced on that fat pig, like a man on a mission. Swine was squealing when the former sheriff tore into him again and again.

Michonne rushed to Carl's side pulling him into her arms, checking him over.

And when she was sure he wasn’t hurt beside a few nasty scratches on his face, she just held him close as if to shield him from the world.

Daryl went slowly over to them.

“Ya both alright?” He asked softly.

He hadn't expected the shocked teenager to answer, but Carl turned his light blue eyes on him, voice shaking he said: “Yeah, I'm... Yeah... The other boy... he...protected me...”. There were tears gathering in his eyes.

“Daryl is... is he OK?”

Daryl closed his eyes for a moment, blowing out a harsh breath. He steeled himself before turning to Harry.

+++++ Flashback++++

Daryl had chased the car that took Beth for hours. And now that he lost the trail on this crossroad he was drained emotionally and physical. Just sitting there staring feeling empty.

He failed.
He was useless.

_Can’t protect nothin’._

“You will miss me so bad when I’m gone, Daryl Dixon.”, damn right, he did and he felt guilty. He had been stupid, let his guard down. Had opened that door, thinking it would be that stupid dog. Gotten them in trouble in the first place. Beth had trusted him. Was his fucking job to keep her save!

He didn’t want to lose people again and again. Didn’t want to hurt like this anymore.

Caring was shit!

He didn’t know how long he sat there hunched over starring at nothing, just feeling alone, guilty...

“You're made for this world.” …. “You will be the last man standing”

Names went through his head like a mantra… Jim…Dale…T-Dog…Lori…Rick… Carl… god, littl’ asskicker… Carol… Herschel… Michonne… Sasha… Tyreese… Maggie… Glenn… Merle… and now Beth...

_Fuck this shit!!_

“The sound of fallen leaves crunching under heavy boots had him looking up. Hell, these guys looked like the lowlifes Merle and he had hung around before. Guys like these were trouble before and now...

“Well, lookie what we have here boys” The greying biker directly in front of him drawled in a thick southern accent.

The rest of the group had taken position around him. There were six of them. The man – the leader?! - came closer, made a move as if to touch him. Daryl felt his hackles rising, punching the asshole and swiftly aiming his crossbow at him. Tension ran high, five weapons were pointed at him.

The leader chuckled and held a hand up “Hold up!”
“I’m claiming the vest!” Daryl heard the man behind him. “I like them wings.” The hunter glanced behind him. Guy sounded like a piece of shit.

“Hold up!” The guy on the ground started laughing, slowly standing up.

“A bowman! I can respect that. But if ya pull that trigger; that boys are gonna drop ya several times over. Dontcha want that?! Come on fella suicide is stupid!” The older man smirked a little while holding his gaze with confidence.

“Why hurt yaself, if ya could hurt other people”, that sounded so fucking much like Merle.

Reminded him of how he lived before, when he had nothing, felt nothing, just drifted with his asshole brother, and right now this numbness sounded good, easy.

He knew this. Lived like this before. He longed for this numbness.

Daryl lowered his bow a bit. This gained him a bigger grin from the man.

“Name’s Joe”

Lowering his bow further and a grunt. “Daryl.”

The shithead behind him grumbled about the vest.

But Joe seemed pleased and cockily grinning “Welcome to the group. Knew ya would be one of us.”

Daryl glanced around carefully taking note of every man and his weapon.

He stocked when he noticed a seventh smaller figure at the side closer to the trees. Practically swimming in too big clothes, shoulder length raven hair that hung limply around their face, hiding the person from his view. The shirt was at least three sizes too big, falling of one shoulder revealing prominent collarbones and a delicate shoulder, pale skin making the huge dark blue and purple bruise on it more obvious. They were favouring their left leg, hunched in themselves, carefully cradling their right arm with the heavy bruising.

The ass with the bow caught him looking and promptly snarled:

“He is claimed.”
Daryl's jaw nearly dropped. “The Fuck?!”

“You dumb? I said the boy's mine. Got that! I claimed him.”

Ok, so obviously that little pitiful thing was a boy. At the Claimer's outburst he had looked finally up. Daryl bit back a growl. Holy shit, the kids face was one big bruise in blues. Blacks and purples, little wounds everywhere, lips busted, one eye swollen shut, the other one showed a startling green iris. The boy threw him vary glances. Checking his reaction.

“Calm down, Len! Daryl doesn't know the rules yet”, looking to Daryl Joe added "In order to keep peace in our small group and everything stress free, I laid down a few rules." Joe explained.

"All ya have ta do is claim. That's how ya mark ya territory, ya prey, ya bed at night. One word...claimed. Len claimed the boy a some months ago, so he's his."

Some of the other started leering and laughing at that:

“Well if ya have some ta trade. Len can share. Has ta be something good through ta get some time with his ass.” More crude comments started to come from the others. It seemed like almost every man had raped the kid at least once. The kid shrunk even more into himself, as if to try to hide himself from view. Daryl suppressed a shudder.

Joe grinned cockily

“Most of us already got a taste of him. Besides Dan... he's just ta useless, has never found anything worth ‘f trading. He's whinging for months about it. Close ta bursting a nut about the boy.”

The short, fat man with mousy features made a desperate noise, beady eyes tracing the boy’s body, licking his lips.

“He is so pretty, it's been ages since I fucked something... if Len would just let me have him for a while. Just his mouth would be enough. Seen him doing you guys. He's good at it.” the man was already fingering his dirty crotch, unashamedly groaning.

Tony, the man with the bandanna grinned.

“Yeah, Len trained him real good, Len's cock must be the cleanest part of him, as often as he has the pet suck him off.”
Daryl felt bile rise in his throat, gripping his crossbow tight. What had he gotten into...? These men talked and joked about raping fucking teenager like it was nothing. Merle and he had been useless assholes doing shit all the time... but fuck even the Governor had drawn a line at rape, there were lines you didn't cross.

The kid couldn't be much older than Carl... and damn if that thought didn't burn something fierce.

Len was still glaring at Daryl. With long strides he went to grab his pet by his neck and dragged him harshly with him.

“Alright boys let get going. We have ta find a resting place for the night.”

With an uneasy feeling churning in his guts Daryl had followed the men.

++++ Flashback end++++

Harry sat on the ground, to cover his nakedness he had pulled his too big and torn clothes around him. He didn't look at Daryl,... no... The kid watched how Rick butchered Dan, green eyes taking everything in but his face was carefully blank. His gaze followed Rick like hawk as he went to finish Joe off.

“Harry?” no reaction...

Daryl took a step closer.

“Harry?” no reaction. Blank face; eyes on Rick who looked something right out Merle’s splatter films with all the blood on him.

Another step closer, Daryl tried to speak calmly but firm.

“Harry, can ya look at me?” Another blink and slowly Harry turned his face to the hunter.

Daryl shivered. Harry's face wasn’t as bruised as it had been when he first saw the kid. The swelling had gone down considerately.

Now it got more obvious what the Claimers might have seen in him.

Even now dirty, sweaty, dangerously thin, exhaustion written in every inch of his face he looked still uncomfortable pretty for a boy. Straight nose, high cheekbones, the lips nicely formed.
But those laser beam green eyes that were slightly too big for his face were a bit eerie; like something too fragile to be touched, like one wrong movement could shatter the boy and at the same time he looked too... sharp..., like you would cut yourself open if you were not careful.

Harmless and frail and somehow not...

And then at last a shuddering breath, shaking his head like a wet dog trying to throw off the last traces off water, the kid’s eyes cleared and lost some of that uncanny quality, he looked and felt more present, more solid.

“Daryl!”, Daryl never heard his name uttered in such overwhelming relieve, green eyes going softer. “You came back! Are you OK?”

___

_Daryl is back!_ Overwhelming relief flooded Harry. He had been worried when the man hadn’t come back.

The gruff hunter was pretty rough on the outside but had treated him mostly with care and respect. Harry wasn’t an idiot as soon as Daryl noticed what was going on with the Claimers, the man could have left and probably would have left the unpleasant scumbags to search on his own for his family. But the bloody man hid a bleeding heart under that entire white trash facade he liked to show off… he had stayed behind for Harry.

++++ Flashback++++

Harry watched the new bloke warily. He looked rough like the rest of the Claimers... tall, probably in his early 40’s, it was hard to tell with how dirty he was... his hair hung greasy and unkempt in his face, making it hard to clearly read his expression.

But one thing was obvious that man was a fighter. He had been incredible fast, decking Joe in the face and simultaneously getting his crossbow ready to take the Claimer’s leader out. He had been entirely stoic when the other five pointed their guns at him. A tough and harsh man. A Bowman Joe had said.

Harry had tried to keep attention off himself but then the others had started talking about him. Harry had felt hot anger and despair as they bloody advertised his “services” to the new guy.
The bowman didn't react to their lewd comments. Didn't seem to be interested... but maybe he was just too stunned or was bidding his time...

Len was harshly shoving his claim along. He looked angry...no... Possessive. Harry's stomach clenched painfully.

Soon Len would try to reassert his claim. And Harry just knew this would happen in the most violent way. The last time the Claimer had looked this pissed he had taken the knife to his back...

Seemed like they had thought about the same things, because suddenly the dirty man hissed in his ear:

“Dontcha forget who ya belong ta! I claimed ya! Maybe it’s time ta remind ya... ya know let the message sink in again.”

Trembling like a leave, the teenager was shaking his head:

“N...no.... pl...please....I haven't... haven't forgotten... just n...not that again... please...!”

“We’ll see, pet! Tonight ya’ll be resting I’ve no desire for sloppy seconds after Joe and the others had ya. Ya look so ugly right now couldn’t get it up looking at ya messed up face. But tomorrow night, after ya cleaned up then yer mine again to do as I please!”

It was only a small relieve. Harry had been punished for the last few nights, because the blue eyed stranger under the bed had killed Lou when he fled. Two more claimers had been bitten by the turned Lou and had died.

So when Tony told them that Harry had seen the stranger under the bed and not told anybody, Joe had deemed that against the rule of not lying and pulled rank over Len.

He had decided that Harry had to face a group punishment for the next two days. That had meant getting beaten by the men, and fucked raw by Joe, Tony and Billy. Harry had never felt this bad before. Everything part of his body was either sore, bruised or bleeding.

Another night of this might have actually killed him... but the thought didn't scare him anymore.

If it happened it would be alright.

*For the prepared mind death is nothing but the next great adventure. And I am prepared!*
After a few hours they had found a place for the night to bunk down.

Daryl, the new bloke, had stayed silent when everyone started claiming their places for the night, he looked uncomfortable. Had tried to stay away from the others, didn't talk much. He was left with an uncomfortable place on the ground near the door, the worst spot.

Harry tried to rest while everyone ate. He noticed that Daryl looked to him from time to time, frowning and scowling. Harry felt vulnerable under the piercing stare of the bowman. He wished he could just curl up and sleep. Len was certainly not feeding him today. Maybe he could sneak out later. Eating grass or herbs would be better than nothing.

A rustling of clothes, heavy steps and then Daryl stood in front of him... holding out a bottle with water and a power bar.

Stunned Harry looked up, blinking in confusion… that was… nice… He must look stupid gabbing like a fish at the new addition of the group.

_**Bloody damn! Hadn’t the idiot listened to a thing that Joe explained… You don’t mess with anyone’s claim!**_

Harry had a hunch that it wouldn’t be well received by Len if he ate something now, especially when the new bloke had given it to him. Feeding another’s claim while nice and dandy, just wasn’t done. And although it wasn’t directly against the rules, Len and Joe would probably see it that way.

This promised trouble. For the new bloke and for Harry.

*_Merlin’s saggy balls!*_

Quickly Harry snatched the offered supplies from the man hiding them under a loose wooden plank on the floor. The trick with floor board had worked with the Dursleys. It would have to do now.
The older man seemed confused as the teen squirreled the food away, if Harry interpreted the frown and the raised eyebrow right.

But before the man could draw any real attention to it, Len suspiciously intervened.

“What did ya gave him?” The Claimer snarled at them both.

Harry immediately held his empty hands up in a hopefully placating gesture.

“He didn’t give me anything.” He whispered and lowered his head in apparent submission not to aggravate the possessive man further. Additionally it hid his face from view which was definitely a bonus because he had never been a very convincing liar.

Len gripped him by the collar and yanked him to his feet, looking him over as if to check if Harry had concealed something in the folds of his too big clothes, going so far as to shake him roughly.

“I think yer a liar!” The man hissed at him. “And ya know what we do with liars.”

Thankfully, Daryl kept his mouth shut, because Harry feared that would have pushed Len over the edge. But the archer started to growl threatening when Len shook the young teen.

“Ya stay away from him! He’s mine!” Len was straightaway in the bowman’s face.

The relief of one potential crisis averted, sadly didn’t last.

“Now pet come here. It’s time fer ya punishment!” Harry couldn’t help the whimper that escaped him. He might not fear death anymore; but hell he was afraid of the pain Len might decide to inflict on him.
“You said you would leave me alone tonight.”

“Yeah, that was before ya pissed me off, now ya will take responsibility and relax me again.”

“...” Harry voice didn't come to him.

*It’s too much. I don’t want to.*

Harry struggled to swathe himself in his usual detachment, tried to find his usual aloofness, but it would come. Daryl had just treated him like a human being, it had softened his defences. He had subconsciously lowered his walls and now he couldn’t find the strength to get them up again.…. 

Panic started to rise in him. His chest felt too tight, he felt like he was suffocating.

He drew a hitching breath and then another.

Breathing got increasingly difficult.

“Fuck! I’m hyperventilating”

Panic! He wanted to say something to Len, but never got there.

The teen looked up just to see Len’s disgusted and cold eyes looking down at him. Saw him raising his fist...

**WHACK!**

Harry head flew back. He nearly blacked out. Blood dripped on the floor. Harry felt confused. Was that his...?

*Oh,... probably.* Black and white spots danced in front of his eyes.

“Get a grip, ya fucking bitch! Draw a fucking breath!” Harry could barely hear his claimer’s cold growl, his ears still ringing.

Daryl seemed to have reached his limit.

“Man, what he done?” He grumbled to Joe. “Not much left of him ta punish.”
Joe looked to him with a feral grin his voice sounding clam and inappropriate gentle:

“Ah... he doesn’t deserve ya pity. He earned very bit he’s getting. The little bitch lied to us. Kept quiet when a fucking stranger hid in a house we wanted to rest in. We were just minding our business. But that sneaky asshole killed our friend Lou when he was taking a shit and then he left him to turn. Lost two more of us, died cause of the biter.”

Looking disgusted Joe snarled at the whimpering mess on the floor:

“And fuck bitch, ya will stop this shit and take what ya deserve.”

Harry struggled to his feet and let himself be dragged away by Len, head still ringing from the punch, shaking all over. He felt disoriented, had problems to focus his vision. Eyes moving over leering faces of the Claimers until he rested his gaze on Daryl his face stoic and harsh in the light of this new information.

Len pushed Harry on the floor before him.

“What’re ya waiting fer! Get on ya knees, bitch! And put that mouth of ya ta work. Ya have ta be hungry... Come and get it!”

Harry let himself fall on his knees in front of his captor, mechanically opening his belt and fly.

Len impatiently grabbed his cock and whipped it against the teenager's face. And what a pretty face it was!

“Come on! Open up already....” Shoving the boy’s head on his already hard cock, causing his pet to choke.

“Ah! Yeah that’s it! ... Fuck!” Len moaned watching his pet struggling to adjust to the sudden intrusion. “Get to work, pretty... make it good. Ya want me to be relaxed and in a good mood.”

Harry relaxed his throat getting to work forcefully shutting his brain off…

****

When everyone was snoring Harry swiftly and silently crept back to the loose floor board and gathered the water and the power bar. With stealth he tiptoed out off the door sneaking by the sleeping outlook in to the woods, as far away as he dared with his impaired sight.
With a happy sigh he sat down on a tree trunk taking a small sip of the water just when someone growl whispered behind him.

“Ya shouldn’t be out on ya own. It’s dangerous.”

Harry nearly spit the water out. Only pressing both hands to his mouth saved the precious goods and kept an unmanly squeak in.

Daryl stood behind him. The man could give Crookshanks a run for his money. Bloody sneaks the booth of them.

Gulping down the remaining water in his mouth Harry took a few deep breaths trying to calm his racing heart.

Daryl pulled a thin blanket out and dropped it around Harry’s shoulders, causing the teen to hiss when the extra weight of the fabric irritated the wounds on his back.

“Ya alright?” It was kind of adorable how such a gruff man could fidget in awkwardness. The Bowman had is gaze firmly avoided and was nibbling on his thumb in an unconscious way that betrayed a nervous habit.

Harry glanced at the archer. He still didn't know what to make off the quiet man but he hadn't laughed or leered at him. He had given him water and something to eat from his own meagre stash.

Oh, come on Potter! The man will think you’re a retard. Speak up!

“Uhmm… th… thank you…?” He stuttered unintelligent back.

His answer was an impatient grunt and a determined avoidance of eye contact.

What a strange and oddly shy man. Harry felt a little bemused but also worried and exasperated.

Daryl seemed like a kind person and that exactly would get him in trouble with the crowd they travelled with. These men destroyed anything good or kind they came across. And they would destroy Daryl.

Nothing good would come out of encouraging the man to care for Harry. So Harry steeled himself to be a jackass. Channelling his inner Lucius Malfoy he tried to give the man his best dismissive glance that said 'you’re a dirty redneck and you’re company alone disgusts me'.

“Giving me some of your supplies was nice gesture… But please don't do that again. It was troublesome.”

It worked perfectly. He could practically see the man’s hackles rising. And if Harry hadn’t tried to
get exactly this kind of reaction he would have smiled because that righteous anger, the red flush over his face and even to the tips of his ears reminded him strongly of Ron.

It was an adorable comparison: lanky, pale, red haired Ron with freckles all over his young boyish face and this gruff, scruffy man with dark greasy hair hanging in his face obscuring his slated eyes and most of his closed-off, dirty face.


“Yes, but it wasn’t much of a help, was it?!” Harry coldly tossed back. The poor man looked like he got slapped, broad shoulders dropping pitifully. He made a sound like a wounded animal. Then he stomped off.

***

Most of the next day Daryl kept his distance from Harry avoiding eye contact, nibbling on his thumb. He walked mostly with Joe and listened to the leader’s philosophy of life.

Harry heard snippets of their talk, listened in when Daryl told the older man that he was looking for a girl. The archer had travelled with her until she had been kidnapped by black car with a white cross on the back window.

And while the description spiked something in Harry's memories he couldn’t lay a finger on it.

Joe told the hunter in no uncertain words that the girl was most likely dead or worse. At that Daryl had thrown a dismayed glance at Harry’s skinny and abused form.

The green eyed teen had had to look away from the despair and pity in the man’s gaze. It had made him feel exposed, disgusting and used. He had gotten sullied. And to his shame it was plain to see for anyone who had eyes.

With difficulty he swallowed back a scream of self-hatred and fury.

How dared they! How dared they to do this to him. How dared this scruffy dirty redneck to judge him and pity him. He knew nothing.

Nothing at all!

_I don’t want this anymore. I can’t take this anymore!_

Unshed tears burned in his green eyes obscuring his vision causing him to stumble and fall. Hitting the harsh ground aggravated Harry’s wounds and caused him to yelp in pain. Mocking laughs surrounded him.

Everything just ached. His body, his head, his heart.

He heard Len's demand to get the fuck up. But he sounded so far away… blood rushed in his ears so loudly, white spots danced before is eyes.

Someone snarled something aggressively at him but it didn’t fully register what it was. He felt disorientated and just off…

Far way. Numb.

He could see himself from above. Lying on the ground. Surrounded by his abusers. Grasping for air a like fish.
It was pathetic.

And then a pair of rough calloused hands pulled him up again. Wide green eyes met slated dark blue ones.

Still dizzy his eyes ran over weathered dirty skin, a face that showed signs of a hard life. It could have been easily an unfriendly face. A face that didn’t care. A face that told you to fuck off.

But right now it showed concern and… compassion.

*Merlin*. He had thought the man was a typical Gryffindore on the outside, impulsive and brash but holly hell the man was a bleeding Hufflepuff at heart. It was plain to see in his frowning face and in his caring eyes.

That man was going to get himself killed.

Before Harry could say anything he got ripped away from Daryl. Len had gripped him by the throat and pulled him roughly back, shaking him all the while like a ragdoll.

“I told ya to stand up, ya useless bitch!” His claimer tightened his hold cutting off Harry’s air supply, effectively choking him. Fighting for breath Harry tried frantically to get Lens hands of him and then he just thought…

*Why do I fight it? It could be over if I just let go now.*

The thought felt freeing, liberating and peaceful.

His face seemed to have betrayed his decision because Daryl’s eyes became incredibly wide in that moment. It must have been shocking enough that the hunter had sprung to action almost immediately to push Len of his claim.

Harry didn’t really notice that Daryl and Len nearly got into a bleeding brawl. He just automatically inhaled, his body decided for him that he needed and wanted air to live on.

But despite being able to breathe again the numbness wouldn’t leave him…

Not really disappointed. Not really relived either.

* 

That evening when the claimers had found a hideout and Daryl had gone hunting, Len had taken Harry into the woods to restore his claim as thoughtfully and violently as he could. Afterwards he had just left the boy there, bleeding, hurt and shaking.

Still so fucking numb.

He didn’t take notice of his surroundings, didn’t hear the rustling of dead leaves indicating that someone or something was approaching…

He yelped in fright when suddenly a ratty blanket was draped on his shivering form. Peeking out from under the fabric while simultaneously pulling the blanket protectively around his body Harry saw Daryl standing right next to him.

*How the fuck I didn’t notice him getting this close! Shite!* 

The man had two dead squirrels on his belt that had apparently been shot through the bleeding
eyes… Fuck… A bowman and a damn good marksman.

“Ain’t a good place ta rest and it’s getting cold. Should cover yaself.” Daryl looked very, very awkward biting his thumb, pointedly looking away from the kid on the forest ground.

A tired sigh escaped Harry. “Please, stop trying to look out for me…”

The dirty man flinched at his words, ducking his head and drawing up his shoulders, slated blue eyes glanced at him in sorrow.

“Can’t. Just can’t bring maself ta look away.” And again the gruff man handed him some water and another bleeding chocolate bar. Harry nearly laughed.

Such a sweet stubborn Hufflepuff!

“I heard you talking to Joe about a girl you’re looking for. I don’t know what happened to her but taking care of me won’t bring her back.

“Know that! Ain’t dumb.” The man hissed back at him, blue eyes spitting fire.

“No you’re not.” Harry agreed easily. “You’re not stupid… And I’m a dead man walking and wasting your resources on me won’t change that… I’ve been sick since before the world went to shit. You’ll only get yourself and me in trouble with Len and Joe. And they will let out their frustration on me. I’m not fond of the results as you can see. You’re not stupid. You’re kind and honestly. I don’t know if that’s not worse right now.”

The stoic man seemed stunned by Harry’s words, disbelieving.

“Ain’t fucking nice! Never been!” There was it again that full face flush that reached even the tips of the archer’s ears.

“Oh you have been nice to me since you joined the group… You gave me supplies, saved me from Len today and just won’t stop looking out for me. Although Joe, Len and I told you that this type of behaviour will get you in trouble… And yet you didn’t ask for anything in return.”

Harry decided on a hunch to give the man a chance. Maybe he could trust the grumpy Hufflepuff to look out for them both… Maybe if he told him to hold back in front of the others they wouldn’t kill Daryl…

“Take ya shirt off.”, came the short and gruff instruction.

Ok… maybe not. Shite, I miscalculated! Stupid!...Of course he would want to fuck given the opportunity… Nobody just nice survives these days. Of course he wants payment. Harry felt the panic building up.

“I... please... I don't...I...” The kid looked terrified.

Daryl face resembled a bloody thundercloud, tense and angry at the dark haired boy’s reaction.

“What?” he barked at the shivering mess in front of him.
“Fuck!” The hunter seemed exhausted. “Just say what ya want damn it. Stop stuttering!”

Harry swallowed, taking a deep breath, fixing those green eyes on him.

“Please, let me...” Harry clenched his fists, visibly gathering himself. “Just, please, let me blow you. I know you gave me the food and all, but please...Len, he already... punished me and I don't think I will get through another fucking tonight again. I promise to make it up to you!”

If Harry wasn't so worried, the expression on Daryl's might have been hilarious. Eyes bulging, mouth dropping open.

“Hell, kid!” The man snarled, but visibly tried to keep it together, grumbling in a calmer tone. “Shit, I ain’t doing anything like that ta ya.”

Eyes narrowed in suspicion the teen scanned Daryl.

“Really? You're sure?”

Daryl heaved a sigh. “Yep, never been so sure of something ma whole life!”

The British teen was still tense and unconvinced he had learned the hard way not to let his guard down so easily.

“Hmmmm, ok...Why?”

The man grumbled something into his beard about how this was becoming a fucked up imitation of their three questions, that confused Harry.

Then Daryl looked directly at him.

“'Cause yer a kid. 'Cause yer hurt like hell. 'Cause it's what any freaking decent person should do. That's why! Are ya satisfied now? Or do ya wanna play 21 questions?”

Harry didn't break his intense stare, starting to make the man in front him visibly nervous. He even started to bite on his thumb again.

And then all of a sudden reached a decision he would trust his gut, the man had every opportunity to hurt him but had taken care of him instead... cocking his head to the side and he smiled at the man.
“Yeah, yeah, I'm satisfied.”

Daryl looked uncomfortable a light blush on his face.

“Good, than turn around so I can look at ya back!”

Now that he concentrated on it Harry could feel all the wounds and bruises burning on his back, but despite that he felt warm and a bit giddy.

*Merlin, I have probably a bloody concussion or I'm finally losing my shit*

He looked up to this gruff man in front of him, he couldn't stop smiling. It was hurting his bruised up faced, but he just couldn't stop. It irritated Daryl visibly, since he started scowling again and barked at him again.

“Hell, yer smiling about asshole?“

*Huh, he's... embarrassed...that's kind of adorable...*

Harry didn't flinch this time, even laughed a bit.

“I'm sorry. Didn't mean to make you uncomfortable”, a softer smile, “It’s just... You’re a good person, Daryl! I didn’t dare to hope that people like this still existed. So, I'm really glad!” Earnest excitement and a big grin accompanied the words.

Daryl blushed heavily. It was easy to see even with his hair obscuring his eyes because the tips of his ears that peeked through his unkempt hair were a fiery red.

“Naah, man... Ain’t good. Did nothing ta help ya.” The words were softly spoken.

“Oh you did a lot. The water and the powerbar they meant a lot to me and not just because it’s sustenance but because it was an incredibly kind gesture.

And just now you went out of your way to help me and if you’re not after all secretly hoping to get off, then you just came to look out for me. You may deny it all you want, but you are one of the good guys.”

He took pity on the flustered man and took a sip of the slightly stale water and nibbled on the power bar. Harry couldn’t supress his moan of appreciation at the taste of chocolate.
It was heaven! He broke some of the bar and offered it to Daryl, who took it a little hesitant. Together they munched on chocolate in companionable silence and the older man getting less tense.

*Remus had been right chocolate cures a lot of things.*

++++ Flashback end ++++
Chapter Notes

I apologize before had for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

This story will show and mention sexual violence against a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses.
Don't like, don't read.

Chapter 3

Anger. Shame. Guild. Exasperation. Fear. Too many emotions were hitting Daryl…the kid was killing him...

Harry was a shivering, half-naked mess, beaten up and violated, because Daryl had taken too long to come back and yet the teen greeted him with relieve and concern… And not concerned for his own health… nooo, Daryl’s!

Taking a deep breath; trying not to snarl at the already hurt boy.

“Yeah, ya idiot, of course I'm alright. The question is… if yer OK?”

That got him an owlish blink... and then the kid frowned, tilting his head to the side...

“I think so..., bruised? But he didn't break anything, back hurts but that's to be expected since he threw me on the ground....he tore me open but nothing to bad... will be limping for a day or two... but should be OK?” His voice sounded hesitant, brittle and unsure.

“You're British!” Rick exclaimed in surprise as he slowly came over.

Harry tensed and eyed him warily, suspicious. So Rick kept his distance trying to make himself as none threatening as possible...

Not an easy thing, since his face and beard were still covered in blood... he looked anything but.

Harry nodded “Yes. I'm British. ”

“My Name is Rick. Rick Grimes. That's my son Carl and our friend Michonne. And seems like you
“Yes, we met a few days ago... I'm Harry.” The boy seemed a little less tense, since Rick didn't try to come closer.

“We've... We've got some extra clothes. Do you want to dress yourself?”

Harry flushed in embarrassment, looking to the side he nodded shyly.

“That would be great actually... But I'm... I'm dirty.” The last part was barley a whisper. Kid’s head dropped in shame.

“There's a small stream not much but 'nough ta clean yaself up. I'll take ya.” Daryl said softly and Harry looked overwhelmed by gratefulness for the hunter.

“That... That would be amazing. Thanks... I...Thank you.” He agreed tearfully.

Feeling uncomfortable with the kid’s gratitude, Daryl groused “Naah... It's nothing! Can ya walk?”

“I think so...”, carefully gathering his clothes around him to stay covered, Harry tried to stand up. But his right leg gave out under him causing him to nearly crash back to the ground if Daryl hadn't jumped in and caught him.

Cursing Daryl tentatively held him in his arms, afraid to hurt or frighten Harry who had gone rigid.

“Sorry, yer alright?”

He heard a shaky exhale released from the underfeed kid.

“Yeah... just startled...” Harry grid out, his expression pinched and eyes clenched close.

“I just need a moment. Hurts more than expected”

Breathing deeply he pulled himself together, forcing himself to uncoil a bit. He felt his legs shaking. Pain laced trough his ass and all over his back...

Damn! Harry felt tears swimming in his eyes. The pressure behind his eyes building. He couldn't even suppress the sobs ripping themselves from his throat.

Daryl felt more and more concerned when Harry stared to shake and sniffle. The hunter felt tears wetting his shirt.

“I...I don't think I can... walk on my own.”, kid sounded so sad and defeated, that Daryl felt his own eyes prickle swallowing heavy. When he replied his voice was thick with emotion.

“That's...”
Alright? Naah... nothing of this fucked up shit was alright... “I’ll carry ya. If it's OK fer ya.”

Another sad, sad hiccup and a tiny nod.

Rick watched from a distance how Daryl picked the small and worryingly thin teenager up, like he was afraid to break the younger male at any moment. It was a heart-breaking sight, to see the usually rough man gingerly handling the sobbing boy. Michonne came over and gave Daryl the fresh clothes for the teen.

Daryl was reminded of the first time he had taken care of Harrys wound’s.

++++Flashback++++

With the chocolate bar finished Daryl had cleared his throat and motioned for the kid to take his shirt off and to turn around. The kid complied with a huff and peeled himself out of his huge shirt.

Exposing his back and a pair of Celtic tattoos on frail wrists surrounded by heavy scarring to Daryl.

A string of courses left the archer's mouth!

“... Aww, sorry should have warned you... This wasn't my first punishment. I tried to make a run for it a few times. Len felt that a whipping or a beating wasn’t enough. He wanted to make the message sink in... so he... well...did this.”

Daryl wanted to punch something or better someone. That bastard... make the message sink in... motherfucking swine... yeah, Daryl could see that.

Under some new partly bleeding welts were some older ones and some other scars. The one on Harry's shoulder looked even older and funny, like someone dragged something barbed over it.

But the scars that stood out the most were the ones that motherfucker Len had fucking carved into the kid's skin.
Down at the stream Daryl dropped the fresh clothes on the fresh grass of the riverside and went straight into the water with his precious cargo, not caring that he got his own pants soaked.

The boy was so light and small that the hunter could easily hold him with one arm, while he used the other to wet some of the torn rags Harry had worn until now. Carefully he helped Harry clean himself, getting the worst of the dirt and other things off him. He decidedly turned his head when the teen started to clean his lower body, giving him a bit of privacy. The hunter’s heart clenched painfully with each uncomfortable hiss or sob the boy made when the cold water would come in contact with any open wound...

The white and red scare tissue around his cuff-like tattoos was gleaming now and then in the moon light.

Accenting the thin wrists and arms, protruding bones and sharp angles everywhere and at last the gruesome scars on the kids back...

Daryl looked over the whipping wounds, most of them healing OK, but a few looked inflamed, so he cleaned them again. He could see Harry's muscles rippling and shaking under his hand with the pain of it.

When they were done, they were both exhausted physically but mostly emotionally.

None of them spoke as Daryl helped Harry into the new clothes and then carefully lifted him back into his arms.

On the way back he could feel how the tension bled out of Harry, his body getting heavier and softer, head resting against the archer's shoulder.

“Daryl?”

“Mhmm”, a soft non-committal rumble.

“Thank you.”

“Mhmm.”
“You really did it! You killed them all.” The teen sounded awed.

“Yeah.” Glancing down on the boy the hunter marvelled at how relaxed he looked right now. Silent tears were running down his face but he didn't seem that sad anymore. There was a small smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

Green eyes met dark blue ones. Smile widening.

“I'm free now, aren't I?”

Daryl couldn’t help himself and he smiled shyly back.

“Yeah, yer are.” They both bathed silently this moment of relieve and hope.

At least I managed to keep my promise to him. They both thought.

+++++Flashback+++++

Daryl had needed some time to calm himself. The words on the boy's back glaring back at him.

CLAIMED

Fuck! They had seen some serious shit... but nothing like this!

“Shit, that's messed up! That sick fuck!” grinding his teeth, Daryl growled. “I should have shot the old ass! Should go back and just do it now!” The archer paced, growling and snarling. Already grabbing his knife...

“Stop!” The kid's voice was like steel!

Daryl halted and when he looked back the teen who fixed him with a hard stare.

“Are you insane?!” Gone was the smile, the kids tone was incredulous and harsh.

Daryl was seething, didn't the brat understand? He was trying to save him... Men like that didn’t stop, they would kill the boy.
“Heard the kid before. Thinks ya another dirty redneck... 'nother low life. Worthless pussy! That can’t protect anything... Useless!” That voice on his head sounded suspiciously like Merle again.

“What cha say?” Daryl growled, turning back to the still sitting, shirtless boy. Vulnerable, bruised all over, beaten up. And those freaking excessive scars on his wrists that told their own story of the kid’s desperation?! All of it was so messed up and Daryl was sick off watching people die.

But this was the first time Daryl saw those green eyes burning with real life.

*Kid's angry...*

“What I'm saying?...”, green eyes narrowed “What do you think you're going to achieve going back there with one bow again six others with weapons? Besides dying I mean!” The Kid glared at him.

“Kid's angry...”

Daryl bared his teeth at the teen. He hated feeling so useless.

“So ya want ta do nothing? Just laying back like a good little bitch and take the next beatin’... the next fuckin’!” Red was clouding Daryl’s vision, his mind conjuring picture after picture of what the kid was going be to suffering.

“But maybe ya like it!”

A hissing inhale.

As soon the words had left his mouth, Daryl felt ice cold... what was he saying?!  

*Shit! Such utter bullshit!*

Glancing carefully at the kid he sucked in a labored breath, damn... the teen looked like Daryl had punched him. Pale and those wide eyes directed on the ground, tears gathering. Another hissing breath.

*Shit... look kid, I didn't mean it... I know ya don't...”*

*Just man up, and apologize, Dixon!*
Kid's head snapped up - glare back on.

“That was a low blow!” Voice cold and expression pinched. The kid looked determined.

“What I want is for you to keep your head!” hissed the raven haired boy.

“What I want, is for you to bloody think before charging in there and get yourself killed. Because that will not change. A. Fucking. Thing! I will still be raped and beaten. You just won’t have to see it anymore, because you will be dead then!”, taking a shuddering breath the boy pulled himself together to calm down.

“What I want is for you not to throw your life away for an already half-dead kid and for things that are long scared over... Fighting now won't change a thing for the better. So will you...please... calm down?”

“I know you look at me and you just see another dead girl”

Like Beth, was all Daryl could think. The kid was like Beth.

The boy would probably end like Beth. Lost in this fucked up world, struggling to get by until all those horrors around him would swallow him up. All anger drained out of the archer leaving only a deep sadness and endless exhaustion behind.

Yeah, running off now would achieve nothing, but he was tired of watching good people die and the scum survive.

Harry watched how the man changed, without his anger he seemed smaller somehow. He looked drained, exhausted... vulnerable....When their gazes met, Harry could see it:

“He’s lost. Just as me.”

Out loud he said: “Calmed down?”

The wind picked up and Harry shivered...and it irritated his back, causing him to take a sharp breath. “Bloody shit!”

Daryl frowned looking guilty, he sighed.

“Yeah... yeah... I'm sorry... I should probably take care of ya back now?!” He said in soft gruff tone.
Daryl was as careful as possible as he cleaned the bleeding marks on the kid's back. The green eyed boy tried to be tough about it but he couldn't help himself from crying out.

In an attempt to distract him, Daryl talked to him, asked questions.

“What's ya name?” carefully dragging a wet cloth over a wound.

A small laugh and a whimper.

“Long time since anybody asked that. My name is Harry.”

“Where are ya from. Ya accent is strange.”

“Ouch, Ou,... I'm from England, lived in Surrey close to London, but I went to boarding school in Scotland. So my accent may be a little bit messed up.”, last part was said in such exaggerated posh English accent, that Daryl huffed a little laugh.

“If ya say so, ma Lord. What were ya doing here, though? When you’re from England was someone with ya?”

Damn was he a rich kid or what? Boarding school in Scotland sounded fancy.

“Vacation...in Atlanta... arg! Bloody hell! My family is gone... Early in the apocalypse. Now I'm stranded here.” Another wound cleaned. Good!

“What a shit vacation...” And after a pause. "Sorry for ya loss! I know it’s hard! Were ya with a group before them?”

Shit was hard enough, but being in another country losing your family, with no way home... that sucked.

“No, was mostly alone, for months… running, hiding... form walkers... and people. I just generally tried to stay clear of people.... well... then came the Claimers... “ Harry told him through gritted teeth.

“I didn’t saw a lot of good people. I started to fear the living more than the dead. I had given up on humanity. It’s a relief to see that there are good people left in this world. They’ll be necessary or the world will be truly lost to mankind. The future needs good people like you. Like the guy that killed Lou, I think he was a good person, too “

That made Daryl pause.
“Ya think? Why?” His curiosity got him the cheeky response that obviously he was the one who wanted to play 21 questions.

“Yer a brat!” Daryl huffed at him.

Harry smiled a little despite the pain.

“The man under the bed I think he contemplated how to kill me.” Harry admitted with a small laugh.

“He was so tense that he was shaking all over...but not in fright, you know. But the kind of shaking when your high on adrenaline and ready to fight. Like a wounded bear backed in a corner. He looked ready to tear anyone in his way to pieces. And at the same time he seemed conflicted about it...

A man ready to become a feral animal but hurting over it at the same time. But it was this ambivalence that made all the difference in the world... Convinced me that he's a good guy and to give him a chance to get away. I think he wanted to help me, too. But he couldn't...

He... he was hurt, looked really beaten up. He couldn't have gotten both of us out there; too dangerous. And I think he travelled with other people he needed to warn them not to come back to the house.

He... He wanted to reach out to me. Seemed real upset that he couldn't help me. So yeah, I think he's one of the good ones. I'm glad he got out, glad that I could help.”

Beaten up... Daryl didn't dare to hope... but maybe it was Rick...?

“What'd he look like?” He urged the little Brit on.

“Huh, umm...brown hair I think, quite curly, and a bushy salt and pepper beard, bright blue eyes... he looked really, really tense, if you know what I mean...? The kind of tension you could normally only achieve with at least 15 espressi. You know him?”

That sounded like Rick, alright.

“Yeah, I think I do...”Daryl smirked a bit, if he'd see Rick again he'd tell him he came across as high on caffeine “Ya know something about the people he travelled with?”

“Sorry, no... The others found woman's cloths in the house and one of the kid’s rooms was recently used. Tony thinks he met up with a woman and a boy.”

Carl! And maybe Michonne!? Daryl could suddenly breathe easier than before. Rick, Carl and Michonne might be alive.
“That’s good news? Right?!?” Harry regarded him curiously.

And Daryl smiled a little “Might be! They’re friends. Ma family.”

Harry’s answering smile was nearly blinding... damn the boy was really pretty under all those bruises...and fuck it was endearing cause the kid was happy for him. Earnest happiness cause he might find his family.

“But Daryl, Joe is tracking them down for what happened with Lou. They want to kill them, I think.” Harry looked suddenly worried.

“They don’t know who they’re messing with. Rick and Michonne are badass and the kid, Carl, is tough, too” Daryl knew he would do anything to protect them.

“I’m done with ya back. Can’t do more right now, sorry. Go back as long as the idiot lookout is still asleep and try ta get some shut eye. Will ya? I’m gonna keep watch.”

Looking at the small kid with his messed up back knowing what these bastards were doing to him, Daryl made a decision.

“Harry, ya were right ’bout not charging headless into a fight... But when we find ma friends, we will kill those scumbags. I’ll make sure ya goin’ ta be safe, alright? Just don’t give up yet, try ta hang on a littl’ longer. ’Kay?”

Harry felt like he took a dive on a broom... stomach clenching painfully...tears were burning in his eyes.

This was... Shit, this was the point... before meeting the man under the bed and Daryl Harry had started to give up. Numbing himself against the constant abuse and pain, but also closing himself off to positive thoughts and feelings... Hoping just hurt too much sometimes. And he hadn’t dared to hope anymore.

Thinking more and more about dying and just giving in.

And now... now he wasn’t sure if he could open himself up again for such feeling. Making himself vulnerable to disappointment and grieve.

“I...I...” His voice broke with pent up emotions, ”I'll...try to...?” He managed to whisper. More a
question than a real promise but Daryl seemed satisfied.

“Is all I ask!” He sounded relived, his own voice rough with unspoken feelings.

And all Harry could think was “Maybe he understands…”

On the way back Daryl had tugged him in the blanket to keep him as warm as possible. Harry felt safer than in a long time. He felt his exhaustion creeping up on him; eyelids already heavy, he murmured:

“Daryl?”

“Yeah, kiddo?”

“Just thanks. I know you don't think so but you and the bloke under the bed helped already. Just knowing people like you still exist is enough. When we find your friends, Joe will want to hurt them... if there's any situation where you can save them or run with them... Promise me that you’ll do that then. Doesn't matter if you can't take me with you... just be with good people!”

Daryl felt too stunned for a moment... Kid just told him to leave him behind if necessary, as long as he'd found his family.

When he wanted to protest, the boy had slipped away.

Fuck all! He was so done with this day!

*  

When the next morning came, Daryl watched Harry waking up, quickly checking where Len was, making sure he kept himself out of sight and the way not to gather any kind of unwanted attention…

For a moment Daryl was quite tried to forget that he promised not to take unnecessary risks and just throw the little Brit over his shoulder and make a run for it.

But before he could say or do anything, Harry caught his gaze.

The kid’s unimpressed look told him that Harry probably knew what had been going on in his
Daryl flushed a little at silent telling off. He hated being this transparent. The hunter scowled at the teen, but those green eyes just held his gaze until Daryl had to look away...

Harry gave him a little half smile and an awkward one shouldered shrug.

As if to say: *Come on, it will be alright... somehow.*

He watched on as Harry squared his frail and bony shoulders. Eyes determined he got ready for the day. For a moment Daryl was reminded of the day Merle went away to the military. Merle had been equally awkward and determined and Daryl had felt similar queasy about it.

+++++Flashback end+++++

When they reached the others Harry was fast asleep in Daryl’s arms and he carefully put him into the car with Michonne and Carl. Carl looked still incredibly pale and shaken over the whole ordeal.

When he saw Harry he craned his neck to check the older boy over.

“Is he okay?”, he whispered. Face relaxed in sleep the British boy looked incredibly young; the bruises still an ugly violet and yellow here and there.

“He might not be fer some time... but I think he will get there with some help.” Daryl mumbled lowly.

Carl frowned in concern but nodded. There was a familiar determined expression on his face.

“Get some sleep, kiddo”

Rick sat on the outside of the car, looking shaken up and still covered in blood. Exhausted and wild at the same time.

Tense like he was high on 15 espressi, had Harry said.

Daryl pulled his red cleaning rag out and put some water on it, holding it out to his friend.

“No, we're saving it to drink.” Rick sounded bone tired.

“Nah, ya can’t see yaself...They can.” Daryl pointed to the car with the two sleeping boys.
Rick started to clean his face without words.

Daryl crouched down beside him, resting his back against the car. He felt the need to explain.

“At first I didn’t know what they were...” Rick nodded looking understanding.

“How did you wind up with them?”

“Was with Beth. We got out together... I was with her for a while....”, the whole thing weighted still heavy on his conscience.

“She dead?”

“Nah, just gone, now... After, that's when they found me...Didn't know what they were capable of. But I knew they were bad. But they had code. It was stupid but it sounded easy... and it was some.” Daryl muttered solemn .

“And then I found out about Harry and things they did ta him. Couldn't leave then, kid told me what happened and that they were looking for ya. Couldn't get him out and away with on ma own. So he made me agree ta do nothing stupid, ta wait till we found ya. Shouldn't have left him tanight ta hunt, kid wouldn't have gotten hurt again... if...”

Daryl looked at the ground hiding his expression behind his fringe. He was biting viciously on his thumb nail.

“Thata's not on you, Daryl.” Rick stopped cleaning his face. “You being back here with us that's everything! You couldn't have known.” Daryl was fighting tears back at that. Those words soothed some of the boiling rage, fear, shame and guilt he felt since he understood what these bastards did to Harry.

“You're ma brother!” Daryl was deeply touched by Rick declaration.

“And at least you did right by the boy and didn't leave him completely behind with those pigs” Rick was clenching his fists in frustration.

“God, Daryl! I fucking left him there, even knowing how they were hurting him. I left although I knew that they would punish him for not telling on me... feared that they killed him for it. Fuck, I left a dead man to turn just one room away from him.”, Rick buried his face in his hand.

“And I have seen his face... His bruises weren't that extensive the last time.”
“Yeah, they did punish him. Beat, raped and whipped him for helping ya.” Maybe it was cruel to
tell him that and Rick flinched at the information. But it was important. Lying about it would solve
nothing.

“But that's not on ya either!” Daryl said roughly.

“He knew that. Kid told me he knew ya were good folks. Saw that ya were ta hurt ta help him.
Understood that ya were with others that ya had to protect. He was glad ya got away and lived. I
think he was afraid they would hurt Michonne... He said ya tried to reach out for him?”

“Yeah, was shaking like a complete idiot while the kid braved through hell...” Rick cringed at the
memory.

“Was happy about it.” Rick head snapped up at that, looking incredulous.

“Said he didn't think there were any compassionate people left in the world... some shit like that.
Told me that knowing that there are some good ones left was enough.”

“Kindness like that... It seems nearly too much now a days...”

“Yeah…”
The morning after had felt awkward. Harry's legs were holding him up now but not for too long and he was still in a lot of pain. He flinched violently whenever Rick or Michonne move in his direction or popped up where he hadn't expected him.

He could feel the weight of their concerned glances, unsure and careful. It was easier to bear Carl's obvious curiosity. The younger boy behaved mostly hesitant and cautious, but the giddy and nervous air around him belied his excitement on meeting someone his age. Harry was impressed how well the blue eyed teen controlled himself when it was so clear that he was brimming with questions.

Harry dreaded the moment Rick would undoubtedly start to ask questions. It would be foolish not to... These weren't the times you didn't ask a stranger any questions. Most people had their own agenda to survive in this world of the dead.

And trust was as dangerous as it was necessary to survive. Harry could see that Carl despite all his excitement had learned this too.

The world had changed. It had turned boys into men and men into beasts. Civilization as it was, had died. But maybe mankind could prevail... Maybe.

With a heavy sigh Harry stared at the frayed hem of the blanket Michonne had given him. The cleanest piece of fabric he seen and felt for a while even though it wasn't recently washed. But requirements had lowered drastically, hadn't they?

How was the saying?
Beggars can't be choosers.

And a beggar was what he was at the end of the day.

A beaten up beggar blind as a bat without his glasses. *Shit!*

He wouldn't last a day on his own. If he was lucky the walkers would get him this time and not another Len. Tiredly Harry closed his eyes. These people had been very kind so far. They had given him clothes, food and water. Merlin, Daryl had kept his word and they had killed his tormentors and had freed him.

And as stupid as it sounded Harry trusted Daryl and he would miss the sullen Huffelpuff when he and his family would decide to move on.

Rick had told them that they had found the map of a community by the tracks and that they hoped to find some people there. They wanted to look into this place, Terminus.

The hope to find more of their people went unspoken because like Harry they had all learned that hope was a traitorous bitch. Hanging your heart on impossible things was going to kill you a hundred times over.

And so Harry didn't allow himself to think that he could expect any further help from this little family when they had already done so much for him.

Nobody right in their mind was going to take a heavily injured kid that they didn't know anything about with them...

Not with the company he had kept, or better the company that had kept him.

Not in times like this.

Aunt Petunia’s voice resonated in Harry's head.

*You're an ungrateful freak. Always were and now you always will be! Who could ever want you?*

The old shame and loneliness that came with being unloved washed over him.

There had never been a place for him in this world where he had belonged... not really. Hogwarts had been his first real home and Ron and Hermine had been his first human friends. But Voldemort and his minions had taken that from him, had destroyed his illusions about the wizarding world and the place he could have carved for himself there.
There was no sense in dwelling on such matters... Ron, Hermine and Hogwarts were gone now and even if they were still out there, they were out of his reach.

Harry shuddered with that thought.

And after wincing in pain again Michonne practically forced an Advil from her pack down this throat because Daryl had tattled on him and mentioned that some of his lash marks had gotten inflamed.

Harry had tried to protest that he didn't need the medication, earning him a glare from Daryl and concerned looks from Rick and Carl.

The discussion ended because Michonne smiled in a frightening way that scared all of the men and said in a sweet voice that if his injuries weren’t so bad then surly it wouldn't be a problem if she took a look at his back.

Harry admitted defeat at that and took the pill with a grumble about hard assed women, while Michonne patted his head with a pleased expression.

Feeling embarrassed that they had shared even more of their spars supplies Harry had tried to ask if they wanted something in return… which had brought some else to light…

To Harry's utter surprise it turned out that neither Rick nor Daryl nor Michonne had any intention of leaving him behind.

Instead they were dead set on taking him with them...

Harry nearly choked on a sip of water when Rick told him had he should take his time resting and that they would start travelling when Harry had recuperated.

His shock must have been written on his face.

“God, sorry Harry! We just thought... You don't have to come with us. We just thought... Well... It doesn't have to be for the long run. But maybe for a while until you’re stronger?! You can leave anytime. You're free!” Michonne had hurried to assure him. Her beautiful face had been so earnest and apological.

“You actually want me to travel with you?!” He squeaked out.

“Ya thought not? We ain't leavin' ya here!” Daryl grumbled out, rolling his eyes as if Harry was the unreasonable one here!

“Wha... But... I'll probably slow you down. You would be much faster own your own.” Harry stuttered wide eyed. Carl just snorted and Rick smiled patiently at the British teen.
They really wanted him to come! They really wanted… He couldn't believe this. They even wanted to wait for him to get better before they traveled on!

Loyalty seemed to run in this makeshift family. Even to somebody they didn't know.

Could it be that they just thought that they had to settle a debt?

It honestly confused Harry.

Daryl and his friends were like nobody else he had met in this fucked up nightmare.

These months on the road and with the Claimers had seriously fucked with his head and what he expected from others... Which seemed to be nothing in the best case and abuse in the worst.

Harry reflected his own frame of mind.

But then again when had he ever been able to rely on the adults in his life...

None of them had ever been too dependable in the end.

The Dursleys had hated the ground he walked on, his teachers had seldom listened when it counted and Dumbledore had just been too distant and the air between them too full of secrets.

Even Remi and Sirius had been too absent and too impulsive for Harry to build a solid connection to them. Although he had loved them dearly and would grieve their deaths and all the things that could have been, for the rest of his life.

And now here in the middle of nowhere in the bloody apocalypse sat three adults and a teenager that wanted to look out for him. It left him reeling.

Harry felt guilty because they were pausing for his benefit only... When he brought the issue up, Rick calmly told him not to worry about it. The blue eyed man even disclosed to Harry how he had gotten so injured that he had to rest in the house where they had met for a few days. All the while Michonne and Daryl had left to hunt.

A few hours and two cooked rabbits later they all tried to give him the most of the meal, looking disappointed and solicitous at him when he didn't eat much.

The green eyed boy tried to reassure them. “It's alright. I hadn't had anything decent for months... Len didn't fe...” Harry shuddered, he just couldn't say feed, without thing about all the blowjobs he had been forced to give and how the Claimers had joked about it as feeding... Merlin, it was just a word! Get a grip, you can say this!

Taking a calming breath, gathering courage, he stuttered.
“Len didn't... fe...fffee...feed me too often”

Nobody commented on his obvious struggles and Harry was really thankful for that.

“How did ya manag’ then?” Daryl grumbled obviously changing the topic.

“Ate a lot herbs and even grass to get by. Eating too much now, would make me probably only sick. I always had to be careful with that before.”

Rick head snapped up in alarm a concerned frown marring his face.

“What do you mean you always had to be careful with that before?”

“Uhm...”, Harry cursed silently... he had blabbered that out without thought. Daryl had said that Rick used to be a Sheriff. And bloody damn, the man was observant.

Harry started to fiddle with his sleeves again.

“Growing up, I didn't have always much to eat...?” He tried to word it as carefully as possible. He really didn't want to talk about his childhood or the Dursleys.

Rick's frowned deepened and Harry could practicality see the gears working in his head. So when he opened his mouth to undoubtedly ask more in-depth questions Harry promptly intervened:

“That’s not really important any longer, is it? Now a day we're all hungry!” At that blue eyes narrowed in deep suspicion.

The former Sheriff was taking in Harry's rigid posture that had to scream -I don't want to talk about that!!!!!! - Before he nodded in conceding.

*Thank, Merlin!*

Sadly Harry’s relieve was only short lived when Carl prodded curiously at his left wrist...

“What are those? Are that tattoos? Aren’t you a bit young for them? And what’s with those scars?”

Harry wanted to groan... That was what he had feared.

*Bloody tattoos!*

*How do you explain that? Normal people don’t get inked in their teens. The Claimers thought them hilarious said they fitted a bitch. And I know Daryl has seen them the first night but hadn't said*
anything about them.

While Harry still tried to find a convincing explanation why he had tattoos and the scars, his head frighteningly blank, Michonne saved him.

She had also looked at his wrists when Carl asked and she had come to her own conclusions when she noticed the scaring on his skin surrounding the tattoos.

“Carl!” She snapped.

Carl looked confused between Harry and Michonne. Harry could see Rick craning his neck to get a better look, hissing when he saw the ink and the rough scaring; cursing under his breath.

“But what...?”

“Carl, Beth had some similar scars…” There was something Rick didn't say outride, but was heavily implied...

And if Harry read the subtitle to his conversation right… Then he adults most likely thought that the scars came from suicide attempts or were signs of desperate self-harm.

Well, bloody fuck!

Ok, maybe the thought of self-harm wasn’t at far off… They must him think that he had lost his marbles. Just what he needed!

“Oh...OH!” Carl paled and flushed and paled again... wide blue eyes searched for Harry's green ones.

“I'm so sorry... I didn't mean to bring back bad memories!” He mumbled awkwardly.

“It's alright! I... I had the tattoos for a long time now... I got them before and after everything… I couldn’t stand to look at them anymore, so I… well you see it. The ink goes very deep. I tried everything short of cutting my hands off. I wasn't quite ready to go that far...”, Harry tried to explain in stumbling sentences. It was as close to the truth as he would get right now. But he noticed that Daryl had flinched at his comment about cutting his hands off...

“I accepted that I'll have to live with them. I haven’t cut myself for some time.” Harry hope he eased their minds a bit.

Nonetheless, the silence afterwards had grown strained afterwards.

Rick cleared his throat awkwardly.
“Uh...well... Harry have you been with a group before... *them*?”

So Harry had been right. While they were ready to take him with them, for now, Rick would fish for as much information on Harry as he could get.

“No... After I... lost my family. I stayed on my own till the Claimers found me.” Harry shook his head.

Everyone's head snapped to him at that.


“Hey, I'll have you know that I'm probably 16 by now!” Harry sniffed with a light pout.

*

The adults shared uneasy glances... 16! Damn, Rick had thought that 15 would have been pushing it... The kid didn't look 16, too small, too thin.... He looked off an age with Carl.

This wasn't just the apocalypse... stunned growth was an effect of long term abuse in younger years. The former sheriff knew that much.

“I'm fast and really good at hiding... spend the first months dodging the living and the dead as good as I could... The people I saw... well they looked and felt mostly like trouble, so I never tried to make contact. I stayed on the move, slept in trees and abandoned houses and scavenged what I could.” Harry continued his explanation.

Another shared glance...

A young teenager, alone in a foreign country while the dead start walking... and the kid didn't even try to find a group. No, Harry had been wary enough of other living to run from them instead of trying his luck with them.

That's not something you do if you had a decent home life and developed a general trust in people. Harry had apparently already learned that sometimes you were safer on your own and was somewhat used to look after himself.

“It wasn't perfect. All that running and hiding exhausted me too much... and in the end it made me careless and slow. The day the claimers caught me I had a feeling that I was staying too long at the same place. I should have left hours ago but I was too worn out. And when I got ready to leave, they jumped me... It was a stupid, rookie mistake.”

Harry sighed deeply. The teen had drawn his knees to his chest, forehead resting on his knees.
“It’s over now! You’re free and you won’t be alone anymore. You can stay with us. We’re protecting each other!” Carl told him.

Rick smiled a bit. He really loved his son. Carl had endured so much already and where Rick had broken down and nearly lost his mind, Carl had bounced back. He sounded kind of excited and hopeful to have Harry with them.

Raising his head Harry looked unsure between them, biting his lip.

Rick was reminded of the first time he had seen the Harry and how small and vulnerable he had seemed when they had stared at each other under that bed.

To the bearded man the British boy looked still ridiculous young, curled up, bruised, raven hair falling in his face. A fresh wave of resentment towards those monsters went through him.

“I still don’t understand. How can you want me to come with you? I can’t do much right now... I'm essentially useless in a fight.”

Harry let out a harsh breath, he looked at his feet and mumbled defeated. “I don't want to be a burden...”

“If ya only talkin’ shit, ya better stop talkin’ at all. Ain’t going ta chang’ our minds. Ain’t leavin’ ya behind!” growled Daryl.

*

The hunter had followed the conversation mostly silent but observant. He stubbornly glared at the boy. This reminded him to much of their talk when Harry had asked him to put his family first... and he didn't like were this was going.

The kid had just no sense of fucking self-preservation! Seemingly never putting himself first.

“Daryl's right, you saved me and Carl. We won’t just leave you behind. If you want to come with us you're welcome, too”, Rick smiled sincerely at the boy.

Harry blushed a bit even if it was hard to tell through the bruising. Daryl could see tears swimming in red rimmed eyes and how the green eyed teen’s throat worked furiously.

“I would like that. Thank you.” His voice broke a little bit and he looked incredible timid.

*

Will you get these poor fools killed, too, with your reckless incompetency, Potter? You're an
“I have a condition... if I come with you, you must promise me something.” Harry looked at his new group. Rick, Michonne and Carl looked expectant, while Daryl seemed wary.

He knows me already well enough, to know he won’t like what I’ll be asking for. The thought was as alarming as it was heart-warming. It showed how much Harry had let his guard down with the silent man.

It was something Harry hadn’t thought himself capable of anymore. Maybe he wasn’t as lost and numb as he had come to believe.

*  

“Daryl told me that you're friends. But not just friends you're family! And in this world there can't be anything more important than that. Right?” Daryl observed how serious green eyes locked with bright blue ones.

Rick looked a bit perplexed but then his face turned equally serious.

“Yes, of course!”

Rick, ya gullible idiot!

Daryl wanted to hit his brother in all but blood on the head.

Harry's bright smile at the man’s agreement did nothing to reassure Daryl.

“Good! I saw yesterday what you were ready to do to protect your son. You would do anything for them right?” This was said more softly. The teen’s words were laced with understanding.

Rick nodded.

Great, Officer friendly is getting lulled in...Really sly kid! Daryl glared at the boy, who innocently ignored him and continued to rope Rick into making that promise he wanted.
supplies. In my book that makes all debts between us paid. You owe me nothing, I owe you nothing”

At that Rick frowned a bit. “Well I wouldn't have said it like that, but…? But yes of course. You owe us nothing. Harry, we’re not trying to bind you to us with the supplies we gave you.”

Jesus! Still not getting it, Grimes…!!

“Good, so we agree on the premise!” That innocent smile Harry threw at Rick reminded Daryl him painfully of Carol. Another nod from a confused Rick.

She would have loved the kid. Sly as they come.

Harry's face grew determined. “If I come with you... I want you to promise me that your family will always come first!

And to be totally clear if I stay behind, if I hinder you, if I endanger you, you'll give me your honest word that you'll leave me behind! Or that you'll kill me.”

“WHAT!?”, Ricks eyes nearly popped out, Michonne and Carl looked shocked.

Walked right into that Rick. Walked right into that!! Daryl huffed in exasperation.

He wasn’t going to promise the kid shit! And the little prick knew that if the stubborn laser beam glance the redneck git was anything to go by.

“You owe me nothing. Without you I would be dead. You saved my life and I’m thankful. And I think the best way to repay you is to make sure you don’t do some idiotic heroic shit that gets you killed.

It’s kind of you to help me but I might prove to be a handicap to you. So it's important to be frank here.

Promise me that you won’t risk your or your family's safety for a foreign sick kid! Family always first!”

Rick looked conflicted.

Damn Grimes! Daryl knew his brother. Rick was a hard ass.
The boy had asked the right person. As their leader, Rick had made tough decisions like this before. He had send people away and he had killed those who were a threat to their family.

They all had done it before. Had made that decision time and time again.

Had weighted their people’s lives against that of stranger’s.

Daryl swallowed heavily and pushed the dread in his stomach down. He already knew what call Rick would make.

Knew it before he saw his brother nodding. And he knew if push came to shove that he wouldn’t let this happen.

Fuck the dumb promise.

* 

“Alright!” Rick’s voice sounded rough and foreign to his own ears.

He ignored Carls angry outcry and how unhappy Daryl and Michonne looked with this.

They all knew that they had done it before. They had been forced to leave a lot of people behind and probably would be forced to do that in the future again...

But to hear it like that, to have it demanded from you, felt different.

It made Rick’s heart ache for all of them.

For himself because agreeing to this showed him how much all this had changed him.

After agreeing to this, after going through with this he would never be able again to claim to be officer friendly.

He ached for Carl, who had already seen and done too much.

He ached for Michonne and Daryl who shouldn’t be forced to make such calls anymore...

And he ached for the boy in front of him with the ancient green eyes who was all too ready to be harmed for the safety of others but wouldn't stand for others to do the same for him.
I apologize before hand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

Chapter 5

When Harry insisted the next morning that he felt good enough to travel Daryl and the others had seemed sceptical. The teen had told them then flatly that he would manage and that the claimers had forced him to move with much worse injuries.

There was also the fact that last night Daryl had insisted to take care of his back again. The hunter and Michonne had then teamed up against him so that he had taken another pill against the pain and the infection, which had helped immensely.

He was as much on the mend as possible.

For Harry this meant that there was no reason, not to get moving. If they waited any longer they would most likely attacked by more dead than they could handle.

But most importantly Harry had the disquieting feeling that they should be somewhere else. It had started the night before… a slight unease, niggling in the back of his mind growing persistently stranger until he just couldn’t ignore it any longer. He had learned to trust his hunches above all else. Discounting it once had led him into months of abuse and sexual assault.

And Merlin damn him if he ever made such a mistake again!

The feeling right now was strange…

There was an urgent excitemt humming in his veins that had him antsy. It was like knowing that you had to search something really important, something that needed to be found fast or would be lost forever but you just couldn’t remember what you were looking for…

And at the same time he felt a sense of foreboding that made his flesh crawl with dread.
Gathering their supplies they got on the way to Terminus following the tracks.

Rick and Michonne leading them, while Carl and Daryl hovered close to Harry. Despite his words was the long walk taxing on Harry in a lot of ways. Physically he was still weakened and he walked with a small limp that came from the pain in his lower back and the bruises the beatings had given him.

But what pulled on his nerves more than anything else were the two mother hens by his side. Darryl was growling every time as he so much as stumbled. Which wasn't always because of his injuries but his bad eye sight... Walking on tracks was no easy feat without glasses!

So between stumping his toes and a litany of displeased grumbling sounds that came from his right side, Carl was nervously rambling and checking in on Harry's state of health from the left.

For Harry Daryl’s and Carl’s protectiveness was as troublesome as it was endearing. And despite his irritation over this unfamiliar kind of care the green eyed wizard felt warm in the light of their concern.

Carl tried to keep him entertained while Daryl was mostly silent. But from time to time Daryl would grumble or huff at them to take a small break, because he thought Harry needed a rest, but knew the boy wouldn't ask for one.

They all made sure to feed and water Harry as much as their limited their means made it possible.

They tried to be unobtrusive about that but they really sucked at being subtle.

Harry decided it felt nice... he felt care for and it reminded him a bit of Mrs. Weasley and Hermione and at the same time all this care made him uncomfortable flustered and honestly a bit shy.

Daryl seemed to understand because once or twice their gazes met and Harry saw his own awkwardness reflected back at him with a small sympathetic smirk that told him clearly to suck it up.

Despite Carl’s talkativeness Harry thought that the younger teen seemed still shaken by something and trying as hard as he might the younger boy couldn't quiet cover it up. It showed in the way Carl looked at his father from time to time.

Nervous, solemn and guilty.

“What's on your mind?” Harry asked carefully.

“Huh? I just told you...” Carl looked like he had been caught with his hands in the cookie jar.
“No, what's really on your mind?” Harry smiled warmly at him.

It was like watching a mask drop. Carl’s childish face morphed into that of an older version of the boy… He looked exhausted and haggard.

“Do you... Do you think that we can come back from all this? The things... The things that happened to us?” The bright blue eyes at looked at Harry were haunted. “The things we did?”

Carl starred at his father's back... There was a story to all that. Harry thought.

“We? As in you and me?” Harry had asked himself the same after his captivity with the Deatheaters… For Harry that had been the beginning of the end.

A nod.

As difficult the question was, as clear had the answer become for Harry in the last months. He was still Harry - the boy under the stairs, he was still Harry the boy who lived, but he had also become Harry the victim and Harry the lost. So…

“No, probably not. At least not as we were. I don't think that I can ever be the same again. Not necessarily for the worse but definitely different.”

Carl looked dejected at that.

“But since I met you I have hope that humanity might have a chance to regain what it has lost in the long run. In time the world could belong to the living again.”

And in an afterthought Harry added.

“Maybe it’s good that we were able to change like we did. Maybe we're still here because we had it always in us - the ability to adapt enough to face all this - to do all of it and to survive, you know?”

Carl shook his head

“There's a fable I had to learn in primary school when I was little. It's called “The oak and the reed”. Have you heard it before?”

“I don’t think so…” The younger boy had tilted his head in thought. Harry cleared his throat.

“It goes like this:

\textit{The oak one day addressed the reed:}

\textit{‘To you ungenerous indeed}

\textit{Has nature been, my humble friend,}

\textit{With weakness aye obliged to bend.}
The smallest bird that flits in air
Is quite too much for you to bear;
The slightest wind that wreathes the lake
Your ever-trembling head does shake.
The while, my towering form
Dares with the mountain top
The solar blaze to stop,
And wrestle with the storm.
What seems to you the blast of death,
To me is but a zephyr's breath.
Beneath my branches had you grown,
That spread far round their friendly bower,
Less suffering would your life have known,
Defended from the tempest's power.
Unhappily you oftenest show
In open air your slender form,
Along the marshes wet and low,
That fringe the kingdom of the storm.
To you, declare I must,
Dame Nature seems unjust.'
Then modestly replied the reed:
'Your pity, sir, is kind indeed,
But wholly needless for my sake.
The wildest wind that ever blew
Is safe to me compared with you.
I bend, indeed, but never break.
Thus far, I own, the hurricane
Has beat your sturdy back in vain;
But wait the end.' Just at the word,
The tempest's hollow voice was heard.
The North sent forth her fiercest child,
Dark, jagged, pitiless, and wild.
The oak, erect, endured the blow;
The reed bowed gracefully and low.
But, gathering up its strength once more,
In greater fury than before,
The savage blast
Overthrew, at last,
That proud, old, sky-encircled head,
Whose feet entwined the empire of the dead!”

(Jean de Lafontaine)

Harry could feel the adult’s eyes on him. Michonne had a small understanding smile on her face and her intelligent dark eyes twinkled.

“Sometimes I hope that we’re like the reed. Even if we bended extensively, we did not break. We survived in the storms so far and such have still the chance to grow and to decide who and what we want to be even if we'll be different than before.

It is still our decision if we want to be good people.” Harry said to Carl.

Wide eyed the younger teen stopped walking. When Harry looked over his shoulder back at him, Carl had his fists clenched and his hat threw a shadow over his face.

“How do you know I’m not broken?” He whispered in a small voice.

Slowly Harry walked over to his new friend. When he stood in front of him Harry lifted the rim of the Sheriffs hat so he could peer under it. Looking into teary blue eyes the British teen smiled kindly.

“You took me in when you didn’t have to. That has to count for something, don't you think?”

And Carl looked a little less pensive then.

* 

As they neared Terminus they passed one more sign with the instructions how to get there and Harry's unease spiked up a few notches. The excitement and the feeling of dread that accompanied this hunch churned in his stomach.
There was something terribly dodgy about Terminus.

It was too... too advertised! No one right in their mind called strangers this openly into their safe home unless they were dead certain that they could neutralise any possible threat.

And if that didn't ring very possible alarm bell...

Something must have shown on Harry's face because Daryl paused to look at the British teen.

“Yer alright? Hurting?”

“No... It’s not that. Just uneasy. A hunch, you know?” Harry tried to explain. He didn't think they would react to his weirdness and was surprised when Rick regarded him intensely.

Rick was frowning. Even in the short time Harry had spent in Rick’s company he could spot the signs easily... The man was gearing himself up for a fight. Tense and blues eyes hardened, he practically latched on to Harry's hunch.

“You think there might be something wrong here?”

“I have no proof just the feeling in my gut so to say... But it never led me wrong. The one time I ignored it, I got captured by the Claimers.” Harry shyly answered. He felt quiet awed by this much consideration.

“I want us to be cautious too. Could be a trap...” Rick mumbled in his beard.

Harry was a bit embarrassed how serious Rick took his foreboding. It was certainly a first for Harry that an adult listened this earnestly to his worries and believed that there might be a problem a head of them.

“Let's go through the woods we don't know who they are.”

And although Rick made the decisions neither Daryl nor Michonne hesitated or questioned Harry's hunch. They just went along with it seemingly trusting their leader and Harry...

It felt humbling.

They explored the areal carefully, tried to get a feel on Terminus. And while they found nothing that hinted at foul play or danger, Harry's unease seemed to skyrocket.

It calmed Harry that Rick also hadn’t been convinced that things were alright and had decided to bury a blue back with weapons and supplies, should things go awry.
At Harry’s apology to making them all so worried about the place, Rick had dryly replied:

“When something’s feels off to you, it probably is. So we're being cautious nothing more.” Daryl had just nodded. They all had felt tense and wary.

“Here, take that.” Rummaging through the bag the former sheriff held a gun out to Harry. Green eyes wide Harry took a nervous step back.

“Uuhmm... yeah, but nooo. I’d rather not. I know shit about guns. Never used one before. And I’d rather not shoot myself or any of you.”

“God, Yer gotta be kidding me. How did ya make it till now?” Daryl grumbled in exasperation. Rick, Michonne and Carl were just starring at him with open disbelieve.

Harry shrugged helplessly

“Like I said... a lot of running and hiding... and I'm alright with a knife...?” The last part was more of a question than a reassuring statement.

Rick shook his head and pressed the gun firmly in the teen’s hand.

“Time you learn. I rather you take it. Here, hold it like that if you want to shoot, here's the safety catch, aim and pull the trigger... When we go in there you need to be able to protect yourself.”

Daryl had no luck in biting back a snort at how baleful Harry starred at the weapon. But with a resigned sigh and a disgruntled look he put it away without further discussion.

“Don't worry ta much, just point and pull the trigger if ya have ta.”, Daryl smirked at him.

Harry childishly stuck his tongue out at the hunter.

Rick rolled his eyes at them.

“Let's go. Stick together!”

They decided to go in from the back and climbed over the fence and moved silently through the compound. Harry could see how well Daryl, Michonne, Rick and even Carl operated as a group. It spoke of practice and trust. They had each other’s backs, were each other’s eyes and ears and gun if necessary.

Rick and Daryl moved first into a room where a woman was talking into a microphone sending out a message of safety.
“...Those who arrive, survive. Terminus. Sanctuary for all. Community for all...”

More people worked in front of maps.

Rick drew attention to them and introduced them, the reactions varied from shock, to displeasure and to an uncomfortable friendliness.

Gareth and Alex. They were creepy.

Harry shivered. Something was very wrong here. All his senses screamed at him to make a run for it… But at the same time the excitement hummed through him stronger than ever… They had come closer to the immediate danger but they had also come closer to the thing had needed to be found.

Harry inched closer to Daryl, plucking at the man's sleeve to get his attention and to make eye contact.

_Don't let your guard down!_  
The hunter looked concerned at him but nodded.  
_Yeah. Think so too._

While Alex led them outside, Daryl started to ask about the place. The young man talked easily about Terminus and their community. Making it sound effortlessly.

_He has done this before! A lot of times... Harry observed. He's used to new people. They clearly have a system to greet new ones. Something's not adding up here._

The green eyed teen just couldn't lay a finger on it.

They reached something like an inner courtyard where a red headed woman that reminded him painfully of Mrs Weasley stood behind a grill minding big pieces of meat.

Looking around, Harry saw nothing much more disconcerting than the information they had gathered by looking through the fences.

A complex of buildings, some patches to grow vegetables, a few flowerpots, a few people working... Suddenly Harry realised what was bugging him. Eyes widening Harry scanned the inner courtyard again...

_Where are all the people? If it’s true what Alex says about Terminus then there should be a lot_
more of them... Harry’s stomach was doing uneasy flips. *Something is rotten in the state of Denmark*...

“Why do you let people in?” Michonne asked Alex.

“More people become part of this, we become stronger!” Alex said this as aside line but it made Harry's hairs stand on the end. And it seemed that he wasn't the only one. Rick was getting tenser by the minute, gaze flittering over different things and people.

Harry watched as the red haired woman offered plates with big slices of meat to Carl and Michonne.

*A lot of meat...*

*We didn't saw any big game out there...Many people coming here...Many people that are nowhere to be seen...*

A dropping feeling spread in the teenager’s stomach... cold dread was taking his breath away.

He just couldn't look away from the meat... it smelled funny, too. His thoughts were running in circles.

*A lot of meat... many people coming here...*

*lots of meat but no game... missing people...*

*no game... meat... people...*

*MERLIN!!!!*

*Meat! People!*

Harry watched in slow motion as Carl guided a piece of meat to his mouth.

“NO!” Harry shouted knocking the plate and the meat out of Carl’s hands. “DON'T EAT THAT!”

At the same time Rick had smacked the plate that had been offered to him out of Alex's hands. The former Sheriff wrestled the young man into headlock and held a gun to his temple, causing Michonne, Daryl and Carl to draw their weapons, too.

“Where did you get this watch?” Rick growled at Alex pointing to the small pocket watch that the Terminus resident had used. Alex started to panic.

Harry hesitated but reluctantly pulled his own gun out. He carefully backed away to Daryl's side.

Clicking sounds above them, alerted him to snipers on the surrounding roofs.
“WHERE DID YOU GET THE WATCH?” Rick yelled again.

“Come on guys. I've got this. STAND DOWN!” Alex shouted at the snipers obviously shaking and afraid to get caught in potential the crossfire.

“Where did you get the watch?” Rick hissed. Harry recognized the look on his face. This was Rick in full fight mode. The bear backed into a corner and ready to tear the world apart if necessary.

“I...I got it from a dead.” Alex stammered.

“Where did you get the riot gear?” Rick didn't let off, pointing to another Terminus resident.

“Where did you get that poncho?” Rick’s voice held an icy anger that promised carnage.

“Got the riot gear from a dead cop! Found the poncho on a clothes line!” Gareth's voice suddenly came from behind them. He was unarmed, hands raised in a non-threatening gesture. His voice was calm and despite the situation conspicuously friendly.

But his eyes are cold! He's done this before, too. In his head he has already killed us all.

Green eyes narrowed at young man looking between him, the woman at the grill and the meat, he hissed: “What have you become?” Harry’s disgust and judgement were more than evident in his tone.

Gareth was startled at this accusation.

“You figured it out, huh? Smart, first one to get it this quickly... normally even those who suspect it don't want to believe it. Most have a hard time imaging what a great system we build here, because they limit themselves with old moral standards.” At the end he grinned sharply at Harry. The creepy man seemed angry and amused at the same time.

“What does it say about your own state of mind, that you came to the conclusion that fast”.

“Fuck off! You sick wanker!” Harry snarled back. While Daryl and others where visibly confused about their conversation and it had them all incredibly tense and guarded.

Until now Harry had been mostly timid, at times carefully polite, to have him breathing fire and brimstone like that, didn't bode well for them.

“We learned that you're either the butcher... or you're the cattle! We survived!”, Gareth said priggishly and there was a mad glint in his eyes.

“Where are our people?” Rick demanded.
“Can't answer the question.” Gareth close the hand he had raised in a peaceful stop gesture.

It was a signal... Gunfire started.

Throwing Alex to the ground Rick yelled at them to duck and run.

And run they did! Fleeing through buildings, rooms and narrow alleyways. All the while snipers were cutting off their escape routes again and again.

*Merlin’s shaggy beard...They don’t even try to shoot us. Bloody bastards! They're leading us to where they want to have us.*

*They are shepherding us around....Shit! Shit!* Harry tried his best not to panic and to keep up with the others which got increasingly more difficult. His stamina declined rapidly.

Harry’s back burned like hell, the fast movements ripped at his healing wounds, his bruised (and maybe broken) rips didn’t take kindly to his rapid breathing… which by the way was getting hard and harder to do.

It felt like Hagrid and Fang were sitting on his chest.

If they didn’t stop soon he would just collapse…

They passed a fenced area with corpses and train cars where they could hear people beating against the metal screaming.

*There were survivors here!* Harry wasn’t religious but fuck… this might be the right time to pray.

Harry couldn’t believe his luck when Rick led them into a large hangar to stop for a moment.

The British teen nearly toppled over, hands resting on his knees trying to catch his breath. Inhaling greedily and forcing himself to exhale just long enough to avoid hyperventilating.

The hall they reached and hid in was lit by hundreds of candles, immersing the room in a soft and warm light.

It reminded Harry a bit of Hogwarts and the Great Hall with its many candles and warm atmosphere. It made him a little home sick.

On closer inspection Harry could make out a circle on the floor where words and few numbers were arranged in small groups. With his blurry sight Harry would needed to go closer to the circle to be able to read what was written one the floor.

It was a lot easier with the big letters on the wall. Even a mole would have been able to read this:
“What the hell is this place?” Daryl asked taking everything in.

Words and numbers. Names and ages.

Harry’s mind supplied after closely taking in letters and numbers on the floor.

This is a crypt! What happened here? Something made them like this...

“These people...I don't think they’re trying to kill us...” Michonne seemed unsure what to think about this.

“No they’re aiming at our feet!” Rick agreed.

“They...*grasp*... they're...*grasp* shepherding us...around...*grasp* to where they ...want us to ...be.” Harry wheezed out still clutching his knees.

Harry’s chest and back still hurt like hell, he really hadn’t been fit enough for a run like this. His back had been still sore before and now a few wounds had probably reopened. And worst of all, he could feel his magic fluctuating under his skin, the binding viciously slamming down on it, sending additional waves of pain through his chest making it harder than ever to breathe.

“Shit!” Daryl cursed. “Ya know what they want from us?”

Catching a bit more breath Harry replied:

“You heard him. You're the butcher... or you're the cattle...I fear we're the cattle now.”

Swallowing heavy Harry righted himself wincing in pain.

Wide eyed they starred at the pale teen. Daryl cursed quite colourful and started to pace in this restless way that Harry had come to associate with some kind of anxiousness and impulsiveness in the hunter.

“Are you implying that they...that... oh goooodddd!” Michonne was shaking herself in disgust.

“The meat...you knocked the plate out of my hands. I nearly ate that...” Carl looked pale and more than a little ill at the thought.
“We need to get out of here! Harry, you good to go?” Rick asked in concern.

“Yeah...yeah, I am.” Harry looked into Ricks blue eyes. “You remember your promise, right?”

* 

Rick clenched his teeth at the reminder. He had hoped that such a situation wouldn’t occur so soon in their joint travels.

“Yes I remember.” He bit out, “Family first!”

The words left a sour taste in the former sheriff’s mouth but he had given the boy his word. Whatever this was worth…

He saw Daryl inching a bit closer to the injured teen so he would hopefully keep an eye out for Harry.

Resolutely Rick hardened himself to go on! They needed to leave. And with that he turned to leave the crypt.

But with each step Rick took he felt the words on the walls burning in his back. Taunting him.

WE FIRST, ALWAYS.

** 

On the outside they soon came to an abrupt end. They were cornered and surrounded.

Harry inched in front of Carl. So they stood back to back.

“Lower your weapons now!” Gareth ordered from a lower roof. “Now!”

They had no choice anymore... They put their guns, the sword and the crossbow on the ground.

“Ring leader go to your left. The train car. Go! You do what we say and the boys go with you. Anything else, the boys die and you end up there anyway.” Came the next instructions for Rick.

Harry tied to cover as much of Carl’s back as possible hiding him from the sociopath’s view. Probably without much success but Harry wanted at least to try. From the corner of his eye he saw Rick walking to the train car, followed by Daryl and Michonne.
“Now the green eyes!” Harry stiffened and glared up at the man.

“What you don't want to leave him out here?” Pointing at Carl Gareth laughed mockingly at the British teen. “Fine, have it your way. Sheriff hat, you may go to the others.” Slowly Carl made his way to his father.

“Ring Leader, open the door now and go in!”

“I'll go in with them.” Rick bristled.

“Don't make us kill them now!” Reluctant the blue eyed man opened the car’s door still looking out at Carl and Harry.

“Good, green eyes you can go after them.”

*

In the car Michonne and Daryl immediately checked the green eyed teenager over, who looked ready to faint. He was pale and in cold sweat, and still alarmingly out of breath.

Rick held Carl close, relieved to see him whole. Then the door slammed closed, leaving them all in the dark.

The silent hunter hovered close to Harry.

“Yer OK? Yer hurt?”

“I'm alright... my back and the running... I'm just really knackered!”

Harry slumped, half against Daryl and half again the wall of the train car.

Suddenly there was a movement on other side of the dark room.

There were more people in there with them….

Harry watched as a young Asian man came forward into the small stream of light that illuminated a bit of their cell.

“Rick?”

Oh! There really had been something important lost to be found here.

Hope hadn’t been a bitch at all.
I apologize before hand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

**Chapter 6**


They were old and new friends as Harry learned. Some of them going way back to the beginning when Rick’s group had formatted in Atlanta.

To think that Rick and Carl had found Michonne and Daryl again after they had been forcefully spilt by an attack on their home… That itself could only be counted as pure luck.

But in this dirty train car, held as life stock for cannibals, they had found even more of their family. In Harry’s book that was nothing short of a miracle.

His hunch had been right Harry decided with small disbelieving smile.

This place was dreadful. A slaughterhouse.

And nonetheless they had found the most precious thing in the world here.

Friends and family. They couldn’t be taken for granted anymore. Every ally in this world was essential for survival.

When Rick told the other captured what they had found out about Gareth and his ‘community’ their reactions had different from panic and shock to violent cursing and soft retching sounds.

Something Harry could very well relate to…

But oddly enough Rick’s mood had seemed lifted up.

There was a small but slightly feral smile in his voice, his eyes brighter than before, when he told
them that they wouldn’t back down.

Rick radiated the charisma of a commander-in-chief. The bearded man was practically burning to fight, vibrating with a vicious conviction to prevail against the odds that came with a readiness to obliterate anyone and anything standing in their way.

With the voice of a leader he made it clear that they would show these cannibals that they messed with the wrong people.

The fire burning in the former Sheriff was the force driving him forwards and he managed to spread the flame to all of them.

Enlightening the people around him with his incitement to hope, to fight, and to survive.

Together!

With the adrenalin from the flight through the compound draining away, pain and exhaustion had become more and more prominent for Harry. He was feeling dizzier by the second and his ability to concentrate had dimmed considerably.

One thing breaking though his slight daze was the young Asian man, who had been introduced as Glenn, asking who the new kid was.

*

The small boy had looked slowly up and Glenn winced. The kid looked sickly, pale and clammy under still healing bruises that covered large parts of his face. Eerie bright green eyes dominated a fine featured face.

But what surprised the former delivery boy even more was the protective stance that Daryl and Carl (!) had taken over the boy.

Because… just! Come on!

This was Carl and Daryl! They knew each other since the quarry. They had each other’s backs when they had travelled on the road all those months before the prison. They trusted one another!

Glenn had to admit that it hurt to see those two taking a defensive stance over an injured boy against him… As if Glenn might be a danger to this kid.

Tiered green eyes fixed him in a wary look taking notice of his obvious bewilderment and hurt by his friend’s behaviour. With a small apologetic smile to Glenn the unknown boy gave a little huff which made Daryl stand down… And was that an embarrassed blush spreading over the hunter's cheeks?! Damn, it was so dark in here!

A careful and inconspicuous tug on Carl’s sleeve made the younger teen resume his relaxed position beside the dark haired stranger.
Seemingly satisfied with the defused tension the teen waved to Glenn. It was a small gesture and so out of place that it looked a bit silly in the circumstances.

“Hi, I'm Harry.” The kid sounded horribly exhausted and fucking hell… British?! Just what had Rick and the others been doing to bring an hurt British teenager with them that made Carl and Daryl so protective off him.

Glenn’s face had always been an open book. So he wasn’t surprised when Carl answered to his unspoken question.

“He saved me and dad.” The blue eyed boy explained with such a solemn expression on his face that this half-answer left the young Korean with more questions than before.

“He stays with us.” It was the only thing Daryl grumbled as if that explained anything! It just didn’t! Glenn wanted to throw his hands up in exasperation. He loved them all dearly but sometimes… Arg!

The worst thing was that Glenn already knew that further questions would be fruitless. He saw it in Daryl’s standoffish glaring, in Carl’s sad and closed off face and in Rick’s and Michonne’s tense postures.

So Glenn did what he always did with them… He conceded.

“Oookay...!? Easy there tigers. I was just wondering. And we told you about Abraham, Rosita and Eugene.” Glenn joked, raising his hands in defeat.

His only comfort was that Harry looked as uncomfortable with the situation as Glenn felt. Great so at least he wasn’t the only one left with a sense for awkward situations…

“Harry do you need another pill?” Michonne asked in concern and probably to defuse some of the tension. “I still have two in my pocket.”

“We're going to fight right?” The soft British voice rasped back and Michonne nodded, her eyes hard and determined. There was a small battle of wills between the teen and the samurai and honestly Glenn admired his courage. The dark woman was fierce! So Glenn watched in fascination as Harry and Michonne starred each other down for a while before the British boy admitted defeat with a small sigh and an even tinier pout.

“Then yes, I’ll take one. But you should keep the last one for something else.”

Michonne’s answering smile showed all her teeth. “Here. Now rest a bit.” Carefully she ruffled his hair a bit.

The pill seemed to help somewhat but also increased the teen’s drowsiness causing him to fall into a light sleep. Nobody woke him.
“... There are four of them pricks coming our way.” Daryl’s voice had roused Harry out of a fitful rest. The hunter watched how fast the kid sprung to his feet. His still sleep dazed expression a stark contrast to the defensive stance he had immediately taken

Suddenly alert.

Everyone had gathered and got ready for the fight.

“Backs to the wall! On either side of the car. Now!” A male voice jelled from the outside. Then a hatch opened and a smoke grenade was thrown into their cell.

“MOVE!” Abraham barked at them. Everyone was scrambling away as fast as possible.

A few seconds later the compartment was filled with thick smoke, making it impossible to breathe. Everyone was coughing and struggling for breath and then men with gas masks came in knocking them unconscious.

**

When Daryl came around again he was being dragged away by someone. His vision still blurry he saw a metal table, a corpse, blood.

Well, Shit! He started to struggle with no avail.

These assholes had them all gagged and bound. Before him they had pushed Bob and Rick on their knees in front of a metal trough.

Assholes really gonna slaughter us like cattle…

Looking around he hunter tried to get a feel on his surroundings and to calm himself. Losing yer head, will get cha killed, baby bro. Merle snarled in his head. But Jesus, even Merle would have freaked out in the light of this shit show. Everything around them looked very clean…clinical and professional… This wasn’t just slaughter for pleasure. This madness had method! These fuckheads meant business.

The butchers were already there. Both clad in plastic aprons, one with a metal bat, and the other with a big knife.

They forced Daryl next to Rick to on the ground. Fear and humiliation were battling in Daryl. To die in this fucked up world - it wasn’t surprising, hell you had to expect it, but this… kneeling in
front of a through about to be cut down like a swine. That held its own kind of horror.

Then they brought in Glenn and...

*Harry! For god’s sake!* It felt like Daryl had been punched in the gut. With concerned eyes he looked Harry over.

Kid's in a bad shape. He's shiverin’ and his breathin’ is all wrong again. More wheezin’ than befor’.

Daryl wanted to curse every god he could think of, they had just freed Harry from months of rape and abuse only to lead him right into this fucking slaughterhouse.

*Fuckin’ fantastic, Dixon! Ya can’t protect shit... Never could.*


“Alright! Let’s get started.” The two butchers went to the other end of the trough were three unknown captives were bound and gagged like the rest of them.

They stated working swiftly and efficient. The guy with the bat stunned the victim first then the other moved in to slit the throat to bleed the body out.

Cold and well-practised.

When they were on the third guy that prick Gareth came in with a book, asking for the shot counts of the butchers from when they had chased them. They were certainly well organized if they kept the shot count of every group member.

Bob tried to use the distraction to negotiate with Terminus’ leader, hoping to get to make him see reason.

“...You don't have ta do this, man! We can put the world back together like how it was.”

“We can't!” There was only cool dismissal in Gareth's eyes when he looked at Bob.

“But you...” A slimy smile was directed at Harry. “You could have become a real part of this community. Could have lived like us. I would still offer you this option, green eyes!” Gareth’s greedy eyes raked over the frail teen.

Daryl felt his stomach drop as the fucker eyed Harry like that. It was the same look Len and the Claimers had given him. Like Harry was just a thing, to possess, to claim, to fuck.

The archer cursed at the cannibal through his gag, struggling more than ever. He was ignored.

Harry in turn looked sick and wide eyed as the bastard came to him to take the gag out of his mouth stroking softly over the kid’s face and lips in the process.
Harry reared back from the touch, green eyes glaring viscously.

“Awww, come on. You are really pretty under all the grime and bruises. You could have a life here with us. You're young enough you'll get used to the life at Terminus and our ways. It wasn't just a trap, you know? It was always gonna be a choice. You join us or feed us. You know... bears, when they start to starve, they eat their young. If the bear dies the cub dies anyways, but if the bear lives, it can always have another cub. That was part of the pitch.”

Daryl watched in fascination how different emotions played over Harry’s face…

Fear and panic. Shock. And then when the little Brit digested the offer… disgust and anger.

“Listen you pillock!” Harry snarled back. Loathing and outrage openly displayed on his thin and bruised face. “I rather die right now than to live like you degenerates! If I die now at least I’ll do it but with my humanity still intact! But you... You are broken!”

The little firecracker was apparently boiling mad, despite his obvious fear and weakness. Jesus, kid was fucking shaking all over.

“We are not broken! We evolved! We survived!” Gareth snarled in distain and cold fury.

But instead of shrinking back as Daryl had anticipated Harry met the slimy bastard heads on with gleaming eyes.

“I won’t call that surviving. The taint you loaded onto yourselves can never be redeemed. Someone who broke such a sacrosanct taboo as you, will only have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment you crossed that last line. You’re hardly better than the walking corpses that rule the world now. You may not rot on the outside but I can smell the decay on your heart. Nobody can come back from what you have become.” Harry's voice resonated in the deadly silent hall.

Daryl shivered at those words, damn. He could see that the men behind Harry had become ghostly pale and crossed themselves. Daryl could understand the impulse. He wasn't religious but holy shit that speech had felt very uncanny.

Gareth had also gone pale but he didn't seem to be frightened... No, the fucker was pissed. Whole face contracted in rage and a mad glint in his eyes he advanced on the glaring teen with the glowing eyes.

WHACK.

He had punched Harry hard enough in the face that the kid plummeted to the right side into Glenn.

“YOU KNOW NOTHING! WE HUNGERED! YOU DO KNOW WHAT THIS MEANS?!” The crazed man bellowed at fallen teenager.
Glenn could probably feel the thin body against him shaking as the Korean tried to support the teen’s body to hold him up-right. The atmosphere was incredibly stifling. Gareth's wild breathing the only thing that filled the silence. Daryl watched on as Harry’s shoulders shook more and more rhythmical.

And then they all heard it… it started really faint but got louder...

*Snickering*

Slowly Harry lifted his head showing off a busted and bleeding lip and harsh ice cold green eyes. His absolutely joyless laugh was schilling.

“Blimey! You bleeding wanker! You...*chuckling*... you really believe you’re the only ones that hungered. I lived of grass and herbs for months... even long before the world went pear-shaped. A lot of people have hungered and they've never fallen this low.” Harry’s crisp British accent seemed to mock Gareth even more as haunted green eyes drilled into the man.

“You are weak!” It sounded like Harry had given his final judgement.

The room temperature seemed to have dropped below zero.

Gareth advanced on the boy but again instead of shrinking back or shielding himself like Daryl expected him to do Harry raised his chin stubbornly, squaring his slender shoulders, facing the approaching threat.

“Bring it on, you nutter! A wise man told me once that *after all, for the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure.* I am prepared!” The boy was even smiling a bit like this was part of a private joke only he was on. There was a grim self-assuredness to the young teen that was freaking Daryl out.

Sneering with hate Gareth raised his gun. Harry didn’t flinch just calmly held his gaze staring their captor down.

*Bend but not broken*” Harry had said but it was more than that. *Jesus, kid has balls.* Daryl was torn between awe and frustration and fear and shock and whatever!

*Who would expect that such a frail little thing that had been hurt so much still possessed a backbone of steel? Harry really wanted to die with his head held high.* Daryl didn’t know if he felt more impressed with the composure Harry was showing or angry that the kid had already made his peace with death.

*Damn… well-organised mind, huh?!... What a shit!*
The little Brit and that asshead were still starring each other down. Then tension was palpable. Everyone was waiting for the other shoe to drop…

For Gareth to make the shot.

The sounds of shots broke the suspense and then…

BOOOOOOMMMM!

An explosion shook the whole compound.

“Damn!” Gareth lowered his gun, to grab his radio. “Chuck?” only static noises answered him.

“Shit! I'll handle this. Wrap this up here.” He snapped at the butchers and with a last withering glare at Harry he was gone.

The shots continued causing the remaining the two Terminus men to argue about what to do and whether they should stay on their posts or go out to try and help.

Suddenly one of the butchers went down a fountain of blood splashing from his neck.

Rick had apparently been the only one to use the distraction that Harry’s argument with Gareth had enabled them with. The former Sheriff had used the diversion to sharpen a rough piece of wood that he had broken out of the train car earlier and had hidden in his boot. His brother had managed to cut his ropes and had now swiftly stabbed their guards to death.

Rick could really be a sneaky bastard if it was necessary.

After that he freed Daryl and the rest.

“They got problems. We’ve got a chance.” Rick was already thinking on his feet again. Ready to rush out and to take on those bastards.

“Sounded like bomb.” Glenn grasped.

“Sounds like a damn war.” Daryl groused.

The hunter carefully pulled Harry to his feet inspecting the teen’s face. The teen looked different now, haggard and his skin was an unhealthy grey colour. It was as if the conversation with the cannibal had drained Harry all the more. Daryl grabbed his red rag and held it to Harry’s tender lip to whip away some of the blood.

“Ya good enough ta go?” He gruffly asked. The hunter himself still felt quite shaken up. Harry had to feel worse and if you looked closely enough the teen was quivering all over. The hunter feared
that the kid would fall into shock soon.

Harry nodded. “Yes, my face is sore and my head feels a little wonky, but nothing too bad, I think.”

“Let’s get out of here!” Rick quickly led them out but not without them walking right through the slaughter house.

This was a killing factory. It showed them the whole scope of what was going on here and send the message of quite clear home... *that could have been us in a few hours!*

“Crossing you this people, you kill them. Don't hesitate! ...They won't!”

Bob grabbed a machete from a table that had clearly been used to cop up bodies. While Daryl broke a pipe of something, he gave Harry a long knife. Then Rick pushed them further along. Their leader moved with urgency and purpose back to the train car where their friends were.

**

On the outside it was chaos... the dead were everywhere.... the fences must have fallen ... gunshots and fighting all around them.

Captives in the other train cars were crying for help. It was bloody mayhem!

Harry felt nauseous and unnerved. He had been sure that he would die and he had been ready that hadn’t been a lie. But... when the bloody bastard had offered him a place if he turned to cannibalism and had leered at him in that familiar way. Harry had just lost it. He had panicked and he had been nearly delirious with rage.

How dared that man!? He had reminded Harry of Tom Riddle. So handsome and well versed with words, a pretty facade that hid a rotten soul.

This place was terrifying to Harry because it reflected how this new world had broken people.

Glenn looked solemn at Rick nodding to the other train cars. “We've got to get these people out!”

Rick just threw the Korean an ‘*are you serious*’ kind a look.

“That's still, who we are! *It’s got to be!*” Glenn implored to their leader. There was a lot in this statement that was just between Rick and Glenn, that Harry didn’t understood.

But in the face of the inhumanity and the industrialized slaughter house behind them, he could relate to the need to prove that they were different. That there was still something civilized and compassionated left in them all. That is was still more than just survival of the fittest and let the devil take the hindmost.

Rick seemed to get this to because he nodded and they ran to the train car.

But when Glenn opened the door of the car a long hair man with tattoos all over his face ran at
them, yelling “We're the same! We're the same.” while laughing insanely.

The Korean did the only possible thing and shoved the mad man back. The insane fellow was promptly attacked by a walker. They couldn’t do much for him besides killing the walker and keep on running to save themselves and their friends.

But Glenn, kind Glenn took a moment to pause and to bash the man’s head in with an iron bat ending his misery.

Harry decided then and there that he liked the gentle Asian man with his good-hearted morals.

Then the switch came immediately. Harry had seen the same change in Rick and Daryl before but he was still gobsmacked by it. As kind and gentle as these people could be they were survivors, blatantly obvious battle hardened. Same had to be said about Glenn.

Again Harry marveled how good these people worked together. They had each other’s back cutting down walkers and humans alike on their way back to the train car where rest of their group still was.

Where the others clearly knew what they were doing Harry once more struggled to keep up. He had to be careful not to get in the way. With his blurry sight and clumsy attempts at killing walkers Harry couldn’t be much of a help, but he disliked the idea to be a burden. He felt his strength dwindling at an alarming rate nonetheless he refused to slow down. Repeating impelling thoughts like a mantra in his head.

*There isn't time for this. Just stay awake and keep moving.*

So they moved swiftly, Rick and the others gathering more weapons as they moved. When Rick had reached the train car he and free their group. Their breaded leader immediately herded his family to the fences all the while cutting and shooting down walkers to clear them a path.

They were close to the fences when Harry stumbled and fell. His vision went black for a moment. His magic had been erratic since they sat foot in the compound; shifting and pulsing just under the surface and now the ritual was biting down on it.

It felt like the binding ripped into him with sharp claws and it took his breath away. Harry’s chest felt like it could explode at any moment.

The dead were already close to him and he just couldn’t get his limbs to cooperate with him anymore. Harry gritted his teeth.

He wasn’t afraid, not really but completely don in.

And a small part of him was even a bit relieved. This was it…

*This is the end. I can’t get up anymore. I will die today…*

*Mum. Dad. Sirius. Remi. Cedric…. I wonder if I will see Ron and Hermione again now…*
Daryl and most of the group had cut their way through the horde of walkers and were over the fence and they hadn't yet noticed that Harry had fallen behind. Rick was the last one still inside the fence but focused on shooting at Gareth and his man keeping them at bay.

When they fled the ex-sheriff did a last perimeter check... and saw him lying on the ground. walkers were closing in on him.

“… if I stay behind, if I hinder you, if I endanger you, you'll give me your honest word that you'll leave me behind or that you'll kill me…”

Rick felt cold...he had promised the boy the leave him behind, but...

“That's still, who we are! It's got to be!” Glenn had been right this wasn't who they were. It couldn’t be.

So with a swift decision the former sheriff was running back and hoisted the teenager up in his arms. He weighted next to nothing, it was frightening.

“...I lived of grass and herbs for months... even long before the world went pear-shaped...” Harry’s word’s echoed in Rick’s head.

“Rick, you promised!” Harry rasped at him. The kid was shaking in pain and exhaustion. Rick pointedly ignored the frail teen and started to run as fast as he could. There were more and more walkers coming and with Harry in his arms he wouldn't be able to climb the fence... Fuck!

“Rick!! Come on man! We need ta get goin’!” Daryl barked at them, eyes widening when noticed he Harry in the arms of the former sheriff.

“Shit. He bit?” There was fear for the kid in the archer’s voice.

“No, but he fell.” And then Rick came to a quick decision and impromptu called out: “Here catch him.”

With that Rick all but threw the tiny teen over the fence into Daryl's arms. Harry would forever deny the unmanly shriek that could be heard, came from his mouth.

Daryl caught him with embarrassing ease and then helped Rick over the fence.

Rick watched as Daryl looked Harry over. Teen was paler than before, body spasming plainly in pain, breathlessly wheezing and coughing, head lolling against the hunter's shoulder, green eyes
Rick came closer and shared a weighted look with his brother.

Despite Harry's bad condition and that the kid was most likely on the verge of an infection with a starting light fever, Rick could see that Daryl felt relieved that they hadn’t lost the little Brit.

They hadn't spoken about it but Daryl had been irritated by Rick consenting to Harry's demand to be left behind if things got ugly. It had felt like the time they had planned to turn in Michonne to the Governor.

It hadn’t been their style back then and it wasn’t their style now. The world was a shitty enough place as it was for them to lose such an important part of who they were as a group, as people.

They're tough! Not to be messed with!

And yeah... they had to leave friends and companions behind before... and even more strangers... but...but not when they could help, not when there was a chance to save one, not without at least trying.

They hadn't given that part of their humanity up yet.

“…I bend, indeed, but never break…”

Maybe Officer Friendly had yet survived somewhere in Rick's heart against all the odds.

He felt lighter than ever since the fall of the prison.

**

Daryl was faint with relieve. Cradling Harry closer the hunter admonished himself for losing track of the injured kid so fast. He hadn’t even noticed that the British teen hadn’t kept up. All this after he had vowed to himself to look after the kid. To protect the boy and Rick from making the fucking call they had agreed on.

Daryl hadn’t been sure if Rick… But he was glad!

And by the way the blued eyed man had heaved a heavy sigh of relieve he felt it too.

*But that's not all... Ya like that kid. Reminds ya of Beth and yaself when yer were a kid and ya daddy beat ya. Ya want him ta survive! Ya want ta protect him...*
Daryl tried to quash this line of thought and to ban them to the darkest part of his mind. He didn't want to think about the implications that he had come to care so fast about his strange kid... or why?
I apologize before hand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn't my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

Chapter 7

After being thrown over the fence like a sack of potatoes everything was a blur for Harry. Daryl hadn't even tried to set him on his feet only cradling him even closer so the green eyed teen had laid his head on the hunters shoulder. Felling oddly calm while he was lulled in by the man rhythmic heartbeat and his unique Daryl-smell, musk, cigarettes, blood and forest...

After a while they stopped where Rick had buried the weapons and supplies and Daryl set him carefully on the floor.

Michonne and Carl immediately came to Harry’s side. The tough samurai woman took just one real look at him before she shoved the last pill down his throat without as much as a by-your-leave. Carl and Daryl just hovered close, giving silent comfort.

He was clearly a mess and he just hadn’t the energy or presence of mind to argue about what waste of resources it was to give valuable medicine to a dying stranger. Or that Rick had clearly broken his word.

The discussion, over going back and taking the rest of the Terminus residents out, passed Harry by. He listened only with half an ear.

In the back of his dazed head was a niggling thought... he tried to focus on it, but wasn't able to concentrate enough. It evaded him and he couldn't grasp it.

I was a hunch... uneasy... dizzy....

A sharp inhale from Daryl alerted him. The hunter’s posture was stiff and all his attention was directed at something in the forest… or better someone!
Daryl's eyes were fixed on a woman that Harry hadn't seen before. Her hair was a whitish grey and cropped short.

She was covered in blood and wearing a sniper rifle on her back. She looked daunting and at the same time her eyes and face were oddly vulnerable as she looked at the group... hesitant...

Harry felt reminded of all times of his childhood when he stood on the outside, watching as aunt Petunia fluttered around Duddley, as she praised him, as she cared for him...

He had been feeling wistful and forlorn. It had always felt like he was seeing something beautiful and he had wanted so much to be a part of it. But at the same time he had known that this just wasn't something that he could have. It had left him feeling stupid and sordid for wanting something that nice and bright for himself, too.

A part of Harry had always been somewhat ashamed and guilty that maybe he really did something wrong. It had born a fear that his aunt and uncle were right about him that being lonely and an outcast in his own family was what he deserved for being a useless and ungrateful freak… That he deserved to be this unwanted.

But this fear had never killed the hope that maybe… just maybe if he made more of an effort… that he could be a good boy for ones. And then he would be loved by them, if he just tried harder… harder… to be less of a bother.

But I don't think she has to really worry about that, Harry thought, watching how Daryl rushed to the grey hair woman without missing a beat. The hunter pulled her into his arms and clung to her. The usually stoic man looked close to crying when he lifted her off her feet.

But it's a heart achingly beautiful picture. And I'm glad that Daryl found her. She means clearly a lot to all of them...

And bloody damn if it’s true that she saved us all singlehandedly then this woman is a force of nature!

It turned out that Carol had indeed single handed rescued them being responsible for the first shots and the explosion they heard at the trough. The sniper had taken the fences down and had let the attracted walkers in the compound. Only to disguise herself with walker guts and to hunt though the compound on her own, taking down of the Terminus residents left and right...

Merlin’s saggy left ball... that woman was a war machine... and a total badass.
After all the introductions and explanations she led the group to a small cabin. Daryl still carried a now grumbling Harry. Because walking on his own he would have been too slow so he had swallowed his pride. And there was just no denying that he felt quite safe with the quiet man.

When they had reached a little meadow with a cabin a big dark skinned man came out of the little wooden house, in his arms a small faire skinned baby.

As soon as Rick, Sasha and Carl had seen them they had dropped everything else and started running.

Teary eyed Rick collected the tiny child into his arms nearly falling to his knees in apparent alleviation while Carl and him stroked and kissed the baby girl’s head. A few feet away Sasha and the big man hugged and cried with the same relieve of reunion.

It spoke lengths of their skills and abilities that they had managed to survive and find each other again after their split up but more so it told Harry how tight knit they were as a family.

* 

Daryl had started sniffling, because... well just because... 

Damn, litl' Asskicker was still alive. No one had dared to hope that! And watching Rick and Carl fuss over her now was just... well it was great! Fuck! Carol! Tyresse! Littl' Judith! They were all alive! Alive! He hadn't lost everyone!

He felt a small hand petting his hair in an awkward angle. Harry was clumsily stroking his hair offering comfort. The teen directed an incredible soft smile at him that reminded Daryl of that night in the forest when he had talked to Harry about his family, green eyes shining and sparkling in excited sympathy.

“He’s really happy for me and them. That we’ve found our family.” Daryl felt a blush creeping up his cheeks, turning his face away in self-conscious embarrassment from Harry's knowing eyes and his bright smile.

“Stop, that smiling thing, man...” the hunter groused and to distract the kid he added: “Hows ya back? Ya still running a light fever... someone should look at it.”

When he glanced at Harry, the little Brit had raised an eyebrow and a mirthful smirk played on his lips.

*he isn't buying it... nahh...fuck them all!* Daryl internally groaned.
But Harry didn't call him out on it so that was OK, somehow...

“I think a few wounds reopened and some started to hurt a lot more than before.” Harry offered, causing the taller man to frown. That didn't sounded good...

“Let Carol have a look?” Out of all of them Carol knew the most about healing. Between learning from Hershel and what she picked up in her years with Ed she would be best suited but Harry had visibly and immediately clammed up at the prospect of showing his back someone else.

And couldn't Daryl relate to that impulse?! Hell he would have taken the head of the asshole suggesting something like that...

Green eyes bore themselves into dark blue ones, searching...

“Will...*nervous swallowing... If... if I let her look….Would you stay, too? Please?”

Daryl felt another flush of warmth in his body, heating his cheeks again but also settling pleasantly in his stomach.

*He trusts me!*

“Yeah...I'll stay.” He gruffly replied.

Carol had watched like a hawk over Daryl and the unknown teenager he was carrying around. The boy, Harry, didn't look older than Carl and was clearly sick and hurt. It was exceptional to see Daryl this open and ...well... tender with someone although it wasn’t a total surprise.

Daryl had one of the biggest bleeding hearts she had ever encountered and once you got to know him it was easy to see how emotional the man could be.

How deep he felt.

So it wasn’t a surprise that he could be this caring, just that he had opened himself this much and fast up to a stranger… That was indeed exceptional!

She observed as the kid patted the gruff man’s head, smiling softly at his teary eyed state. It filled her with mirth to see how a blush creeped over the archers face… and that he neither snarked nor yelled at the boy in his arms nor pulled he back from the touch…

*OHHO, this is getting better and better! Oh Pookie, I will have so much fun with you!!* She was
just on her way to poke some fun on the stoic man, when he cut her a look.

“Carol, would ya take a look at his back?”

“Uhmm… yes sure? Come here!” She was a bit puzzled by the request but even more so when she saw how both of them made identical expressions of high discomfort.

“Naahh, in there!” Daryl quickly shook his head and stomped off to the cabin…

Well Pookie, this is beyond interesting.

******

Glenn watched out of the corner of his eyed how Daryl disappeared with the kid still in his arms into the cabin and Carol trailing behind them with a bemused and expectant air around her.

The kid looked really bad… and with the way Daryl, Rick, Michonne and fucking hell, even Carl hovered around the other boy something must have happened that they still didn’t knew about.

A lot of things had happened since the prison, they had lost a lot and it was a freaking wonder that they had found each other again.

It made their remaining family even more precious than ever.

He carefully took Maggie’s hand to assure himself of her presence. To reassure himself hat they found each other against all odds. That he hadn’t lost her!

Rick and Abraham were already getting restless. Now that they had convinced Rick not to go back to obliterate the slaughter house and its butchers, both alpha males were tense to get them all as far away as possible from this horrid place.

Glenn shared a look with Maggie. This was going to be difficult. Some sort of trouble was bound to occur. With two so intense and impulsive men in a group, one of them on a mission to save the world no matter the cost and the other one… prioritizing their little family over everything else in the world…

It was a recipe for disaster.

After few more minutes Carol came suddenly out of the cabin alone. Her face pinched and her eyes hard she slumped down on the first step of the stairs dropping her head on her knees and
burying her hands in her short hair.

With her face hidden from sight, a sound of deep sadness, anger, grief and resignation was ripped from her mouth altering the entire group to her.

“Carol? What’s wrong?”, Maggie asked in worry.

Behind his wife’s back, Rick and Michonne were swapping loaded looks.

“Just how bad is it?” The samurai inquired softly.

Carol slowly raised her head. Her eyes were glassy with tears and her lip wobbled dangerously and Glenn realised that it had been ages since he had seen her cry about anything. He could see that she wouldn’t allow herself to cry this time either. Despite the sadness there was steel and fire in her eyes, ready to take on the world and to do what was necessary.

“Have you seen his back? He said you gave him pills?” The grey haired sniper asked harshly back, causing Michonne to shake her head.

“No… Daryl was the only one the kid let this close to him.”

“Well, his back is a mess of old and newer scars.” Carol informed them through clenched teeth. Her tone was clipped and clinical. “Some of the fresh ones got infected. So he is running a fever. He is starved and badly beaten up. His rips are bruised if not broken in one or two places. His left shoulder and his right ankle are definitely contused. I honestly don’t know how the hell he is moving around…”

Glenn shuddered at the list of injuries that Carol had just rattled off.

“Son of a dick! This kind of damage isn’t done by accident! The boy doesn’t look it but damn he’s a tough little shit if he took that and still stands.” Abraham barked out.

Carol narrowed her eyes at the loud man and at first Glenn thought she would say something to him but she seemed to think better of it and her sharp eyes zeroed in on Rick.

“…but that’s not everything, is it Rick?!” The Asian took automatically a few steps back and winced. Her tone might have been sweet and friendly but damn if he hadn’t learned to recognize a woman on a warpath and ready to crush some nuts.

And when he took in Rick’s conscience-stricken expression she had hit the nail on the head…

Glenn felt dread pooling in his stomach at the implication what else could have been done to the kid inside the cabin that had Daryl and Carl hovering protectively and Rick squirming in guilt.
“The people who had him … they assaulted him, didn’t they?” Despite Carol’s soft voice they all flinched at that.

The young Korean could feel Maggie shaking beside him. He pulled her close trying to fend off the memories. The Governor hadn’t raped her but he had threatened to do so and he had definitely assaulted her.

“Yes. They did.” Ricks defeated and sad tone felt even worse…

“How long was he with them?”

“Harry said he was with them for three seasons… so probably close to nine months… He said that they kept him just for that.” Rick had closed his eyes when he said this. His voice was thick with unspoken emotions while Michonne had pulled Carl in a protective embrace.

Glenn wanted to hurl… nine months… nearly as long as Judi was old now… it was such a long time! He and Maggie had been nearly destroyed by one attempt but to endure months of rape and abuse…

“…they kept him just for that.”

Heaven help! That was horrible. Looking around he saw similar expressions of the shock and anger he felt and he had seen when Carol came out of the cabin.

“They nearly took me, too” Carls whispered softly. Everyone’s head snapped to the teen with the sheriff hat, Glenn could feel his own eyes bugging.

_Carl got nearly raped… Not Michonne! But Carl! Those men had raped a boy for nine months and tried to do the same to Carl. And I thought the governor and Merle were the biggest assholes we would ever meet…_

“One of them… Harry pushed him away from me but he… he… Harry offered himself up to get him away from me.” Carl’s voice broke with tears towards the end.

“He protected me too before that when I was still badly hurt from the fight with the governor. I would be probably dead if it hadn’t for him. And most of his injuries were punishment for helping me.” Rick admitted quietly pulling his son close.

_What a selfless and kind boy! People like him had mostly died early in the apocalypse…_
Carols face was now a blank mask with steel blue eyes. No tears! No weakness!

“She has who had him… *Are they dead*?”

“Yes! They are…” They all gave a start when a soft British (!?!) voice answered from behind the grey haired woman. Harry was leaning heavily on Daryl’s arm but was walking on his own.

“Daryl, Michonne and Rick killed them all!” The boy sounded a bit awed was if he still couldn’t really believe it that his tormentors where gone.

“Rick took the knife to the one who tried to rape Carl. And he ripped the leader’s throat out, with his teeth!” The boy told them the last part with a smile.

“And now that you know all that maybe you could be finished talking about my business behind my back?” This was said with toothy smile in all polite Britishness that could have put Carol to shame.

Glenn could swear that he heard Rick and Daryl groan at the teen’s happy demeanour.

*Well, shit!*

**

Carol was a nice woman, Harry decided.

She had taken one look at his back and gone tense for a moment. Harry had felt her prying eyes on his body when he started to fidget Daryl had cleared his throat and the adults had exchanged meaningful looks behind his back.

After that she had gotten her shit together and had cleaned the infected wounds and put some antibiotic cream on them. Not once had she commented on the words on his back or his general state of health.

She had been nice the whole time telling him and Daryl nonsense and teasing the silent hunter, distracting the thin teenager from the pain and his embarrassment.

When she was done she had told Daryl to bandage him carefully and that she would wait outside for them.

Cleaning the wounds had been painful and exhausting but at the same time Harry felt better now.
The fact that he felt safe with Daryl did one more thing because it calmed his magic down and the tattoos had finally stopped acting up. He could breathe again.

When they lastly followed the grey haired woman outside, they had overheard the group’s conversation.

Daryl hadn’t been amused by their noisiness.

Harry had felt torn. It made him feel dirty to have his shame discussed so openly and that so many people now knew about it. It made it more real than ever.

He had only survived those months because he had kept himself in near constant a state of mental detachment. Pushing away his every sense of awareness and cognition, blocking out his emotions. He had gone through the motions necessary to survive.

And now that he was safe… the barriers he had built up, were crumbling, bringing back fragments of memories and sensations of all kinds. All the while ripping away the soothing blanket of detachment, making him feel… making him bloody damn realise that… yes, this shit had really happened to him and now others knew about it too.

Taking away every possibility of denial.

It was an excruciating thought.

And yet they seemed shocked and angry on his behalf which was very kind. The kind of sympathy he had already found in Daryl and the others and that had moved him to tears again and again.

When he heard Carol ask if the Claimers were dead, he could feel her killing intent. Really this woman was a viscous badass. He could feel his own hot and cold anger, his need for vengeance resonate in the older woman.

It made him smile a bit, made him feel a bit less alone with his feelings.

It gave him a perspective that even if these horrible things did happen to him, that his confusing and chaotic feelings were justified.

***

Rick and Abraham had insisted that they moved further along, getting away from Terminus and its survivors.

Ricks motives were easy to understand but Harry was surprised when he learned that the chunky
man with the mullet, Eugene, was supposed to be a scientist… And not only a scientist but someone who had a cure to plague that had made the dead walk.

On the way the others had compelled the autistic man into explaining what the cure would be… and Harry decided that his explanation sounded… well… it sounded wonky.

He hadn’t any real muggle school education since Hogwarts but he was pretty sure that Eugene’s idea off fighting fire with fire wasn’t how such things worked.

That… and the man had started to sweat like a pig. Furthermore Eugene had been very, very insistent that he was the only one to get the cure right while not so subtly demeaning everyone else’s intelligence by suggesting no one could even understand his idea of the cure.

Which mean that the nerdy looking man either thought that he was the last intelligent bloke left in America and would imply a much bigger ego and arrogance than the clumsy business-in-the-front-and-party-in-the-back guy had shown so far. Or it meant that the man was a bloody liar…

Harry couldn’t quite determine yet what may be the case.

But something was definitely dodgy about the whole situation.

It didn’t help that the brash big red head with walrus moustache and the beautiful Latina were Eugene’s “army”-escort to DC.

While Rosita was tough, she seemed to be the more approachable one of the two.

But Abraham was a man on a mission, aggressively driven and single-minded. A bloody Merlin the man cursed worse than a drunken sailor.

Madeye would have been impressed.

It would have been funny if the bearded red head didn’t remind him so much of uncle Vernon when he was angry.

And it didn’t take long before Harry saw the ex-soldier in full bully attack mode.

They had just found another small barn to hunker down for the night when Harry collapsed again in utter exhaustion, the day taking its final toll on the too thin British teenager.

He could feel the analytical blue eyes of the U.S. Army Sergeant burning on his skin.

It felt like the man critical observed all his weaknesses and shortcomings for their forthcoming and if posed a threat to Eugene’s safety. It made Harry feel naked and inadequate.
Abraham had apparently come to the same conclusion since he squared his broad shoulders his face set into a frown and started to walk over to where Harry sat on the floor slumped against a wall.

Daryl and Rick who had been busy scouting and scavenging through the house hurried back to the teen at that, cutting Abraham of before he could come too close.

It was a nice gesture but it didn’t stop Abraham from speaking his mind.

“Listen, boy! This all you got?” His abrasive tone and the word boy made Harry flinch and caused him to instinctively duck his head in anticipation of some kind of physical or verbal violence.

Shit! Too much like uncle Vernon!

Daryl had noticed his reaction and was already growling at the taller man, warning him non-verbally to back the fuck off! Abraham’s moustache quivered a bit face growing red.

“Boy, either you pick up your game and start to keep up or you’re a burden to everyone. Time is crucial! We need to get Eugene to D.C.”

You know he is right! That Snape-like voice in the back of Harry’s head whispered. You are a burden! They are wasting precious time and resources on your useless ass.

“What the fuck man?!” Daryl snarled back at Abraham.

“Daryl’s right. That’s not your call! If you want to make haste? Good! Then leave! But you don’t get to decide who we take care of!” Rick closed shoulders with the hunter effectively hiding Harry from view.

The tension in the barn was palpable!

Abraham was in Rick’s face huffing and puffing like a steam engine, similar to Vernon when angered, snarling at the ex-sheriff.

“This is the fate of the world you’re talking about! We need more people to protect Eugene and we need to get him as fast as possible to D.C. That has the highest priority. Not some used up boy!”

Used up boy… freak… worthless … burden … Harry wanted to curl up and die. He is right!

“Harry, we’ve got you! Run to Remi! I’ve got your back!” Sirius voice echoed in his head. The
buzzing sounds of spells flying over his head and the screams of Deatheaters and Order members reverberated through his mind. Clenching his eyes shut he tried to escape the memories that threaten to overwhelm him. Remus and Sirius voices calling desperately out to him, a high and cruel laugh and twin beams of a sickly green light… long spindly fingers stroking over his tear strained cheek.

“They are dead because of you, Harry. They didn’t need to die. Like your parents. Like that boy.”

“Watch, what ya say asshole!” Daryl’s angry yell ripped through the fog of the flashback. Harry saw how the hunter lunged for Abraham grabbing the taller man by his collar his right fist already raised for a punch.

**

“How the fuck did it always come back to this?!” Harry’s small body wrenched himself between the two angry men.

“No offense, boy! It’s nothing personal!” Abraham groused at the small green eyed teen. The kid was shivering all over but his face looked strangely detached.

“None taken. And I know it’s nothing personal. That’s why I have no qualms make an equally impersonalized request to you.” Daryl growled again this time because he had the unsettling feeling what Harry was about to ask… fucking again!

Abraham looked surprised by the kid’s attitude and the hunter couldn’t fault him for that. Harry was pale and shaking like a leaf but he looked straight up at the red head.

Met him head’s on like he had done with Gareth, his voice unwavering.

“I will try not to slow the group down anymore. I can push my sensitivities back.”

“Boy, you’re badly hurt… I didn’t mean for you to…” Abraham seemed a bit taken aback now. He had been ready for a fight Daryl realized in surprise. Maybe the tense man had looked for one. The idiot was totally unprepared to find his demand met.

Nonetheless by a frail teenaged boy with haunting green eyes.

“No, you didn’t mean to… but you’re right anyway.

I’m used up. I’m injured. I don’t know how to fight… I’m a burden and a safety hazard. You said it wasn’t anything personal. Well, and now I intend to hold you to that. When the time comes that I slow the group down too much, when I endanger someone… you will make them leave me behind or you will kill me yourself.”
“What?!” Choked the ex-soldier. Daryl could see Eugene and Rosita’s uncomfortable glances. Both were obviously not sure if they were ready to go that far…

“Nothing personal, right?!” Challenged the little Brit, still shaking but those damn green eyes hard with determination caused Abraham to take a step back.

Now it was Harry taking a step forward, the little shit was pushing it. Chasing after Abraham as a new chance to keep his twisted idea of protecting them from investing too much into “a half dead kid”.

“If you won’t kill me… if you can’t that’s fine. Then I have just one further appeal to you: leave me a knife. I may be not able to keep up with you but I refuse to fall prey to anyone ever again. Be it walkers or men! So do we have a deal?”

The look of astonishment on Abrahams face would have been hilarious if Harry hadn’t demand for the fucking third time (!) to be left behind should things become a bit hairy…

And Rick finally was starting to get angry. That was the reaction Daryl had hope for when Harry had made the request the second time.

“Now, wait! Harry, this isn’t how we do stuff in our group!”

Harry whirled around eyes blazing, finger poking in the man’s chest.

“No, I noticed! You gave me your word! You promised…!”

“Yes, I went back on my word. But damn looking out for each other helping people when you can that’s all we have left of… of us! Of humanity! It is the only thing that distinguishes us from animals like the Claimers. I promised you family first and that’s what I did. Everyone else was already over the fence. You saved my life and protected Carl from something even worse. We look out for each other that’s how it works with us.” Rick argued back.

“You fool! That’s how you lose valuable people for useless ones! This is how lose cable fighters for the worthless ones! That’s how good people die! What would have happened to Carl and the rest of the group if you’d been bitten…” Harry yelled at Rick, his face contorted in self-loathing, desperation and… grief.

_He lost somebody! He lost someone who had tried to help him… Someone died protecting him! And now he won’t allow anyone else to look out for him anymore._

It was so obvious now… Survivor’s guilt had Merle called it once when he told Daryl about a comrade in the army.

When Rick looked over to Daryl he could see the same realisation on his brother’s face. Saw the same heart break he felt.

The kid honestly thought that he wasn’t worth saving, that he wasn’t worth being taken care of.
Daryl didn’t know what to say, didn’t know how to make any of this better. How to convince Harry that it was ok to rely on them?

*  

Harry tried to calm himself after his outburst, deeply embarrassed that he lost his composure like that. The atmosphere had become stunned and uncomfortable. Most of the other occupants in the barn looked at him with a mixture of pity and shock… the only difference was Eugene’s expression of guilty conscience.

Harry glanced stoical back at Abraham:

“Do we have a deal?”

The red moustache quivered again but this time in silent laugher.

“Holy hell! Boy, it takes a serious case of balls to ask for such shit! But you do understood how the world goes now, so yeah! You’ve got yourself a deal!”

“Abraham?!” Eugene hesitantly tried to intervene.

“Shut it, man! The kid proved that he has a set and that he knows how shit works. Let him decide for himself.” Abraham deflected the scientist.

“Harry, ya don’t have ta do this! We won’t leave ya behind!” Daryl chipped in, his face serious and earnest.

“I know and I didn’t say to leave me behind right now…” Green eyes searched for slated dark blue ones. “You asked me to hold on and… I haven’t given up yet. I’m still trying, more than I did in a long time. But I’m also realistic and I need this. I need to know, that me trying won’t hurt you. But I promise to keep trying, alright?”

*  

Oh… *Maybe that’s all we can ask from him for now.*

Daryl thought stunned.
Ezzykatt’s comment on the last chapter made me thing that I might have to explain a bit about Harry’s instance on being left behind should things go wrong. People who lived through long term neglect and abuse develop often problems in the regulation of closeness and distance to other persons. On the one side they often crave real closeness and emotional intimacy and are ready to do a lot for it. On the other side growing up under those conditions frustrated their need for control and autonomy. Getting close to someone is what they want but at the same time it scares them because automatically they make themselves vulnerable and experience a loss of control. These two very different but strong needs can create an almost unbearable tension and stress in those victims of abuse. So Harry’s demands are his way to allow certain closeness but at the same time he keeps an emergency exit that allows him a bit of control over the situation. One foot in, one foot out. ^^
I didn’t write this in the story because people with abusive pasts are seldom aware why they do those things. It’s usually a very frustrating process for very one involved.

And on another side there is power in numbers… three times is the charm. ;P

Chapter 8

Father Gabriel was a bloody fraud and a wimp, Harry had decided. They had met the man in the woods where the priest had ineffectively tried to fight off three walkers and even Harry could have done a better job with that…

Especial since Carol had started to show him how to use a knife correctly and efficiently. She was a great teacher and very patient with him, pointing out flaws in his posture, his hold on the knife but also potential weak spots on dead and living targets.

Rick and Daryl were a little less pleased with his training in the light of his demand to be killed or to leave him with a knife. It had left both men slightly uneasy.

And while Carl hadn’t been thrilled with Harry, he was another big help in training him. The younger boy was a lot more experienced with fighting and showed him a lot. The blue eyed teen had also been very persistent on showing Harry how to shoot, too… but, well, that had been a disaster.

Harry sight just too blurry to aim right… bloody damn he was really as blind as a bat. In the end
Carl, Rick and Glenn were laughing their asses off at him while Daryl and Carol watched him in exasperated disbelief.

“Yer a damn shit shoot!” The hunter deadpanned while Carol was still shaking her head.

“He’s so off the target that we’re lucky he’s not hitting us.”

Harry heaved a weary sigh, looking pleadingly at his teacher.

“I told you so… I’m much better with a knife. Can we please stop this now?”

Carol had raised an eyebrow totally unimpressed with his performance then she had looked again at his practice target… Fuck… He didn’t even hit once… Nobody alive should be this bad! It was frustrating!

“Yeah, we might as well stop. We’re just wasting bullets like that. But you’ll have to train harder with knifes and if we find a sword you’ll train with Michonne!”

All in all he had been able to keep up with the group even if he still collapsed in exhaustion as soon as they stop for the nights. Everyone beside Abraham seemed still quiet bothered by it but Harry had rebuked every attempt to mollycoddle him. He was getting better physically but mentally the burden had gotten heavier.

Nightmares were getting more and more frequent. There had even been some flashbacks and a panic attack after Glenn had grabbed his shoulder unexpectedly from behind the day before.

Embarrassingly scaring both the young Korean man and himself in the process.

Harry had been deeply abashed by his own reaction and very sorry that he had troubled Glenn. The kind man hadn’t meant any harm and started to handle him with kid gloves which in turn frustrated and annoyed Harry immensely…

Harry had been angry with himself for his own weakness especially now that he was in less danger not more.

So every time Harry became disoriented or was losing his grasp on the here and now he would start a little mantra, recounting the days since the last raped and since Rick, Daryl and Michonne had killed the Claimers.

It helped him to differentiate the flashbacks and intrusions from the present. Grounding him like an anchor. It was a near constant fight with himself on keeping hold onto his sanity or what was left of it.

It didn’t help that at times he got the feeling that someone watched them…
They had forced the strange priest to take them back to his church and then to lead some of the group to the local food bank to get more supplies while Carol and Daryl had gone looking for water. Glenn had taken Maggie and Tara to scavenge the area.

Harry had stayed back with Carl and Tyreese taking care of litt’l’ Asskicker who surprisingly liked the green eyed teen quite a lot.

Not that Harry was an unlikeable person but the little princess could be a bit fussy…

It might be because Harry had taken to humming to the little girl whenever she started to whimper in hunger or unease. But Judith had crowned the British teen was her new favourite after Rick and Carl. And it was obvious for Daryl that Harry adored the small girl right back.

When Daryl and Carol came back with four canisters of water they heard someone softly singing in the church.

The soft melody reminded them both of Beth but the voice was certainly male. Rick and the others came back at the same time looking prompting at the hunter and the grey haired woman.

“What are you standing here for? Something wrong in there?” Rick asked worried.

“Nah… just listenin’” Daryl signalled his brother to be silent. Motioning to the church with a bitter sweet smile they carefully opened the door.

‘… Oh, take your time, don’t live too fast
Troubles will come and they will pass
You’ll find someone and you’ll find love
And don’t forget, son, there is someone up above

And be a simple kind of man
Oh, be something you love and understand
Baby be a simple kind of man
Oh, won’t you do this for me, son, if you can

Forget your lust for the rich man's gold
All that you need is in your soul
And you can do this, oh baby, if you try
All that I want for you, my son, is to be satisfied…”

Harry was walking around the church singing and slowly rocking a sleepy Judith who groused
hungrily at him from time to time. Tyreese and Carl were sitting utterly relaxed on the ground listening to Harry’s singing. Abraham, Eugene and Rosita sat in another corner in a similar state of contentment, cleaning their guns.

With the soft light shining through stained glass windows the room was aflame in mellow violets and reds… and Harry looked breathtakingly beautiful and peaceful in this moment. The song sounded hauntingly hopeful and sad. It reminded them all of past that was long gone.

With the last notes of the song fading away they moved slowly into the room altering everyone to their presence. Carl immediately grabbed his gun while Tyreese stepped in front of Harry. The British teen had curled his upper body protectively around the little girl in his arms. Abraham and Rosita were also ready for combat shielding Eugene.

“Easy there, guys! It’s just us.” Rick placated holding his hands up.

“Nice taste in music, short stuff. Lynyrd Skynyrd is a classic.” Glenn bounced into the room, the compliment causing Harry to blush and duck his head, stuttering embarrassed thanks.

Daryl silently agreed Harry had a nice voice soft and richer than one would expected from the dainty teen. It made his heart ache to think how Beth used to sing for little asskicker.

Sweet Beth gone and lost for them… thinking about her always brought back the guilt and the feeling of failure. He had wanted to protect her, to keep her alive!

“You will miss me so bad when I’m gone, Daryl Dixon.”

Yeah I do! And I don’t want to think about Harry as another dead boy!

****

They had made a little feast out of the supplies they had found, eating better and more than any of them had in a while. Even Harry managed to eat more than before which didn’t go unnoticed if Carl’s beaming smile and Daryl’s satisfied nod were anything to go by. And yet despite the relaxed atmosphere Harry felt a nickelling in the back of his head… uneasiness… a hunch that something was going to happen.

“I’d like to propose a toast. Look around this room, I see survivors; each and every one has earned this title! To the survivors!” Abraham toasted to them all everyone cheering with him. But he wasn’t done with that.

“That all you want to be? Wake up in the morning, fight the undead pricks, forage for food, go to sleep with two eyes open, rinse and repeat? ‘Cause you can do that. I mean you got the strength,
you got the skill. Thing is, for you people, for what you can do, that’s just surrender.

Now we get Eugene to Washington and he makes the dead die and the living will have this world again. And that is not a bad takeaway for a little road trip.

Eugene, what’s in D.C.?”

Eugene was ready for his bit, talking in rapid staccato.

“Infrastructure, constructed to withstand pandemics even for this fubar magnitude. That means fuel, food, refuge. Restart.”

“However this plays out, however long it takes for the reset button to kick in, you can be safe there. Safer than you’ve been since this whole thing started. Come with us. Save the world for that little one, save it for yourselves. Save it for the people out there, who don’t got nothing left to do except survive.”

Harry had to leave it to the ex-soldier that had been a compelling speech, done at the right moment using the light mood perfectly and even if Harry still doubted that Eugene could really save the world, going to D.C. was probably a smart move in either case.

There was a tense moment when they all looked at Rick, checking for his reaction. To Harry it was clear that if Rick refused to go to D.C. none of them might go with Abraham and the tall red head knew it too. He needed Rick Grimes.

Rick was looking down on Judith who started to babble excitedly causing Rick to grin at his daughter.

“What was that? I think she knows what I’m about to say. She’s in. If she’s in, I’m in. We’re in.”

Some clapped in excitement at Rick declaration. Harry could practically taste the relief in the room that they would stay together. And that there wouldn’t be another argument between the two alpha males.

Harry was surprised when Abraham looked at him directly.

“What about you, boy? You’re up for it, too?” Harry cringed at being called boy yet again… trying to shrug off the unpleasant memories of his life at Private Drive Nr. 4.

Vernon looming over him, face purple and moustache trembling.

Petunia screaming at him for not doing all his chores.

Vernon grabbing him by the scruff throwing him into his cupboard.

Petunia swinging a frying pan at his head.
Vernon shaking him and calling him an ungrateful freak.

**

Daryl watched as Abraham raised his eyebrows in question at the teen’s obvious discomfort interpreting it as a refusal.

“You want to stay behind? You don’t need to, you held yourself up quite well till now. No need to back out.”

“No! No I want to come!” Harry quickly assured the man and the worried looking group.

“But if I may request something? If I come with you, will you please refrain from calling me… boy…? It gives me creeps!” The boy’s face was tight with agitation but his tone was carefully polite and controlled as if he wasn’t sure if he was allowed to appeal for such a simple thing.

It caused them all to blink in surprised… it was strange request, a simple one… and it wasn’t as if boy was an especially insulting thing to call a white teenager.

“Yes, sure! No problem, bo…. Uhmm kid! Can do that! Glad you want to come with us.” Abraham agreed in slight in confusion.

“Did the Claimers call you that?” Carl’s curious question broke through the silence causing Harry to jump a little.

“Carl!” Rick’s scandalized tone disrupted Carl. “You don’t just ask things like that!”

The younger teen had the decency to blush at his father’s sharp rebuke.

But Harry was visibly left reeling after the question with to many things running too wild through his head.

They fell into an awkward silence after that.

“No, they called me other things… pet… bitch…” Abraham could see how everyone’s eyes widened at the whispered and carefully worded response. The small Brit didn’t stop there.

“I don’t think they saw me as human enough for them to call me boy…!”

“Then why…?” Feeling encouraged that Harry had answered, Carl pressed on.

Harry hesitated mulling over the question before he raised his head to look at the younger one. His green eyes were solemn his face yet again pale and haggard and he sounded resigned.

“My uncle used to call me that all the time. That or… freak…”
Daryl wanted to fucking punch something. That sounded too much like Will Dixon. He remembered all too well how it felt when his Pa had gone on a bender coming back piss drunk. He could still smell the reek of the moonshine and stale cigarette smoke. And he could still feel the burning pain of the belt buckle making contact with his clammy skin. Rick, Michonne and Daryl had talked about the possibility that Harry had been abused before. They had already expected it.

But now… it had never been so clear that Harry had been abused even before the world had gone down. Daryl just hadn’t expected that his uncle had been the one to do this. Sounded like Harry’s home life before was shit even before…

“Ya uncle?” The hunter inquired softly.

“Yeah, I lived my aunt and uncle and my cousin… I think I can count the times they called me by my real name on one hand” Harry shrugged helplessly.

“Oh, why wouldn’t they call you Harry?” Carl stuck to his gun. He wanted to know more about Harry and now that older teen finally talked about himself, he wasn’t about to waste the opportunity.

Curious little shit! But somehow Harry was much more content to talk to Carl than with the adults.

“Because they didn’t want me. Never did in fact….” It was said in such a bland way. It sounded like a fact. A heart-breaking truth long accepted. It made them all ache for Harry. Daryl knew how much it hurt when you weren’t wanted.

“How long were ya with them?” the gruff hunter inquired.

“Since I was baby… only a little older than Judi is now… Aunt petunia was my mother’s sister… “

So he’s an orphan?! Just a little older than Judi… Damn, he could see how Rick and Carl swallowed. Must be thinking about Lori.

“What happened to your parents?” The former Sheriff asked carefully.

It was as if a shadow had moved over Harry’s pretty face. The usually bright green eyes looked a bit duller now and a heavy frown pulled delicate brows together. Daryl had to fight the impulse down to reach out and smooth the wrinkle on the teen’s forehead out. Harry had an empty gaze fixed on one of the stained glass windows and for a while he seemed alarmingly far away.

Just when Daryl wanted to shake the kid awake Harry exhale in a long exhausted sigh. The teen curled more into himself and hugged his keens.

“Dad had gone into law enforcement and mom had just started to work for the ministry. They were young, idealistic and ambitious. It was the time of the… terrorist attacks in England. They both managed to get involved in the… elucidation and swiftly pissed off the…wrong crowd.” Harry spoke very carefully and sometimes he stopped himself and searched for words but nobody wanted to interrupt the kid.
“They had to go into hiding when I was born… witness protection. But they were sold out by someone they thought they could trust…” Here Harry had to stop for a moment. His green eyes displayed a confusing mixture of fear, hatred and regret.

“The terrorist leader came personally to take us out… when I was 15 months old…” Daryl looked at Rick and saw the former Sheriff shiver. This had to be every cop’s worst nightmare if the job followed you home. If the bad guys started to hunt not only you but your family.

“I don’t remember much about them. My aunt never spoke about them and I… I learned fast that asking about them would only get me into trouble and most likely punished.” The kid managed to look sad and detached at the same time. But then he looked at Judith and a bitter sweet smile graced his face.

“The little memories I have about them are the best and the worst I have…. I remember them dying. Just their voices, you know.” He sounded so young in that moment. Most of the time Harry behave so mature that it was easy to forget that he was just 16…

To hear him talk about his parent’s death it brought Daryl back to a short time when his mom had been still alive. A time when she had been less drunk, dad hadn’t been so violent and Merle had been still at home. Daryl could relate to this bitter sweet feeling. To know what you had, what could have been if things had played out a little different… It made it all the more clear what you had lost.

“Dad had been yelling at mom to take me and run that he would try to hold him up. He didn’t even have his wa…. Weapon on him. And I remember how mom begged him to let me live to take her instead. I remember him laughing. High and shrill. I remember her scream when she died…” Harry’s voice broke and Daryl’s heart with it. Carl looked pale but instead of saying something he just grabbed Harry’s hand in silent comfort.

“He tried to kill me too but he… it didn’t work out like he planned. Didn’t finish the job.“

Harry pulled his fringe back showing them the lightning bolt scar on his forehead.

“He left me this.”

To Daryl it looked like someone had carved the symbol on Harry’s forehead. What a sick fuck would do that to a baby. Rick held little’ asskicker closer to his chest, jaws set and a little teary eyed.

“How did you know that your father hadn’t got his weapon? You said you only remember their voices?” Eugene wanted to know.

That question changed something in the British teen, as he looked up to Eugene that faraway look was gone, replaced by something sharp and alert.

“Because he told me! Their murderer didn’t like lose ends. When I was eleven he found me, he knew I would start boarding school… He told me then. He liked to talk and to brag. It amused
“Holy fucking shit!”

Wide eyed they starred at Harry, Abraham cursed in the background.

“The man that led a terrorist cell that murdered your family came for you???” Rick voice had gone at least one octave up.

“Yes he did. He wanted to settle the bill. Set one of the teachers on me…”

Shit! Where there only assholes in the kids life!?

“One of your teachers…??” Carl sounded appalled.

“What kind of school…? Fucking damn, I’ve seen shit. I’ve done shit but I never heard about such a shitty shit show! Kid, you got my respect to making it this far!” Abraham saluted him, causing Harry to blush and duck his head.

“And your aunt didn’t take you from the school? Mom… She would have flipped if something like that happened to me. She would have pulled me out and home schooled me instead.” Carl shook his head in utter disbelieve while all of them that had actually met Lori winced. Flipped… that didn’t cut her justice. That woman had been able to raise drama and hell over way smaller things. Daryl shuddered when he tried to imagine Lori Grimes reaction to anyone trying to murder her son.

“Uhm… I think the headmaster told them? I’m not sure… if he did, they didn’t care… or they were disappointed that the attack failed.” Harry deadpanned with a flat look and a typical teenage shrug.

“Did they abuse you?” Michonne asked him directly. Harry bit his lip softly shaking his head. He looked quiet unsure about it, cocking his head to the side. The frail kid worked his teeth over his lower lip, searching for a way to explain his relationship to hid blood relatives. When he finally answered it was carefully worded.

“No…? I… I don’t think so?! I don’t know if abuse would be the right term for it… They didn’t beat me if you mean that! Some rough handling maybe… they knocked me around a few times but nothing too extensive!?” Harry’s answer entailed more question marks than Daryl was comfortable with. It was obvious that the kid struggled with the question.

“They really, really didn’t like to touch me. Tried to avoid that at all cost, actually? It was more like… neglect?” Michonne sighed. She looked pained by the awkward way Harry danced around the theme of abuse. But she waited patiently for the teen to continue. And in all honesty Daryl was quite impressed how much Harry had told them. At that age Daryl would have sprouted every obscenity in his repertoire at every fucker asking after his bruises and his home life but Harry had braved through it.
The kid had opened up and had taken a leap of faith.

Still did.

“They just didn’t want me. They made sure, that I knew, that I was a waste of space and resources to them. Telling neighbours and teachers that I was a ‘troubled boy’. So everyone stayed clear of me. Most of the time it was just incredibly lonely…”

And wasn’t that the saddest thing he heard in a while. Daryl remembered the whispers of neighbours and teachers about the Dixon boy.

Will Dixon’s son… whose alcoholic mother had burned the house down… dirty… poor… redneck trash… nothing but trouble… stay away from him! He remembered his loneliness when Merle had pissed of… and his burning anger at the world!

“And other times? You said they punished you… how?” Bless Carol! She knew what to focus on.

Daryl thought relieved that her question brought him out his own mind.

Harry sighed tiredly a strained smile pulling at his lips.

“You are very observant…. Mostly it was withholding food… Sometimes they used to lock me away a lot in my cupboard under the stairs.”

Silence. Daryl wasn’t even sure if he had heard right…

“Your cupboard???” Carol’s eyes narrowed dangerously.

“Huh?... Uhm… Well, it used to be my bedroom?!”

These people were worse than Will Dixon Daryl decided. At least Daryl had been allowed flee from his father into the woods… to get away from the abuse. But to be looked in a fucking broom closet…!

“But only until I was eleven! After I got my letter for boarding school they got afraid someone would come looking and calling them out on it. So I was allowed to move in Duddley’s second bedroom” Harry hurried to explain as if this made anything better…

“His second…? Son of a bitch! They stopped locking ya in then?” Daryl growled

“Well… Uhm…” Harry stuttered wide eyed at their combined indignation.

“Did they or didn’t they stop?” Carol demanded it a sweet sing song voice.

“They might have bought five bolting locks and a cat flap for the door…?!” That damn down playing shrugging again.

“It was manageable after I started boarding school. I only stayed a few weeks of the year there. The rest I spend either at school or with friends.” Harry close the report with what he apparently thought
to be an appease gesture.

A beautiful and serene and fucking fake smile graced Carol’s face her voice sweet like honey when she asked.

“Harry hun, tell me. Are those people dead?”

*Heck, she is terrifying! She wants to burn those fuckers down. Gotta love that woman!*

Harry sweat dropped a little… Carol was bloody frightening.

“I think so… I… uhm… they kinda left me behind early on?! They checked out of the hotel while I was out. So I’m not sure… but uncle Vernon and Duddley weren’t very fit to begin with and Petunia isn’t the kind to do well in a fight. I just don’t see them making it out here.”

“So when I asked you about your family… and you told me you had lost them… You really meant that they checked out of your hotel room and just left you behind. On your own. In a foreign country. While the fucking apocalypse happened?!” Rick pinched the bridge of his nose in exasperation.

“Uhhh…yes?”

“Well, I hope for them that the walkers got them! ‘Cause if I ever meet them their dead!”

***

It was a strange and warm feeling that settled in Harry’s stomach. It felt like his first Christmas at Hogwarts when he unpacked his first hand knitted Weasley sweater. The warm fuzzy feeling when someone cared for you. Being part of a family, like he belonged!

Ducking his head Harry felt his face flush but a shy smile ghosted over his lips.

*This is kind of nice.*
Bob was missing!

Daryl and Carol were missing!

Just gone, no one knowing where they went or what happened to them.

Harry’s uneasiness had picked up again. At first he had thought it was his physical and mental exhaustion after their talk that was making him queasy, but then he couldn’t find Bob at Sasha’s side anymore.

And he had started to miss Carol silent hovering presence and noticed that the reassuring weight of Daryl’s gaze on him was gone.

When he asked where the three had gone an oppressive silence had followed, nobody else had realised that they were missing in the first place.

Well, shit!

Daryl had become his big scruffy security blanket.... Which in itself was a bit embarrassing never before Harry had depended this much on another person. And it terrified Harry.

Daryl wasn't gone that long, and he was going to be back... He just had to.

So get a grip Potter! Everything is going to be fine.

Unless it wasn't... Bob, Carol and Daryl were gone.

And Rick and Sasha were losing their minds over it.

Sasha and Rick had been onto Father Gabriel like harpies, both spitting mistrust and accusations at the quivering man who hadn’t been able to put up any resistance against their combined anger. The pitiful man had denied any involvement in the absence of their missing friends or having any ties to an outside group.
But Rick didn’t let up demanding answers about the mysterious inscriptions marking the side of the church. After being forcefully confronted by the former law enforcement officer the priest was a sobbing mess confessing that he had kept the church doors locked at the onset of the outbreak and had refused to open them for members of his congregation who had come for refuge from the apocalypse at his church.

He hadn’t opened the doors leaving his sheep to the wolves, listening to them screaming for help as they were devoured.

“The lord sent you here to finally punish me” Gabriel had cried falling to his knees overwhelmed by guilt. “I’m damned. I was damned before. I always locked the doors… I always locked the doors…”

Ricks distain for the weak man had been palpable… his silence seemed to Harry more damning than any violence. Deeming this picture of misery not worth of any punishment or reaction…

Harry had crouched in front of the crying man giving him a handkerchief to dry his face.

“I don’t think that anyone here will kill you for what you have done. Your life will not conveniently end now just because you’re drowning in guilt. That would be a bit of a too easy exit, don’t you think…?”

Shocked wide eyes had searched in glowing green ones for any kind of mercy. The little Brit had found none of it for the man in himself.

“You had a choice between what was right and what was easy. And now you will live a long life with this burden trying to atone for it. You don’t deserve death yet.”

Gabriel had shivered… paralyzed in shock and fear.

I’m damned. I’m cursed!

It hadn’t escaped Harry’s notice that Eugene had looked distinctively uncomfortable with everything going on around him.

And Harry had still the uneasy feeling of being watched... Something had been nagging him since they had escaped Terminus.

Maybe they should have listened to Rick Harry reprimanded himself. He knew better than to believe that things were just going to be right just because you wanted them to.

And then they had heard it… a whistling sound.

Someone had been dropped off in front of the church’s steps…
Rick and Tyreese brought Bob in… missing a bloody leg! And as if that wasn’t enough he had been bitten by a walker in the food bank.

Bob was dying and Sasha was being ripped apart by grief and a hot burning rage.

The whole situation was horrifying!

Bob disclosed the whole magnitude of the mess around them. Gareth and the Terminus survivors had followed them.

They were out for revenge, hunting their cattle. Hunting them.

And they had already started and taken Bob to eat his fucking leg.

*

And now Rick was getting ready for battle while Abraham just wanted to take Eugene and as many people as he could and leave all this bloody mess behind.

It was only Glenn’s intervention and promise that Maggie, Tara and he would follow the former Sergeant in twelve hours if they helped them to take out the threat that prevented a full fist fight between the two aggressive and impulsive men.

In the background Harry had noticed how Tyrese had flinched at Bobs description of the men and women that had come for them.

“You know one of them?” Harry asked softly. The tall broad shouldered man slumped in resignation.

“Martin, he was the outpost at the cabin where we met... He... Carol wanted me to take care of him you know? And I just couldn't... The guy he got into my head. And then he nearly killed Judith. And I had the opportunity to end him. I should have ended him. I... I didn't... Couldn't. I let him get away.” Tyreese confessed quietly.

“Why?”

“What?” Surprised Tyreese’s head snapped up. He had obviously expected to be scolded or laughed at.

“Why did you let him go?” Harry asked.

“I hoped that he would change... That he just needed a second chance. I wanted to believe that I didn't have to kill him. It was stupid! Look what they did to Bob for fucks sake.” The tall man looked so torn and helpless in that moment. And Harry knew how this felt. To have the consequences of something well-meant thrown back at you. The way to hell is paved with good intentions. The line between nativity and kindness it was a frail one and nowadays it was harder than ever to distinguish between the two.

“I understand how hard that choice can be. The man that betrayed my parents…?
I met him. And my godfathers they wanted to kill him... But I stopped them. I hadn't wanted them to become murderers for that snivelling rat. He was supposed to go to prison. He escaped before that could happen and went back to his old boss.” Harry told him and the old familiar guilt, that he always felt when he thought about that night in the shrieking shag, washed over him.

“Shit I'm sorry.” The dark skinned man looked taken aback.

“People died because of that... People I cared for.” Harry revealed with a heavy heart and Tyreese made a wounded sound.

“Do you regret it?” The man asked carefully.

“Yes every day! I wish I would have killed him myself.” The British teen replied firmly searching out Tyreese’s dark eyes. The big man flinched at the harsh answer.

“Do you think I should have killed Martin?” Harry didn’t look away from the defeated sounding man.

“I think that the moment you gave him a second chance, you took a gamble. Trusting people it has always been a gamble. I took a gamble trusting Daryl and Rick... And it paid off. So I can't tell you to stop looking for the good in people. But I learned that my actions can have dire consequences for the people around me and that sometimes the best and easiest choice for me isn't the right one for them.” Harry told him honestly.

* 

They had decided to set up a trap for the cannibals… The plan was faulty at the best.

But what did Harry know?!

So he hid with Carl, Judi, Gabriel, Eugene and Michonne in the back room of the church.

Harry could hear them coming for them...

Gareth’s voice carried through the wood of the door. Oily and false he called out to them trying to draw them out. Baiting and mocking them. What a prick!

Then Rick sprung the trap...and what followed had been carnage and rage.

There was no other word for it. The sound of slaughter and begging from Gareth and his companions Harry wouldn’t forget about that for a long time.

When it was over and Harry had been allowed to come out. He had tried to catch Tyreese’s eyes. But haunted and infused in an all-consuming sadness the bulky man had just starred at the blood covered floor boards.
“… Someone who broke such a sacrosanct taboo will only have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment you crossed that last line. Nobody can come back from what you have become.”

And they hadn’t.

****

Bob was dead… It was hard to watch Sasha grieving. She hadn’t been able to stab her boyfriend afterwards so Rick had to step up.

The atmosphere was thick with farewell, settling over them like a heavy blanket, making it hard to think clearly and breathe freely.

Glenn, Maggie and Tara were getting ready to leave with Team ‘Cure’ to save the world. And watching from the outside it seemed to Harry as if no one wanted to go through with the separation…

Everyone seemed to wait in high tension. Still hoping that miraculously Daryl and Carol would be back in time so they could go on together.

Judith was getting fussy sensing the sad and solemn mood in her caretakers. So Harry had taken her outside a little away from the others letting them say their good byes in peace and sparing the baby some of the stress.

Humming softly to the little girl Harry watched Abraham and Rick beating around the bush. Both men seemed sorry but too proud to find the guts to apologize for their words last night.

It felt stifling and frustrating at the same time… A family breaking apart over the egos of two alpha males. It didn’t feel right. And it added to his worries for Daryl and Carol who were still missing.

Abraham looked over to Harry and Judi, giving Harry room to voice his own disappointment.

“You’re leaving?” the unspoken you promised to make sure I wouldn’t endanger this people clear between them.

“Yes… We have a mission! We can’t wait for your people.” Abraham seemed exhausted there was nothing left of the fierce bravado he showed in his speech last night. Just sad determination and longing. A man on a mission needing the feeling of purpose but at the same time wishing for comrades and a place to belong to. Harry sighed softly, resignation settling in.

“You promised to leave me behind if necessary, not them…. You’re making a mistake. You should wait.” It sounded ominous even to his own ears. He should stop saying such weird stuff…

He started to sound like Professor Trelawney… Alone the thought sent shivers of distain down his spine.
“You’re one hell of a creepy kid! Take care!” The ex-soldier gave him a strained grin and a rough clap to the shoulder.

And then he was gone. Leaving in the church’s bus, sharing a last tense barely there nod of acknowledgement with Rick.

**

Harry really needed to question some of his life choices…

This group was a fucking disaster. A bunch of true Gryffindors.

They were in Atlanta to rescue Carol and Beth.

So far so good… but the plan Rick put forward was brash and impulsive and would most likely end in terrible bloodshed.

Their leader wanted to storm the fucking hospital packed with armed and trained policemen and assassinate as many as they could to fight his people out… hoping to do all this silently.

*Merlin! This is beyond reckless! No wonder Snape always snarled at us for being idiot Gryffindors.*

“Rick!”

“Rick…”

Tyreese had tried to intervene at the same time as Harry.

“Uhmm… you first…” the teenager motioned to the tall man with the gentle attitude, hoping that the soft and pacifistic teddy bear heart of Tyreese had thought of another solution than a bloody slaughter feast.

“This is best case. What is worst case? All it takes is one of these cops going down the hall at the wrong time. Then it’s not quiet. We talking about a lot bullets flying around…”

*Thank Merlin, Tyreese got it.*

“If that’s what it takes.” Sasha said without any emotion.

*She’s itching for a fight. It doesn’t matter who. She’s just too angry right now… like I have been*
after Sirius’ and Remus’ deaths. This kind of burning rage is so much easier to bear than the drowning feeling of sadness and grief. At least the anger lets you move onwards. But it’s a bad counsellor in such delicate situations.

“It doesn’t! We’re going to get a couple of her cops. Alive. Out here. We do an even trade. Theirs for ours. Everybody goes home.” Tyreese implored to his sister.

Not subtle either but a lot better!

Rick wasn’t convinced about it… He also was holding onto his aggression to drive him forward. Harry got the impression that their leader only felt safe anymore when he took the threat out. Killing the enemy left no lose ends, gave them no chance to get back at you.

Harry could understand that… It was so tempting to be compassionate. He had been so easily swayed to let Pettigrew live, but it had cost him everything. On the other hand he had also learned his lesson not to rush into dangerous situations. It got your people killed, too. Good and valuable people.

It will always be the people closest to you that will pay the price if you got to reckless.

In the end it took Daryl backing Tyreese’s plan up to make Rick agree to the more careful approach, hopefully sparring lives.

“We can still keep the upper hand in this.” Harry tried to soothe the tense man.

“I convinced you to bring me for a reason, didn’t I? We can still use an element of surprise on them. If we go through the back entrance that they think is locked.”

Taking Harry with them hadn’t sat well with any of them but he had valuable information on the area surrounding and the hospital itself…

++++Flashback++++

Harry slumped down in relief when he saw Daryl coming into the church behind Michonne. The man looked worse for wear. Dark bags under his eyes betraying his exhaustion, his hair hung greasy and limp around his face obscuring even more of his eyes than usual.

The archer came with good and bad news… and new companion.

Noah was a tall and lanky boy in his late teens with big innocent eyes, dark skin and a prominent limp that seemed to be more of a permanent handicap than an acute injury. He had lived for months in a hospital in Atlanta run by former policewoman, Dawn Lerner.
They had built up a system, ‘recusing’ sick or injured people, taking them in and curing them, on
the condition that after recovering, they would work off their debts for the resources invested in
keeping them alive by working for the hospital.

It was how they kept the hospital running trapping survivors with debts by charging them for their
upkeep, including food.

And they were ready to sacrifice a lot to protect their system falling as low as to murder when it
was convenient for them. When they encountered Noah they had intentionally left his dad behind
to die, so he couldn't be a threat later on…

And now they had Carol who had been hit by car when she and Daryl had followed the trail of a
girl named Beth to Atlanta.

Beth, who had been with Daryl before he met the Claimers and Harry. Beth, who was apparently
Maggie’s sister and had been kidnapped by this strange police force before Daryl had been able
intervene.

“They hav’ Beth and Carol… their alive. We need ta get them back!” Daryl growled softly and
pointed to Noah. “He knows where ta go and ‘ll help us getting them.”

“We will get them back.” Rick firmly assured Daryl. There is this intensity surrounding the ex-
sheriff again. A man ready to take on the fucking world.

The fight burning through his eyes, pushing himself and everyone else forward, taking everyone
down who dared to stand in their way or worse: tries to hurt his family.

“Yes, I know the Grady in and out. I can bring you there!” Noah promised.

Wait! What?

“Grady memorial hospital?” Harry asked stunned

“Yeah… How the hell do ya know that?” Daryl grumbled in surprise.

“I know the area… the hotel, we stayed in, was near. I spend three weeks running through the
neighbourhood…uhm exploring while my uncle and aunt took Duddley sightseeing.” Harry told
them. “I spend a lot of time around and in the hospital.”

“The hell you were doing in the hospital?” Carl asked flabbergast.

“Uhmm…. I got admitted a few times while I was in Atlanta? The nurses were extremely nice.”

“You’ve been there for three weeks. How is it possible to be admitted a few times?” Rick looked
like he wanted to throw his hands up but at least Daryl could find some kind of humour in all of
this.

“You’re pretty accident prone, aren’t ya?

“More like looking for trouble.” Grumbled Rick to his brother and the teen.
“Hey, I like you to know that I don’t go looking for trouble. Trouble just usually finds me.” That statement earned him a few very unimpressed looks. *Well, it had been worth a try.*

“Do they still have power?” Harry asked Noah

“Yes, for the most important things. Why?”

“I know the pin for the back entrance, where the nurses used to smoke.” That earned him another round of disbelieving and bewildered stares. “It were a few really hot weeks and when I was there the head nurse and I got friendly with each other.”

“It also reminded him of one of Merles ‘friends’ who had been all to ready to make him drunk and to take his virginity when he was thirteen.

The encounter had left him shaken and with a sick feeling in his belly.

“ ‘We were drinking tea together’ Ok, Daryl hadn’t expected this…”

“What?”

“She was a big fan of Earl grey tea. The real stuff not that instant swirl you Americans call tea here. She said she enjoyed sharing with someone who could appreciate the good quality of correctly brewed cuppa. So she gave me the pin to the backdoor so I could visit her there.”

Daryl couldn’t hold back his snort at that, part relieve, part incredulous amusement, because that was the most British thing Harry had said since they met. His posh accent got even thicker when he said *cuppa.*

“Well, I think she was just tried of me being admitted with heatstroke and dehydration… but she was really nice about it. So it didn’t feel like pity or charity.” Harry admitted a bit embarrassed.

Daryl could relate to that, too. He had always reacted with verbal or physical violence in such cases. It was demeaning and he needed no charity. It just proved the bastards right who thought that he was just a dumb low life and a redneck. Not that the aggression helped either in proving them wrong… but at least they left him alone then.

“I want to come.”

*Yeah, hell… no!* Daryl didn’t want the frail teen anywhere near Atlanta.
“Naah… ’s too dangerous! Ya still can’t shoot a straight line.”

“You’re won’t be a help. You should stay back with Carl and Michonne. Help them with Judith.” Rick had pulled out his best father voice for that.

“No… it’s just a hunch but I think it’s necessary that I come with you. You’re taking Noah with you, too. He and I both know the area and the hospital best. I’m a lot better now. I’m fast and I’m good at going unnoticed. You’re going to need all the help you can get.”

It had been quite a discussion but in the end they had given in and Harry had been allowed to come.

++++ Flashback end+++++

Looking back the plan had worked surprisingly well… attracting officers with shots and Noah as bait.

Harry had stayed behind despite his protests. Daryl and to his absolute bafflement Noah had been the most vocal in their refuse to let him come with them.

And in the end it had been Noah who got him to stay behind by pointing out that if something went wrong with the plan and Noah got taken, hurt or killed… They would need Harry all the more and that it would be wiser not to endanger both of their guides at the same time and place.

It had left Harry waving the white flag and admitting defeat.

The group around Rick had come back with three kidnapped cops, Lamson, Shepherd and Licari. Nobody had gotten killed or seriously injured… well Daryl looked like he rolled in in the dirt, black smears all over him but otherwise ok.

They even got the cops to agree with the plan and their pledge to cooperate in the exchange for Beth and Carol. Lamson would be the one to talk to the woman in charge at the hospital.

It sounded perfect… and it had been too good to be true at the end of the day.

Bob Lamson had seen an opening with the grieving Sasha and had used that she had softened to him after hearing his name. He sold her a sob story about a walker being his former friend and wanting to deliver the poor man from his undead fate and when Sasha turned her back to the cop to shoot his supposed friend… The bastard had knocked her out and fled.
Rick hadn’t lost any time going after the man…

He came back. Alone. All bowlegged swagger and a tense face. Nobody needed to ask. Lamson was dead.

What surprised them all was the readiness of Shepherd and Licari to cover the murder of their comrade. They had obviously their own agenda against Dawn Lerner and they both wanted to avoid the whole ‘going-in-guns-blazing’ thing.

Harry couldn’t shake the feeling that Rick would have still preferred this direct Gryffindor approach over the exchange but the cops played their part well. They seemed earnest in their will to lie to their chief, earnest in their will to avoid bloodshed.

*

Noah and Harry had discussed the safest route to the hospital going unnoticed by the lookouts. They decided that Harry would lead the group to the back entrance because it was locked with a pin code that nobody knew any longer. Lerner hadn’t it watched as carefully as the front area.

Daryl and Rick observed Harry who led them through the streets.

The small teen was fast and knew exactly how to navigate around the area. At first Rick had wanted to protest against the dipsy-doodle way the kid made them walk until he realised that Harry was using shadows, plants, corners to hide them from curious eyes.

But the most incredible thing was how at times Harry would suddenly pause and made them wait. In two instances he even sent them back to where they came from. Rick could never tell what made Harry do this… and it seemed like no one else did either. The British teen would just freeze up and then usher them away to take another way.

Rick started to understand when they had hid yet again behind another corner… it was Daryl who pointed it out.

A distant patrol car that would have driven though the street Harry had just made them back off from. The car was at least a minute away… Harry couldn’t have seen it before but the cops would have caught them without a problem if they had gone that way…

Damn! Daryl looked as stunned as Rick felt.

When they reached the Grady they hadn’t seen another berry or more than one walker at times on the whole way.

For the first time since they met the British teen Rick started to understand how the kid had survived on his own…
“I’m fast… good at running and hiding…” Yeah, he could see it now. The kid had incredible instincts.

The officers Shepherd and Licari had been confused why they were going for the back entrance, telling them that the door was locked with a pin nobody knew…

Jaws had dropped when Harry had opened that door.

Noah led them from there through the hospital to an abandoned floor where Sasha and Daryl went into position, ready to intervene if Lieutenant Lerner decided to fire.

Rick took the radio off Licari and started the show:

“Lieutenant Dawn Lerner. I’m Rick Grimes. I was a deputy in the king county sheriff’s department. I’m here to make a proposal.”

There was a pregnant pause and then the other line came to life.

“Lieutenant Dawn Lerner speaking. What kind of proposal? And where the hell are you?” A woman answered her voice sharp and strict.

“You have two of my people. I have two of yours. We want to make an exchange. Then we’ll be on our way. No one gets hurt. We’re already in the hospital”

A sharp inhale and a hissing exhale. She was fighting for control.

“Who?”

“Officers Shepherd and Lacari. For Beth and Carol. You picked up a woman yesterday, after your people hid her with a car.”

“Noah, he’s with you? Is it how you know?”

“Yeah, he is.”

“What about Lambson? And I want to talk to my officers.” Rick held the radio to the bound officers and nodded.

“Shepherd and Lacari here. Lambson was attacked by the dead before they got to us. They just want their people than they’ll leave…”

“Ok, where are you?”

“The abandoned floor by the back entrance, we’re waiting in the hall.”

***

Harry watched as four cops came slowly into the hall. The woman in the front was pretty with a stern face. Her strict hairstyle reminded him of his old head of house. A no-nonsense kind of woman.
Behind them where Carol in a wheelchair and a young blonde with a yellow shirt and a grey cardigan, Beth. With them was a male in a white coat, apparently the doctor Noah had talked about.

All movements were deliberate and careful Lerner and Rick had everyone holstering their weapons.

And then they exchanged the hostages one on one. First Carol then Beth. All in all it went well enough, despite that Harry unease rocketed up a notch… this wasn’t done yet. Daryl and Sasha came out of their hiding spots causing the Lieutenant to bristle at the obvious power play. Making it clear that who had kept the reins tight the whole time.

They were getting ready to leave. But Lerner wasn’t about to let them go, not when they just showed her one up. She needed to save face…

“Glad we could work things out. Now I just need Noah.”

_Oh bloody hell, Salazar be damned._ Harry closed his eyes… the pressure of the hunch prickled like a hundred needles over his skin.

“That wasn’t part of the deal” Rick’s hackles raised immediately. The man was ready to fight, teeth barred and his hand itching for his gun.

“Beth took his place now I need him back. Then you can leave.” Lerner wouldn’t back down.

_She needs to win this power play or she’ll lose her position with her people… She can’t give in and she won’t._

Noah knew this, too, causing him to make a reluctant step in her direction. Only to be held back by Daryl.

“Naah, he ain’t staying.”

“He is one of _mine_. You have no claim on him.” Harry inhaled sharply at her words.

This was getting way to close to the mind set he encountered with Len and it sickened him.

This woman was no better than the Claimers had been. She gave herself and her people an air of supposed civilisation but in the end they were the same.

Thinking they were entitled to take whatever and whoever they wanted for their own gain be it pleasure or power.

That they just needed to say “claim” and it was theirs. In some way he thought that Dawn Lerner was even worse than the Claimers, at least the bastards had been honest about being bastards, hadn’t tried to masquerade their shit behind some farce of a greater good.
“The boy wants to go home so you have no claim on him.” Rick growled.

“You took him without asking that makes you a kidnapper in the best case and a slaver in the worst! You’re ready to take away his freedom for your own benefit while having the gall to sell it as some greater good. You’re just afraid that you’re going to lose your position. He’s a human being! No one has a freaking claim on anybody!”

Harry couldn’t keep himself from hissing at her, too.

She looked like Harry had slabbed her. Lerner’s face had paled drastically and her expression looked pinched.

“Then you don’t have a deal.” She spoke in barely controlled anger.

Noah didn’t know what to do. He obviously didn’t what to cause trouble for them but Rick cut him off when tried again to go back to Dawn.

“The deal is done!” The former sheriff looked close to snapping. The whole thing was about to boil over.

“No. It’s ok!” Noah gave Rick his gun back. Beside Harry Beth was whispering “It’s not! It’s not ok.”

Something is going to happen… Something will happen any minute now. The pressure of foreboding in the back of Harry’s head grew by the second making his teeth hurt. The sensation of pins and needles on his skin began to change into aching sensations all over his body. Harry could feel his magic moving under his skin and increasing weight on his chest that spoke of the binding working against it.

Watching as Beth went to hug the dark skinned boy good bye, he knew it would be about her…

She’s planning something… the way she’s looking at Lerner… Harry didn’t listen to what the blond was saying just taking in her body language looking for a cue what the bloody hell was going on.

Tense. Ready. But for wha…?!

Shite! Shite! Bloody fucking…

Harry had started moving before he knew it himself, rushing past Daryl and Rick.

Right when Beth rammed something silver into Lerner chest, Harry grabbed her shoulders and kicked the girl’s feet out from under her.

Knocking the girl and the woman in front of them, who had pulled her gun in reflex, out of balance.
A shot rang through the narrow hall!

It missed the blond girl by a hair while Harry dragged her to the ground with him. They crashed to the floor with a heavy thump. The force of the fall with the girl’s added weight on top took Harry’s breath away for a moment. Harry could swear that he heard one or two of his already injured ribs break and his head throbbed with pain where it had met the floor quite forcefully. The pain lacing through his chest made him whimper and he could feel the punishing effect of the seal.

There was deadly silence on the floor.

Dawn looked shocked from the little scissor in her vest to the gun in her hand to Beth on the floor. She had nearly shot Beth… Had missed only by a hair. The sound of two guns chocking had her looking up at Rick and Daryl.

“Lower your gun! Or I will kill you.” The former deputy sheriff growled.

Every gun in the room was now ready to fire.

“No, hold your fire! It’s over! Dawn, it’s over! You’re done. It was just about her. Stand down.” Shepherd intervened holding her comrades back.

They listened.

Dawn Lerner had lost her backing… She was really done, and all fight left the stern woman, tears pooling in her eyes.

“I didn’t mean to… it happened in reflex… I…” She stuttered wide eyed, shaking her head again and again.

Beth noticed something tugging at her sleeve and looking down she was met with a pair of brilliant green eyes and a British accent.

“Oh my gosh, I’m so sorry! Of course!” Scrambling of the boy she saw how small and slight he was. He didn’t seem much older than Carl.
Groaning he rolled himself on his knees, holding his ribcage in pain and his breath came in unhealthy pants.

Although his shortage on air didn’t stop him from berating her.

“That… was one… of the stupidest stunts I ever saw… What were you trying to accomplish? I mean besides getting shot I mean?”

Daryl came over to him pulling him carefully to his feet, and took his condition in with a frown.

“Ya alrigh…?” The gruff hunter got interrupted.

“Harry?! Harry, is that you?” Daryl glared at the Doc that now pushed through the police men and women.

“Huh…?” Squinting at the approaching male Harry thought he might recognize the voice and stature.

“Dr. Edwards?! You’re still here?”

**

“My god, Harry! You’re alive! I thought you died!” The Doc seemed to be nearly crying, hovering much too close to the teen for Daryl’s liking. The bespectacled man didn’t seem to be aware of the glowering frown that was directed at him and started to inspect Harry.

“You don’t look good. Let me check you over!”

“Ah… no, I rather not. I have no intention to be trapped here. Sorry!” Harry didn’t even want to consider something that might force him to stay in this Merlin forsaken place. He had been robbed of his freedom two times already and he refused to give it up a third time.

“I don’t intent for you to pay back anything.” That was met with a lot of raised eyebrows.

“Wait now Dr. Edwards, that’s not how it works here.” Lerner tried to intervene.

“Everything he’ll owe I will take on my own debt. He was my patient before. He falls in a category for provisions made to safeguard existing standards.” The doctor firmly replied.

Lerner scowled heavily but Shepherd nodded her permission. Leadership had apparently already switched.

Although the man had treated him before Harry didn’t know if he felt comfortable to expose himself before the Doctor. His scepticism must have been apparent because he suddenly felt Daryl’s reassuring presence more firmly behind him.

“He ain’t going alone with ya anywhere.”
Harry knew why Edwards wanted to check him over and why he had been sure that Harry hadn’t made it in the apocalypse. The doctor had treated him every time he had been brought in during the three weeks he had spent in Atlanta with his relatives.

The doctor had been extremely worried about Harry’s health. Too small for his age. Too thin and frail, even back then when he had few stones more on him.

But there had been other things that had troubled Edwards.

There had been signs of an underlying illness… high inflammatory markers, liver and kidney blood levels going off the chart, fainting spells, beginning neurological problems.

Signs of a body shutting down slowly but surely.

But no explanation as to why. They hadn’t found anything in the tests… No cause meant, no treatment options.

Not that there had been any real treatment options for a foreign teenager who was obviously abused and neglected by his guardians.

“Ok… but I’d like Daryl to come with me.”

There was no denying that the silent hunter made an impressive bodyguard. Scowling menacingly every time the doctor came too close or Harry gave any kind of indication that he felt uneasy.

**

Edwards was beyond shocked when he saw the extent of Harry’s health issues. He carefully prodded at protruding bones and a discoloured ribcage, confirming what Harry had feared… two ribs were broken. The treatment was easy enough with a stabilising dressing and some pain medication.

The wasteland that Harry’s back was had the seasoned man cursing up a storm and glaring at Daryl.

“Is this what you do to your people? Is this the reason you couldn’t leave me alone with Harry?”

Harry didn’t need to look at Daryl to know the man was bristling at the insinuation and decided that he needed to reveal at least some of his story to the doctor before the hunter resorted to any kind of violence.

Harry made a careful gesture towards the hunter as if to lay a calming hand on Daryl’s arm, stopping just short of making real skin contact. It got him the man’s attention and Harry gave Daryl a soft smile. He never retracted his hand, letting it hover above Daryl’s skin never quite touching but giving a form of soothing comfort.
“No! Daryl saved me from the men who did this and more to me. They claimed me as… as a means to their pleasure.”

Dr. Edwards paled significantly. He dropped his head into his hands.

“How long were you with them?”

“Maybe nine months… These people outside, they save my life. They saved me.”

It took a few minutes and a shared big glass of bourbon between the three of them before Edwards gathered himself enough to keep going.

Treating the last slightly infected wounds on Harry’s back and checking his general health.

Daryl carefully looked away from the teen when Edwards looked over the teen’s private parts and discussed the possibility of having caught any sexual transmitted diseases in the months of his capture. Shit!

When he dared to look at the frail Brit again, the boy was deadly pale and sick looking. Shaking like a fucking leaf in the wind.

“You should think about staying here Harry. It’s a wonder you survived this long… You’ve been sickly since before the outbreak. We could take care of you here.” Edwards implored to the raven haired child.

“He’s that bad?” Harry had gotten to know the gruff hunter well enough to detect the underlying worry in his brash snapping way of addressing the other man.

“Harry’s health could only be described as very fragile… Medically speaking he should stay here. It’s his best option. We’re surviving here. It’s better than out there.”

Harry’s heart dropped when we saw how Daryl’s defensive scowl changed into something softer… uncertainty. He could practically see the wheels turning in the man’s head.

He’s really considering to leave me here.

Harry wanted to cry.

“No! I will not stay here!” Both men flinched at the teen’s loud and clearly desperate exclamation.

Daryl couldn’t look away from those big green eyes that shone with absolute distress when the teen addressed him.

“Daryl, I promised you and Rick that I wouldn’t endanger you or slow you down. I made the deal with Abraham.”
It’s ok… if you don’t want me to come with you any more, knowing that I’m ailing. But you don’t get to decide if I stay here. So don’t you dare to push me off to these people.

I’m not going to stay here either way.”

Taking a deep breath and gathering all his determination not fall prey to yet another slaving system, Harry spoke firmly to the two men in front of him. He knew that both meant well but…

“I’d rather die on my own terms alone and out there than live under force and without my freedom. I’ve had enough of people claiming me and my life.

Never again!

And you Dr Edwards. You weren’t able to improve my condition before when you had all the means… you didn’t even know what caused me to get sick in the first place. You said so yourself back then. And we both know there’s nothing you can do now that would make a real difference with my condition. Not really. All you could do here is monitoring my health.”

It was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Daryl and the doctor seemed to be deeply affected by the teen’s words. Neither talking back to him.

The check-up end with Edwards giving Harry some more antibiotics for the inflammations and in case he had indeed contacted any kind of STD from his rapists and strict instructions to eat more

The atmosphere between Harry and Daryl was awkward afterwards. The hunter was once more biting on his thumb nail and avoiding eye contact.

“Ya really sure? Ya ain’t staying here?”

“No, I won’t… can’t. I meant what I said. But don’t worry. You’re not obligated to take me with you.”

“That’s not it…” Daryl seemed a bit alarmed.

“Talk with Rick and the others. Let them decide if they still want to come along.”
I apologize before hand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

Chapter 10

Rick watched in concern as Daryl escorted an obviously hurt Harry into the doctor’s office.

His brain was still reeling from the things that happened just a few minutes ago…

The exchanged had worked well enough but they had forgotten about Noah… They all had made a mistake in that point, hadn’t seen the huge gap in their well thought out plan.

And then Beth had taken action… in the worst and most reckless kind of way.

Attacking Lerner like that…

Damn it, attacking any combat trained person like that and not even going for the kill right away. That had been a fucking dumb move.

And it had nearly costed her life.

He still couldn’t believe how fast Harry had reacted…

Nobody had seen that coming… Nobody could have seen this coming. Nobody of them had been able to even move a fucking finger before it had been too late… much too late.

There had been no ill intent there, Lerner’s reaction had been pure reflex. Rick had seen her expression she hadn’t wanted to shoot at Beth. The Lieutenant had been as shocked as them.

Harry had moved fast and without any outside prompting… like he knew what would be happening… But how?! How could Harry have known when not even Lerner had known that she would make that shot?!

Rick had always been a down to earth kind of man. He had laughed at people believing in esoteric stuff and mysterious forebodings. But hell! How else…
His only consolation lay in the perplexed and rattled faces of his friends and family.

The sound of a big car coming to a halt in front of the hospital and heavy footsteps ripped him out of his musing and had all of them alert.

Looking out of the window he noticed a familiar red head with a walrus moustache.

Abraham was back!

*****

Eugene had lied to them all. He hadn’t worked in the human genome project. He had never been a scientist. There was no cure!

Disappointment cursed through them all, but it dimed in the light of their reunion.

Rick was happy to see Carl and Judi whole and well. And they all rejoiced at how Beth and Maggie fell into each other’s arms holding on for dear life and crying in relief and grief.

It made them all even more aware that Herschel was gone… gone for ever. The two farm girls had lost their father and their group had lost a wise man that had guided and supported them in rough times. To Rick he had become a moral compass in moments were it would have been all too easy to drift off the path and end up like all these groups they had encountered… Broken souls and hearts.

They had lost so much in the fall of the prison that they would never get back. It wasn’t just material things or people but parts of themselves, their hopes and dreams of a secure place, of a community and of a life that might resemble the time before… Now it all lay on ground rotting between walking corpses.

In the meantime Daryl had come back to them while Harry rested on an old chair looking pale and drawn… Dark circles under his eyes spoke of a deep exhaustion. The sight pulled Rick out of his morbid thoughts.

“How is he?” He asked his brother.

“Ribs are messed up pretty bad. He’s been sickly since befor’. Doc said it’d be better if he stayed…” Daryl looked worried as he mumbled his nearly inaudible answer to Rick. The eyes glued to the floor.
“That bad, huh? I mean he kept up until now…” Rick was simultaneously surprised and then not. There had been times Harry’s condition had appeared to be very bad but back then they had tied it to the abuse Harry had suffered until now.

Daryl threw him a heavy look that said so much about the man’s worry for the teen, showed his uncertainty in the matter. He had already brought his thumb to his mouth biting on the skin around the nail.

“Rick, Harry refuse’… Told us straigh’ he’d rather die alon’ outside than ta sacrific’ ‘s freedom again. He ain’t stayin’ her’… If we don’t…”

“Shite!”

The implications were clear. Damn, Harry had been clear what he would do if they decided that they were sick of him…

“Wanted me ta ask ya if yer still want him ta come with us. With how sick he is?”

The other’s had come closer listening to Daryl’s words.

“We’re not leaving the boy behind that saved my sister!” came Maggie’s resolute voice from behind. The brunette woman held her sister close to her in a one-armed hug, glaring at the leader of their group.

Rick swallowed the older farmer’s daughter had grown into a woman that you didn’t want to mess with. Beth, nodding along with her sister, was sening him a pleading look that was just as compelling.

Tyreese backing the sisters up immediately.

“She’s right, Rick! And he has proven himself out there. He lead us through the city… You saw what he could do. That was amazing!” Shaking his head again in wonder the big man turned to the newcomers. “The little kid navigated us through the streets like he knew what would be around the next two corners. We’ve never seen more walkers than one at time.”

“And he was the only one to even notice that something was wrong when Beth hugged Noah. If he didn’t intervene… Lerner would have shot Beth!” Carol confirmed again.

“Everyone calm down! I’ve no intention to leave him behind. We owe him that.”

Catching Abrahams gaze he saw understanding there. They wouldn’t leave the boy behind to fend for himself or… to kill himself.
When they got ready to leave Harry seemed be almost dropping with tiredness. The teen was uncoordinated, slightly swaying and visibly in pain with the way he was holding himself. It had been heart wrenching to see his surprise when Daryl had collected him and told him to get in the car. He had hesitantly searched in Rick’s face as if to ask why they would burden themselves with him.

Rick couldn’t help the frustrated sigh that escaped him when the kid only relaxed when he saw Abraham was back with them...

*He thinks the deal between them is back on…that Abe will make sure that he won’t be a burden to us.* Rick was not grinding his teeth… no, he wasn’t!

Dr. Edwards had come to the door with them and watched with a small grin how Daryl ushered the small Brit into the bloody and beaten up fire car to get him settled.

“He said he was your patient before?!” Rick asked the bespectacled man.

“Yes, and a memorable one at that. He stayed in Atlanta for only three weeks but got admitted five times in the first two weeks.”

++++Flashback++++

“Dr. Edwards, to the ER. Dr. Edwards, please.”

Steven Edwards rushed swiftly to the pit where a pair of paramedics had brought in a small unconscious teenager.

“What have you got me?” Already checking the vital signs of the young patient. The boy was small, maybe 14 and really thin. He had a mob of unruly black hair that was partly plastered to his sweaty skin and for a boy he had striking features, not to say pretty…

“John Doe, male in his teens, worried passers-by found him collapsed in the midday sun… We think it’s a heatstroke and dehydration.”

That wouldn’t be anything unusual about it. Georgian summer could be extremely hot and especially children and older people could get circulatory problems.

“Ok, a blood sample. And hook him to an IV with fluids.” He ordered a close by nurse.

Soft groaning alerted the doctor that his patient regained consciousness.

“Hey, there can you hear me?”

“Uhm…hmmhmm…” A pair of luminescent green eyes resurfaced behind pale eyelids and thick
black lashes.

“What’s your name kid?”

“Harry. Harry Potter, sir.” The kid whispered hoarsely in a… British accent?!

“You’re British?” Steve was surprised… not about the heatstroke. Tourists from the northern European countries were often not used to the heat here in the south but where the hell, were the kid’s parents?

“Yeah….Where am I?” The boy seemed still disoriented, blinking rapidly to clear his vision.

“Grady Memorial Hospital. You collapsed and worried citizens call an ambulance.”

“Bloody hell!” the kid groaned cursing, sitting up abruptly. “I need to go!” Edwards immediately pushed his patient back down.

“Hold your horses, for a moment! Would I be correct in assuming that you’re still a minor? You can’t be older than 14…”

A tired sigh left the kids mouth. “I’m 15… You’re going to do this by the book, aren’t you?” A questioning raised eyebrow was his answer. Another mumbled curse was uttered.

“You’re not letting me go until you notified my guardians…?” Harry clarified in a deadpan voice.

“Yes, that’s the protocol! And because I like my job, I will stick to it!” the doctor firmly declared, watching as Harry let himself fall back into his pillow with a frustrated huff.

“Now, if you could give me your guardian’s mobile number, I will contact them. They must be concerned about your whereabouts…” An amused snort interrupted him. The boy looked at him in mixture of resignation and… pity. The ironic twist around the corners of Harry’s mouth clearly told him that the boy thought him to be a clueless idiot.

“I don’t have their mobile number and I don’t have a cell myself. They thought it would be a waste of good money.”

Ok, Steve hadn’t expected that… who in the world didn’t have a mobile these days and what kind of parent didn’t leave their number with their kid when they were in a foreign country.

“Well, do you know where they are?”

“No, they didn’t say, sorry…” Oh, great a shrug! He hated teenagers!

“You could save us both the trouble and just let me leave…” If those green eyes hadn’t sparkled in sly mischief the air of innocent might have worked better.

“Yeah, well…good try but that’s not happening! Where are you staying? Maybe the hotel can help.” Edwards just wasn’t ready to give in yet.

Defeated Harry closed his eyes and flopped back into the pillows. Surprisingly the teen gave then
the address of a 4-star-hotel close to the hospital and the name of his guardians. At First Edwards
thought he was getting played again but the hotel confirmed that Harry and his guardians were
indeed living there. Something the doctor hadn’t expected when he looked at the too big and worn
clothes the boy wore.

What had followed had been as frustrating as it was had been worrying. The hotel was trying to be
helpful but couldn’t get a hold of the boy’s family but promised to inform the Dursleys as soon as
possible.

And then… nothing happened…

Their social worker couldn’t do anything because Harry wasn’t an American citizen.

Nobody came!

The afternoon passed and Harry had finished his IV, had eaten and charmed all his nurses with his
soft politeness and a pretty dry British wit.

A lot of the kid’s blood levels were alarmingly increased, but he would need the explicit
permission of a guardian for further tests … and the accountant department would skin him alive if
he didn’t check the kid’s insurance status first…It was a mess!

By the evening the bored teen had left his bed and had started to help the head nurse and was
drinking earl grey tea with her…

It was getting ridiculous! What worried Steve was the total nonchalance Harry displayed with his
guardians non-attendance.

Something that had changed abruptly around 11 pm, when a large, obese man with a walrus
moustache barged into the ER, barking at his nurses and his interns, where the hell he could find
his good for nothing nephew.

Harry had gone very silent and tense then…

What followed had been extremely unpleasant, the big man had looked murderous when he got
presented with a small bill (his British health insurance covered all most all of the costs) and then
dragged the kid by the arm out of the hospital…

When Edwards had dared to mention the increased blood values the man had nearly bitten his head
off, telling him in no unclear words to mind his own business.

The doctor had thought that he had seen the last of the boy.

Until two days later the paramedics brought him in again… he had fainted again overheated,
dehydrated and with a new bruise.

_Fuck!_

Harry had asked him again not to contact his uncle. And Steve stuck by the rules again…

At 10 pm Mr. Dursley rolled in the ER snarling at his nephew and everyone else in the hospital roughly shoving the skinny teenager out of the door.

This pattern continued two more times before his head nurse told him very frankly that all his nurses would strike if dared to call the boy’s dreadful uncle again!

After that he had been hospitalized only one more time because he had helped an old lady who had been in the process of getting robbed. In the end Harry had come out of the scrimmaged with small concussion and a nasty cut on his left forearm while the woman had scared the robber away with a .44 Magnum.

The elderly woman had thanked a wide eyed Harry with a bonbon and a pat to the head calling him “Honey”. It had been sweet.

After that his nurses adopted the kid and had given him the pin for the back door where they would smoke and invited him to come for a cup of tea when he was bored or in trouble.

The doctor had tried to keep track of Harry’s symptoms and his blood levels were still worrisome, especially when there was no clear cause…

+++++Flashback end+++++

“He’s sick, probably seriously ill… maybe even terminal. I ever found the cause and his uncle didn’t allow any further diagnosing. But Harry manged to come this far despite everything, so who knows…” Steve revealed with a bitter smile.

“What do we need to know about his condition?” The former deputy asked concern lacing his voice.

Edwards sighed in resignation. “As much as it pains me Harry was right there’s not a lot I or probably any one could have do for him now, here or anywhere… We’re missing the necessary means to diagnose him. So that means no real idea how to treat him besides a stable environment. I gave him some medication for the road which should help somewhat. Try to get him to eat as much as possible and to make him rest, so he doesn’t overexert himself too much.

I know him… that will be difficult enough.” A wry grin pulled at the doctor’s lips as he held out his hand to Rick.

“Thanks!” A rough hand clasped his.
They had decided to bring back Noah to his family in Richmond and the price had been high. Harry had stayed back with Carol and Daryl still pretty much out of it because of the pain medication. The grey haired woman was in an even worse condition after her car accident and her close brush with death. Only Beth’s intervention had saved her life back in the hospital.

So Rick, Michonne, Glenn and Tyreese had gone with Noah and Beth to look at the community. They wanted to be careful in case the habitants weren’t as friendly as Noah remembered them to be. And Noah hadn’t seen his home and family for a long time there was always a possibility that this safe heaven was gone… like the prison.

The truth had been so much more… Richmond had fallen. Its habitants slaughtered and left to turn.

When they came back Tyreese was dead… he had been bitten by one of Noah’s turned twin brothers. The try to amputate his right arm had been too late and the infection had been too far gone.

They had buried the soft hearted man under Sasha’s stoic closed off gaze. She hadn’t cried but that made it somehow even worse to watch. It reminded Harry off his own mind- crippling grief he still felt sometimes over the loss of Sirius and Remus.

After that they decided to move on. Eugene had lied to them about being a scientist and the cure but his reason why he wanted to go to D.C. had been sound.

So they hit the road.

Life on the road was much harder than they had expected. They all had spent longer periods on the road before. But that had been shortly after the world had been in shambles back than scavenging had been easier… But now after one and a half year they were running out of supplies and fuel fast and replacements were very hard to find. They had changed cars and scavenged if they could but opportunities had gotten more and more sparse as they moved on.

The harsh heat of an early spring wasn’t kind to them either, burning and parching them.

Harry scouted a lot with Daryl. Both of them content without the need to talk constantly, mostly communicating with small gestures and over shared gazes. Together they searched areas around the roads, they travelled on, looking for food, water, fuel or safe places to spend the night. All the while Daryl patiently taught him how to track and how to lay snares. The grumpy man was
sometimes quiet short with him only answering in huffs, grumbles and little hums but never uncomfortably so… Harry liked spending time with him.

In the beginning he had been more firm in his promise not to slow them down. He had braved through a lot of days when the walking got too much, when everything hurt so much that he could barely see or breathe anymore. He had managed to endure, to grit his teeth and to keep up with everyone but as soon as they had stopped for the evenings he had collapsed into deep unconsciousness more than once.

After a frank telling off from Carol and Michonne that had left him with a healthy amount of respect and a tiny bit of fear from the these fierce women he had caved into accepting their help a little more.

Whatever Edwards had told them they were all trying to look out for him… Carol, Rick, Michonne and Beth were always on his case to eat more and to make him rest if they didn’t like the extent of his exhaustion.

Harry knew what they were doing and it didn’t sit right with him that they were so focused on caring for him. It made him uncomfortable and… itchy. Because it felt like he wasn’t contributing enough and… he had been raised under the premise that he had to work for any kind of ‘care’. That nothing good in life came for free.

His already futile protests had soon been nipped in the bud and his breaks got covered as babysitting duty to Judith.

And what could you say when someone put a cute blonde, blue eyed baby in your lap… so he had let these mother hens flutter around him and grudgingly had learned to put up with it.

All a long pointedly ignoring Carol’s and Beth’s self-satisfied grins…

The toll their travels had on his health had been still heavy after that but a little less extensive…

When Harry wasn’t scouting with Daryl he had taken to tagging along with Maggie and Glenn. The British teen enjoyed the dynamic between the strong young couple. Glenn was funny and tried to be respectful of Harry’s need for personal space at times, making sure to alert the teen before touching him. Maggie was tough to the core. And most importantly they were so obviously in love with each other. Harry couldn’t help himself sometimes when he watched their interactions he wondered if maybe Lilly and James Potter had been equally madly in love with each other. This question left him always with a bitter sweet melancholy.

Glenn and Maggie Rhee were both seasoned veterans in the apocalypse and taught Harry how to handle walkers and oversaw some of his training with knifes.

Guns were still out of question since nobody wanted to waste ammo on his dreadful aim.

And surprisingly Glenn had incredible fun in testing Harry’s hunches whenever they went scavenging, asking him for directions and places that would be worth looking into
After pointing out a loose floor board in a shop where they found baby formula and a few bottles of much needed water, Glenn had been really impressed. The young Korean had turned it into a game. It was nice to see him so happy and giddy. The young adult then turned into an overgrown nerdy child with big eyes sparkling in excited wonder. So Maggie and Harry had started to play along with it, sharing amused and fond glances over her husband’s behaviour.

Now standing in front of a line of abandoned cars Harry pointed a few that might be worth looking into very choice a hit.

“You my young friend are a freaking Jedi!” Glenn cried out in excitement, eyes glinting in mirth.

“Uhmm… Did your husband just insult me?” Harry looked to Maggie for help who only rolled her eyes in fond exasperation at her other half’s geekiness.

“No! That’s a Star War thing.” She told him as if that explained everything… Which it totally didn’t! At least not for Harry. He cluelessness must have shown on his face because Glenn gapped at the teen in disbelief.

“You don’t know Star Wars???” There was pure appal in Glenn’s voice.

“Uhm… No? Well, I know about Star Wars… a bit? The Dursleys didn’t allow me to watch movies with them but I know Duddley was a fan.” Harry mussed a little lost in his own thoughts, not noticing the look the couple exchanged at the reminder about Harry’s less than stellar home life.

“So being a Jedi is a good thing?” Harry could help but ask in a slightly insecure voice.

He could see Glenn’s facing softening and with a reassuring smile the young man tousled his wild raven hair.

“Yeah being a Jedi is a really good thing.”

It was a warm and fuzzy feeling that filled Harry from head to toe. He had always craved acknowledgement, craved people who accepted him for who he was and had always wished for a place where could belong.

At the same time the unfamiliar feeling left him embarrassed, shyly flushing and ducking his head out from Glenn’s hand trying to push his hair down.

Then Harry’s gaze was caught by another car… uneasy shivers ran down his back.

There was something… not good… but… something he should see… no… something that needed to be done.

Harry gingerly tapped on Maggie’s arm to get her intention pointing to the black dusty car a few feet away from them.

“This one too? You think there’s something good in it?” Glenn asked in excitement already bouncing over in the direction.
“No…I don’t believe it will be something good per say… but something that needs to be done?!?” Harry mumbled, causing Maggie and Glenn to look at him in surprise. But they didn’t doubt him.

Glenn went first, carefully positioning himself between the car and his companions.

“The trunk…” Harry whispered, watching how Glenn wrenched the trunk open, only to reel back with a curse.

Inside was a walker. It had been a woman. She was bound and gagged, snarling in hunger her rotting jaws snapped at them. The bindings had rubbed her wrists raw.

*She died in there. Alone. She died bound and gagged in a fucking trunk. Afraid.* Harry paled at the sight reminding him that of his own captures…

He felt his breath coming in short uneven bursts while white and black dots danced before his eyes. He pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes trying to block out the memories flooding him…

“Harry, breathe! Come on, hush sweetheart. We have you. Glenn took care of her. Shhh.”

Maggie had pulled him in a close hug, tenderly rocking his shivering body. Harry tried to cling to her voice, following her instructions to breathe in and out.

Slowly gaining his grasp on the present back.

Harry forced himself to open his eyes again and to look around falling back to his mantra.

“They are dead. They can’t get to me anymore. Rick, Michonne and Daryl killed them all. It’s been 41 days since I’ve been last raped. I’m safe!”

In a snails tempo he came out of his panic, drenched in cold sweat and utterly exhausted.

“Come on. Let’s get you back to the others!” Glenn pushed gingerly Harry’s hair back checking the little Brits state and waited for Harry to give a tried nod. Then the couple pulled him onto shaky legs.

The way back was spent in silence between the three. The simple task of setting one foot before the other grounded Harry a little further.

As soon as they reached their camping spot Glenn guided the slight teen to the ground exchanging heavy looks with a worried Beth. Harry still looked quite far away…

The blonde girl immediately handed Judith over to Harry causing the raven haired boy to blink in surprise at the added weight.

“Hello pumpkin! How are you?” He playfully tucked at one faire little curl. It earned him a brilliant smile and soft cooing sounds the baby. The small girl babbled to him like she was telling
him about her day. He listened to her and encouraged her with soft humming noises, settling her comfortably against his knees.

Handling the sweet little one eased something in him. It was like he had been wound too tight after discovering the female walker and now his intestines slowly uncurled themselves. Glenn had finally released her from her unworthy fate. She had suffered enough and now she was free to move on and rest in peace.

Notwithstanding his physical exhaustion and weakness Harry felt a soothing tranquillity settle in his bones. Something he hadn’t felt since Hogwarts… Hope!

I’m free, too. I’m safe now. I want to see how far these people will come. I want to live another day.

When Daryl came back Harry had taken to lowly singing to the baby girl.

“Sometimes, I feel the fear of uncertainty stinging clear
And I can’t help but ask myself how much I’ll let the fear
Take the wheel and steer

It’s driven me before
And it seems to have a vague, haunting mass appeal
But lately I am beginning to find
That I should be the one behind the wheel

Whatever tomorrow brings
I’ll be there with open arms and open eyes

Whatever tomorrow brings
I’ll be there, I’ll be there…”

Daryl liked it when Harry or Beth would sing. There had been a time when Beth’s singing had
irritated him but now it felt calming. And Harry’s deeper voice covered them all like a fluffy comfort-blanket.

He had heard the song before that the young teen had chosen as little asskicker’s lullaby for the night but never like that. It spoke to all of them, echoed all of their fears and their determination to move on.

Their hope, that there would be a tomorrow…

**

Every one settled for the night.

Despite the searing heat in days the nights got uncomfortably cold, so they started taken to seek comfort and warmth in closeness sharing much needed body heat… because whatever Tara said Daryl refused to call it fucking snuggling! Just no, he was a grown ass man! And he didn’t snuggle. Point!

But damn, watching them all settling for the night on the forest floor he couldn’t help but remember the how he and Merle had played with Mrs. Masons small whelps when he had been a small kid. He had laughed at the little puppy’s crawling all over the place as soon as their mother had shaken them of her teat. Little buggers that still hadn’t opened their eyes, helpless whimpering, searching until they found each other in one cute puppy pile. Snuggling for warmth and comfort, waiting for their mother to come back to them.

They had established an unspoken order how they would sleep at night with the youngest ones in the middle of their pile. Carl curling protectively around his sister then Noah and Beth would follow on either side. Eugene and the women would drape themselves around them. They avoided taking Harry in the middle because the enclosed feeling led to intense night terrors and panic attacks.

Those attacks had burned themselves into their memories and had left them all teary eyed or with clenched teeth.

Even shaken with fear and terror Harry never cried out loud…

No.

Shaking, trembling, hands clenched so tight around his arms that his nails bruised his skin, teeth digging into his lips until they bleed....

Eyes wide open but unseeing, big tears running down his dirty cheeks, ragged muffled breaths only thing audible.

A child used to swallow his emotions until they impended to suffocate him.
It reminded Daryl how he used to lay on his stomach. His back torn open, crying as quite as possible into his rancid mattress afraid that his father would come back and punish him again if he was too loud.

In the end it had taken Carol and Daryl to calm Harry down. They had started to take the distraught kid between the two of them at night. Carol in front of him Daryl protecting the kid’s back and together with Rick, Glenn and Abraham he made the outer ring of their puppy pile complete.

Daryl was always a little bit awed when Harry would relax as soon as Daryl settled behind him. Somehow the frail and sickly teen had come to trust him so much, that Daryl… scruffy, dirty, rough, Redneck trash Daryl Dixon… had become this abused boy’s safe haven.

It felt humbling and frightening at once.

I don’t want to fail him. Jesus, damn! Please, don’t let me fail him, too.

********

Carl was a curious little shit!

And he sure as hell hadn’t the inhibitions to dance around his questions about Harry’s past like all the adults. And it drove Rick nearly up the wall.

The boy with the sheriff’s hat asked things totally unfiltered and it had thrown Harry a few times. Rick and Michonne had berated the blue eyed boy for that a few times but to their surprise Harry seemed to get better about it. As time passed he had gotten less panic attacks and in rare occasions had even taken to answering in that typical shy way of his, as if he was still unsure if they really cared.

“How did you get your tattoos?” The question had sounded innocent enough but for Harry it meant a stifling amount of painful memories.

The green eyed boy stopped walking for a moment drawing a much needed breath to centre himself.

Carl noticed that he had lost Harry and looked back with a worried frown.

“Are you alright? You… you don’t need to…”
“No. It’s… It’s ok. I have to face it somehow. They’re on my skin so there’s no sense in running away from it…” Harry shook his head to velar his head. “I got them when I was 14 not too long before I’ve come to America.” Rick observed how emotions ran in quick succession over Harry’s face.

The expression of the green eyed teen was pinched and his posture hunched, a boy weighted down by the world. The little Brit struggled visibly with himself.

“The Claimers… They weren’t the first to hurt me like that.” He finally confessed quietly his cheeks flushed red in shame and discomfort. He seemed even smaller than before.

Rick felt like the air just got thinner.

What the fuck?! Had the abuse at Harry’s home entailed more than he had told them?

Carol and Glenn who walked beside him scowled both darkly at the street. Harry was such a sweet kid and none of this was fair!

“I… I got in trouble with the group that killed my parents. I made a mistake… and they got to me and… and a friend.” Here Harry faltered. He opened and closed his mouth a few times but no words left him. There was an anguish in his eyes that needed no words.

“He… they had no need for him… He was a spare to them. Everything happened so fast.”

Fuck! Survivor’s guilt at its best. Harry had known pain and loss long before we had to face the end of the world.

Retelling these thing appeared to be nearly physical painful for Harry. “He died with the look of disbelieving surprise still on his face…”

“That’s not on you!” Rick said gruffly.

“It feels like it… it all felt like it was on me!” The former sheriff felt rattled with the boy’s despair and guilt. Carl had gone pale and still.

“It was not just Cedric… My… my godfathers came for me. They got caught in the crossfire. They died trying to safe me. Died to get me out. They were brave and strong men capable fighters… but they were killed nonetheless. They died and I lived.”

“That’s how you lose valuable people for useless ones! This is how lose cable fighters for the worthless ones! That’s how good people die!”

“Oh kid! That’s not your fault either.” Carol pulled the boy into her arms not caring that they were both sweaty and dirty. Harry stiffened at first until he slowly relaxed into her hug.

“Is that why you don’t want us to risk anything for you?” The grey haired woman asked tenderly stroking over his hair and face.

“It’s just… It feels like enough people died for me. My parents, Cedric, my godfathers… I don’t want that anymore. I got the tattoos after that. They are a reminder. To what I lost and how useless
I have always been.”

“Oh hun! Then become stronger for them! So their sacrifices won’t be in vain.”

A lone tear fell from eerie green eyes.

*****

Harry was getting weaker. They all were.

They had spent months on the road now. They ran out of resources and supplies faster than expected.

Hadn’t made it as far as they hoped. The bits and pieces they found on Harry’s hunches and instincts kept them alive, together with Daryl’s hunting but their situation was… well it was shite!

Mostly because they had no water left! The heat had left the world around them parched. They all were marked by hunger and thirst. Their faces were sun burned and lined with exhaustion and dirt.

Damn, they had eaten dog! Harry had sent a silent apology to snuffles that night.

Though the group’s biggest worry hadn’t laid with Harry for a while but with little Judith. The baby had seemed weary, often grousing unhappy or crying pitifully. There had been times when Rick and Carl weren’t able to calm her down, and then only Beth or Harry rocking and singing to her could console the small girl.

And soon enough Judith had developed a light fever on top of everything. Harry had felt sympathy with the little poppet. He remembered how it had been when he had been burning up with fever and aunt Petunia had only thrown him into his cupboard barking at him to stay away from them. So he had slipped her his last antibiotics to alleviate some of the baby’s discomfort.

It had stabilized Judith’s condition immensely and had taken a huge load of their minds. Everyone’s relief had been palpable when one morning the tiny girl had been smiling gummily at Carl, babbling happily.

And while Judi was back to health, Harry’s condition had taken a turn for the worse again. As they all had lost weight Harry had never a lot reserve assets. He had gone back to fainting as soon as they stopped anywhere, sinking into a bone deep exhaustion every time. He had stubbornly refused Carol’s or Beth’s fussing over him. Instead he had taken to searching Abraham’s gaze trying to hold the man accountable to his promise.

And while Abraham hadn’t avoided his look he hadn’t acted on his promise either.

It assured Harry somewhat that maybe he wasn’t a too big burden on the group he had come to care
deeply about.

He respected Rick and Michonne for their leadership and their protectiveness to them all. He could relate to Carl’s seriousness and he just plainly loved Judith.

He adored Beth, Maggie, Noah and Glenn. They all were so kind and gentle but at the same time they knew how to fight, were ready to do it to survive and shelter their loved ones.

Carol was hardened steel and motherly warmth. A torn woman that wanted her family to live and was ready to burn the world for it. Harry felt with her.

The British teen marvelled at Eugene’s brilliant mind. The man reminded him a lot of Hermine and even a bit of her problems to connect to others in their first year… all awkward and know-it-all attitude.

Rosita and Tara were just ready to rock this new world, proving that they were nothing less than any men.

Abraham had managed to find the will to live on despite losing his purpose… Harry knew how hard that was, so he hoped that would stand to his word, even if the man had started to drink whiskey in the heat…

And Daryl, well, the brooding man was a special case. He had saved Harry in more way than one. The gruff hunter had made him hold onto life. He was the first to take care of Harry in a long time.

There were moments when Daryl would still snarl at the teen especially when he felt embarrassed or backed into a corner but Harry had learned to see past these instances. Harry saw how faithfully the man cared from them all. How he made sure to feed Judi, Carl and Harry first, how he made sure to protect them from harm even if he would get hurt in the process. The brotherly bond between him and Rick reminded him painfully of Ron and it was mesmerising how he and Carol knew each other on such a deep level that they needed no words to communicate.

He was such a gruff Hufflepuff.

Harry and Daryl had come to know each other’s boundaries, their shared need for personal space physically and emotionally. The British teen had always suspected that Daryl could relate to some of his abuse on a deeper level…

That foreboding had proven true when Daryl had accompanied him to a small well so that Harry could wash up a little, the silent hunter being the only one who he was even slightly comfortable with showing his body to.

Although Daryl had seen his back before there was always a tension in the older man when he got confronted with the ugly marks his captivity had left on Harry. Not just the boiling anger he had shown the first time but something deeper… A vulnerability that was altogether his own.

That day Harry had offered to watch out for walkers if Daryl wanted to refresh himself too. The
hunter had hesitated before he had taken his vest and shirt off, laying his own back bare before Harry’s eyes. Old gruesome scars and dancing demons told a story of a moved and violent past… and of another lost boy.

To Harry he had seemed like an wild animal ready to strike at any trespasser to his emotional territory, so Harry had stayed silent, giving the hunter the same accepting and understanding breathing room Daryl had granted to him on so many occasions. He didn’t pry. And it wasn’t necessary.

“Was ma dad. After ma mum was dead and ma brother had left.” Daryl grumbled after he had washed up. Only his bobbing Adam’s apple betrayed his inner turmoil as Daryl’s eyes were firmly fixed on the way in front of them.

“I’m sorry, Daryl.” The older man glanced shyly at him, slanted blue eyes flickered with insecurity.

“Nobody deserves to be hurt like this.”

_We didn’t deserve to be treated like this._

Green eyes tried to convey this message and maybe the hunter got it because he relaxed a bit. They shared an open look… lost boys recognising each other.

After that they had grown closer. Talking about their childhood experiences, the abuse, their little escapes… never judging and while sympathetic for the other, there was no pity. It felt freeing.

Harry had grown to love them all but Daryl was… was just _special_ to him in ways he wasn’t ready to explore yet.

Harry selfishly wanted to travel with these people a little longer and maybe he wasn’t ready to let go of them just yet. So he had started to use the pain medication Dr Edwards had given him to endure the long walks still full of determination to keep up with everyone else.

It was necessary to move forward. They couldn’t stay on the road for much longer… There was nothing there to find… no shelter, no food, no water…. Nothing to help them survive!

In the end Harry wasn’t surprised when he collapsed in the middle of the road one day. He had woken up to building headache, chills and fever wrecking through his body.

It had been obvious that he had reached his breaking point but he had stubbornly pushed on, gritting his teeth and ignoring his body’s protests.

He paid the price two miles down the road when the world tilted before his eyes and he couldn’t hear anything anymore over the rushing in his ears.
The only thing that saved him from a painful collision with the asphalt was Daryl’s strong arm.

“Fuck, Harry!” The hunter growled in concern patting Harry’s cheeks with his calloused hand. Thin eyelids fluttered over fever dazed green eyes. The kid looked unfocused and his breath was strained.

“Daryl?” Even his voice sounded brittle and he was burning up.

“Yeah, kid… It’s me. Ya have a fever. Where’s ya antibiotics?”

“Uhmm…” Rick and Carol kneeled next to them their faces mirroring the worry Daryl felt.

“Hey hun, where is your medication?” Carol tried again.

“Gave… it to Judi…” came the mumbled reply. “When she had the fever…”

Fucking shite!

Exchanging alarmed glances with the others Daryl felt dread settle in his bones.

This was such a Harry-thing to do… Giving away all of his medication for a tiny girl that had only a slight fever. Something that wasn’t even serious but damn the boy just couldn’t stand to see others in pain, especially if the idiot thought he could help.

Daryl wanted to scream in frustration, wanted to shake this dumb, stupid boy until…

A familiar wetness gathered in his eyes and the sharp claws of fear ripped at his heart. He had opened himself up to the abused teen, had shared more of his history with him than with Beth, Rick… or hell even Carol.

Forming any kind of emotional connection had always been hard for Daryl, his dad and Merle had taught him that each in their own way, be it drunk beatings or drunk/high homophobic and racial slurs about him being a weak pussy.

But this had been different… It had been so easy to confine to Harry because there had been no pity, no worry nor any disbelieving shock… no stupid advises how to feel or behave… Just understanding.

And now… now…

I don’t want him to die like this. Just please!

A thin dirty hand gripped Daryl’s before he could start gnawing on his thumb. Slated blue eyes
searched for slightly dull green ones.

“It’s alright. We knew it might come to this and I rather it be me than Judi.” A soft smile stretched over Harry’s lips.

“You should leave me here… You need to find a safe place for Carl and Judi.”

A growl ripped from the hunter’s throat, a sound that was part frustration, part despair. Pulling the sickly thin boy closer to him as if to ward off anyone who thought they really could leave Harry behind burying his face into the kid’s raven hair.

Rick’s grave voice broke through the vicious chaos that was his emotional state.

“Harry, you told me once that family should always come first and not to risk anything for a sick, foreign kid… I agreed with you back then. But now… You saved my life. You saved Carl and gave yourself instead. Without you we would have lost Beth in Atlanta. You travelled with us for weeks, guiding us, scavenged and hunted with us, sung Judi to sleep…

You might have been a sick, foreign kid when we met the first time, but that’s not what you are any longer…

Now you’re our sick kid!

You’re family. And family will always come first! We look out for each other. None of us is going to leave you behind. I did it once… I left you on the carpet of a squat and we’ve both knew since Terminus that I wouldn’t be able to do that again. I can’t sacrifice one of us for the greater good, because we all are the greater good. You’re part of the reason we’re still here.”

God, Daryl had never loved his brother more than now! Relieve and gratitude washed over him in big waves.

A sob rippled through the malnourished body in Daryl’s strong arms. Looking up he saw how Harry had Abraham fixed in a heavy stare.

The big loud man had been unusually quiet the whole time, had kept his distance from Harry most of their trip. As if he feared to get too close to the sick teen.

And maybe it hadn’t helped that Daryl had snapped and snarled whenever the red head had come near the little Brit…. Just maybe…

The look that the former Sergeant directed at Harry right now was pitying and forlorn and had Daryl’s hackles rising. The hunter felt his muscles coiling ready to defend Harry if Abraham decided to go through with his promise.
“Sorry, kid!” The mouth under the walrus moustache was pressed to a thin stern line. The corners of his mouth were slightly down turned. Daryl could feel Harry’s tension under his baggy shirt building.

“I know that I promised it wouldn’t be personal but… well. What he said, kid! The deal is off!”

The tall man gave an awkward shrug and an agonized tone broke from Harry’s throat. Harry looked harrowed and afraid, desperation and panic clear on his face.

“Please! You shouldn’t… I…”

Glenn put a calming hand on the teen’s head to stop him from babbling. Carefully petting the unruly raven hair as he spoke to Harry in a firm but sympathetic voice.

“Hey stop fretting! Look at me and look at everyone else.” He waited until the green eyes took them all in, took notice of how much they all obviously cared.

“At this point we make it together or not at all!” Glenn replied kind but firm.

Nothing else was needed.

Big tears ran down on dirt stained cheeks leaving pale traces in their way. Shaking his head again and again Daryl could see and feel how the fight drained from small body.

“You… You want me? You really want me.” Harry’s voice sounded so small… It left Daryl the heart wrenching image of a tiny boy with raven hair and too green eyes locked away and lonely. Hoping for some place to belong to. Hoping form someone to love him.

Abraham stepped forward, his expression soft as never before.

“Come on, Kid! I’ll carry you!”

So the big ex solider carried Harry piggy bag. At the teen’s insecure inquiry if it wouldn’t be too strenuous to lug him around the red head had the audaciousness to bark a laugh at the little Brit.

“You weigh less than shit, kid. So don’t get your knickers in a twist Shakespeare.”

“I’m not a girl!” Harry hissed back.

“HAAAHAAAAHHHAAH! No you’re a tough little kitten.” It was said in such a fond teasing way that Harry blushed and only mumbled an uninventive “Asshole.” back.

The smell of sweat and the rippling of Ab’s muscles lulled him into an uneasy sleep.
The heat wasn’t letting up and soon enough they were all but staggering along the road. Daryl, Maggie and Sasha had searched for water but every creek had dried up, not leaving even a rivulet of water.

Something was going to happened it didn’t feel threatening per se… not like Terminus or Grady… But his magic was humming in giddy trembling anticipation for something right to happen. It felt like bees were dancing under his skin.

In front of the group was a small pallet of water bottles on top of it a note “From a Friend”.

It was highly suspicious in a world like this; strangers weren’t friends any longer by a rule. It had everyone’s hackles raised.

Everyone’s but Harry’s.

The usual uneasy foreboding was still missing… *How curious!*
Eugene feels still guilty for lying about the cure thing… He too thinks he isn’t contributing enough to the group.

And then Harry felt it a slight change…

The first rain drops started to fall on them.

A drop of air pressure… a new humidity… a rumbling from far away…

The prickling feeling of electricity…

A storm was brewing.

“Uhm.. guys?” Harry poked Abraham’s biceps to get his attention but they were all busy enjoying the pouring rain.

“Guys!”

“What’s wrong short stuff? We need to collect all the water we can.” Abraham grumbled good-naturedly.

“I think we need to get going. Fast! That’s not just a bit of rain… Just look!”

Rick and Daryl turned in the direction Harry was pointing. Big grey could be seen starting to build up, towering all over the forbidding sky.

“Fuck!” Loud thunder nearly drowned their cursing out. Everyone scrambled to their feet.

“There’s a barn.” Daryl shouted over the noise.

The wooden barn was old but spacious. It was dark and dusty inside, the stuffy smell of years of disuse prominent in the air. The only thing left, was crippled walker… a woman that had held on as long as she could.

A woman that had onto hope and where had it left her…? Harry thought cynic.

They were all soaked to the bones. They were weary and hungry.

Judi was grumpy and unhappy. Beth tried to settle the little girl but she just whined and made grabby hands for Harry.
Only half awake and dazed by a rising fever Harry took her and laid her between himself and Carl. Chills and fever still raged through his body and being soaked definitely hadn’t helped his health issues.

He was listening with half an ear to the adults. They discussed how they expected Carl to bounce back from the ordeal like none of them could.

If he had been so tried he would have argued that this was adaptation not bouncing back… No one would be able to just bounce back from what they went through.

That growing up like this wasn’t easier, it was basic survival!

This was the world, at least for now! And Glenn was right, this was their reality now and they all had to face that.

These where the hands they’re given.

Future would be what they would create out of that despite everything.

With the light of their small fire on his face Rick told them all a story.

“When I was a kid, I asked my grandpa once if he ever killed any Germans in the war. He wouldn’t answer. He said that was grown-up stuff, so I asked if the Germans ever tried to kill him.

But he got real quiet. He said he was dead the minute he stepped into enemy territory. Every day he woke up and told himself, ‘Rest in peace. Now get up, and go to war.’ And then after a few years of pretending he was dead, he made it out alive…”

*He is right. I was dead the moment I was captured by Voldemort. And I died every day after. I wasn’t alive for a long time…*

*It was them that woke me up again.*

“…That’s the trick of it, I think. We do what we need to do, and then we get to live. But no matter what we find in D.C., I know we’ll be OK, because this is how we survive. We tell ourselves that we are the walking dead.” Rick concluded.

“No, we ain’t them.”

To Harry’s surprise, it was Daryl that didn’t agree with this mind set of numbing themselves against the world. On other side he had already learned that the man had a much bigger emotional range than his gruff exterior might imply. The hunter was in fact a very sensitive person. It made him one of the strongest and simultaneously one of the most fragile people Harry had met. It said a lot about one’s inner strength to refuse oneself the calming effect of dissociation to face up to your feelings and reality.
He liked that about Daryl!

Harry watched as his friend paced through the barn until suddenly the familiar feeling of a foreboding slammed into him sending a spike of adrenalin through his body.

Looking to the front part of the barn he saw that Daryl, too, looked intensely at the door, as it swung slightly only loosely held together by a chain. A look of concentration on the hunter’s frowning face…

Listening...

Harry sprung onto his feet startling everyone around the fire. Without thinking he ran to Daryl and all but threw himself against wooden door.

And only now Harry heard them over the thunder and lightning… groaning… loudly… many!

Shite! Shite!

Slated blue eyes widened in shocked surprise when they locked gazes. Without hesitation Daryl pushed all his body weight again the door next to Harry.

The dead were on their doorstep and the old creaking barn wouldn’t shelter them against the storm and the onslaught of the walkers.

*We’re going to be overrun!* Harry tried his hardest to remain calm, to swallow his rising panic. His magic was fluctuating under his skin, rippling in waves, wanting to protect, waiting to be used again.

Next to Harry, Maggie had positioned herself. Sasha had taken the place next to Daryl. Realizing over the mounting racket what was going on the rest of the group spurned into action. With united forces they tried to keep the dead out.

The pressure of unused magic increased tenfold.

*Merlin, please, please, please!!*

Excruciating pain bloomed over Harry’s chest nearly taking his breath away. The tattoos on his wrists burned like fire. Clenching his eyes shut and balling his fists he tried to block out the pain just concentrating on holding his place.
Just Merlin please let me hold out. These people saved me! They brought me back to life! I don’t want them to die!

SNAP!

It felt like something broke in him. He was burning alive! He was freezing to death. He got built up. He got ripped to pieces.

LET THE DOOR HOLD!

PLEASE!

**

Fuck!

For one terrible moment he had thought that the green eyed boy had died. Daryl had watched in shocked worry as Harry crumbled to the ground. The kid hadn’t even made a sound.

He had just dropped… silently.

… Deathly pale…

…Not moving…

And then he had seen the nearly unnoticeable rising and falling of the kid’s chest.

Only then his own heart had started beating again… Harry was alive! Thank fuck!

In his shock he hadn’t noticed it right away but it felt like the pushing on the other side of the door had let up.

The groaning wasn’t as loud anymore… maybe the worst was over.

Seemed like he wasn’t the only one noticing Rick and the other had stopped pushing, too and were gathering their breaths now.

They were safe for now.
Carol and Beth rushed to Harry carefully checking the little Brit over, feeling his forehead grey haired woman pulled her hand back with a hiss.

“Damn, he’s burning up! That’s not good at all.”

_Fucking shit!_

“We need to keep him warm. And we need to apply a cold compress… We don’t have anything else.” Carol sighed in resignation. “And we need someone to keep watch over him, in case…”

Daryl crouched next to Harry tenderly stroking dirty sweat soaked hair out of the kid’s face. He seemed to be in pain and it tore at Daryl’s heart. He didn’t want to think about Carol’s insinuation, but…

_Maybe we’ve been selfish ta drag him alon’ this far… This ain’t what he want wanted._

These dark thoughts weighted heavy on the hunter. Now that there was a realistic chance that Harry could die… He wanted to rage and curse to force Carol to save the kid no matter what, because… because…

Daryl started to draw his hand away but Harry let out a little whimper face crunching up. The frail British teen chased his touch and the little comfort it gave him.

..._because I can’t bring maself ta kill him._

_I just can’t_…

*****

_Well, that could have gone better. I’m just glad that Eric let me go alone to meet them…_

Aaron’s jaw ached terribly where Rick had hit him with his right hook. He could understand cautiousness but damn, Rick was fucking badass, all hard edges and cold determination.

He was suspicious of everything that the scout said and while Aaron’s training usually came in handy when he needed to convince the person in front of him not to punch his lights out. But this case had been different, the more he tried to be friendly, open and non-threatening, the more Rick appeared to be on the edge.

The bearded man just refused to believe anything Aaron said…

These people were a tight knit group, they were survivors that had still enough humanity in them to
form such close bonds…

It showed in the way they had cared for the sick boy, their refusal to leave him behind. That was what had convinced Eric and him to invite them.

But they were survivors and there was a chilling feralization to them all that betrayed the horrors they all had endured to get here.

Rick had send to groups out. One group to find his car and another to scout the area looking for further threats and his partner… Eric.

That had left Aaron with Rick, Baby Judith, an unconscious teen and the delightful promise of a knife to the back of his scull shouldn’t Rick’s people be back in a hour. Aaron didn’t doubt those words for a second. He just prayed that they would be back soon and that Eric was ok.

With every minute ticking by, Rick didn’t backed off an inch and it got even worse when the little girl’s grumbling developed to full out crying, in what was obviously hunger.

And Aaron had no problem in admitting that he started sweating at the baby’s loud noises... She would attract roamers to them.

And he was still bound he and helpless. It had been a long time since Aaron had been in such a tight spot.

Rick was trying to grind some nuts with his colt’s handle for the baby, when the frail boy in the corner woke up. He had been sleeping in a cocoon of blankets and other fabrics. His raven hair was long and unkempt falling in wild disarray around his pale face… a very pretty face Aaron noticed. But his most fascinating feature was a pair of big bright green eyes. If Aaron remembered correctly the others had called him Harry.

“Rick? What happened?” The scout was still surprised every time when he heard the British accent. The teen rubbed his chest with a wince.

“Harry, stay there! You had a fever last night.” Rick growled back.

“Uhmm…yeah, I remember the storm...” Ignoring Rick’s protest Harry scrabbled round until he had managed to bring himself into a sitting position and squinted at Rick and Aaron in obvious confusion and concern.

Slowly the boy took notice of the things around him, his tense leader, the crying child and Aaron bound and bruised.

“Rick, give Judi to me. You’re too tense she can sense your unease. You’re just working her even more up. And then you can grind some hazelnuts for her.” The teen finally sighed and held his arms out to Rick and the baby girl.
Rick looked a bit embarrassed at being called out but didn’t argue with the British teen, dutifully handing over the babe.

Aaron watched in awe how the small teen handled the baby girl with a gentle calmness, settling her against his knees, cooing nonsense to her. After that her loud wailing died down considerably to small sniffles.

“You see already better, isn’t it pumpkin? You’re such a sweet little princes.” The raven hair boy praised the tiny girl and cuddled her close.

It might be stupid but Aaron got the impression that the little one seemed a bit smug when she snuggled deeper into Harry’s embrace.

And when he took Rick’s fond indignation into account then he wasn’t the only one.

“I swear to god she likes you best. And that’s she only making a fuss to get to snuggle with you.”

“I always knew you were a prankster in the making” The British boy laughed tugging softly on a blond curl.

*Oh god, that’s so adorable! And holy hell no one should be this pretty when they’re sweaty and dirty. Damn Aaron Raleigh, get a grip you’re not perving on a teenaged boy! Eric would tell you that you’re being creepy.*

“I have a jar of applesauce in my bag.” Aaron babbled out, partly to keep the little girl happy and partly to stop his brain from thinking stupid things. A pair of hard and cold blue eyes and a softer pair of bright green one bore into him.

*Great! Maybe I should learn to keep my mouth shut.*

“And who might you be?” Harry inquired curiously.

“Uhm…My name is Aaron. I’m from a community nearby. … We want you to audition?! I’m a scout.” Aaron couldn’t help it he was even more nervous than before. Those impossible big green eyes seemed to strip his soul naked, weighting his truthfulness and his worth. He never felt anything like this before.

The sickly teen cocked his head to the side and scanned him.

“It’s awful risky to approach such big group of strangers… all on your own.” Raising one fine black eyebrow the teen seemed to be unfeigned intrigued by the whole thing.

“Uhm… my partner and I followed your group for a while before we decided to approach you…”
“Oh, you’re the friend that left us the water, aren’t you?” Harry cooed at the baby pocking her nose in the process, making her giggle at his silly voice.

“That was a nice gesture, wasn’t it pumpkin? Yes, it was!” Tickling the bouncing girl in his lap Harry peered at the scout from the corner of his eyes.

“But friendliness from faceless strangers makes us so very suspicious now a day. Out there you can’t trust so easily… That gets people killed or worse.”

Aaron shivered against his will despite or maybe because of the still cooing voice these words sounded somewhat sinister.

“He brought us photos of their community…” Rick admitted reluctantly.

“Hmmm…hmm… And? What do you think about it?” Harry asked patiently.

“Sounds too good to be true. Could be a trap!” The former sheriff grumbled into his beard, his blue eyes already judging and condemning Aaron as a liar and a threat.

“So you punched him and fettered him?” Green eyes peered over blond locks at Rick. The teen voice was soft and neutral to the Alexandrian scout but Rick flushed a little, looking rebuked.

“Yes, better to be safe than sorry. It was all too suspicious! And he smiled all the time even after I decked him in the face! I have a bad feeling about this.” Now the bearded man was rambling, obviously feeling the need to justify his actions.

“What did Michonne say to this?” The frail teen hummed.

“She wants to give it a try.” It sounded… petulant. Harry seemed to think so too because he made an accepting noise nodding to his leader with a small knowing smirk on his face. And Aaron had to look at the floor to hide the smile that threatened to break over his face.

“I don’t have a bad feeling about this.” Harry casually informed Rick… to Aaron it seemed like a banal thing to say, but apparently not to Rick. The man did a double take at the boy who calmly held the steely gaze.

“You don’t?” Rick asked with a frown.

A small soft smile and a light shake of his head. “No, I don’t.”

Hopefully that was a good sign…

“You’re sure?” Rick pressed on still sounding doubtful.
“Yes, I’m sure. He seems to be earnest. And even back with the water I had a good inkling.” Harry nodded.

It was fascinating to see how the tensions bleed out of the bearded man, leaving only a tired and haggard looking man behind. A man torn between the fight of hope and the need for caution and cold aggression.

A man that had lost a lot and was ready to do anything to ensure the survival of his group.

A dangerous man.

“Uhm… do want the applesauce for her? It’s in my backpack.” Aaron asked again, when all the cuddling in the world couldn’t divert the baby form her hunger any longer.

“I think that would be a good thing, Rick. She has been too long without any real food.” Harry implored to the exhausted father.

Rick face clouded over… again.

But after a long shared gaze with Harry, he nodded and started to rummage around in the backpack. When he brought the applesauce to light, he screwed the glass open. After a last distrustful sniff, he went to Aaron, forcefully offering the first spoon.

“Here, you first!” More a growl than a command.

*Shit! God just no…* Aaron already felt nauseous. He hated applesauce! He couldn’t help himself, moving away from the spoon in instinct. He earned himself a dark frown and a face resembling a thunder cloud.

_Damn this suspicious man!_

“You think that I would try to poison your baby daughter? I’m tied up and you already expressed a willingness to stab me in the head. How would cruelly killing your daughter right in front of you help the situation in any way?” Aaron tried to reason with the growling papa bear. Sweat was pouring down the scout’s face and his voice had gained an octave...

So yeah, he was panicking… not because he got punched, tied up or threatened… oh no… he panicked because of fucking applesauce!

And like a predator Rick sensed and probably smelled his fear.

“Maybe she doesn’t die. Maybe she gets sick and you’re the only one who can help her. And I just lose!”
“I’m the only one, who can help her because I have applesauce! And we all win.”

_I just don’t want to eat it myself!!_!

Rick wasn’t letting up shoving the spoon again in his face.

_“Mommy loves you, baby! It’ll make you manlier and then we’ll be a family again.”_  

Even the smell reminded him of his mother’s old kitchen how she had bound him to the kitchen chair, force-feeding him with everything she knew he hated. Always hoping that it would make him stronger. If he closed his eyes now he would still see her slightly crazed expression, while reassuring him that he didn’t have to be queer, that she could cure him… And then daddy would come home to them when Aaron was a normal boy again.

“I hate applesauce. My mom used to make me eat foods, I didn’t like to make me more manly. Salmon patties, applesauce and onions. She was a very confused woman who tried her damnest. I…”

God he could see it in those cold blue eyes that he shouldn’t expect mercy for his fear of _fucking_ applesauce! Aaron really tried fighting down his nausea and old panic.  

_God, please don’t let me cry!_

“Rick, I think you can stop bullying him now. I believe him. That’s not the kind of story you fake easily. Just look at him!” Harry quipped up from behind them startling both adults out of their tense interaction.

“What? I… I’m not bullying him!” Rick squeaked, ears burning red. Again a long meaningful look was exchanged between the man and the boy before Rick relaxed noticeably and finally took the offending spoon away from his face.

Aaron slumped over in relief, his bindings the only thing holding him upright.

“Good, if you’re done harassing the poor man, give me that applesauce and so I can feed this little hellion here.” Harry grinned happily at them.

_I like the kid._ Aaron decided.

*****

Rick was a bloody insane control freak, Harry decided grumbling.

When the others had come back to confirm everything Aaron had told them, Rick had revealed to them that Harry had a good feeling about Aaron and the community. The relive that message had
unleashed in the group was humbling to the teen. It showed how much they had come to trust him and his instincts.

And despite all that Rick had wanted to control, how they would arrive in the community. So they had been driving in two groups, on an unknown road, that wasn’t cleared from walkers, to a still unknown destination, in the bloody dark night! Harry wanted to throw his arms up in exasperation.

This was bound to go wrong from the start!

After checking his temperature Daryl had loaded Harry into a caravan and bundled him up in a mountain of blankets and told him to sit tight. The hunter had still looked a bit spooked by his anew collapse. Worried but mostly silently fussing over him again and again, frowning and grousing at the teen whenever he had tried to stand up on his own.

Harry had seldom felt so useless but if he was honest he was incredibly exhausted…

The fever, the hunger and that incredibly painful magical backlash had drained him terribly. Especially the last one…

*My magic… something gave away in me… And it felt like my magic had reacted.*

And it had definitely looked like it. The area around the barn had looked like a battleground. Fallen trees and dead walkers everywhere. At least some of the broken wood should have fallen on the barn, but… nothing. Nothing had touched the barn. Maggie said that it looked like a sign of faith but Harry saw something else… accidental magic.

It had reacted to his plight.

*And the seal punished me for it…! Even the skin around the tattoos looks inflamed now…*

*The pain had felt frightening close to being crucioed.*

Even the effects seemed to be somewhat similar. The longer he was awake the more he noticed a light uncontrollable trembling in his hands and arms.

And if Daryl’s overprotective hovering was an indication the hunter had seen it too…

So Harry resigned to himself to his fate and rested his body, without too much complaining.

Then happened, what had to happen they literally ran into a huge group of walkers, and what a bloody mess that was.
In the commotion they lost the car with Rick, Michonne, Glenn and Aaron…

It was dark! They had lost contact with three group members and the scout who should bring them to a potential safe haven.

A scout who had told Rick in no uncertain words that this route was too dangerous! And now they had driven right into a herd of the dead.

Merlin help! It was infuriating!

Harry’s grumblings about hard-headed, reckless leaders were interrupted by the bright light of an emergency flare.

For a moment he saw himself back in the dark maze of the third task sending red lights in to the air for Victor. He shivered when he thought about that night and what he had lost back then…

Cedric’s dead eyes wide in surprise … a high cruel laugh … the smell of fire … blood and burning flesh…

“Harry?!” Carl’s concerned voice ripped him out of his memories. “Are you alright?”

Trying to shake of his haunting intrusions, the older teen concentrated on taking calming breaths before he nodded carefully.

“Yes… just far away, you know?”

Carl didn’t look quite convinced that the British teen was really alright. His mouth was pressed into a thin line and his bright blue eyes moved anxious over Harry’s face.

Usually this much fussing left the older teen uncomfortable in irrational guilt and shame like he got something really, really good that he didn’t deserve. Even with Hermine and Mrs. Weasley who he had known for years and who he loved whole heartedly there was always a little uneasiness left.

But here with Carl he only felt giddy warmth that swelled in his tight chest and brought tears to his eyes.

_Family!_ He had found a family in the end of the world.

“Don’t worry, Carl! It’s going to be ok. Let’s see what the others are thinking about the emergency flare.”

Hoping to find Rick and the others, they decided to follow the flare signal but on the end of the rainbow they didn’t find their friends but someone else.

A slender man with faire skin and auburn locks that had been trapped under a car by the herd. And while looks might be deceiving on occasion, the poor guy didn’t look to be a fighter. The dead had tried to get to him and it seemed like they had ended up pushing the car’s tire onto his ankle and breaking it in the process.
They had found the shooter of the signal and Aaron’s partner. Eric Raleigh.

The man introduced himself very nervously, but with the same forward politeness that Aaron had shown them. And Harry couldn’t fault him for being on the edge around them… Merlin, Daryl and Abraham alone looked threatening enough on their own but neither were the women of the group something to laugh at. If one cared to look closely enough, one could easily sense the liquid steel running through their veins.

On top of that Eric had to know that they had… well there was no better word for it… kidnapped his partner.

Swiftly Daryl, Noah and Sasha took care of the dead surrounding the injured man, while Maggie and Ab pulled him free.

As they were all pretty sure that the other group had seen the signal, too, they decided to wait for them and hunker down in a garage building along Route 16.

While the adults secured the place, Noah and Beth made sure to settle Carl, Judi and Harry into a corner of the garage, where Maggie had started to treat Eric’s injury. The man braved through the process with minimum fussing and gritted teeth. His ankle was obviously broken. Maggie braced the fracture a good as possible and tried to distract the soft spoken man with casual chatting.

All of the nights excitement had upset little Judi, making her squirm in unhappiness just short of full out crying. So Harry and Beth had taken to singing to her in hushed calm tones.

“When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me

Speaking words of wisdom, let it be

And in my hour of darkness she is standing right in front of me

Speaking words of wisdom, let it be

Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be

Whisper words of wisdom, let it be”

Harry found that singing to Judi settled something deep inside in him, too. At the same time in woke a familiar wondering longing in him. Sometimes in the last weeks he had started to wonder if his mom or his dad had sung to him as a babe. And if they did what songs they had chosen…?
With Judi sleeping soundly and contend in his arms he looked up, to find the auburn haired man staring at him in soft surprise. Maybe it was surprising, to see two people singing a baby to sleep… There weren’t a lot of comforting things left out here considering the state of the world. And their whole rag tacked group sure looked closer to wild beasts than a tender nurturing family.

Harry had surely been more than surprised to find that any kind of compassion had survived the apocalypse.

In Eric’s face laid a friendly gentleness when he regarded them, causing a warm feeling in Harry’s cheeks that made him lower his head in slight embarrassment.

A sudden racket outside the garage heralded the arrival of their missing group members.

With a bang the garage door was ripped open and a ruffled and shaken looking Aaron stormed in to the room. “Eric?!”

“I’m ok. It’s like a volleyball injurie. It’s a broken ankle. It’s what Maggie said. I like her.” Eric greeted the other scout in nervous relief.

Wide blue grey eye drunk in the sight of Eric with his popped up ankle, the man that had been so well versed with words before seemed to be struggling now.

And while Aaron had been mostly calm and friendly before like nothing could break through his carefully crafted polite composure… except applesauce… Now he oozed panic and desperate fear for his partner.

It felt so intimate that Harry felt the need to look away.

“It’s not a big deal.” Eric tried to reassure the visibly distraught Aaron. “I’ll just go right to Pete when we’re back.”

For a moment Aaron hovered over the broken ankle looking heartbreakingly anguished over the injurie, before literally throwing himself at his Eric… for desperate kiss…

Kissing. The two men were not just partners in the flied… They were a couple.

They were gay.

They had sex with other men. They wanted to have sex with men….

Oh… OH!

All air left Harry’s lungs. Chest constricting painfully. A familiar light headedness took over.
He couldn’t see anymore. Black and with dots dancing before his eyes.

He couldn’t hear anything over the dull drumming of his rising blood pressure.

He couldn’t feel his body any longer. Everything was numb.

He was losing control over his mind. Incoherent thoughts and flashbacks mixing.

Gay… sex…

The soured smell of unwashed men… Rancid taste on his tongue… The slapping sounds when skin met skin… lustful groaning… degrading slurs

“Bitch!” … “I claimed ya.” … “Suck me! Make it good”… “The only thing you’re good for.”

The feeling of rough hands grapping, touching and hurting him…

Len pushing into to him… Ripping him apart… Tearing him to pieces…

Laughing at his cries…

Beating him… Carving his claim into his back…

Pain… Pain… PAIN!

His hearing came back first…

“Harry…?”

“Harry!”

“Damn, HARRY!”

Voices were calling his name… He knew these voices. It wasn’t Len… It wasn’t any of the Claimers.

No, the voices were familiar in a comfortable way… secure… warm…

Uneven ragged, hysterical breaths interrupted with sobs filled the room.

My own… a distanced part of his brain filled in.

“Harry, come on, kiddo! Fucking breathe!”

Abe… Abraham was there!

“Good, hun! Breathe like that! In. And out! Just like that!”
Carol.

Very slowly he started to see again. And like always after a flashback he was surprised for a moment that the people surrounding where neither Deatheaters nor Claimers.

Blinking heavily he tried to see, taking in Carol’s and Abraham’s concerned expressions.

His head felt like it was filled with cotton candy, thoughts slow and muddled... gooey.

Where are we? What happened?

Confusion, fear, panic and numbness battled in him.

“Harry can you hear me?” Carol tried to keep him grounded now that he reacted at least a bit and Harry wanted to answer her, but all he could manage was a small nod.

Eyes flitting aimlessly other the small crowd... Carol, Abe, Carl, Beth and Noah supplied his foggy mind. Now that he seemed to be coming around they all inched a bit back giving him some space revealing Eric, Daryl and Rick.

The two scouts were incredibly pale. While the auburn hair man looked mostly shocked, his partner had a pinched expression on his face. Aaron had stationed himself protective in front of his boyfriend and with good reason... Rick and Daryl were both glaring daggers at the two.

“What ‘ave ya done or said ta him?” Daryl’s voice was a low snarl. With his narrowed eyes he looked like a tiger ready to strike his prey down. Rick wasn’t much better, stony mine, jaw tense and his blue eyes cold as ice. With his hand already on the handle of his Colt Cobra he vibrated in icy tension.

Gripping his own arms tightly Harry started to rock his upper body back and forth. The rhythm felt calming. He distantly remembered that he had done this as a small child when he lay sick and alone in his dark cupboard.

“We didn’t do anything to him! We didn’t speak or even looked at him!” Aaron was visibly angry over the accusation and there was a hint of disappointment in his voice when he said: “It’s not our fault that the boy is a homophobe!”

“BOY!”

Inhaling sharply and Harry clenched his eyes shut under the new onslaught of panic and intrusions.
He could hear Daryl’s threatening growl but again it started to sound farther away than a second ago.

The teen could feel the clammy cold fingers of his horrid memories clawing at his soul and heart, it felt like they were dragging him under water, taking his ability to breathe and think from him.

Merlin, please not again. Potter, get a grip or your nightmares will drown you forever.

It was a struggle to fight against flux of his panic, against the lulling promise of easy numbness and dissociation.

“W… Wai… Wait.” Harry stuttered quietly rocking faster and with increasing momentum until he slammed the back of his head against the wall behind him again and again. He heard somebody curse beside him and frantic calls for his name.

But Harry relished in the pain. It cut through his haze like a sharp knife. And finally he felt like he was gaining at least some kind of awareness and control back.

Shivering and shaking Harry forced his eyes wide open trying to exhale, pressing used up air out of his lungs and gulping greedily for new air.

Get a grip! Here and now! Stay here and now! Where are you? What changed? What are the differences? You’ve done this before!

Gritting his teeth Harry forced himself to open his mouth but for a moment it felt like he had forgotten how to speak… No words were forming…

His demons were already lurking in the shadows of his mind, still too close, waiting to gain the upper hand back.

Pictures of abuse playing before his inner eye…

NO!

Again Harry slammed his head back against the wall with so much force that he saw stars for a moment but it helped him to hold onto reality.

He saw that Daryl was now a lot closer than before so he must have drifted off again.
The hunter had one hand stretched out to the British teen as if he wanted to keep Harry from hurting himself further. The expression on the man’s face reminded him of Aaron when he had looked at Eric’s ankle. It was the overwhelming anguish over seeing someone close to you hurt.

Looking his gaze with slated blue eyes Harry tried to ground himself and finally found his voice again.

“It’s been 76 days since I’ve been last raped. “ He heard a sharp inhale from somewhere but didn’t break eye contact with the hunter, his grasp on reality still too fragile.

“I’m safe now.”

Harry already felt a little more solid saying these things out loud. It always hurt to admit to his shame but at the same time, hearing himself say it out loud… That it was over now! It made also a little more real that he was safe. Even Daryl looked a lot calmer now, less tense and worried and grumbling agreed.

“Yeah, that yer are!”

Yes, there was there was an old promise in Daryl’s eyes.

One Harry once had a hard time believing but now…

“They are dead. They can’t get to me anymore. Rick, Michonne and Daryl killed them all.”

Another grasp from somewhere.

The noise brought it back that there was still one big fear left to confront. Swallowing back panic and rising bile he forced himself to look at Aaron and Eric, not just to look but to try and see them for who they were. Not just some potential sexual predators…

He immediately noticed how close they were. How Aaron was holding one of Eric’s hands the other arm draped around the slender man’s shoulders.

A flashback of their desperate kiss brought a bit of the panic and tension back but Harry outright refused to bow to his fears like that…

He wanted, no he needed to be stronger than that.

*Hold onto reality! See things for what they really are. Don’t let your fear rule your perception and life!*
“Y… You’re not them. You’re Aaron. You’re a scout for your community. Your mom used to abuse you. Feeding you things you didn’t like to make you more manly. You’re… You… Shite!”

He started to hyperventilate yet again…

He forced himself kept his eyes open and to keep looking at Aaron and Eric to keep track of their reaction. Aaron had stopped glaring at him but had gone ghostly pale, eyes wide in pity and compassion. Eric just looked sickened. Both had noticed Harry’s struggle to go on and seemed confused what this was about.

“Please, tell me something about yourself… Just anything. I need to… need to see the difference. Please!” Harry hoped that they would get his plea, his need to differentiate them from his rapists.

Tears were running down Eric’s face, when he started rambling.

“My name is Eric. Eric Raleigh. But you know that already… Uhm… I grew up in the Appalachian Mountains with my parents who worked on the land. I always like being outside and working in nature. But… But it wasn’t a good place to be gay. People there don’t like things that are out of the ordinary very much.”

*Like the Dursleys. His mind complied. You know what he’s talking about. You know what it’s like to be shunned for something you have no control about.*

“My parents aren’t… weren’t bad people but they just couldn’t accept me as I am… So I left.”

*He couldn’t help himself being gay any more than I could stop being a wizard. Not without losing and hurting ourselves.*

“I joined a NGO. And for the first time I met people who were like me who accepted me. I was free. I got to work with Aaron giving supplies to those living in the Niger River Delta. We fell in love back then. We’ve been together for five years now. We had a great condo in Washington, D.C… And… And I make some serious spaghetti…”

Harry hung on very word Eric told him tried to build a picture of the man before him when Aaron took over from his partner.

“I like photography. I have the tick to collecting memorabilia from the places I’ve visited. Eric hates it… he calls it hording which I assure you it definitely isn’t. After the apocalypse, I began collecting license plates from each state. I hung them all on a wall in our house.”
That sounds like Mr. and Mrs. Weasley.

“We have built a home for us in Alexandria. Eric is the love of my life and I don’t know if I could live on without him.”

They not like the Claimers. They are not like them. They are not like them!

I didn’t have any warning forebodings about them. I could always trust my gut!

They love each other.

The Claimers only cared for themselves!

Gathering his courage Harry nodded at the two men.

“You’re Aron and Eric. You’re a couple. That you’re gay doesn’t … doesn’t mean you’re going to hurt me. It doesn’t make you any more of a rapist than Rick or Daryl or any of the others. The men that hurt me weren’t even interested in men just in a hole to use. And they’re dead. They’re dead.” Harry forced himself to speak, to give his thoughts real words. Sweat was running down his spine.

“And we will kill anyone who thinks they can hurt you again, kiddo.”

“Yeah, we’ve got ya back!”

Daryl and Abe promised with grim faces but the tension in the room had deflated or maybe it was just Harry.

And now that he was less tense and the last physical numbness was slowly leaving him, he could feel a deep ache in his bones and the burning pain of the tattoos on his wrists. He was still alive. He could face his fears and could come out on top.

He could prevail… He would prevail!

“They become stronger for them! So their sacrifices won’t be in vain.”

“I want to be stronger. I refuse to fall prey to anyone else again, be it walker or men.” After that came just exhaustion and darkness.

*******

Aaron looked pensive at his sleeping boyfriend when Noah came in and offered him some Advil for his bruised face.
The day before had been draining for them all… The capture, the herd, Harry’s panic attack. Aaron felt a heavy weight on his chest when he remembered the hysterical fear the boy had showed over his and Eric’s kiss.

At first he had felt so angry and disappointed to be judged for their sexuality yet again. That even the end of the world had changed nothing about people’s prejudices.

And then Daryl had gone all dirty, angry redneck at them. Combined with Rick’s cold alpha male fury, Aaron had been sure this was just about a serious case of homophobia…

Until the British teen had disgorged that he had been raped…

“It’s been 76 days since I’ve been last raped.“

Last… the kid had said “last been raped” it implied clearly that it hadn’t been a one-time assault. And apparently it hadn’t been a single rapist…

“The men that hurt me weren’t even interested in men just in a hole to use.”

Men… not man, plural… this short sentence had revealed so much horror that Aaron wanted to hurl.

He remembered how much gay sex could hurt and escalate if partners didn’t take the right care with each other. When he had been young and still trying to find himself in his sexuality, he had engaged in quite a few risky encounters until he met his first steady boyfriend. The man had been a few years older and had guided him carefully through his preferences. It had helped him to find security in his sex life, to learn what he like and what he didn’t.

And most importantly he had learned that he didn’t need to do anything he or his partner felt uncomfortable with just because others did it.

The raven hair teen looked young, maybe 14 or 15… Aaron had to bury his head in his hands, to see the kid battle his demons last night had been physical painful.

He understood the group’s protectiveness to the boy a lot better now.

The pale, haggard face with impossible big green eye shining with panic and horrors, struggling to breathe would be forever burned in the back of his head.

And despite everything the kid had refused to bow to his emotions, had forced himself to face his fears, until he had been able to look at him and Eric and not seen his rapists.

It had felt humbling to witness this fight against an enemy no one else could see or fight but Harry.

Right now Harry lay on one of the benches in the front part of the RV fast asleep after last night’s anxiety. The green eyed teen had passed out as soon as the adrenalin of his flashback had left him.

Daryl and Carl with Judith kept an eye out for the frail teen. It was surprising to see the rough
redneck so gentle and caring with the three kids.

How sweet and effortlessly he handled the baby, how serious he took Carl, how he would check on Harry and tuck the blanket around him tighter or brushed wayward locks out of the boy’s face.

There was an uncanny bond between these unlikely people.

It reassured Aaron that they had made the right decision to invite this group to Alexandria.

Chapter End Notes

While editing the beginning of the chapter I was a bit amused… because I thought:
“Damn! Harry has a Hodor-moment here!” ^^’
Thanks, Games of Thrones! :p
Chapter 12

Alexandria was bright and beautiful and it was… unreal.

Like a fantasy that should have been gone for a long, long time. An all-white suburbia disconnected and protected by a dome of steel walls and ignorance.

It felt like all the dirt, blood and horror that had defined their reality had no place here. It was a paradise far away from the real world.

It felt save. And Harry felt immediately out of place.

When they had reached the settlement people… whole families had gathered to gawk at the newcomers.

And Harry had felt an old unease, not one of impending danger but one that he had grown up with, the unease of being judged and of not belonging. These innocent, clean and civilize people were so untouched and clueless of the real horrors of the outside.

They were like lambs that had missed the necessary evolution to be lions when the situation had asked for it. Most of them wouldn’t have survived outside that much was clear. But Harry felt fear instead of distain for their weakness. He had learned to be careful around those blinded by ignorance and blind faith.

A middle aged woman with a no-non-sense attitude named Deanna was the leader of the community. She seemed tough and was obviously well respected and completely in charge.

She had taken the entire group into separate interviews with only one exception.
Harry had been stiff with worry and angst as soon as she had started to split his new family up. He tried to stay very close to Daryl, who had taken a protective stance next to him. The hunter had then outright refused to let Harry go anywhere alone in this unknown community. Harry had nearly melted at the warm feeling in his chest.

His grumpy, loyal protector.

His Hufflepuff.

Aaron had given the confused Deanna short look and then explained to her that it would be better to let Harry go with someone else.

The green eyed felt very thankful to the scout for that, he didn’t know if he would have had the strength to tell the woman that he was too… messed up to talk with her alone.

On top of all those new impressions he was yet again confronted with his still impaired sight, being blind as a bat in a new environment, certainly didn’t help him feeling secure.

But being close to Daryl gave him a sense of safety. His broad shoulders made it easy to hide behind. And honestly holding a dead opossum in his hand made the hunter look pretty fearsome and as displaced before these big white houses as Harry felt.

*

Being in Deanna’s living room during the interview, felt weird to Harry. It was a mixture, a bit like being back at the headmaster’s office back in seconded year, with the books, the atmosphere and Deanna’s attitude benevolent but strict. And on the other side everything around them was so clean and tidy… that it reminded Harry of Private Drive and how immaculate Petunia held the house. It made the harsh contrast to their dirty and rundown appearances all the more clear.

Daryl paced through the room like a caged tiger poking at books and trinkets, all the while swinging the dead opossum around like a trophy. While Harry had buried himself in the armchair, Daryl had pushed him immediately into because the hunter had been worried about his health. Even Deanna had insisted that he should visit the local doctor after their talk.

The interview itself had felt intrusive and uncomfortable for Harry and Daryl. And they had dealt with it each in their unique way.

Deanna had started with Daryl but the hunter answered mostly in grunts, scowling silence and at the utter most in monosyllabic words.

Which had leaded a slightly frustrated Deanna to ask: “Daryl you want to be here?”

The hunter had seemed uncomfortable at this question and Harry thought that maybe Daryl had been asking himself the same thing…
Dark blue eyes had glanced at Harry on the chair, holding eye contact, searching.

“"The boys and the baby. They deserve a roof… so I guess…”

You’re really are a sweet Hufflepuff at heart, Daryl Dixon.

Harry had forgotten how much you could come to love someone. But here with this silent man, who looked so uncomfortable and yet would put up with it because he thought it would be the right thing for Carl and Judith… and Harry. He remembered that prepossessing warmth that he had always felt for Ron, Hermine, Remus and Sirius. And now he felt the same for Daryl.

And then Deanna had passed over to Harry, asking him where he came from and how he met Rick and the others. He nearly folded into himself.

“How long where you out there?” She wanted to know.

“Since it started” He answered in low mumbles, behind him Daryl had stopped pacing and had taken position behind his chair, radiating reassuring warmth.

“With Rick and the rest?” Deanna implored further.

“No… I joined them just recently…” He had started to break out in cold sweat, his voice shaky.

“Oh, how do you found them?” Damn her for sounding so politely interested.

“Uhmm… I… I was… they saved me… I was with some bad people?!?” Now Harry was stuttering and breathing had just become a little harder than before.

Shame and fear were gripping him tight. He couldn't find the words to tell her about the horror he had lived through. And it must have shown because Daryl started to growl at the noise woman like a guard dog.

All it earned them was an unimpressed raised eyebrow.

So McGonagall!

“Mr. Dixon, I do not appreciate being growled at. Harry will have to answer just a few things. Alright?”

“Naah, ain’t alrigh’! Ya see him. Stop asking him bullshit!” Blue eyes narrowed to small slits Daryl made an angry sweeping gesture, apparently forgetting that he was still holding the opossum.

Causing the dead, overgrown rat to fly out of his hand in a high arc…

Right onto Deanna’s prestige and clean couch.
Daryl and Deanna starred both transfixed at the dead animal… like they had never seen it before.

Harry couldn’t help himself and burst out into a fit of hiccupping small giggles.

“I... I’m sorry… But your faces!”

Daryl flushed up to his ears and hastily grabbed his kill of the clean upholstery. Between his laughs, Harry peeked at Daryl with warm eyes. Wanting to make sure that the sourly man knew that Harry wasn’t laughing at him per se, just the comic relieve of the situation.

But it seemed like he worried over nothing. Because while the shy hunter was still blushing, he also sported a small satisfied smile himself as he looked at the laughing teen before him.

At the very least the small stunt had broken through the British teen’s anxiety enough to let him gather his wits. “I was… captured by a group that kept me for their… entertainment, if you know what I mean?”

Deanna looked lost for a moment, until her eyes widened in horrified realisation. “I’m…. Oh my god! I’m sorry! How long were you with them?”

“I’m not sure… but I think it might have been nine months.” Harry answered her. The woman looked pale and old for a moment.

To Harry it just confirmed again, what he had thought about these people in the beginning. They had lived sheltered and in ignorance to what the world had come to.

Deanna carefully eyed him and Daryl before she asked in a subdued manner:

“Rick said to me that it was all about survival now, at any cost. That people out there were always looking for an angle. That they would measure you by what they could take from you. By how they could use you to live… And that you have killed people… so your family, all those people out there, could be alive. Is this what he meant?”

Harry pitied her right now. She hadn’t been ready to understand, what Rick was telling her.

And he didn’t thing she really understood it yet but she had started to get a glimpse of the monsters the living outside her protecting walls had become.

And it shook her badly.
“Where is Harry?”

Rick looked around the spacy room that looked more like a slumber party for overgrown kids than a real living room. They had decided to stay together, first and for most for safety reasons in an unknown new community but the truth was all of them had gotten so used to their puppy pile, when they huddled together for the night, that they all had felt uneasy at the thought to spilt up.

Most of them had taken showers.

Rick himself had even shaved his caveman bread off. It had been… strange…

To see his own face like that. Wild and untamed. Rough and only a step away from being feral.

But to see his clean shaven face after had been even more unsettling. He looked like officer friendly again and the same time had felt like he was looking at a stranger.

Judith hadn’t recognized him. It had taken her nearly an hour to stop looking over his shoulder every time he spoke, like she was confused, why she could hear him but couldn’t see her daddy. Carl and the rest of the group had just laughed their asses off at him and teased him merciless.

It showed him that Michonne had been right. He needed to change… needed to let the fight go or the fine line that distinguished him from being like Joe and Gareth would slowly but surely vanish.

They needed this place. Carl and Judith needed this place.

One way or another.

“Kid’s gone ta shower…” Daryl gave him a short reply. His friend and brother looked troubled sitting on the windowsill, nibbling on his thumb.

At Rick’s questioning look he sighed deeply.

“He been gone fer sometime… Carol went ta look.”

Deanna had chosen this moment to look in on them saying she wanted to make sure they had settled in. She complimented their caution of staying together and then moved on to tell them that she had jobs for most of them, to get them integrated in the community.

When she had turned to leave the house, Harry and Carol were coming down the stairs.

And well Rick didn’t think anyone could help themselves but stare at Harry.
The kid… well the kid looked very pretty… there was just no other word for it.

And didn’t feel Rick like the biggest creep on earth for even thinking it.

But… Jesus!

Harry was clearly freshly showered. The usually unruly and unkempt raven hair, which used to hang greasy into his face, had been washed and if Rick guessed correctly Carol had cut it for the teen. Because now it no longer obscured those big eyes and the thin face with its fine features but it was cut with a neat fringe and much shorter, curling around his ears and chin.

Without all the dirt and grime he looked uncomfortable beautiful for a boy. Straight nose, high cheekbones, the lips nicely formed. Eyes that looked a little too big for such a thin face, almond shaped and soo very, very green.

Harry’s skin looked pink, and as if he had scrubbed himself clean with a little more force and a bit more heat than strictly necessary. It made him look flushed and innocent.

The shirt that Carol must have forced on Harry, while too large on his malnourished form, was still the best fitting attire Rick had ever seen on him. It showed off a slim and small build with good proportions. But shite all in all he looked heartbreakingly pretty and delicate…

It made it so easy to see what the Claimers might have seen when they took the boy… and it disgusted Rick that the Sheriff in him had analysed, what had been the appeal to claim the boy.

All of them starred at Harry, even Deanna, making the small British teen clearly uncomfortable with this much attention. As the boy quickly ducked his head and made with hurried, slightly stumbling steps a direct bee line for Daryl.

A smile tugged at Rick’s lips when he saw how his brother almost unnoticeably puffed his chest a bit up when Harry took shelter and comfort from his presence.

Something had troubled her deeply…

“How nice of you to check in on us. But we’re all very much tired and would like to settle for the night.” Carol chirped at the community leader.

Damn, she’s good. All polite and charming submission. Served with such sweetness that you might be in danger of getting diabetes from it.
And Deanna fell for it without a second glance. She even seemed a little flustered.

“Oh… yes, yes. Sure! I just wanted to make a short stop here.”

She was already half out of the door, when a shy voice piped up from the other end of the room. “Uhm… Mrs. Monroe?” Harry was indeed squinting at Deanna from his safe place next to Daryl.

“Huh? Yes, Harry? What can I do for you?” She asked in kind astonishment.

“Uhm… you said, you had a lot of resources and supplies gathered, right?” Harry shyly inquired.

“Yes, that we have. Do you need something?” Deanna seemed surprised that the modest teen would ask for anything but her demeanour stayed open and friendly.

The teen was nervously fumbling with the hem of his shirt peeking unsure at the woman in the door way.

“Well, I just… I wondered if you might have some glasses somewhere?”

HUH!?

Rick could see more than one jaw dropping at Harry’s request… glasses!?

Deanna was the only one who was unfazed.

“Yeah, sure. We found a few here in the houses and collected some ages ago. Tomorrow morning you can go the Olivia. She’s taking care of our supplies.”

With a last smile she felt them behind, but no one paid her any mind. They were all regarding Harry in open disbelief.

Glasses?! The boy needed fuck glasses!!!

Abraham in his eloquent ways voiced his thoughts perfectly.

“Mother dick! Kiddo, you need fucking glasses?!”

“Uhm… yes?” Harry blinked owlishly at them.

“What’s… uhm…yes? Supposed to mean young man?! Do you need glasses or not?”

Oh, that was Carol’s best mom-voice. Fists stemmed into her sides, face pulled into a disapproving
frown she made an impressive figure of a strict mother scolding her kid.

“Yeah, I need glasses. Always did.” Harry told them in full innocence as if it was the most normal thing in the world that he was running around in the apocalypse with human eating corpses fucking everywhere and people just looking for a chance to get the better of you when you saw shit!

Daryl just gaped like a fish at Harry, while Caro threw her hands up in exasperation. A sentiment Rick shared whole heartedly.

He had travelled with us for months, god dam it. How it never had come up that Harry needed fucking glasses to get around?

But then there had been some signs…

Harry could be quiet clumsy. He had stumbled a lot on their travels but Rick had put it down to the green eyed teen’s bad health and weak constitution. Hell, Harry’s dismissal shooting skills should have tipped him of…

Honestly nobody could be that bad.

On the other side Harry had navigated them through Atlanta’s street…

Damn it all! How was any of this possible!?

“Then why have you never said so? We’ve could have gotten some specs for you.” Maggie inquired.

“You would have needed to take me with you because I don’t know my exact prescription. And first and for most we had to look for enough other things. It just wasn’t that important in comparison?” Harry shyly tried to explain. He had tilted his head to one side and with his new haircut, raven looks danced around his face, making him look guileless.

Groaning Carol dropped the head into her hands… *Yep!*

Flushing Harry tried to defend himself.

“We needed food and supplies more than anything. The Claimers destroyed my own glasses after my second escape attempt so I wouldn’t be able to run away anymore. And while I don’t see well without them, I’ve learned to get by without them. So it wasn’t that important…”

Glaring, Carol fixed him with an unrelenting stare. “Was that the reason you were so bad at shooting?”

If he wasn’t so pissed Rick might have laughed at Harry’s deer-caught-in-the-headlights
expression. “Well… uhm… No? I just really don’t like guns…?”

With narrowed eyes their tough den-mother pointed a sharp finger at the British teen.

“You’re a bad liar! Tomorrow, after you get yourself some glasses, we’re taking you out for shooting practice again.”

Too big green puppy dog eyes zoomed pleadingly in on Rick and then to Daryl.

“What? Pleeeeaaaaasssssee! No, I don’t want to! I hate the guns. I promise to practise more with the knives!”

Rick could see that Daryl had already buckled under the force of the plea and when those emerald orbs fix themselves on him, he felt his own resolution wavering fast. And maybe he would have given in…

“That’s not up for discussion!” Carol had spoken!

A clear frown of disapproval on her face judged both men as push overs and not fit to hold themselves against the small teen.

“You’re learning to shoot! And that’s final.”

Harry dropped his head in resignation… and after he shared a last look of dismay with Daryl which earned him just an amused little smirk and a helpless shrug that clearly said: *She’s right and you know it.*

The teen heaved a heavy sigh and nodded in defeat.

“Yes, ma’am!”

* 

Daryl watched Harry as he chose a pair of glasses from a small collection. The hunter had stayed in the doorway and tried to ignore the panicked looks the plumb woman that ran the supply storage threw his way every few seconds.

He hadn't showered last night. Hadn't seen the fucking point. So he was still dirty and greasy and looked as unrespectable as ever. Carol had said the woman was named Olivia and she behaved like he would assault her any minute…

Since he was with the group, he had grown used to be a part of a family, people accepting him for who he was, without any need to keep up appearances. It had made him forget how people used to judge him all the time before.

He had never looked too much after his appearance. Not after his ma died. She had been the only
one to care about shit like that. Merle might have when he served but never at home.

And Daryl could still remember, how his daddy had slurred insults at him for trying to tidy up when he was still in school. Calling him a pussy and a fag. Laughing cruelty at him for smelling like a flower, when real man shouldn't care about a bit of sweat and dirt.

Later he had learned that a scruffy and dirty appearance helped to get people off his back.

In the beginning his peers had tried to bully him because of his dirty and holey hand-me-downs and his family's reputation but they had soon learned that he had could back up his bark with a bite. They had kept their distance then.

His exterior combined with a harsh glare and a known readiness to punch first and ask never had done the rest. The dirt and his aggressions had become armour to him, protecting him from getting too close to anyone. People had left him alone which was what he wanted but it had been lonely sometimes...

There had been nobody had cared about or for him... All he had was a drunken, abusive asshole for a father and a mostly absent asshole for a brother. Maybe that was why he had clung to Merle so much all his live...

He had been a douchebag, drifting uselessly, getting into stupid and needless trouble but at least he hadn't been alone anymore.

The way the shy fat woman regarded him, reminded him painfully about the mistrust and distain people had shown him all his life. She squeaked, when he when looked at her and nearly his behind the counter top. It was fucking ridiculous.

Harry had completely ignored her and showing Daryl pairs of glasses from time to time, trying them on squinting through the lenses, testing his sight before he switched to another pair.

It was kind of adorable, Daryl decided. How Harry would scrunch up his nose and tilted his head to the side in deep concentration.

Finally he made an exited noise that drew Daryl’s and Olivia's attention.

“This one!”

Daryl wanted to groan... These glasses were a monstrosity!

Big, nerdy, horn rimmed glasses. And hell, was this a pink flower pattern on the frame? Fuck! These ugly things looked like they belonged to an old lady before.

“Jesus, yer sure?”

“Yep, I can see perfectly with them. They are great.” Harry positively beamed at the hunter.

“Well, they look like shit.” Daryl told the teen in deadpanned voice.
Harry looked amused at his words and started to turn them in his hands inspecting them carefully. “Huh... Well I like them. They are special!” Harry laughed lightly.

Daryl felt a nice and warm fluttering in his stomach. Had felt it before. When Harry had laughed so carefree during the interview. Happiness suited Harry, the older man decided.

Harry put the damn specs on... And want do you say it... The kid looked like an adorable dork. Somehow the glasses accented those green big eyes perfectly and even the fucking flower pattern fitted his fine features and skin tone quite well.

Poking his tongue out at Daryl Harry quipped at him with a smirk: “Don't you think that I can pull them off?”

Daryl couldn't help the traitorous twitching in his right mouth corner.

Yeah... The damn glasses were OK if they made the kid happy.

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At noon everyone had gathered back at Rick’s house. And Glenn had nearly bounced at them when he saw Harry, Daryl, Rick and Carol coming back from shooting practice.

The geeky Asian had stumbled a bit when he saw the new glasses with flower pattern.


“Told ya, them look like ol’ lady glasses.” Daryl snickered at the green eyed teen.

“Oh shut it, you tossers!” Harry shoved Daryl in good humour. “I see very well with them and the pattern isn’t too bad.”

“If you say so.” Glenn laughed outright at their silly teasing.

“How was shooting practice?”

This question made all of them react in different stages of frustration and exasperation.

Michonne and Maggie raised surprised eyebrows at that strange reaction.

“Come on, kid can’t have gotten worse?! That’s not humanly possible.” Abe bellowed loudly from behind the women.

If possible Carol's and Rick's expressions grew even more pinched than before while Daryl looked torn and Harry just avoided eye contact at all.

“Really? So he’s gotten worse?!” Glenn asked wide eyed. “Because I saw his first tries and... well Abe is right it’s not humanly possible that he’s gotten worse, unless he managed to shoot backwards.”
Carol just shook her head at that and stomped inside the house. “Rick, you deal with this. I need alcohol.”

“God, what happened?” Now they were all concerned, even if Carol didn’t seem angry something was off.

Rick sighed deeply and looked a little dazed at his family.

“Nothing bad… just turned out that Harry is … despite all his whining … is a fantastic shoot.”

“HUHG??!!”

Now Daryl snorted while his face, too, showed a strange mixture of exasperation and proudness. “Yeah, hit three walkers right ‘tween the eyes on 50 yards with a pistol on first trial.”

“Holy shit and bagging balls! You’re eye sight must be a fucking disaster, kiddo, if you’re flowery glasses made such a difference!”

“Yeah, that’s want we said, too!” Rick glared at Harry.

“And I said sorry! But it was really ok… I handled the knives just fine. Carol and Michonne said so, before you knew about the specs.” Harry pouted. “And for the record: I’m still not fond of guns… They make me uncomfortable.”

“But now at least we know that ya can defend yerself or others if ya need ta…” Daryl quipped up. He was the only one who looked highly amused by the situation

* 

Carol was taking over casserole duty to help the elder people and to integrate herself more into the community. Dressed in a pretty cardigan with flowers and with a meek house wife persona slipped on, like an additional jacket she strode out to infiltrate the new community.

A mole on a mission.

Harry thought she was one of the scariest persons he had ever met in this new world.

When she passed Daryl sitting on the porch she stopped and looked him over in irritation. She took in the dirt on his skin and clothes, tsked at his unwashed hair and the way he sat on the porch glaring at people, starring at him or others of their group.

“Take a shower. Take a shower and wash that vest.” Carol commanded. “We need to keep up appearance, even you!”

Daryl’s only response was a low grumble that showed that he had no intention of doing so.

“Take a shower or I will hose you down in your sleep.” And while neither her tone nor her words were directly unkind, it brought Harry back to those hot days on Private Drive, when Petunia had
hosed him down with ice cold water in the garden because she deemed him too dirty for the house.

Harry shivered and walked also out on the porch to Daryl. He couldn’t help but voice his worries to the hunter: “Will she really do that?”

Daryl looked surprised at Harry’s tone and question. Maybe he had expected to be ridiculed or that Harry would agree with Carol.

“Nah… well maybe… That woman can be scary.”

“You’re filthy creature! Dragging dirt into our precious home, I’ll teach you!” Petunias shrill voice screeched in his mind.

“What’s th’ matter?” The hunter drawled in his soft, deep voice. His slated blue eyes were taking in Harry’s pale face and the worried wrinkle between his eyebrows but didn’t say anything. Harry liked that about Daryl. This ability to wait until Harry was ready to tell him things.

“Nothing. It’s just something aunt Petunia used to do… When she thought that I was too dirty from working in the garden to be allowed back into the house. And… I… I don’t know. It’s brought back some unpleasant memories…”

Daryl never offered empty platitudes but he met Harry’s gaze open and an honest with understanding. And somehow that was enough. Just know that there was anybody, who could relate to his upbringing. Who didn’t react with horror or anger, but with a quiet acceptance that came from similar experiences.

It felt calming. Made it easier to breathe.

Daryl and Harry watched the surrounding properties for a while in in companionable silence until the gruff man looked again at Harry and dragged his gaze over Harry’s head and how the teen was wearing his new flowery glasses as a headband instead on his nose.

“Yer know ya should wear yer glasses on ya nose not on ya head… Hard to see somethin’ like tha’.” Daryl’s southern drawl was velvet smooth as he teased Harry with a small smirk.

“Oh, shut it. Yes, I know that!” Harry could feel a blush creeping over his face as he rolled his eyes. “I spent so much time not able to see clearly. I got used to it, not relying on my vision but my guts instead. I got by… even if I couldn’t run from the Claimers anymore. And now when I look at this place, truly seeing those white pristine houses and the people here… I… They are… Carl said they were weak and that he fears that staying here will make us weak, too.” Harry admitted. Daryl had lit a cigarette and was thoughtfully smoking. His whole attitude could have looked disinterested if it hadn’t been for the knowing glint in his eye when he glanced at teen through his fringe.

“We ain’t getting’ weak. Rick and Carol their on their toes. Don’t cha worry ta much.” The hunter
rumbled with the cigarette pressed between his lips.

“But it’s not just that, they are ignorant and naïve. And I see how they look at me, at all of us. Like we’re dangerous. They see how dirty we are and how wild we grew out there. They think we violent. They are afraid and weary of us. All the while they cling to an illusion of normality and white fence morality that gives me creeps. These people don’t like change and they are suspicious of the different.” It eased Harry’s mind a bit to get these thoughts off his chest.

But Daryl looked troubled. Letting his watchful eyes wander, Daryl had started nibbling on his thumb.

“Know whatcha mean. If they already hate ya why try ta prove them wrong. I ain’t need ta play nice fer anyone. Never did. Won’t start now. If they want ta hate me, a shower won’t change that.”

“You think that it’ll be useless to try and change their minds about us? It reminds me of my aunt and uncle. Makes me feel dirty and like they only need to look at me and just… know, you know? Like I’m covered in the kind of dirt even a thousand showers couldn’t remove… and their looks… When they look at me like that I feel like I can never be clean again.”

Daryl looked sharply at the raven haired boy. “Yer ain’t dirty!”

“I feel like could never belong to this kind of normality, never did. I walk through this streets and all I hear in my head is Joe telling me that there’s nothing sadder that an outdoor cat thinking he’s an indoor cat.”

“Doesn’t matter if ya don’t belong with these assholes. ‘Cause ya belong with us now!”

Serious blue eyes bored into green ones. Daryl’s distinct jaw was stubbornly clenched.

Harry felt a warm fluttering feeling in his belly at those words that spread through his body easing the tight knot in his chest and the itching on his skin a little.

“Thank you.”

As always Daryl couldn’t handle the gratitude and turned his face away mumbling a silent.

“’s nothing.” And as always this show of shyness caused Harry to direct a warm smile at the hunter.

“So it’s just easier to stop looking at least for a bit… and to take a break. To take the glasses off for a moment so I don’t have to face all these looks and their judgement. To hide, for a bit of piece. Just like you decided not to take a shower, to keep people off your back.”

Coughing in embarrassment Daryl glared at Harry.

Harry had to repress a snigger at the pouty face the grown man was making. No wonder Carol loved to tease him so much, if it got you these kinds of reactions.

“Why do ya think they know?” The hunter wanted to know after a while.

“I think Pete, the local doctor, babbled… I can’t be sure… But, well it’s just a hunch.”

Aaron had taken Harry and Eric to the surgeon at the sick bay on the first afternoon and it had been really unpleasant.
“Well there’s not much left of patient’s confidentiality these days… And he was creepy.”

“He did anything?” Daryl seemed immediately alarmed.

“No but he commented on a few things and well…”

+++++Flashback+++++

Aaron had brought him and Eric to the local doctor. A tall man with blond hair and cold eyes. Harry felt immediately uncomfortable with him.

Pete had greeted Aaron and Eric nicely enough... But he regarded them with an air of superiority.

“Hope that wasn't a sex injury. Who knows what you two get up to in the wilderness?” Pete indicated to Eric’s broken ankle with wiggling eyebrows and sharp smile. The light leering joke made Harry cringe, even if Aaron seemed to take it with good humour, but the tightening around Eric's mouth was more than a painful ankle and belied the show of an easy going atmosphere.

It confirmed that Harry wasn't the only one to feel the latent aggression in the doctor.

“No, I got hurt in an encounter with a Herd of roamers. Pushed a car on my ankle.”

The auburn haired man looked a bit vexed with the talk and the way the surgeon behaved.

“Sorry just a joke.” The man held his hands up in a pacifying gesture, smiling like a shark before he turned to Harry.

“Who have you brought me here? Hope that's not your new boy toy. He looks a bit young for that. Even if he surely isn't hard on the eyes.” His tone had stayed joking but there was an edge to his words and a calculating glint in his eyes that made all of Harry's alarm bells ring.

“No. Peter he surely isn't that. His name is Harry. He was with the group, we brought with us to Alexandria. He wasn't well on the way here, so we thought it might be good, if you took a look at him.” Aaron sounded very calm and controlled but he had stopped smiling. Something that happened very seldom as Harry had observed. Aaron wore his smile like Daryl his glare as armour against this the prejudiced and harsh world.

“Well, well… not much of a talker yourself, huh? Harry is it then. Come in pretty, I’ll have a look at you.” Pete completely ignored Aaron and Eric now. Those cold eyes observing Harry.

“People out there were always looking for an angle. They measure you by what they could take from you.”
Harry couldn't say what exactly made him do it but instead of following the man, he gripped Eric’s sleeve.

“Could you please come with me?” He managed to get out in a pleading whisper. Eric and Aaron shared a surprised and worried look.

“Yeah… You're sure?” Eric asked stunned.

“Yeah… Just…Please!” Harry couldn’t look them in the eye but they seemed to get it, because Eric put a comforting hand onto his shoulder, squeezing it carefully.

“Yes! No problem, I just thought you might want some privacy for your appointment?!”

Shaking his head quickly, Harry replied: “No, I don't want to be alone with him.”

“Ok… Sure!” Eric’s face was soft with sympathy and kindness.

“Eric there’s no need to come. I’m sure Harry and I can manage just fine on our own.” Pete’s sharp reprimand and displeasure showed clearly despite his strained smile.

“I want him to come.” Harry inched closer to Eric now nearly buried into the man’s side.

The smile Pete gave him, certainly didn’t reach his cold eyes.

“Can’t say anything against that, can I?”

++++Flashback end++++

“After that he just checked me over. Found nothing different than Dr. Edwards, gave me some pills. And basically repeat of the instructions I got in Atlanta. Rest. Eat. And hopefully, I won’t die tomorrow.”

Sharp blue eyes scanned him in apparent worry trying to gauge the extent of Harry’s health issues or any further damage.

“And the doc?” Harry could see Daryl’s impressive arms budged in tension ready to storm the Doctors house, if he gave any hint of abuse.

“He didn’t hurt me and Eric stayed with me the whole time. But…I… He… I never want to be alone with his man.” The older man’s jaw tensed for a moment until he exhaled audibly and gave Harry a sharp nod.

“Ok, kid!” And after a small pause. “Wanna get out for a while?”

“Yes, please!”
Daryl loved being outside with Harry. Watching Harry move nearly silently with him through the woods was fascinating. And damn the kid was a lot more graceful now that could see farer than his own two feet. From time to time the man would stop and point small details out to him. Sometimes he showed Harry small animals, rare plants or tracks.

It was nice and calm.

Daryl would never admit to it but he liked teaching his skills. It had been nice to show Beth how to track and all that. And it was nice now to share this with Harry, who was all bright eyes and wonder.

The boy had seemed so upset by Carol’s threat to hose Daryl down. Not to mention that the community doc seemed to be a creep. So Daryl was glad to see him so carefree and genuine happy for ones.

They both enjoyed the calm of the woods, until a rustling in the bushes caused Daryl to signal Harry to stay behind him and to be quiet.

“Come out! Now!” The hunter growled in deep suspicion, bow ready to take out any threat. Both of them breathed a sigh of relief, when they saw Aaron stumbling out in the open.

The scout sported his usual smile and sprouted his usual friendly bullshit that had Daryl immediately on the edge. The hunter couldn't hold back a frustrated growl while a deep scowl worked itself over his face.

And that had absolutely nothing to do with Harry peeking from behind him and greeting the Alexandria scout with a happily chirped “Hello Aaron” and a wave. It hadn't! Nah!

At least Aaron seemed to falter a bit under Daryl’s heavy frown which gave him a small flare of satisfaction.

“Uhm… You know the difference between walkers and the living just by sound? That's amazing.” Flattering bastard was nervous.

*Like he’s supposed to be.* Daryl couldn’t help but think viciously, just all too aware of Harry small presence beside him.

“Yeah, ya can't?” Daryl knew he was being a jackass.

“Can you tell the difference between a good guy and a bad guy?” Aaron challenged. Daryl narrowed his eyes even more but it seemed that, when you didn’t shut the smiling asshole with a punch to the face, he would babble on.

“Because Rick didn’t seem to be an expert with that.”

“Not much of a difference, no more.” He rasped back at the scout. Daryl already felt his ire rise. How dared he to judge them for being distrusting or for lashing out before asking. Asshole knew
Beside him Harry had come a little closer, just shy of really touching him. With everyone else, even with Rick and Carol, Daryl would have been hard pressed to distance himself again, not comfortable with such close proximity.

But this felt good...

“Whatcha want? Why are ya following us?” Daryl hissed at the scout, who seemed honestly surprised by the accusation.

“I wasn’t. I came out to hunt rabbits.” And with a kind look to Harry and Daryl he added: “I know why you are here. Mind if I join?”

Huffing like a lock he shared a look with Harry. Harry just calmly looked back and Daryl knew that the kid wouldn't mind having Aaron around but he wouldn't say so unless Daryl was OK with it. He just stood there holding the hunter’s gaze with an open and warm expression....

_Shit these ugly specs really showed those big eyes off..._

Waiting patiently for the hunter to come to a conclusion. Daryl liked that about Harry.

“Keep up and keep ya mouth shut.” With that he quickly turned his back on Aaron and Harry to block out their obviously amused expressions.

_Assholes!_ He grumbled without aby real heat.

Sometime later they came along the most beautiful black horse. Apparently the kids had given it the most stupid name ever… Buttons. Aaron had told them that Eric and he had tried for ages to capture the beautiful animal, to bring it inside the walls. But with no luck because the animal spooked easily. Daryl offered to try it this time.

“You’ done this before?” Aaron questioned him nervously.

“Ah, ma group did. But they weren’t out that long. The longer they out there the more they become what they really are.”

Daryl was reminded of the days in the prison when they had managed to bring in pigs and a few horses. So he was fairly sure he could manage better than Aaron…

But well horses were never his favourite animals and the beasts knew it. Maggie … and Hershel had always been so much better with them. A pang of grief went through the redneck when he thought of the kind old man that had given them all so much.

Slightly crouched and with careful steps, equipped with a rope Daryl started to approach the stud and while Aaron had stayed behind, but Harry was following Daryl silently just a few feet behind.
In smooth grumbling tones the hunter mumbled small, nonsensical things to the horse, hoping to keep the animal calm and relaxed.

Praising the black beauty for staying and encouraging it to keep doing so.

And just when nearly had it… The stud raised his head in alarm. The horse had smelt them before Daryl could have heard them. Walkers.

*Fucking shit!* Throwing the rope away he grabbed his bow to defend himself. Aaron had started immediately to shoot at the undead fuckers.

*And man he did good! Right between the eyes. No bullets wasted.*

But Buttons had startled badly and had dashed away in the commotion and with a curse Daryl saw Harry running after the stupid horse.

“*Harry! Let it go!*” But too late the kid and the horse had disappeared in the high grass.

“*Damn it!*” Aaron had noticed it too. Together both men made quick work of the remaining walkers, before snatching up their weapon to chase after Harry and a really troublesome horse.

They were lucky. A horse dashing through a flied with nearly neck high vegetation left some quite obvious tracks… a blind man could have followed that.

After just a few minutes they saw both Harry and the black stallion. Daryl felt his stomach cramp at the sight…

The dark horse stood in the corner of an old pasture fence, skittishly throwing his head from side to side, while Harry’s frail figure inched carefully closer to the tall and powerful animal.

Daryl could see how agitated the horse was, eyes wide and its nostrils flaring. His heart nearly stopped, when Buttons went on its rear legs to kick at Harry. It would need just one bad kick and Harry would be dead. Beside him Aaron inhaled sharply. The scout was wide eyed and pale and Daryl guessed he looked the same… sick with worry!

He wanted to shout at Harry to leave the fucking horse alone but the hunter feared that he might distract Harry and spook damn animal just more… The British teen didn’t waver in his attempts, gaining inch for inch on the animal, hands open and slightly crouched like Daryl before.

The wind carried softly mumbled words, soft humming noises that made the horses ears twitch in interest. It seemed to calm the god forsaken horse a bit… at fucking least. Sweat was running down Daryl’s back and his arms hurt with tension. The crossbow was ready to shoot the horse if necessary!

Aaron made a choking sound, as they watched Harry suddenly bowing to the horse and not just a small one… No, a real deep bow with a sweeping gesture that could have belonged to a scene on a
king’s court, all the while the raven haired teen maintained eye contact with the powerful animal.

And then… nothing.

Harry stood there bowing to a freaking horse… apparently waiting.

The hunter wanted to curse! What the fucking hell was that dumb idiot doing?!

Next to him Aaron wasn’t faring any better… Bewilderment, shock, fear and anger fought in the man’s face.

Just when Daryl was ready to end this insane shit…

Buttons bowed back!

The horse bowed back! He had seen the dead walking, he had seen a chupacabra but never in his live he seen any animal doing such strange shit!

Buttons had bowed his neck in greeting to Harry, which was apparently the sign the teen had been waiting for?! Because now he crossed the last distance to the black horse, patting it with a warm smile, while the horse huffed a few breaths in his unruly hair, causing the teen to giggle.

Jesus, that boy would bring him into an early grave. Exasperation became a common reaction to the stunts Harry pulled all the time.

“Have you ever seen a horse do something like that?” Aaron asked him wide eyed.

“Nah…” And even to his own ears Daryl sounded a bit faint.

“He’s a good judge of character” The tracker didn’t know why he mumbled this to Aaron but it seemed fitting.

Perplexed the scout tilted his head. “Huh… you mean buttons?”

“Nah, ya ass. Talkin’ ‘bout Harry. Rick might not be an expert but we ain’t trusting anyone anymore, is hard ta, when ya saw what we saw. But Harry, he knows them good from bad guys, despite what he went throu’“

Aaron’s expression looked pained for a moment. “Eric… Eric stayed with him during his medical appointment. He didn’t tell me any details but he was shaken… Harry got hurt badly, didn’t he?!”

“Yeah… And still he was the first ta trust yer sorry ass. Convince’ us that ya tol’ us the truth.”

Swallowing heavily Aaron looked back to their wayward friend and his new pet, a deep look of consideration settling on his face.

Both men watched as Harry spotted them and waved to them with a big smile on his face.
It was a bit uncanny that the skittish horse just followed the teen without any rope. The beast let himself be lead to them just by Harry’s delicate hand on its neck and calm words.

Daryl greeted Harry with a cuff to the head and a small glare for scaring them like that.

“Ouch! That was uncalled for! I convinced him to come, didn’t I?” The green eyed teen pouted. All in all he glowed with satisfaction, which made it very hard for Daryl to stay angry with him.

_Convinced him…_ was a really strange wording, when you captured a horse but in consideration for what they had just witnessed it might not have been too far off…

On their way back Aaron watched the interaction between the teen and the horse with unveiled curiosity.

“You did something this before?” The scout asked.

“No directly with a horse… But uhm… My boarding school had some… animals and I had some courses on how to care for them.” Harry scratched the back off his head nervously.

“Yer school sounds fancier every time ya talk ‘bout.” Daryl shook his head.

And asked himself not the first time what kind of school Harry had gone to—“At least that sounds useful.”

Harry cringed a bit. “Sadly not that useful. But I certainly learned that intelligent animals should always be approached with the utter most respect or they kick your ass. And I really thought that Buttons needed someone to take care of him. He was just afraid.” The green eyed boy hummed happily.

“Getting close to new people is hard. Always has been but now…” The teen heaved a sigh.

“I know, why you came out here.” Aaron offered. “I know, you’re feeling like outsiders. Not your fault.” The curly haired man quickly added after a scowl from Daryl and a worried look from Harry.

“Eric and I are still outsiders in a lot of ways. We heard our fair share of well-meaning but hilarious offensive things from really nice men and women. You saw some of that when we went to Pete, Harry.”

“Then we both clearly disagree on the well-meaning part of your little speech. That man was nothing more than an asshole and nearly everything he said was offensive and mean.” Harry butted in and Daryl could see how surprised Aaron was at this little outburst, made him think that the gay couple must have gotten used to some shit from their community.

“You know people, the more afraid they get the more stupid they get. Fear shrinks the brain.” Aaron said with a small smirk. “They’re just scared of you and me for different reasons. Well they’re less scared of me now because they know me. It’s less and less every day.”

It sounded bleak to Daryl, this fight for approval. It hadn’t worked for him before the apocalypse.
and he didn’t think it would work now.

But Harry seemed to lighten up with those words like he had been shown that there might be a light on the end of the tunnel, a future where he could bear to leave his glasses on all the time.

“So let them get to know you. You should go to Deanna’s party tonight.” Both Daryl and Harry shuddered at the idea of so many unknown people gawking at them.

And while Harry always grew more silent in his discomfort, Daryl went with scowling aggression.

“I got nothing to prov’.” He snarled at the scout. “I met a lotta bad people out here. A lotta ‘bout shit. I ain’t afraid of nothin’.”

But Aaron didn’t budge. He voice was calm and sure.

“Yes you were.”

After that they walked the rest of the way in silence.

*  

“So we’re going to the party?” Harry asked Daryl.

“What? NAH!” Harry sniggered at his flushed appearance. He had obviously showered and wore the cleanest clothes he had ever seen on the man. So he just raised an eyebrow to let his friend know that he was calling bullshit.


They moved together through the streets, until they could see Deanna’s house and as soon as they would hear the noise of a lot of people talking, it was over.

Harry couldn’t move his feet anymore. He stood there rooted on the spot unable to move forward. It felt like an elephant was sitting on his chest. He couldn’t breathe, again. The fear had gripped him tightly and he felt his knees buckle under him.

And he finally found the strength to exhale loudly, to press the used up air out of his lungs before he inhaled greedily.

“Come on, kid. We’re going back, that’s enough for today.” A callused hand sweep unruly dark locks from his sweaty face.

Daryl, his less panicked mind supplied. Harry managed a weak nod.
When they came closer to their house, someone called out to them.

“Daryl! Harry! Hey.” There was Aaron standing on his porch, greeting them with a smile.

“Thought ya went to that party over there.” Daryl grumbled.

“Oh no, I was never going to go. Because of Eric’s ankle. Thank god.” Harry felt the man beside him stiffen…

“Why the hell, ya told us to go then?” Daryl sounded angry and a little hurt.

Harry had to hold back a sigh. Daryl would never take kindly to such games and Harry could relate. It felt a bit like being made look silly in front of the class. He knew how much being ridiculed hurt, how angry and lonely it made you.

With a long white beard and some badly coloured robes, Aaron would have made a great impersonation of Dumbledore. All wise and all knowing.

“You should try. You did. It’s more of a thoughts that’s counts kind of thing.” Yep, Harry appreciated such little manipulations even less than Daryl.

“Alright.” Daryl sounded unsure and vulnerable. But Aaron was unfazed in his friendly quest.

“Come in you two. Have some dinner. Come on, men. It’s some pretty serious spaghetti.”

Aww… hell what did they have to lose and Harry generally liked Aaron and Eric. Even if Aaron could be a wanker.

And yes, the spaghetti proved to be very, very good. But Aaron had apparently another agenda with them, or so Eric indicated. The scout revealed that he wanted Daryl as Alexandria’s new second scout. Aaron revealed to them that he couldn’t stand the thought of Eric getting hurt out there any longer.

Getting ripped apart had to feel like that. Harry understood rationally that Daryl needed to get out from time to time or he would go nuts in here, where people were afraid of him and treated him like leper. Really, it was the best solution.

Daryl would be part of the community and at the same time he would have room to breathe. Because Aaron was right with this, too. Daryl was good out there and he would be a great scout.

But Merlin, it felt like losing the ground under his feet. Harry knew for some time now, how much he depended on the quite man for safety and support. He had realized it on so many occasions on the road. He needed Daryl. The person he trusted the most. Without him Harry would fall apart, would fall into this dark, black hole that was full of his darkest memories and demons and that was threatening to swallow him whole. Daryl was his anchor. He kept him grounded. He kept him alive.

And Harry wanted Daryl to be happy.
So he tried to smile for Daryl, to encourage him to use this opportunity. The hunter had to know this was a bloody good offer, but he looked unsure, shooting worried looks at Harry.

“Daryl, this is great. You could ride a bike again. You could get out and move freely. And I knew you would be good at this. It suits you. If you want to do it you should.” Daryl nearly shook with uncomfortable embarrassment at the praise, looking at the garage floor and the bike, avoiding eye contact. He mumbled a quiet thanks.

“Actually I have another proposition after today but I haven’t spoken to Deanna about it. So, it isn’t official. But I would like to take you with us, Harry.” Overwhelming relieve flooded through Harry’s whole body. He would get to breathe, too and most importantly would be able to travel with Daryl.

“Really?” A bright grin stretched over his face. “Yes, I would like to!”

“Good, because I think Buttons will need some exercise.”
It had been a few days since Deanna had given her approval, to let Harry go with Daryl and Aaron. It would be a test run, but well… Harry didn’t really care!

He would be able to leave the town. These walls were starting to close in on him. Even the others had begun to notice that his panic attacks had become more frequent. It had worried Beth and Carol especially.

While the blond girl had taken to fluttering around him, to make sure he was comfortable, Carol had forced weapons practice on him. The grey haired woman said it was to build his self-defence skills up a bit more, but Harry suspected that she saw in truth that he needed to get out. Grudgingly Harry had accepted both forms of care, even if it had been hard, to let others care for him that much.

So he had spent his time distracting himself with training and hanging out in Aaron’s and Eric’s garage, watching and assisting Daryl with his bike.

Tomorrow Aaron, Daryl and him would start their first scouting trip. The hunter had finished the bike so far and it was ready to go. There were just some last finishing touches left to do today.

Harry had also taken lessons in riding from Maggie and Beth. Both women had complimented his natural talent in handling the temperamental horse. It reminded Harry of Hagrid’s classes and Buckbeak but riding a horse was a lot easier than flying bareback on a Hippogriff. Harry liked it a lot.

So he had decided to take Aaron’s joke serious and to take Buttons out with them. The horse needed to stretch its legs as much as he did.

Harry was excited for Daryl and himself. They’re needed to get out and they needed to know that they were contributing to their family. That way they could do both and they would be riding together… in a sense. Aaron had joked endlessly with them about it, when Harry had said that he
would take Buttons with them for real.

When Harry was on the way over to Aaron’s for the day, he came along Glenn, Noah and Tara, who were getting ready for a scavenging trip with Nicolas and Aiden.

The pressure and unease of a sudden hunch was like walking into a bloody brick wall. Since they had arrived in Alexandria, there hadn’t been any real forebodings and Harry hadn’t been prepared for the suffocating feeling that compelled him to do something or…

Something was going to happen, something big…

Harry came quickly to a decision. Daryl didn’t need him today any way.

“Hey Glenn! Do you think, I could come with you today?” He addressed the young man, his voice a bit higher than usual with unease.

The young Korean looked surprised. “Uhm… You’ll start your scouting trip with Daryl and Aaron tomorrow. Don’t you want to relax some more?”

Harry softly shook his head. “No, I think it might be best to come with you today.” That got everyone’s attention.

“Harry? Any specific reason you want to come?” Aiden asked calmly. Deanna’s son was an asshole. And a reckless idiot that shouldn’t been allowed outside these walls, if Glenn and the others were to be believed. Tara and Noah had been furious about the careless and cocky way Aiden and Nicholas had behaved at their test run, playing around with walkers, clearly underestimating the danger.

The fact that kind and good-natured Glenn had felt the need to punch Aiden’s lights out spoke volumes to Harry.

In the end only Rick’s and Michonne’s resolute intervention had prevented a full brawl in the streets, because Daryl had immediately taken Glenn’s side and thrown himself at Nicholas. Everybody, who hurt their family, had to answer to the hunter.

His grumpy Huffelpuff had been hurt by Rick’s rebuke for the fight and Harry had felt for the loyal man. It was hard for Daryl to hold himself back like that when everything in him screamed to defend his precious people. Harry could relate to this. He remembered the need to protect his few loved ones, the burning anger when they were wronged, and the fear to see them hurt… to lose them again.

Harry had squired Daryl to the stable. The two of them had spent the rest of the night away from the others in Button’s new refuge in companionable silence, until Daryl had been done pouting. Harry asked him stupid questions or pressed for answers he just sat in the hay and watched as Daryl brushed the horse down, muttering sweet non-sense in a velvet smooth voice to the black beauty. Calming himself and the animal until it preened and huffed in comfort, nibbling on the hunter’s long hair.
Hours later they had went back to the house in a relaxed and warm atmosphere, walking very close but not quite touching. Harry had relished in the small almost unnoticeable smile on Daryl’s face.

Not that the scruffy man would admit that he had sulked in the first place.

Even with all his faults Aiden had never been unkind to Harry and he wasn’t now.

“Not a specific reason, no. Just… a hunch that it might be good, if you had another pair of hands with you. That’s all.” Harry tried to sound casual but might have failed, if he took Aiden’s raised eyebrows into account.

But the British teen was relieved to see that Glenn and the others got the message. He saw it in the way Glenn’s shoulders tensed and straightened. He saw it in the tightening of Tara’s mouth and in the line between Noah’s eyebrows.

*Good.*

Aiden just looked confused. “Listen Harry that is a nice gesture but that’s not, how we work here.”

“I know Aiden. And it wasn’t supposed to sound like I wanted to undermine your way of doing things… it’s just that I really thing that I could help today.” Harry tried to sound as subserviced as he could, trying to keep things calm, despite the pressure of the foreboding suffocating him.

“Aiden, Harry knows, what he’s doing and he helped us out there a lot. If he says he can help than we should take him with us.” Glenn said nervously.

“Please, I swear I won’t hold you back.” Aiden didn’t stand a chance against the force of the green, puppy dog eyes and the teen’s pretty face, blushing to the tips of his ears he nodded.

So Harry had gone with the group… And bloody hell! The whole endeavour had gone pea shaped far too fast.

Eugene was a bloody coward, who hadn’t wanted to go on the run to the storage warehouse in the first place, while Aiden and Nicholas were far too cocky and sure of themselves. At least Aiden seemed to have learned something from the last time that had ended in a brawl with Glenn.

The Korean expert for runs had warned them against going in the mall without checking the perimeter more thoughtfully. And Aiden had listened, thank Merlin for small mercies.

On the inside they had discovered a group of around two dozen walkers trapped behind a chain fence. Aiden and Nicholas had both looked deeply unnerved by that.

Aiden had then tried to work better with them. He really had, but bloody damn…. The young man was just resistant to advice!
There had been nothing any of them could have done.

Harry had been with Tara and Eugene, looking for the micro-inverter they needed. But he had heard Glenn’s shouts of warning to Aiden to stop shooting. Looking up between the shelves Harry had spotted the walker in a military uniform that the brunet man was shooting at.

*Merlin’s saggy balls… Fuck!*

Despite Glenn's protests, Aiden had impulsively continued to shoot…

The pressure of the foreboding had increased then, accompanied by burning pain on his wrists. So Harry had done the only thing he had been able to think of and had grabbed Tara and Eugene to take cover. In that moment an explosion had blown through the warehouse.

…..

Smoke, debris and a thick layer of dust had settled around them. Harry’s ears had been ringing painfully.

He could hear faint movements around him… someone was coughing.

With a groan Harry pulled himself in an upright position. Tara lay right next to him and wasn’t moving… Blood had started to pool around her head. Cursing Harry sprung to his feet, frantically searching for a pulse on the young woman.

There! There it was!

A bit weak but there. *Thank Merlin!*

The head injury looked bad and it was clear that she needed medical help. Looking around for aide, Harry saw the others picking themselves up, too.

And then he saw *him*…

The pressure of the explosion had impaled Aiden on a shelf.

*Bloody fuck!* Sour bile was rising in Harry’s throat.

A warm hand touched his shoulder. “Come on Harry. I know it’s bad but we need to keep it together. We’re not done.” Glenn’s dark eyes were solemn.
“Yes, yes. I know.” Taking a deep breath Harry forced himself to stand up and the contents of his stomach to stay down, where they belonged.

Together they carried the unconscious Tara to safer place, a small office with big windows and a door. The head wound was bleeding badly but hopefully it wouldn’t be fatal.

“Come on, Tara. Wake up!” Harry mumbled to her, carefully tapping her face mindful of her head wound. “That’s it. Stay with us.” The poor thing gave a pained groan.

“She's gaining consciousness! Thank god!” Eugene exclaimed.

“Uhhgg…” A sound half groan, half scream alerted them…

Aiden was groaning.

Oh oh oh nooo… He is alive?! Absolute horror washed over Harry and cold sweat started to gather on his forehead. The three metal bars, that had punctured Aiden’s body, hadn’t killed him and were now holding him in upright position.

There would be no easy way to do this.

Aiden was alive!

Merlin!

Alive and gaining consciousness!

Looking into the faces of the others he saw his own terrified horror mirrored.

“We need to leave.” Nicholas exclaimed with fear written over his whole face.

“What?” They all looked to the Alexandrian scavenger in shocked disbelief.

“You want to leave him like this? He’s alive. He’s your friend, you bloody coward!” Harry snarled at Nicholas.

“We need to go. We can’t take both of them with us. They slow us down.” Nicholas hissed in panic already fidgeting and looking for an escape route.

“No. We don’t leave our people behind. That’s not what we do.” Glenn’s voice was firm.

“We have to try.” Harry and Noah agreed. But Nicholas just wanted to leave the dying man behind. He was shaking with fright and nerves... Shite!

But they needed to try!
The plan was simple. Eugene would stay with Tara, who was gaining her wits back… It would be easier to get her out if she could move on her own a bit. Glenn, Noah and Nicholas would try to lift Aiden from the shelves.

“We’ll need to pull him of the bars.” Noah said out loud, what Harry had feared… Yep, that was about to get nasty.

“I'm not tall enough to pull him of the bars with you. Noah, give me your gun and the flare signal. I keep the walkers of our backs.” Harry offered.

“Didn't think I would see the day, you’d ask for a gun on your own free will.” Glenn joked in bad humour.

Harry just flipped him off with a rude gesture he had learned from Daryl. They had a job to do. This wasn’t the time for nerves.

“Take care, Harry.” Noah put a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

Aiden would scream… There was no way he wouldn’t.

And the biters heard the dinner bell ringing.

Harry shot the flares first, hoping to keep them distracted for a while at least.

Behind him he heard his two friends arguing with Nicholas. The wanker wasn't even really helping… Damn that coward to hell! Harry was grinding his teeth but kept his eyes on the task at hand.

Keep the walkers away!

Harry felt his magic move under his skin rippling like hundreds of small snakes, hissing in discomfort, when the barricade of the seal pushed them forcefully back.

But something had changed.

Maybe it was just wishful thinking but Harry thought that his magic felt stronger than before and that the binding was wavering...

He could feel, how his tattoos burned stronger than ever before, like the binding had to strain itself to fight his magic down... Harry shoved the usual discomfort that came with the fluctuations of his magic to the back of his mind.

He needed to concentrate on the task at hand. There was no room for doubts and introspections. If they survived this, he would still have time to contemplate, why it was easier to keep his mind, when he normally couldn't breathe or move under the crippling force of the binding ritual.

*Keep your head in the game, Potter.* A Mood-like voice growled in his head. *Constant vigilance!*
They needed to get Aiden and Tara out. Now!

“Eugene, how’s Tara?” Harry hissed in the genius’ direction.

“I’m better, Harry.” Tara sounded wobbly at the best but she was alert and she was speaking that was more, than they could have hoped for under the circumstances.

“Good! Help Glenn and Noah with Aiden. And then run as fast as possible to the van. Aiden needs the medical supplies from the first aid kit and so do you Tara.”

“We others will have your back.” Noah called out to them, catching on.

Harry gathered himself. Aiden’s scream ripped through the air, as he was finally pulled of the metal, tuning out the whinging of Nicholas and the moaning of the dead.

In all honesty Harry didn’t know who was more dangerous...

The dead or this living coward?!

“Fear shrinks the brain...” Oh Aaron, how right you've been!

“Ok. Good we have him. Fast, put pressure on his wounds!” Glenn instructed Eugene and Tara.

Harry was busy shooting at the dead, closing in on them. “Run now.” The British teen didn’t dare to look behind him. But he heard them arguing and Nicholas panicked blabbering. “No. No. No. You're killing us all.” And with that Nicholas ran away like a headless chicken.

“God damn it! After him!” Glen and Noah had grabbed their guns and chased after Nicholas shooting walkers left and right on the way.

The idiot had gone for the front door. The way they had ruled out as a save escape route!

“Nicholas wait!”

But too late, with the dead on their heels, they were stuck in a revolving door. Glenn and Noah in one compartment, Nicholas and Harry in the other. If any of them moved their compartment, they were exposing the others to the dead.

Corpses on the outside and biters pawing at the glass from the inside.

They were surrounded!

Harry saw the same realization in Glenn’s and Noah's faces, while Nicolas hyperventilated in panic next to him. In absolute fear the older man tried to grab Harry's gun.
Stop that you bloody moron! The magazine is empty! And shooting in an enclosed place like this could get us hurt and would only attract more of them. And we don't need that!” Harry hissed in anger.

“Be silent for a moment. You hear that?” Glenn held up a hand.

Yes, that was Eugene awful techno music. He was driving the van, windows down and music blaring along the storage house, luring the dead outside the door away.

Thank Merlin!

Glenn looked over to them. “I can smash the door window, so we all can get out. But I need you to hold the door steady for me.” It was a risky plan but probably their best bet, to get all of them out here alive.

The young Korean started to hit the window repeatedly with the back of his rifle. The whole door shook under the force and was pressed a bit open on Nicholas’ and Harry's part, causing the idiotic man to lose the last of his composure, yet again.

Hysterically he tried to pry the door on their side open, completely deaf to Glenn's and Noah's horrified shouts as he pushed their compartment open. The dead clawing at their clothes.

Harry felt the pressure of foreboding increase tenfold.

This was the moment!

Sweat had gathered on his upper lip, all his muscles were tightly coiled in tension. His magic hissed in agitation demanding to be used.

In all this time he had lived with the tattoos, Harry's magic had never felt like this. It was like comparing a storm with big waves, crashing into a rocky shore, to a bloody tsunami... slamming through every barrier, mindless of the damage it left in its wake, flooding the land.

And for the first time in years Harry could grasp his magic. Its brutal force shook him to his very core but he didn't give himself time to dwell on this.

With as much strength as he could muster he gripped Nicholas and pulled him back. With his magic aiding him, he slammed the idiot against the wall, pushing his underarm with all his meagre weight against the coward’s throat.

In the window he could see the reflections of Glenn's and Noah's wide eyed stares. Noah looked a bit worse for wear, because a walker had grabbed him through the gap Nicholas had created with his stunt.
Only Nicholas choking sobs and the groans of the dead were filling the silence in the door.

“Listen to me you spineless, little rat. I know the likes of you. But that’s not what we do. We survive together or not at all, you hear me! If you try some shite like that again, I will end you with my bare hands. Are we clear?” Harry hissed lowly at the quivering, sorry excuse for a man. Harry just hoped that he hadn't slipped into Parsel in his anger.

But since the idiot nodded...

“No one will help me to hold the bloody door steady! And you will do it right!” Magic was humming in excitement in Harry’s body. He could feel it in the air. It’s electric and metallic taste on his tongue, lacing his every word, strengthening his command.

Nicholas eyes glazed over and then he nodded.

No further complain left the man's mouth.

Harry shared a look with Glenn to signal the Korean that it would be alright to start again.

He was met with two hanging jaws.

“You, my man, are really a fucking Jedi!”

“Whatever. Get started we need to get out of here.” Harry rolled his eyes good-natured at the Asian geek.

*

The drive back was tense. Tara was slipping in and out of consciousness and Aiden’s condition was dire…

Glen watched them in worry through the rear mirror. Eugene and Noah had tried their best in dressing the wounds but there wasn’t much they could do. So Glenn drove back to Alexandria as fast as he could.

Behind him sat Nicholas sporting a brand new black eye. Fucking coward! Glenn gripped the wheel tightly.

Fuck, the only reason they were still alive, was riding shotgun next to him. Harry had saved his and Noah’s lives today, without him Nicholas would have gotten one or even both of them killed…

“Just a hunch…” The magical words. He had been uneasy when Harry had said them, knowing that the run would probably go wrong… But shit!

Tara and Aiden were seriously injured. He and Noah had nearly died. If this had been the best outcome of this fucked up day, he really didn’t wanted to know what would have happened without their small Jedi.
Said small friend had also started to look very unhealthy on the last mile. Glenn was sure that Harry tried to hide it, but on their shared travels they all had learned to look out for each other. So he knew what signs to look for…

He recognized the tense way the green eyed boy was breathing, a bit hitched, a bit shallow… He was in pain. It was clearly written in the wrinkles on his forehead and light sheen of sweat that covered his skin. The teen looked haggard and it twisted something in Glenn’s stomach, to see him like that.

Harry had looked a lot better since they had come to Alexandria. Heathier, even if he was tense with all the new people around. But three meals a day, sleep, showers and haircut had done wonders on the teen. Jesus, even the glasses with the pink flower pattern suited the delicate boy. Glenn was afraid that today’s stunt could have undone any progress, Harry had made until now.

God, Daryl was going to string him up by the balls if he saw Harry like that.

Nobody could overlook how close their grumpy, reclusive hunter had become to Harry. They all had in a way, Harry was easy to like. Kind, compassionate, despite all the shit life had thrown at the teen, he was always ready to help, like today. Looking out for them… Harry just tucked at your heart string, with those big green eyes and his frail appearance. He made you want protect and shelter him from further harm. He was a good kid.

They all knew that he was sick… had been for a long time. And even if they didn’t talk about it… they were all anxious that Harry would die before he had the chance to become an adult. Daryl probably more than anyone else. Glenn suspected the real reason the hunter wanted to come with Aaron and him, was so he could keep an eye on him.

The connection between Harry and Daryl seemed easy from the outside and Glenn was even bit envious of Harry. He had been able to form this connection to the hunter so fast. Daryl was a hard person to get close to. All silent, brooding and sharp words if you got too close. It had taken ages for Daryl to accept that they were a family and that he was part of it. That they cared about him as much as he cared for them.

But the tracker hadn’t been that way with Harry. They were close from the start and most surprisingly they were comfortable in each other’s presence.

*

Glenn breathed a sigh of relive when they had finally passed the gate of Alexandria, immediately driving through to the sickbay. Calling for help.

Rick, Michonne and… ahh fuck, Daryl were already there. And the hunter’s narrowed eyes, when he saw Harry jumping out of the van, promised a shit load of trouble for Glenn.
As fast as they could they brought Aiden and Tara into the infirmary and Pete went to work on them. With the extent of damage Aiden had sustained, Pete even demanded that the community’s other doctor should be brought in, a psychiatrist named Denise.

She treated Tara’s head wound while Pete operated on Aiden.

In all the hectic Glenn had lost sight of Harry for a bit, until he saw him outside. He was concerned, when the boy looked even worse than before. His skin an unhealthy mix of green and grey and he, sure as hell, wasn’t breathing right, as he leaned heavily against the van. And Glenn wasn’t only one who had noticed Harry state. Daryl growled next to him and Rick cursed silently, with long strides both men made their way to the teen.

“Hey Harry, are you alright?” Rick inquired in obvious concern.

Feverish green eyes looked up to them, clouded by pain. Harry tried to smile at them but it looked more like a grimace.

“Why didcha go with them?” Daryl growled at the boy, whose smile grew just a bit softer, when he looked at the archer.

“I’m sorry, I worried you. I went on a hunch…” Harry’s voice was raspy and uneven with hitching breaths.

“Should hav’ tol’ us…” Daryl’s rebuke missed all heat. Instead he looked increasingly worried.

“You’re such a worrywart. I didn’t get hurt. I’m fi…”

Like a puppet whose stings had been cut Harry crumbled to the ground in mid-word.

Fuck, Glenn hadn’t thought that their friend was this unwell. Harry hadn’t fainted since they met Aaron and had come to Alexandria.

And then Harry’s body started to convulse on the floor.

* 

Waking up had never been this difficult. Harry’s head hurt like hell and his body felt bruised all over. For a terrifying moment he didn’t dare to open his eyes in fear that he was still with the Claimers, that Daryl and his new family had been nothing more than a nice dream.

But then he felt callused and scarred hands on his forehead tugging carefully on a lock for raven hair.

Daryl.
Forcing his eyes to open he saw the hunter in the chair next to the bed, he was laying in. This was definitely not the room he shared with Carl… the smell… antiseptics… Ah, shit! He was in the infirmary.

Blinking he looked around or tried to… someone must have taken his glasses off.

A light cough from the other side revealed Rick, who held out his glasses with the flower patterned frame. After the Sheriff had settled the specs securely on his nose, he noticed at Glenn and Maggie were there, and even Aaron and Eric.

“What happened?” Harry croaked out. Daryl held a bottle of water out to him.

“Whatcha remember?” Daryl mumbled. The man looked very concerned and upset.

“I went with Glenn and Noah on the run… Oh, Merlin!” Sitting up straighter, he frantically looked around.

“Woah, woah, woah… easy there tiger.” Rick pushed the slight teen back to the bed.

“Where are Tara and Aiden? They were hurt. Did they make it?”

The atmosphere turned awkward. Rick sat down with a heavy sigh dragging a hand over his face.

“Tara’s ok… badly concussed, but she’ll live.”

“Yep, she already flirted with her doctor, Denise.” Maggie joked. Harry exhaled in relief, but he recognized a half-truth if he heard one. “And Aiden…?”

Everyone looked uncomfortable. Glenn cleared his throat.

“Aiden didn’t make it. His wounds were to grave. Pete managed to stabilize him, gave his family the opportunity, so they could say good bye but he died an hour ago.”

It felt like a punch to the gut. Harry had hoped… that maybe he had been able to save Aiden. That had been the reason for the hunch, hadn’t it?

I failed. Again.

“I’m so sorry! I should have… I failed you. Glenn, I’m so sorry.” Harry apologized again and again unable to look at the Korean man.

“Oh Harry! It wasn’t your fault! Don’t believe that.” Glenn took his hand.

“But I should have helped more. The hunch… it was the reason you took me with you on the run. And in the end I couldn’t help him. I failed you. I’m…”

“Harry! Harry, stop!” Rick spoke loudly over his rambling. Filled with shame he looked up to Rick, who looked so different in his uniform.

“God, kid! None, and I mean none of this is on you!” The Sheriff told him in a firm voice. “Glenn told us what happened. You did well in there.”

“Rick’s right. Aiden didn’t listen to me when I warned him not to shoot at the walker. And Eugene
said that you pulled him and Tara into cover. Who knows what kind of injuries they might have suffered, if you haven’t been there. Not to mention that you’re the only reason Nicholas didn’t run out on us, when we were stuck in that door.” Glenn tried to comfort the agitated teen.

Tears burned in Harry’s eyes and a lump formed in his throat but Glenn’s gentle words and earnest face soothed some of the overwhelming guilt he felt.

“No one expects ya ta solv’ all our problems. Ya felt somethin’ was off an’ ya told Glenn. Even went with them, ya did enoug’.” Daryl grumbled, his southern drawl settled around Harry, comforting as snugly blanket.

The guilt lessened a bit but it had always been difficult for him to let such things go, to accept that he had yet again failed to protect a life.

Suddenly something else that Glenn had said came to his mind.

“You… you said he died an hour ago?! How late is it?”

“It’s around 9 pm. You were unconscious for quite a while. You had us worried.” Maggie said softly.

“I was unconscious?” He asked in uneasy surprise.

“Yeah, ya dropped like a sack of potatoes.” Daryl deadpanned.

“And you had a seizure.” Rick said carefully.

“What? I… I had a seizure?!” Alarmed he looked around. He found deeply concerned faces. Daryl and Aaron seemed especially solemn.

“Yes, a bad one. Lasted around ten minutes. Denise was very worried about you.” Glenn told him.

Dread filled Harry. A major seizure.

He didn’t need medical training to know that this wasn’t good. Dropping his head into his hands, he tried to compose himself but it proved harder and harder.

A small sob escaped him.

“This means I’ll have to stay here, won’t I?” Tears were now freely running down his face.

He had wanted to go scouting with Aaron and Daryl so much. Freedom! Alexandria’s walls were suffocating him…

“Harry…” Rick tried to say.

“No, it’s alright, Rick. I understand. I really do.” More tears were running over his cheeks. Harry tried to whip them way with no avail. “It’s stupid ‘cause I really understand… It’s just I really wanted to go with Daryl and Aaron.”
Daryl looked torn at his admission. “Maybe we could…”

“No, you big teddy bear… You can’t and we all know it. I would be a danger to myself and anyone with me. Slowing them down, bringing them into impossible situations… I won’t risk any of your lives like that… and not for something so selfish.” Harry tried to reassure Daryl between hiccups. Still slightly dazed he looked at Rick.

“I won’t be allowed to go outside any longer, right?!” He could hear Aaron sharp intake of breath. The scout had to remember what that kind of forced house arrest would do to Harry’s mental health.

But Harry only looked at Rick. He wasn’t just their group’s leader, he had also become the Alexandria’s Sheriff. Safety was his business. The man looked upset, his expression pinched and worried.

“Yes, Deanna and I agreed that you should stay inside the walls. I’m sorry, Harry. I honestly am. But you’re right it would be too dangerous. Aaron, Daryl and I have talked his through.” Rick even sent a small disapproving glare at his brother. Probably for his attempt to take Harry with them despite his decreasing health.

If he had been able, he would have laughed at their nervous twitching.

“Ignore this. I’m not... I’m just disappointed. It’ll get better.”

Harry nodded, hiccups still shaking his body. He got more and more the impression that Rick and the other guys would have preferred to take on a herd of walkers than sitting here with a crying teenage boy. The men looked all fairly uncomfortable. It reminded Harry of Ron and how Hermine used to accuse him to have the emotional range of a teaspoon.

But then another thought occurred to the British teen.

“Am I allowed to stay in the community?!”

“What?” That was Eric. The auburn haired man looked completely aghast.

“Yes of... Of course! Harry! Nobody is sending you away! Right, Aaron?! Rick?!” Eric looked in alarmed concern from his boyfriend to their Sheriff.

“Calm down. Harry is staying here.” Rick was quick to intervene.

“Are you sure...? Seizures mean that I have gotten worse. A lot worse. Dr. Edwards...”

“It ain’t meaning shit!” Daryl growled and while it sounded aggressive, Harry could see fear lurking in his dark blue eyes. “Ya better be her’, when Aaron an’ I are comin’ back. Ya hear me?! We ain’t talking about ya kickin’ the bucket. An’ no one’s goin’ ta send ya away!” A furious gaze was thrown around the room.

“Are you certain? I mean, I would understand. It could be dangerous to have me here.

You told me that you had problems in the prison because someone died and turned at night...”
At the mention of the prison everyone flinched. Daryl grabbed Rick's arm over Harry’s bedcover and his face was contorted in an angry and desperate grimace.

“It ain’t goin’ ta be like tha’!” He spoke more to Rick than to anyone else in the room and Harry was surprised by the force in Daryl’s voice.

“Rick, tell her! It ain’t!” The British teen thought that he could hear Daryl’s teeth grinding.

Tell whom? What?

For a moment Harry was very confused until he remembered something.

Something that the original group had discussed after they had fled from Terminus and reconnected with Carol…

The grey haired woman had killed and burned two sick group members because she had wanted to protect the rest of her family from a flu infection...

Wide eyed he looked at Rick.

Something, Rick must have misinterpreted because the man panicked a little. “No. No, don’t you worry about that, Harry. That will never happen again.”

“Rick! I would never hold it against any of you if it came to this. You made me family. And I accepted that you won't leave behind. But your safety and wellbeing will always be my first priority. If it comes down to that…” Harry swallowed. He could see how his family flinched away from the topic.

“Harry...?” Maggie sounded tearful.

“In the light of this new information, I think it might be best if I stopped sleeping in Carl's room.” Harry told them with a sigh. He didn’t want to fight with them and he saw it in their faces, they wanted to protest that it wouldn't be necessary, that it wouldn't come to this. But no one could hold anything substantial against this kind of pragmatic logic. And they knew that it could be fatal to be flippant about such things.

“Tak’ the attic then. Will be empty, when I'm gon’ with Aaron.” Daryl sighed. He looked haggard and exhausted.

“And lock the door at night.” Glenn sighed in defeat.

It felt comforting that they cared so much. But Harry had grown into a realist. He couldn’t share their optimism that this was just a temporary problem.

His magic had pushed itself free today. He had felt it, as it had slammed through all barriers the seal had created. It had shaken his magic core and had ripped through his body without care. It had nearly broken its host in the process.
Something magic wasn’t supposed to do, at all! It should want to protect and heal him, before anything else… Not break him in the need to be free.

The resulting backlash of the binding had been even more vicious than ever. It felt like the tattoos’ magic had tried to make up, for its loosing strength with brutal force.

Terrified horror would be a good description of Harry’s mental state right now… His magic was growing stronger, stronger than the binding. But the pent up magic had become aggressive to its own vessel it seemed… how long until it would bust the chains the ritual had put on him.

And what would happen to his body and the people around him, if it did?

*

Being left behind in Alexandria was as taxing for Harry as he had feared and then some.

The mother-hening of Beth and the others was driving him up the walls. They meant well but the green eyed teen felt watched and smothered.

He was in nearly constant tension because he was afraid to do something wrong... that he had already done something wrong.

He had grown up to a steady demand to earn his keep. Verbal and physical abuse had followed if he had failed to contribute, as his relatives demanded and there had never been any room for mistakes.

Merlin, Vernon and Petunia had seldom needed a real reason to hurt him. And Duddley certainly had bullied him on any occasion with or without a cause.

His existence had always been enough of an irritation to them to excuse any abuse. Harry learned to keep his head down, to always expect an attack. Be it words, fists or being locked away. Even in the wizarding world there were always conditions for care... Expectations, who he should be, what he should do... Even with Ron and Hermine.

This perceived lack of freedom right now... it was like being locked into the cupboard under stairs again, just bigger. It felt like a punishment even if his head knew that this wasn't the case. It felt like he had done something wrong.

His health issues had led to be called off all tasks and duties and it left him without anything useful to do... without anything to contribute... to prove his worth, to ensure that the people that had taken him in and wormed their way into his heart wouldn't cast him away.

Not in a physical manner, he could live with being sent away, because it would make them safer. His biggest fear was being near them but not close to them anymore... Harry feared the emotional exclusion more than anything else.
He remembered the heart wrenching feeling of trying and trying... of being a good boy so his aunt and uncle might finally love him, like they had loved Duddley.

He remembered the all-consuming shame and guilt, he had felt in those lonely nights, locked away in his cupboard crying into a ratty blanket, when he had heralded himself with the question of ‘what was so wrong with me that makes my own family unable to care for me?’

There had to be something he could do to make it better... There had to be!

Because if there wasn't... If they were the problem...

He would be alone... He would be existential alone. Lost!

So it was no wonder that panic attacks and flashbacks had become frequent events since Daryl and Aaron had left. The nicer people were to him the worse it got. There had never been a time in Harry's live when care in any form had provided for him without a price. He had had to always work for it.

Harry couldn't help but to feel undeserving of his new family’s kindness.

All the cleanliness and normality around him, the houses, the people that were all so untouched by the terror, the unconditional care he was offered, they stood in stark contrast to Harry's self-disgust and to this black, oily and rotting hole in his head and in his heart that threatened to consume him at any time.

How long until the others would see what his relatives saw? What he himself saw every time he looked into a mirror or took a shower?!

++++flashback+++++

Harry felt a bit giddy. He had thought such things were gone for ever. This would be his first hot shower in ages. He really wanted to wash all this dirt off his skin... And of his soul.

The bathroom was spacious and as luxurious as they could get.

But when Harry looked into the big mirror over the skin, he flinched back with a suppressed shout.

*Who was this scarecrow like thing?*

A haggard face was covered in dirt, blood and other things. There were small bruises and scrapes everywhere. Matted black hair reached to frail shoulders where collar bones stuck bizarrely out of a too big and ragged shirt. The hair was a mess of greasy tangles. Venturing closer the mirror Harry was able to spot dirt, leaves and chunks of blood and... Other stuff in there.
What a poor creature...

Two big green eyes looked pitying back at him.

On autopilot he pulled his shirt off and saw the scarecrow in the mirror do the same.

Too thin.

Too beaten up.

Too used...

But used to it.

No longer able to look at the thing in the mirror. He turned to walk into the shower, when he saw it in the periphery of his vision. Looking over his shoulder his eyes traced the map of scars that had been revealed.

So many... Must have hurt...

CLAIMED

A sob could be heard. And another.... And another…

Wetness ran down his cheeks.

...


Still not...!

Suddenly the heat was gone.
Cold air hitting his skin.

There was someone else here.

Panic.

But before he could scream or lash out… Ice cold wetness poured over him. Like a shock to the system!

An unmanly squeak escaped him.

And then he could see.

“Ca.. Carol?”

The grey haired woman stood beside him in the big shower, her right hand on the shower valve, getting wet with ice cold water.

“Yes, you didn't hear me. When I knocked... Or when I stood behind you and called your name.” She sounded strange, somehow strained.

The ice cold water burned on his overheated skin. Clearing up the fog in his brain.

“Sweet heart, I think that’s enough for today. OK?” Carol said gently, turning off the water at last.

“I...” Harry didn't know what to say.

“You’re clean now.” She searched for his gaze.

Harry tried to blink the water out of his eyes. But it wouldn't stop.

Why the bloody fuck wasn't it stopping. Carol had turned the water off... So why?

Another sob.

“Oh honey!” A warm and fluffy towel was carefully put around is shaking body. “Come here. Let's get you dry.”

Thin gentle hands put a towel on his head and started to dry his hair and face.

“And then I'll cut your hair a bit.”

+++++flashback end +++++
He still felt like that broken scarecrow. He still saw it in the mirror every day, looking back at him with haunted and pitying green eyes.

Used and dirty goods. Not fit for anything anymore. Useless.

The only place in Alexandria, where he could breathe a bit lighter at the moment was in Daryl's room. And if Beth, Carol and Carl would have let him, he would have stayed there indefinitely. Snuggled up in a dome of pillows that he had nicked from every family member in the house and then some... And a blanket that still smelled like Daryl (smoke, forest and sweat). A smell that Harry had come to associate with safety, comfort and an understanding that needed few words.

* 

Harry had helped Beth in the kitchen and entertained Judith, when Carol had come into the house sharing her suspicions. She thought that Pete the community's surgeon was beating his children and most likely his wife, too. It had confirmed some of Harry's unease about the tall man with those cruel and cold eyes.

A shiver ran down his spine and a deep unease settled in his chest. It wasn't the sharp sting of immediate danger but more like an aching itch that you couldn't reach to scratch. Not hurting but persistently uncomfortable.

Harry had met the surgeon's wife, Jesse, and the two boys only in passing. He himself had been far too caught up in hiding from people and getting the mess in his head under lock and key.

He knew that Rick had taken a liking to the pretty blond and Carl had become friends with her oldest son, Ron. The youngest, Sam, had latched onto Carol, much to her dismay. She had complained about the clingy child a lot. And Harry thought that beneath her cold demeanour she was afraid to get too close to the small boy that demanded cookies from her.

But seeing her now talking to Rick and the others about the abuse, it seemed to Harry, like she had become attached nonetheless. Or maybe she just couldn't close her eyes against the suffering of a woman and her children, even if the grey haired woman wanted to put their group first.

This new potential threat was putting Rick and Carol on the edge.

Two predators laying in waiting. And while Rick was like a bear, seemingly getting taller and more visible in his fury. The fight cloaking him like armour and burning in his eyes.

Carol was different. She twisted herself, growing more inconspicuous and cold, behind her flowery cardigans and sweet smiles. Hidden but ready to strike, like a snake in the grass.

Their tension and scheming brought a strange atmosphere to the house, making it difficult to approach them both.
Especially when all the others were trying to integrate themselves into the community. They all really tried.

Maggie helped Deanna. They planned together for a future.

Beth helped in schooling the smaller kids.

Abraham worked and led the construction team... Michonne was Sheriff besides Rick.

Carl had found friends in Ron and the other teens in the community.

Tara, Rosita and Glen helped with runs and were taking watches.

Noah learned to be an architect from Deanna’s husband. Even Eugene tried to be as much as an asset the intelligent man could be.

They wanted this life and they all worked hard for it.

The only one having major problems to settle in besides Harry, was Sasha... He had seen her only a few times but Michonne had told him, how much she struggled.

He had seen it for himself on the first night Daryl and Aaron had been gone.

++++Flashback+++++

He had sat on the porch late at night staring into the night sky with little Judi in his arms. She had been fussy all day, because her teeth came in. He had walked with her, singing to the little princess.

“Hey Jude, don't make it bad
Take a sad song and make it better
Remember to let her into your heart
Then you can start to make it better

Hey Jude, don't be afraid
You were made to go out and get her
The minute you let her under your skin
Then you begin to make it better

And anytime you feel the pain
Hey Jude, refrain

Don't carry the world upon your shoulders

For well you know that it's a fool

Who plays it cool

By making his world a little colder”

On the last notes he had spotted Sasha. She must have come from the watch tower. Much too late.

She just stood there and watched him with the baby. He waved her over and as she came closer the green eyed teen felt his heart swell in sympathy for her.

He recognized the signs of overwhelming grief. Anger and desperation were apparently the only things that were still holding her together.

When she reached him, he handed her the drowsy baby without words. Motioning her to sit down for a moment.

And Judi worked the magic only a baby was capable of. He knew, how the warm and surprisingly solid weight of the fragile infant could settle the worst of heart aches.

They didn't talk. They didn't touch. They just sat there in silence.

Together they watched as Judi drift off to sleep, as she snuggled deeper into Sasha warm embrace. Harry offered no consolation to the woman, as tear mutely fell from her beautiful dark eyes. Knowing there was none.

He let her cry.

He let her grief.

For Tyreese

For Bob

For herself and what could have been.

When she calmed down, her hand ghosted over his. Mindful that Harry still didn't like to be touched.

With a nod and a silent “Thank you.” She was gone.
Harry wished they all could settle and have a future here.

After Rick had agreed to look into Carol’s suspicions about Pete, they left Harry and Beth behind to look after Judith. Harry really liked the blond girl. Her small stature made her look frail and weak but Beth possessed an inner strength.

In the last days she had looked after Harry, checking in on him that he didn’t do anything to strenuous and probably making sure that he hadn’t collapsed in another bloody seizure. But she tried not to be “in-your-face” about it. Instead she entertained Harry with stories about their family before Harry had come to them. She told him about the old Green farm where she and Maggie had grown up. She told him how Maggie and Glenn had become a couple. A story at had Harry smiling and laughing at Glenn’s expense.

Beth talked to him about Hershel, her father who had been a devout man and an abstinent alcoholic. A wise and kind man that advised Rick and the group, until he had been killed by a man called the governor.

Harry was soaking all these things up and Beth seemed to sense that, because she started to tell him more about a certain absent hunter. She spoke to the green eyed teen about Daryl and his brother Merle. How Daryl had left them for a short time, because he couldn’t bear to lose his brother again, who had been a persona no grata with the family at the time, but had come back to them.

The blond girl revealed, how Daryl had taught her to shoot the crossbow and to track.

“You miss him?” Beth asked.

She giggled a little when she saw him blush. “Don’t you worry! It’s ok if you do! Daryl can have that effect on you. It’s the broody, silent bad boy appeal.” She winked at him in conspiracy.

Harry shied back from her. Wide eyed he just stared at her. He could feel the blood rushing in his ears…

Beth had just implied that he liked Daryl… like that… OH, Merlin!

He couldn’t help himself and clenched his eyes shut. Pictures were forming in his head.


Daryl bending down to ki…
Fuck!

Suddenly there was Len’s leering face in front of him, laughing at him, mocking him.

“Always knew yer were a fag. A bitch in heat! Ya may have screamed rape but ya wanted it.”

Merlin! NO! Please!

“Harry!? Harry, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean anything by it. I was just teasing you….” Beth’s panicked voice came from far away.

His tormentor’s face was the only thing he could see. He was back in the Claimer’s camp. He could feel filthy and rough hands, ripping his clothes off, pushing him to the ground. The man’s hot breath was on his face, smelling of rotten teeth.

The slurs and mocking insults that this disgusting mouth close to his ear hissed to him, were the only things he could hear.

SLAP

A sharp pain on his cheek pulled him back into awareness.

For a moment it was like he was watching an overlapping picture. He could still see Len, could still hear him, but at the same time he could see Beth and… Jesse. The two blond women knelt before him and the older one had still her hand raised from, when she had slapped him.

Two pairs of concerned eyes looked at him… Jesse reached out to him, gathering him in her arms.

It was meant as a motherly embrace but to Harry it felt like ants were crawling over his skin. Hyperventilating he pushed her away from him.

He ran to the kitchen skin… just in time… and got violently sick.

With shaking finger he fumbled in hectic with the tap, needing three tries to get the water running. Without thinking he turned the water as hot as possible and grabbed the dish soap. He sloppily applied the soap and grabbed the scrubber.

He neither noticed nor cared that the water was too hot or that the scrubber was too rough. All he could thing about was the filth and sordidness on his skin.

Scrubbing and scrubbing, still feeling his skin crawl with invisible bugs and layers of abuse.
And it just wasn’t going away!
Still so dirty…!

“Harry!!” Someone stood behind him. They were close but not touching, reaching past him to turn the faucet cold. Harry yelped, when the cold water hit his maltreated skin.

For a moment the only sound he could hear, was the soft rush of the water. And then he noticed his own ragged breathing, his heart was beating like a drum in his rib-cage and sweat was running down his spine.

Looking to his right he saw Eric. The auburn haired man was very pale and slightly out of breath as he braced himself heavily on his crutch.

“Hey there, you’re back with us?” Eric’s expression was nothing, if not concerned.

Still dazed, Harry looked around the kitchen. Beth and Jesse stood at the aisle both looking shaken and upset.

But all that Harry could think about was... that Jesse had touched him.


She had touched his soiled and disgusting body. He felt like falling apart.

“Wa… wash. Need… need to get clean!” He stuttered out.

“Hush Harry, you already did that.” Eric tried to calm him down.

Harry viciously shook his head. “Nnn..noo…Not me. Je… Jess..ee. She touched… me. She got her… herself dirty.” Shudders wreaked through his body making his teeth rattle.

“Oohh, oh, sweet heart!” Jesse had pressed her hands to her mouth, visibly fighting for composure. Beth had turned her head away, her shoulders moved with silent sobs.

“I’m so..sorry!” Harry’s stutters were turning into hiccups, because he wasn’t breathing right, making his chest hurt all the more.

“Sweetie, you have nothing to be sorry for!” Jesse cried. Her pretty face was contorted in empathy, tears were wetting her cheeks.

“She’s right, Harry. Breathe!” Eric instructed from behind. “Say your words.”

“It…It’s been 137 days since I’ve been last raped. I’m safe now. They are dead. They can’t get to
me anymore. Rick, Michonne and Daryl killed them all.” Harry forced the familiar words out, quivering like a leave in the wind.

Jesse and Beth had made small sounds of anguish at his words.

But his head got clearer.

*Merlin, help! I made a fool out of myself and behaved like a nutter.*

Uncontrollable spasms shook his body as he stood there, shame flooding through him. He had lost completely control.

Beth and Eric carefully guided him to the living room, where Beth settled him with a blanket and baby Judith on the couch. His tired and tested anti-flashback medicine.

The small girl cooed at him and tried to pat his cheek in quite uncoordinated movements. It made him smile.

“It’s alright, poppet. I’m sorry for the fuss.” He gingerly kissed her head, which made her giggle.

When he looked up, Jesse stood close to him, eying him in worry. He felt his face flush under her scrutiny. Pulling Judith closer to him, he hid his face into her baby fine curls.

“I’m so sorry for freaking out like that, Jesse.”

There was a small pause.

“It’s not your fault, you’ve been hurt like that.” She finally told him kindly but firm.

Letting out a sharp exhale that ruffled Judith’s locks and made her squeal, Harry looked up. Tired green eyes searched out soulful brown ones… Eyes that told him everything he needed to know.

Carol had been right.

“You know it’s not your fault either. right? That he hurts you, I mean…” Harry whispered to her. She paled even more, her mouth already opened to undoubtedly sprout a rehearsed denial.

“But you’re at least partly responsible, if you allow him to continue to hurt your children.”

The blond woman reared back as if burned. Her mouth opened and closed like a fish’s but no words came out. Harry knew he should probably stop now… but he couldn’t. Carol was right Pete was beating his wife and most likely his kids, too.

Staying quiet maybe the easier thing but that didn’t make it the right thing to do.

“I know, how it feels to be abused by someone, who is supposed love and cherish you… how it tears you apart. How you spend hour up on hour, hoping that they will come to treat you like they should…

But the truth is… They never will. And if you don’t fight for yourself, you and your children will
be crushed under his abuse.”

With a broken sob Jesse fled from the Grimes home.

“That was harsh.” Eric commented from behind, the rebuke clear in his voice to hear.

“Do you think it might be worth it if she changes something?” Harry asked back with an exhausted sigh.

Glancing at Eric’s and Beth’s drawn faces, Harry had to admit to himself that he should take his own advice.

There was no denying it, his flashbacks were getting worse. And the pain in his chest, his laboured breathing and the continued spasms through his body, told him all one thing all too clearly.

His problems weren’t going to solve themselves and that the time for hiding under Daryl’s blanket had to be over. He needed to take action. He needed to face his fears or his fears would consume him whole.

He needed to see Denise.

Chapter End Notes

I like the idea from the comments that there might be more to Buttons... than meets the eye right now ^^
As usual I apologize before hand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.
I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

**
Also thank you for all your support! ^^ This is my first try on writing and at beginning I wasn't sure if it would be well received! So a big thanks to all readers for every bookmark, every kudo and all those nice comments :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 14

Following his own advice had been one of the best and hardest things Harry had ever done.

Denise had been quite happy to help him. And Merlin, she may not look the part, but the woman was tough. With a surprisingly self-assuredness, she had guided Harry through stuttered request for therapy.

The green eyed wizard had nervously talked about his flashbacks and his increasing anxiety and Denise had taken it all in stride. She had been patient and kind, waiting for him to address his trauma.

This first meeting was nothing like he had expected it to be.

The psychiatrist hadn't demanded that he told her everything about his abuse. Instead she had even stopped him from going into too many details, because he had apparently started to drift away into a flashback, while he talked about it. Which he hadn’t even noticed, but she had!

Afterwards Denise had stressed the importance of keeping him grounded, while they talked and that sometimes it was better for patients to confront their traumas in small doses, so his memories wouldn’t flood and drown him every time, like they had before.

She explained that it was like standing in front of deep pool...

Therapy was going to be about calling it a “pool” and talking about it, but keeping him from falling into it every time he got close to it.
“You already know it's deep, wet and cold. There's no need to shove you into it every time, to experience it again.” She had deadpanned with a raised eyebrow.

Harry had choked back a teary and relieved laugh at that. The idea of having to relive all those horrid moments again and again, made his stomach churn and a familiar numbness had started to crawl up his legs. When he told Denise about this, she had complimented him for noticing the symptoms.

“PTSD forms, when something so incredible horrifying happens that our brain can’t process it any more. It’s like looking at an atrocious picture. And because it’s so horrendous you cast it away from you and the picture fractures in all those thousand pieces, scattering all around you... Everything you experienced, broken in little fragments. Sounds, feelings, smells, sensations and images. The you fell numbness, saved you in that moment, helped you to survive the unthinkable. And what you described just now are the first signs of disassociation. The disassociation might protect you from feeling the whole horror, but it also keeps your brain from processing what happened to you. As long as we allow your mind to hide like that, you won’t to come to terms with the abuse you suffered, because it stops you from gathering all those pieces around you. Instead it lets you stumble again and again on fragments, triggering flashbacks and panic attacks. Keeping you from drifting away, will be hard. But it is necessary so we can gather all those pieces and place them together. After that it will be still horrifying but it will be a whole picture again. And you won’t have to stumble over its tiny reminders every day.”

The necessary survey of his biographical case history, that had followed, had been very awkward for Harry. It had felt like running through a mine field, trying to dodge anything magical that he certainly couldn't tell a shrink about...

Keeping to half-truths and leaving potential incriminating things out of his narrative. His labours had earned him an unimpressed look and a small sigh from the plump woman.

“I suppose that wasn't all...!? But you know what? It’s alright. You can always tell me more, whenever you feel comfortable enough. You've already done an impressive leap of faith with me today. How are you feeling now?”

“Drained and exhausted and... “ And he didn't know. Maybe a bit relieved.

He didn't know when he had ever talked that much about the abuse and the rape he had suffered, without backing out or falling into a flashback.

So it was a start, wasn’t it?!

Denise at least seemed to think so.

“I want you, to do a few things in the next weeks. Starting right now, you will leave that attic no later than 9 am, after that you will take a walk each day, for at least an hour. It might do you some good, if you would visit a few friends. And you will eat three meals a day.”

That didn't sound too bad... Barring the one hour of walking through the safety zone, when he would have to put himself out there. He cringed when he thought about it.

The looks, the whispering… The thought alone made his skin crawl with invisible ants.
Denise smile had just gotten a bit broader, as she observed his unease with hawk eyes.

“You’re enjoying this.” He accused her without any heat.

“Oh yes I do. From your reaction I can tell, that forcing you to show yourself more on the streets of Alexandria, is the right start. These are the issues we have to tackle first, to stabilise you again. And I just realized how much I missed my work. It felt good to work again with a patient. We will meet biweekly, come back at Thursday.” With a bright smile and a wave, she sent him on his way.

With a sigh of resignation Harry made his way to the only friend, he wanted to see right now… so he went straight to Buttons’ stable.

* 

In the following weeks the British teen braved through several sessions with the young psychiatrist. It helped, that Harry really liked Denise. She seemed little bubblier and a lot more self-confident, than the first time he had seen her around the sick bay. Back then the psychiatrist had been hesitant and clumsy, like a penguin on land, but in their sessions she was in her element, the penguin immersed itself in water and became a very graceful swimmer.

She was good in her job.

She encouraged him to keep his mantra up, showing him skills to stop flashbacks and dissociation. She taught him small stabilizing exercises and most importantly she pushed him to face his fears. Talking about the rape and the Claimers became a bit easier every time.

And since he showed more presence in the community, he had come in contact with more people in Alexandria. They weren’t all gossiping Petunias, some really tried to be nice and wanted to help. So Harry had come to talk to an elderly couple, who adored Judith, a few times and had a cup of tea with an old woman that lived alone two houses next to Maggie and Glenn.

Small talk was still a chore! But one, he manged a bit better and a little less awkward, than before.

And Harry had found two other therapists.

One was being Buttons, who had still a thing for huffing and nibbling on Harry's dark hair. The animal seemed to know instinctively, when Harry needed a cuddle or comfort but felt unable seek out any human friends for it. The tall and powerful horse also loved to be groomed, which was an oddly calming thing to do for the teen. The steady movements of brushing out the shiny coat were helping Harry to clear his head after his talks to Denise.

Buttons didn’t asked difficult question and there was no judgement in the animal.

No looks, no whispering. Here in the stable Harry could let lose.

And maybe it helped that the stable reminded him of Daryl…
Maggie and Beth gave him riding lessons every so often. In retrospect something he really could have needed before climbing on Buckbeak’s back, back in third year. And while he did miss his firebolt, Harry enjoyed these moments in the saddle a lot, almost as much as flying.

Maggie called him a natural on horseback, grinning proudly, when she watched his progress. But the woman had also very frankly told Harry that she would have his hide, if he ever tried to ride on his own...

Apparently having a seizure disqualified him from being on a horse’s back without a babysitter. He might grumble about it but he knew she was right.

He hadn’t told anybody but he had collapsed two more times since Daryl and Aaron had been gone… He didn’t think that he had seized like before but since he had been alone, he couldn’t be sure.

He was getting worse.

His third therapist had come as a surprise. Harry had named her Tilly and she was a very cute but sassy tabby cat. A stray, that had come to live in the stables, begging for cuddles and scratches without an ounce of shame. She had become his companion and followed him everywhere he went.

And after he had cleaned her fur very thoughtfully, he had been able to convince Michonne that Tilly could stay in the house with him. Ever since the small cat slept next to him at night, successfully keeping his nightmares at bay.

When Abraham had seen Harry with the kitten for the first time, she had lounged of his head and shoulders, while teen had entertained Judith with a picture book. The former soldier had laughed his ass of at the sight. Calling Harry “too damn fucking cute that even a camel in the desert would want to puke”… whatever that was supposed to mean… but it had the green eyed teen pouting at the tall red head for two days.

Lost in mind the green eyed teen brushed out Buttons’ coat, but today his thoughts refused to settle. While Harry had talked a lot to Denise, about practically anything that was on his mind, there was one tiny thing he hadn't told her… yet.

It was this small little sequence, he had seen before his inner eye that had pushed him into that flashback, when he had freaked out at Jesse. This little thought that poor Beth had unknowingly triggered.

Daryl leaning down to him to...

Harry's mind came to a screeching halt!

With a groan of embarrassment he buried his burning face in Buttons coat. He was so confused about this...
He had hardly been interested in romantic relationships before... Sure he had a small crush on Cho. She had been so pretty and such a good seeker, but it had never been serious. And maybe his interest in her had been fuelled because Cedric had gone out with her... Harry had never analysed it but he had watched the handsome Hogwarts champion a lot... good-looking, loyal, kind, fair... and dead before Harry could understand his feelings.

There had never been the bloody time to get to know himself in that way! There had always something else to worry about. Mostly Voldemort. Staying alive.

And Harry didn't know shit about what he liked and... and... And now that he had the opportunity to explore...

He couldn't stand the thought of kissing anybody.

The Claimers had broken that in him and he feared that liking Daryl meant...

_Merlin, it didn't make, what they had done to him, ok, right? A few times Len had..._.

_Arg!_

He just couldn't do this on his own. If he had learned anything from Denise, then that he couldn't trust the fucked up stuff his thoughts were telling him sometimes. He needed to talk to somebody about it...

But preferably not with Denise... That would feel a little too strange.

So somebody else it was!

* 

Eric was stunned, when he found Harry on his door step that afternoon. He hadn’t seen much of the boy since Beth had called Jesse and him over in fright over Harry’s panic attack. The auburn hair man would never forget the sight of the frail kid, leaning on the sink, scrubbing invisible dirt away with nearly boiling water.

The desperation in Harry’s eyes had pulled Eric’s heart apart. He felt for the kid and it proved that Aaron had been right, both Daryl and Harry had needed to get out of the community for a while to breathe freely.

Not that it was possible any more...
“Hi Harry!” Eric greeted the nervous boy warmly. “Do you want to come in?”

“Uhm…” Harry was fumbling with the hem of his sleeve. “Yes, that would be nice.”

“Good because Mrs. Niedermeyer is craning her neck so bad, it’s going to snap, if we don’t go in soon.” Eric deadpanned.

_Those damn gossips… They were probably scandalised that he brought an underage boy into his house. Him, a homosexual with a sodomized teen. Alone. The horror!_

Taking a deep breath, Eric forced a bright smile on his face and waved at the women, loudly calling out to her. “Hello Mrs. Niedermeyer!”

That nearly caused her to tumble into her flower beets. Served her right! But at least Harry snickered a bit and lost some of his tension.

“You want anything to drink?” Eric asked when they reached the kitchen.

“Yeah, sure why not…” Harry inhaled and exhaled a few times, visibly battling with something. “I… Eric?”

“Yes?” He tried to behave as relaxed as possible, giving Harry enough room to find the right words. “Could I ask you something? Uhm… something private?”

“Huh? Uhm… sure… Shoot!” Grabbing them both a glass of water, he had just started to drink. “Do you enjoy sex?”

Eric wished he hadn’t just sipped on his water, because it had definitely gone down the wrong pipe. Coughing, he clutched his chest, before he could croak out a breathless: “What?”

“I’m sorry I shouldn’t have asked! I… I’m leaving.” The young teen hurried a few steps back. His body language and the little bit of his face, Eric could see, screamed shame and uncertainty.

“Harry, wait!” And thank god, the boy did, but he had his head lowered and his eyes fixed on the kitchen isle, where Eric had spilled his drink.

“It’s ok. I was just… surprised. You can ask me.”

There was a long pause. The only thing that was calming Eric down, was the fact that Harry hadn’t ran from his kitchen, yet.

“I… well, I know sex is not supposed to be like… like what they did to me. But how could anyone like it when it’s hurts so much?” The boy finally forced out.

_Ah, shit!_
Harry was looking for an expert on gay sex.

*Fucking wonderful.* Eric felt panicked rise in him, along with what had to be a full-body blush. This was so not his type of conversation!

*Aaron, where are you??!!*

*Ok, Raleigh! Deep breaths! Harry needs answers. You can freak out later. Over a big bottle of wine… or better whiskey!*

“Oh honey! First of all sex doesn’t just have to be … that…” Eric stuttered out. It felt like his whole body was blushing. He was to be only one degree away, from having steam coming out of his ears.

“God, sorry! Aaron always laughs at me, because I’m such a prude.” He hid his burning face in his hands hoping that Harry wouldn’t try to run away again. Mrs. Niedermeyer would have a field day, if she saw a red faced Harry fleeing from his house.

“Maybe that’s why I asked you… so I wouldn’t be only one embarrassed as hell.” An incredible pale Harry joked weakly.

“You’re evil.” Eric deadpanned. He tried to gather himself.

*Get yourself together man. You can do this. It’s just sex.* And with that he felt himself flush some more.

*Well, here goes nothing.*

“Let me try again. First of all not all men enjoy… a… anal sex, doesn’t matter if they’re gay or not. Jesus, uhm… In a proper relationship or even in a casual… uhm… encounter? The partner on the top should always make sure that the… receiving one is well… prepared.

Between two men that usually entails lube… lots and lots…. And lots of lube!” Eric didn’t know what to do with his hands. He just couldn’t hold them still. Instead they seemed to be everywhere, waving uselessly through the air.

“And well… God, promise me, you never tell Aaron that you made me say those things out loud!” He wanted to pull his hair out in embarrassment, fighting to keep his voice steady. “There should be fingering involved, to stretch the… you know what.”

At that Harry looked distinctively uncomfortable. The colour of his face switching unhealthily often from white to red to green to white and at least settling back on red.

Eric decided to get over the rest of this awful talk quickly and then he would need alcohol, tons of it. Maybe it would erase his awkward situation from his memories.

“You know what goes where… Uhm, it can be uncomfortable at first but… uhm. Shit I’m telling you now that this is the first and the last time, we’re ever talking about all that stuff!” Eric huffed.
“Anal sex can be really, really great, if it’s done with some skill and with some care. All men have this little gland, the prostate, inside that can be reached from… behind. Having it touched or… otherwise stimulated. It’s grand.” The auburn haired man hoped, he could reassure Harry with this, that sex could be a great thing.

But Harry’s head had snapped up at that. And there was certainly no relieve in his gaze.

“I… Would it… Could that make a difference, if it really hurt before and then the prostate… I mean would it make… Would it make you react even, if you don’t want to?” Those wide green eyes were filled with so much fear and desperation that Eric had to swallow heavily against the lump forming in his throat.

“Harry, what is this about?”

“He hurt me so often. Mostly just took me, how he wanted. He didn’t care. But sometimes he made me… react to him and that felt even worse.” The boy confessed to him, sounding very meek.

Biting his lip, Harry sprung to his feet, pacing through the kitchen, trying to keep himself from drifting away into his horrid memories.

“That I… my body… that it reacted. Does that mean that he was right about me? That a part of me deep down liked it? That I enjoyed it?”

Holly shit, so that’s, what it’s all about. These pigs hadn’t just raped him. They had played with Harry and in the process they had taken the last peace of mind from the boy. Making him doubt his non-consent.

Rage and a kind of desperate pity raced through him. It made him want to burn the horrible world down that had broken this sweet kid.

“What?! No! Jesus, Harry, never think that! It’s normal reaction of your body to stimulation. That would most likely happen to all men. That’s not consent! It isn’t!” Eric finally cried out.

“I felt so dirty. They all stood around me and mocked me for it. I hated my body for betraying me like that.” Harry admitted in a small broken voice. “I swear that I didn’t want it! I swear!” Tears were swimming behind those atrocious Elton John glasses, as mumbled these words desperately.

Erichad to hold back the impulse to gather the kid in his arms. He was pretty certain that touch wouldn’t be appreciated right now.

“Pardon me for saying it like that but your dick can’t make decisions but you can. Even if you’re got hard, it doesn’t matter. It was still rape.” Eric told Harry as firmly as he could, willing the poor kid to understand.

When glassy green eyes searched for his, Eric felt the look deep in his soul, conveying the message.

“Thank you!” Harry mumbled softly and Eric exhaled in exhaustion.
“Anytime, Harry anytime! I might have bitched about it, but any time. But please make sure, we have alcohol for the next conversation of this calibre. But if you allow me to ask… where does your preference lie?” Eric just couldn’t resist asking.

He feared, he had over stepped his boundaries, when Harry didn’t answer. The teen starred at the kitchen counter, looking lost.

“I’m not sure… I’ve crushed on a girl before and… uhm, possibly a bit on a boy but I just never really thought about it.” Despite the blush Harry seemed more confused than embarrassed.

*Still so innocent and fledging. Still just a boy growing into himself.*

“And now?” Eric inquired. There was a niggling thought in the back of his mind…. Something Beth had mentioned…

Blushing madly, Harry nervously fiddled with his hands and even started to bite his thumb.

*Oh…OH!*  

“I think might… like someone?” The sweet boy sounded so unsure. Eric remembered a time in his teenage years, when he had felt the same, just discovering that he liked boys more than girls.

With a conspiratorial grin he leaned in and whispered: “Daryl?”

“Huh!?” A deer caught in the head lights, wouldn’t have looked this wide eyed. A laugh escaped Eric. “You’re both very obvious with your sneaked glances, practically joint by the hip…”

“Both?!” The naked hope in the teens face was so adorable that Eric could keep himself from teasingly poking Harry’s forehead.

“Yes sweetie, both!”

*Harry had calmed considerably after his talk with Eric, feeling reassured and relieved. Although he had forced his head not to dive into Eric’s revelation that Daryl might feel be interested in Harry. A thought that had left Harry equally giddy and frightened, every time it popped up in his brain.*  

He was so not ready to deal with this!
Harry had kept to the exercise regime prescribed by Denise reining in his wayward thoughts. The bright side of getting out more was that Harry realized a lot more than before. Isolation tended to keep you quite out of touch, with the things going on around you.

So imagine Harry’s surprise, when he observed Carl and a teenage girl, Enid, if his memory served him right, slinking off. Out off the walls…

Harry wasn’t really worried. Carl knew what he did out there. The blue eyed teen could most likely handle himself much better, than any of the local residents ever could. But judging by their sneakiness these two hadn’t told anyone that they were leaving… Interesting!

Harry had refrained from following them. The green eyed teen had come to a realistic assessment of his limitation in the last few days. It had been in Denise office that he had understood it. But in fact not in their therapy session of the day… no after.

+++++Flashback+++++

Getting ready to leave Denise’s living room, he spotted something on the mantelpiece.

“Is this a desk calendar?”

“Yes Tara gave it to me yesterday” Denise blushed as every time, Tara’s name was mentioned.

“Sorry but why? Isn’t it out of date?” Harry asked her in confusion.

“Oh no it’s year-independent and therefore completely general, featuring months and dates but no specific year or the corresponding days of the week.” His psychiatrist told him, as she carefully traced the paper of the calendar with a wistful smile on her face.

“That’s useful.” Harry said, taking a closer look.

7th of July

“Is this right?” Harry blinked in surprise at the date on display.

“Of course wouldn’t make much sense otherwise.” Denise laughed at him, but she also seemed to sense his growing thoughtfulness. “Are you ok?”

“Huh? Yes, yes. Don’t worry. I just realized that my birthday is really close. I’m turning 17 on the 31st. Where I’m from, it’s kind of a big deal. Coming of age.” He mumbled distractedly.

“Really? I always thought in England coming of age was with 18?! Do you want to celebrate?” The young woman blinked confused at her client. Lost in thought Harry barely listened to her anymore.

“No… I haven’t decided yet. I have to go… See you later.”
The date had burned itself into his mind.

31st of July.

With shaking fingers he traced the inked lines on his right wrist. The binding ritual would brake then… after two years. When Dumbledore had applied the ritual, he hadn’t planned on it to be in place for so long. And for the longest time Harry hadn’t thought, he would live to see his 17th birthday. So he had pushed all thoughts on it away.

But now… the 31st of July, only 24 days away. He had always thought he would feel elated at the prospect of this day. But right now an overwhelming foreboding of utter dread washed over him.

Cursing he closed his eyes.

He realized that he had never talked to Dumbledore about the way the binding would end… he had just always assumed… He had assumed his magic would just come back.

Shit, it had been a sham!

Facing the facts.

The changes, the headmaster had made with the ritual, had left Harry with a basic access to his latent magic, by waving in runes to stabilise Harry’s core. It had been done, to keep his core from being permanently damaged… theoretically. But the ritual was also keyed into his core’s maturity. Meaning its power grew weaker, as Harry’s core continued to grow.

To grow on top of the magic that had been locked away for two years, trying to rise to every potential threat and had been contained by the binding.

Where had all that energy gone? When he surely hadn’t be able to use it or let it out in any way….

If he was honest he already knew, where it had gone most likely.

The punishing pain every time his magic fluctuated.

The way it had slammed through the binding, when the walkers had attacked the bar during the storm or when he had confounded Nicholas. The seizure directly after that and his waning health ever since.

His magic was attacking its confining vessel.

His magic that was still growing in power and that would be contained until his birthday… Harry hadn’t any strength left in him to rage or cry about this. He had known that all this pain hadn’t been a good sign. But shit!

To think what kind of damage, his magic would do to his body until the 31st of July… what if his body wasn’t able to control his violent magic?

Was it going to damage anything else?
In this moment he missed Hermine desperately. What wouldn’t he give to hear her declare that they should go to the library, because there would be certainly a book on the problem…

He missed her cleverness and her ability to find answers. She had been his sister in all but blood and she had been his solid rock, when everything else had been in shambles.

+++++Flashback end+++++

After that Harry had admitted to himself that he needed to lay low for a bit or his magic might kill him before he could turn 17.

And so he settled down in a good watching spot and to wait for the two wayward teens, while Tilly enjoyed her opportunity to use him as a climbing tree.

He tried to school his patience, nothing good would come from rushing after them and he didn’t want to chance another of his episodes out there, which would probably endanger the younger kids more, than it would help.

When he finally spotted them sneaking back into the community, he couldn’t help to call teasingly out to them. “Hello, hello! Just where might you two come from?” Harry grinned cheekily at them.

It was funny how teenagers could still look like toddlers, caught with their hands in the cookie jar. Enid immediately ducked her head and ran into the other direction, while Carl was blushing in an endearing shade of pink.

“Harry! You can't tell anyone!” Carl croaked out, his nervousness caused his voice to break a bit.

“You know what's even more dangerous than sneaking out?” Harry asked, as he scratched Tilly playfully behind the ear. Carl shook his head.

“Not telling anybody bout it!” Harry admonished softly. “I'm not going to lie to you. Rick will probably not be amused, to hear that you're sneaking out with a pretty girl.”

Carl blushed a bit more.

“But damn, if he finds you gone and doesn't know where you are... What do you think is going to happen then?” That question was completely rhetorical, because they both knew how that scenario would play out. Carl winced.

“Exactly! That man will tear every wall in the community down to find you.”

For a moment the green eyed teen wondered, if he radiated the same guilt tripping disappointment that Remus had shown him, when he had caught Harry sneaking around in third year...

Harry glanced at Carl's dropped shoulders. He remembered the pressure and the guilt that came with those high expectations, to be better than a normal kid even if you still were a kid.
Being reckless and impulsive, while forgetting about all the consequences that you actions could have, in a single minded conviction that you were doing the absolute right thing... Might be as well a mandatory thing, when you were fourteen.

Feeling like a hypocritical jackass, Harry poked playfully at the brim of Carl's hat.

“Come on, you marauder! And you too, Tilly! Let's get you inside for some tea and cookies. Carol was over and brought a few.” Harry had to laugh at Carl’s disgusted expression at mentioned tea.

“Oh you barbarian! Let me prepare you a decent cuppa! Glenn brought me the good stuff yesterday.”

“It doesn’t matter how good the tea is… It’s too hot outside for tea!” Carl grumbled.

“It’s never too hot for a good cuppa.”

Hopping down from his hiding spot, Harry had moved a little too fast, because suddenly black and white spots were dancing before his eyes, causing him to stumble. He managed just in time to brace his fall and caught himself in a kneeling position.

“Fuck, Harry!! You're alright?” Carl jumped towards him.

“Yes, yes.” Harry waved the concerned teenager off. “It's already better. Probably just a small circulation problem.”

“You're sure? I mean…” Carl scanned him with unsure and sceptical looks.

“I'm positive. Relax, I'm not going to having another bloody seizure. Some water and I will be right as rain.” Harry carefully righted himself and swallowed a wince back, when his head throbbed painfully. “Come let’s go.”

Conducting both, teenager and cat, to the house turned out to be a futile endeavour. As suddenly the sounds of glass breaking and the unmistakable clamour of a fight filled the streets of Alexandria.

Picking up speed Harry and Carl ran around the next corner...

What greeted them was the sight of a bloodied Rick and Pete interwoven into a twine of flying fists and kicking feet, rolling through the dirt. More Alexandria citizens stood in various stages of shock and disbelief around the brawling men.

Apparently Jesse had come to her senses and had finally made a decision to protect her children and herself from her abusive husband. And Rick had immediately jumped in, to remove the offender from his home, which had led right to a fist fight.

From an outside perspective, this looked really bad in Harry's opinion. The people in Alexandria
were so ignorant of the outside that they had never gained the edge that was needed to survive. They had never been pushed to the feral violence that came to you only, when you had to fight for life of your loved ones or your own.

They couldn’t understand, why their newly elected sheriff was beating the crap out of their surgeon. And it had never looked good, when the law enforcement got into a rumble that looked like it belonged into a pub, rather than on the streets between these pristine houses.

So yes, this looked definitely bad...

Until it suddenly looked worse!

Harry wanted to groan. Their fierce, formidable and... bloody reckless leader hat pulled a gun on Pete.

Fantastic!

It was like watching a train wreck… an unstoppable train wreck. You knew that it would end in a disaster but you couldn’t look away.

After punching Pete’s lights out, Rick started to rant and rave about that they needed to control who lived in this community…

“...We know what needs to be done and we do it. We’re the ones who live. You! You just… sit… and plan and hesitate...” Which might have even worked, with the Sheriff hadn’t been covered in blood from a profoundly bleeding head wound… and if he had stopped waving the bloody gun around like a maniac.

“Your way of doing things is gone. Things don’t get better because you want them to. Starting right now we need to live in the real world…”

It was tense. It was awkward as hell to watch and Harry couldn't hold back the sigh of relief, when Michonne knocked Rick out with a single anticlimactic punch.

Thank fuck!

*

With a frustrated growl Rick walked back to his house. Prowling through the streets like an angry lion, he saw those righteous weak mousses hide behind their curtains. He could still feel the bruises littering his body.

And damn that son of a bitch, Pete!

Rick was furious! Those stupid and blind idiots! They thought *he* was the problem... *He*!? When Pete was the one beating his wife and his sons? When it was so fucking clear, what needed to be done!? Carol had been right. There was only one way stuff with Pete could end.
House arrest, what a fucking joke! In this world you took care of the thread or it would come back to you. There no room left for mercy or weakness like that. Those time were gone!

On the porch Harry and Judi awaited him. His little girl squealed in happiness to see him, stretching her little plump arms out for a hug. Seeing her like this, content and with a healthy amount of baby fat...

It made the blue eyed man’s heart ache. He wanted this for her and for Carl. This was their chance to live in relative safety, to raise an infant and several teenagers into adulthood.

They couldn't back down now.

Cuddling his daughter close to his chest, he armed himself to fight his way through the tick heads of Alexandria. They wanted a meeting to vote on whether Rick would be allowed to stay… because he was he dangerous one?! It was hilarious.

Inside the house Carl was waiting for him. Rick felt a pang of regret, as he saw how worried his son looked. His teenaged boy only needed a few long strides, before he had caught up with his father.

How tall had his little boy become?

Rick pulled the lanky teen into a warm embrace. He tried to play it cool, but which father could, when he felt his kid gripping his shirt tight in the need of reassurance.

“I'm alright!” Rick told his son, while he patted his back.

“I know that.” Carl grumbled, all teenaged embarrassment but he never relinquishing the hold on his dad's shirt. With great reluctance the blue eyed boy peeled himself out of Rick’s arms and shuffled off.

Watching Carl leave the room and with Judi’s grounding weight in his arms, things could have been good for a moment, if Rick hadn't felt a heavy stare, drilling into the back of his head.

Time to face the music...

Turning around he met Harry's piercing green eyes. Most of the time Harry was a kind and soft spoken kid, but right now he looked unusual serious and disapproving.

Rick felt his hackles rise.

“What?” He snarled. “You wanna me lecture too? Like Michonne?” He felt immediately guiltily for his tone, when Harry flinched a bit. But the small teen didn't back down.

“I'm not sure, what Carol and you are playing at here… But that yesterday that was reckless.” Harry voice was soft but it didn't waver. His glance was firmly fixed on Rick.
“We’re not playing on anything! But these people are weak. We need to be prepared to take over if necessary! And you were the one, who told Jesse more than bluntly that she was responsible, if Pete continued to beat her and the boys.” Rick growled back. Harry didn’t seem to understand that they needed to fight to stay here. They had to force these people to see reality. And Jesse had told the Sheriff, how Harry had verbally cut her down.

“Yes I did! But I did not pressure her into a decision. I did not put her into a compromising position, when her abusive husband could have come home at any time. I didn’t let the situation escalate without any possibility to get her out of the line of fire, when said husband got foreseeable mad and violent.” Harry hissed at him with narrowed eyes. The blue eyed man felt all this rage bubbling in him.

“So I should have done nothing? Just left her to the abuse? I didn't think that you of all people would...” Yelling at Harry wouldn’t change anything but Rick was just so angry and he had thought that at least Harry would understand. Jesse had told him what the boy had said to her...

He could see how pale Harry had gone. This conversation couldn’t be good for the boy’s health. But Rick just couldn’t bring himself to care about it, right now. He craved the fight and the adrenalin.

“I said no such thing!” Harry snarled back at him. Emerald eyes were burning but Harry’s voice was cool. “But can you honestly tell me that this is how you remove an abusive partner from his home and family? I'm quite sure that's not, what you learned in the academy or in your years as deputy sheriff!”

Rick cringed at the accusation...

*Guilty as charged, Officer Friendly.*

Back in the day this would have been a bunch of rookie mistake.

Or something Shane would have done... Impulsive and reckless! And Rick would have been the one scolding him for acting alone, going in without knowing the situation and hell, not even thinking about calling back up. He would have reprimanded him for letting this turn into a fist fight, instead of a clean removal of the violent spouse and for not thinking about the abused woman.

Harry’s eerie green eyes implored to the former deputy. “Look at these people, Rick! They are naive and ignorant... Hell, they live the whole big house with a white fence dream here. It might have made them weak but also dangerous.”

“That’s exactly what I tried to tell them yesterday. But they seem incapable of getting it.” Rick shouted in frustration and Judith, who had started to pick up the strained atmosphere between two of her favourite people, mewl in confusion.

“Merlin, I'm not even denying that the stuff, you said yesterday was right, but bloody damn... Screaming at them, while you're covered in blood and waving around a freaking gun. That’s not going to make them listen to you. It scares them into covering their ears, singing lalala.
You're going to call a witch hunt on all of us, if you don't stop acting like this. Because scared people do stupid and desperate shit!” Rick got the impression that the last part wasn’t just aimed at the people of Alexandria but also at him. Narrowing his blue eyes the man growled. “They can always try! We will take them!”

Harry shook his head at him in open resignation.

“This lone ranger shit that you’ve been doing out there, punching first, fast and hard, and asking questions later. That’s not working here anymore!”

“I remember a time, when this ‘lone ranger shit’ saved your ass.” This was the second time that Harry flinched away from him in this argument but this time Rick felt a small vindictive satisfaction at boy’s discomfort. It was low blow but…

Sad and disappointed green eyes saw very inch of his rotting soul.

“If I remember correctly, it wasn’t just my ass you saved that night.” There was a chilling coldness in Harry’s voice. But before Rick could find the courage to apologize to the little Brit, Harry had turned away to leave.

“Rick, you have to decide, how you want to live. If you want to live in a community or if you want to put our family and yourself before all else. You can't have both at the same time! And you can’t kill them all.”

*

Leaving Rick, to think about everything said between them, Harry stomped of to clear his head.

He respected Rick. He really did.

Merlin, the man had ripped Joe’s throat out, with his teeth nonetheless!

The blue eyed man had taken on any threat to his family and had never backed down. But shite, if he didn't stop looking for the fight first and think over other solutions later, then Rick would drown in blood one day and he would take them all with him.

Harry hadn't joked, when he said he feared that this would turn into a witch hunt.

“Fear shrinks the brain” Aaron had said. And Harry knew that the scout was right. Harry had lived with people, fearing and hating him, for over a decade. And, bloody hell, he knew what these irrational feelings and thoughts could make people do.

Like locking an infant in the cupboard under the stairs…

With a tired sigh Harry walked through Alexandria’s bright streets. Tilly was by his side, her tabby tail standing proudly up, as she processed through the houses like the Queen of England. The elderly couple a few doors down cooed at them and Harry went cordially to them, so Tilly could get her share of kindness and affection. The sweet tabby cat seemed very satisfied with all the attention.

What a little diva!
Walking, breathing, Tilly… it calmed him a bit. This normalcy was still hard to bear but they all needed to find a way to come to terms with it or the stress of the constant fight or flight mode would eat them up from the inside.

But Rick words had hurt… deeply. To have that last night with the Claimers thrown back into his face…

To keep his thought from wandering off into dangerous territory, Harry looked over the surrounding area and houses, where he spotted Beth walking alone through the streets. The bright girl had probably just finished her shift with the younger kids in the community’s school.

The pretty farm girl had been easily accepted in Alexandria. She was the most approachable of their lot. With her friendly demeanour and her bright eyes, she had charmed kids, house wives and every unbound straight man in the community.

And in opposition to Carol, Beth really wanted to integrate herself in the safety zone.

Like Michonne, Glenn, Tara and Abraham did! Like they all wanted it for Carl and Judi. Merlin, even Daryl seemed to want it!

This chance, to settle, to be part of something bigger than pure survival.

That's why Harry was so frustrated with Rick and Carol. He wanted this to work out well for all of them. He wished desperately that his family could find a life here, happiness. They were good people, who had survived against all odds. They deserved this. They deserved to try!

To see Rick threatening all that with his erratic behaviour… It made Harry afraid for them.

Without a warning heavy ache settled on his chest, an ever building pressure...

Suddenly a blast of air was whipping in, stirring up Beth's blond hair and a cloud of dust on the road. The gust blew forcefully against fences, rattled loudly on garden gates and banged against windows, before it was gone as fast as it had come.

“What... What a curious weather?! Don't you think so my dear?” The elderly man behind the British wizard remarked a little shaken to his wife. Harry had to force himself to exhale...

*What the ever living fuck!*

He hadn't done that since he was eleven years old. And even then it had always needed intense emotional distress to do something this... Flashy!
This right now had been wild and untamed and worst of all *uncalled* magic.

Harry had never been frightened of his own magic but he was getting there now. The tattoos on his wrist were burning viciously, leaving Harry no room for doubt that it had been indeed his magic that had acted out on its own bloody accord.

Bile was rising in his throat and his heart was beating painfully fast in his chest.

Oh, he had learned enough with Denise to recognize this… He was about to panic...

*What the...?*

A movement behind Beth jostled Harry out of his distracted state of mind.

Pete! The surgeon was lurking behind the girl, tracing her with greedy eyes. From his position the surgeon probably couldn't see Harry or the elderly couple but the teen could see him very well. The tall blonde man still gave Harry creeps and an uneasy feeling had settled in the teen’s stomach, when the man suddenly moved towards Beth!?

Pushing everything else to the side, Harry strode as quickly as possible in Beth's line of sight. Plastering a wide smile on his face, he waved at the blond girl.

“Hey Beth! You got off early today.” He loudly called out to her.

He wanted other people to see her. To be in the public’s eye was sometimes the best protection.

“Harry? Is everything alright?” Beth asked in concern at his strange behaviour.

“Yes, yes. I’m on my way to visit Maggie for another riding lesson with Buttons. Why don't you come with me?” He must have sounded a bit too enthusiastic and too loud, because Beth frowned in confusion. Behind her ear Harry caught Pete's glare.

*Gottcha, wanker!*

The man seemed livid but refrained from saying anything. Wordlessly he turned away with a sneer and stomped back into his assigned home.

“Harry? What was that all about? What’s going on?” The blond girl inquired softly.

Still looking over her shoulder he sighed. “You've still got that small knife?” He asked her quietly.

“Yeah sure, in my room... But Harry, why?” Looking around in alarm, Beth stopped, when she too, caught Peter starring at them. Carefully and not to draw more attention to them and their conversation, Harry gingerly pulled her further along to Maggie’s house.

“Good, you and the other women should better carry one all the time until the matter with Pete has
been resolved.”

“Are you certain?” She whispered.

“I'm never certain, until somethings happens... Doesn't mean we have to take unnecessary chances.” Harry deadpanned. “I'll escort you to Maggie and then make sure to tell the others. Don't go anywhere alone!”

“Ok.” She gave his hand a squeeze.

*

When he came back to the house, he was exhausted physical and mentally. Fatigue seemed to weighting him down. He felt dead tired and burned out.

Since the gust of wind his tattoos hadn’t stopped burning. Harry could feel himself shaking and quivering from the inside out. Today was the 21st of July, only ten days left until his birthday…

Fear and uncertainty had plagued his mind for weeks… just what was happening to him?!

“Harry?” He startled badly at Carl’s soft call. He had been so absorbed in his worries that he had lost all perception of his surroundings.

“Oh, hey Carl.” Harry greeted tiredly, taking in the other boy’s hat and Judith on his arm. “You’re leaving?”

“Yes. I’m meeting with the others. The children are not allowed at the convention tonight, so we’re making our own.” The blue eyed teen nodded. He seemed nervous, but that was understandable, considering Deanna wanted a voting about Rick staying in Alexandria.

“Will Enid be there, too?” Harry couldn’t help but tease. He had to laugh a little at Carl’s blushing face.

“Oh stop that! It isn’t like that” The young Grimes grouched at him, swatting his arm.

“No?”

“No! She’s Ron’s girlfriend.” Carl told him seriously.

Ok, that was surprising. Harry had met Ron, Pete’s oldest son, only in passing. And if he had to be perfectly honest, he had avoided spending time with the namesake of his probably dead, best friend. But even in these brief encounters the boy had seemed a bit off.

And considering the extensive abuse he had suffered through his father, Ron had been extremely good at hiding it... Maybe just a bit too open, too chattery…

To think that a closed off girl like Enid would be comfortable with a boyfriend like that, it felt strange…
“Really I haven’t expected that…” But Carl didn’t seem to hear Harry, as started to ramble.

“And even if she wasn’t. She’s… she’s strange! She’s sneaking out all the time. Alone! And she just won’t listen, when I tell her to go back. Telling me that we belong outside the walls. And then one minute she says that I scare her… and when I… when I tried… but didn’t! She laughs at me and says that it’s cool that I’m afraid of her too.”

Oh my! Harry blinked that sounded like a lot of pent-up questions and… it was endearingly normal. Carl’s agitated complains about strange girl-behaviour, it brought Harry back to the Gryffindor common room, when he had watched Ron complaining about Hogwart’s female population before the yule ball.

“That sounds confusing…” He told Carl with a small understanding grin.

“Yes, it fucking is! I don’t know what to do around her anymore.” Carl grumbled in frustrated exasperation.

Harry laughed at his poor fellow teen. “I don’t envy you.”

Carl groaned. “I need to go. I don’t want to be late and Ron was really upset after last night…”

“Yes, it’s been awful, what happened to him and his little brother…”

An upset, abused teen, beaten by his father, who had watched how his dad had dominated and controlled his mother’s life…

Carl hummed.

“Carl?”

“Yeah?” Carl looked distracted back to the British teen.

“You might want to be careful around Ron…?!” Harry tried to word his concerns carefully. The British teen had been very protective of his friends, because he had so few… because he knew how hard it was to find friends and how lonely it had been without them. Harry suspected that Carl might feel the same about his Ron.

“What? Why? We’re friends!” Carl frowned at him. Harry could easily spot the stubborn tension around his friend’s mouth.

It was like a déjà-vu. Carl had never looked more like Rick than now, posture tall and proud, chin raised, blue eyes hard and unrelenting, little Judi balanced on his hip.

Merlin, Harry was too tired for another confrontation with an obstinate Grimes.

“You became quiet close to his girlfriend… And with everything going on between his father and your dad. It’s just too easy that things can turn ugly very quickly. He went through so much it… it can mess with your head. It’s so easy to get jealous of what you have managed, Carl. He might…” Harry tried to explain.

“Stop!” Carol yelled at him, making Judith’s lip wobble in upset. He brother shushed her immediately, but Harry could see the unwavering tension in the younger teen’s shoulders.

“Carl? Just listen…” Harry wished, he could get through to him. Hard and angry blue eyes shut
him up.

“Stop projecting your shit on other people! Ron is the first friend I made in ages. Don’t ruin this for me, Harry.” The boy with the Sheriffs hat hissed at him.

This was going all wrong! Bloody shit!

A headache was building behind Harry’s eyes, but that wasn’t what brought a traitorous wetness to his eyes.

“No, Carl, please… I don’t want to ruin this for you. I just…”

“You’re just jealous that you’re too fucked up to make normal friends yourself!” Carl didn’t even look back at his and stomped angrily out.

In the living room a vase burst into dust… Shite!

A piercing pain ripped through Harry’s chest and a strong coughing fit hit the green eyed teen out of the blue, bringing him to his knees without a warning. It went on for ages and even when he felt a warm wetness, hitting the inside of his clammy hands in front of his mouth, he couldn’t stop.

When he could finally breathe again his hands and front were splattered in dark red fluid… Shite!

This wasn’t good at all!

He was shaking all over, but he managed to drag his broken body into the bathroom. There was it again.

The scarecrow was looking back at him from the mirror. It worse than ever before. So pale that its skin tone was mixture between grey and green. Glassy, read rimmed and blood shot eyes starred back at him. A light sheen of sweat gave it a very ill look…

Poor thing!

But worst of all was the cascade of red the seemed to flow from its mouth and nose.

Carelessly he cast all his clothes to the side and stepped under the shower. Mechanically he cleaned himself, watching in fascination, how the water running into the drain changed from red… to pink…to rosé…to a clear colourless fluid.

The bathroom mirror behind him shattered into a thousand pieces…

Shite! Harry flinched in fright. His magic was going to break him and everything around him. He could feel it. He just knew it.

It would shatter him, like it did with the mirror… that was the last piece of the puzzle. He always
had known but he had refused to acknowledge it.

Because the truth was, even if he held out until his 17th birthday, the process of getting his magic back would most likely kill him.

And even if he survived…

Magic like that didn’t tend to go unnoticed… Like a beacon in the night it would call the moths.

Just… who was going to notice it? Who would come? The end of the seal, would also be the end to the witness protection and Harry had no idea, if anyone was still looking for him.

Either the good or the bad?

Maybe neither?

He didn’t know, if anyone was left to come for him, when he exploded in wild magic…

And one question wouldn’t stop circling in his head:

Just how much collateral damage he was he going to cause in the process?

*

Running from the house hadn’t been a good idea! It really hadn’t… but then again Harry had just come to a life-changing realization. So maybe he could cut himself some slag. He had wanted to see Buttons to calm himself down and if he was honest to hide for a bit.

+++++Flashback+++++

The arguments with Rick and Carl had been draining, but since he knew that he was a magical time bomb he couldn’t get this small ticking noise out of his head…

Tick… Tack… Tick… Tack…

He was a dead man walking and the question was how many he would take with him…

Tick… Tack… Tick… Tack…

He needed to clear his head and while everyone else was preparing for the meeting the stable would be heavenly empty. He would brush Buttons down and just breathe for a while.
And hopefully he would regain some mental equilibrium while doing so.

He didn’t even manage half of the way before weakness overcame him and he collapsed again… Before his eyes dance the now familiar white and black dots and the old pressure around his chest squeezed his air supply off like a corset. The only thing keeping him conscious was the searing pain from his wrists. The binding was still in place fighting for control.

He never noticed the sounds of approaching steps behind him.

He never realized that, while he had warned Beth and the other women…

He hadn’t listened to his own advice.

He was alone. And he had forgotten to take his knife with him….

Weakened as he was, he had no opposition to offer, when hands roughly grabbed him from behind and dragged him away.

+++++ Flashback end++++

And now he found himself in exactly the position, he had sworn to be never in again!

Under a man, who had bound his wrists and gagged his mouth. A man, who was ripping at his clothes.

About to be violated.

Again.

“I refuse to fall prey to anyone ever again. Be it walkers or men!”

That had been his own, grandiose words! Right after he had asked to carry a knife.

A knife Carol, Michonne and Daryl had taught him to use.

A knife that lay perfectly in shape in his room, next to Daryl’s big, old hunting knife, the man had forgotten in Alexandria.

He was a bloody idiot! And worse he was a hypocrite. Arrogantly he had lectured Rick and Carl about safety and reckless behaviour, when he himself had made such rookie mistake. Again!

And now he would pay the price for that…
Pete leered down at him. The stench of alcohol hung on the surgeon’s breath.

“You people think you can just take everything from me, huh?”

Harry tried to struggle, to scream, to kick at the man just anything to make noise… maybe someone would hear.

Harry’s effort just got him two hard punches, one to the face, one to the stomach.

Pete was way taller than Harry and weighted easily his double. His attack, on top off Harry’s already frail health, left the teen a whimpering mess.

“Stop, struggling! You, you took everything from me! My house, my wife, my children!” Pete’s cold eyes stared at Harry. The surgeon relished in the power he got over the teenager.

“Everything was good until you came here! And Rick, he thinks he’s so mighty! But… But I’ll show him that I take what I want. Wanted to take the pretty blond today but you had to get in the way. Making it hard for me… But then I thought, hey Pete, the boy is pretty, too and has been broken in already. He’ll do!”

In that moment the green eyed teen understood. This wasn’t about Harry or Beth or even sex…

This was just about dominance over Rick. Pete was obviously drunk and out of his mind with hatred towards the Sheriff.

Harry’s last conscious thought was that he was glad that at least Beth had gotten away.

After that came only pain.

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Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the cliffhanger but it felt right to end the chapter there. The next two chapters are going to be pretty angst filled… I’m sorry but they’ll be the peak of this story arc. After that I promise that things will get better for Harry ^^
I apologize beforehand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

Chapter 15

He was covered in blood. From head to toe.

Again.

The dead corpse he was carrying on his shoulders weighted heavy on him but maybe now they would listen.

Harry had been right. Rick couldn’t just yell at the people here and hope that they would understand. He needed to take them by the hand and show them.

When the Sheriff reached the forum for the meeting, the discussion about his place in the community, was still going. Rick stumbled than walked into their circle, with the corpse of one of the walkers he had killed and threw it before Alexandria’s assembled feet.

_Screaming at them, while you're covered in blood and waving around a freaking gun that's not_...
going to make them listen to you.”

Fuck! This couldn’t go, like it did yesterday.

Well, he couldn’t change the covered the blood part, but this time he had his gun still holstered and he wasn’t screaming at them, yet...

Two out of three! That had to count for something, right!?

So Grimes, keep it calm and collected! Make them see your point.

“I asked Gabriel to close it.” Deanna’s eldest son stuttered out.

“Go.” Deanna’s voice was cool and laced with strict disappointment and Spencer rushed out like a chastised child.

Good! Rick thought. No matter what she thought of her wayward Sheriff, she got that this wasn’t a small mistake. This was serious.

Inhaling deeply Rick gathered himself. It was now or never. These people they needed to understand or they would all be in danger. Harry had been right. Rick had to make a choice…

“I didn’t bring it in. It got inside… on its own. They always will. The dead and the living. Because we are in here. The ones out there, the living and the dead; they’ll try to get in here. ‘Cause we’re in here. They’ll hunt us. They’ll find us. They’ll try to use us. They’ll kill us. But we’ll kill them, we’ll survive, I’ll show you how.”

God, they weren’t read. They all looked so helpless and confused at him. Mice before a lion. Completely overwhelmed and afraid.

“…scared people do stupid and desperate shit!”

Harry had been right. And Rick had just refused to listen, because he had been afraid, too. If he was honest, he had been nothing but scared, since he had woken up in that in that hospital two years ago.

Scared and angry…

“You know, I was thinking, how many of you do I have to kill, to save your lives? But I’m not going to do that, you’re going to change.”

Rick nodded at all of them. Grim determination filled him. They had to change! And Rick needed to change, too. He had lashed out today. At Michonne and at Harry. He had enjoyed hurting the British teen verbally, to push him back, and he still needed to apologize for that.
“I’m not sorry for saying that last night. I might be sorry for the way I said it. But most of all I’m sorry for not saying it sooner.” Harry had been right. They were listening. Finally they were listening. “You are not ready. But you have to be! Right now! You have to be.”

He could see it in Deanna’s and Reg’s eyes, they were getting it.

Now they were talking!

They finally understood that their carefully constructed walls were just one part of the equation, alone they would not be enough to keep the residents inside safe.

Rick felt relief wash over him. The tight ball of tension in his chest that consisted mostly of aggression and fright was finally loosening a bit.

He looked up at Jesse but instead of seeing support and friendliness, the woman’s gaze had fallen on something behind Rick. Worry and fear were clouding her pretty face!

“YOU’RE NOT ONE OF US!”

Pete’s angry shout carried through the forum.

“YOU’RE NOT ONE OF US!” Rick eyes widened at the sight of Michonne’s sword in the hand of the obviously drunken man. Unsteadily he staged forward pointing the blade at Rick. “You have no right…to come here and make these changes.” Pete slurred out.

“He tells you that he'll protect you. But he can't even protect his own people.” The surgeon addressed Alexandria’s citizens tauntingly.

“What are you talking about?” Michonne asked through clenched teeth. Her face mirrored the discomfort Rick felt.

“Well, where is that green eyed minx of yours?” The tall blond man grinned viciously.

Harry?!

Looking around, Rick noticed with growing unease that the teen was nowhere to be seen. The blue eyed man could see a lot of confusion in the faces around him but Beth had gone incredibly pale.

Fuck!

Swaying intoxicated, Pete laughed mockingly.

Dread was crawling down Rick's spine.

“I wanted to go for the pretty blond. You know… equal exchange. You take mine and I take one of yours. But the little bitch had to mess up my game. And I thought, why not?” Pete bragged
casually. Rick didn’t want to think about the things the violent man was implying.

“Where is Harry?” The Sheriff managed to hiss out.

“What have you done Pete!?” That was definitely Jesse desperate voice.

There were several people simultaneously asking and mumbling in fear and shock.

But Pete was just staring back at Rick. He seemed giddy and with a leering grin he mock whispered to the Sheriff.

“And I... I tell you for such a used up little thing, he was a surprisingly tight fuck.”

Blood was rushing loudly through Rick’s ears, nearly blocking out the cruel laugh that echoed through the forum.

Shocked disbelief filled the night.

The blue eyed Sheriff saw his own horror, reflected in the faces of his family. Michonne and Abraham had their fists and their jaws clenched in the same desperation that cursed through his veins.

But Rick’s brain felt somehow empty...

Like it couldn’t process just what had been said. Had Pete really done, what had just implied?! Had he really raped their sweet and kind-hearted teen…?!

Where was Harry?! Surely Pete was baiting them... The surgeon of this weak community would not have dared to…?!

Fuck!!!

Where was Harry?

He could hear Jesse sobbing behind him and out of the corner of his eyes he could see Eric, who seemed frozen and just starred helplessly into nothingness.

Swallowing felt painful and Rick was shaking all over but he managed to keep his voice steady and cool, as he asked. “Where is Harry now?”

“Huh? Probably dead. Didn't look too good, when I left him. Such a thin throat… I could circle his neck with just one hand.”
“Was already half dead when I found him...” The careless way Pete shrugged, made Rick’s blood boil. He tried to ignore his rising panic.

Had the man really raped Harry... to get back at Rick?

Harry had warned him... Had told him that had gone the wrong way about the whole Pete issue. That he should have thought this through before he had acted so harshly...

“You spineless excuse for a human being!” To Rick’s stunned astonishment, it was Eric, who had sprung up and shouted at the surgeon.

“Keep your panties on homo.” Pete hissed indifferent. “The kid was dying any way. What does it matter if I got something out of him, before he kicked the bucket? The way I saw it, he was already well broken in.”

At the sharp inhale around the forum, Pete shook his head in mock sympathy. “Oh you didn't know!? That's because you're blind idiots.” The surgeon fixed his hate filled eyes on Rick, as he sneered drunkenly at Rick. “And you do not belong here!”

The man looked crazed and livid. Pete took unsteady steps towards Rick, swinging Michonne’s sword in uncoordinated movements. The Sheriff observed him in tense anger, all muscles coiled in expectation of a fight.

Let the fucker come! Rick would make him pay!

But suddenly Reg, Deanna’s husband, moved forward into Rick’s line of sight and stepped up to Pete in an attempt to placate the drunken man.

“Pete, calm down. And give me that sword!”

But with no avail.

“Stay away from me, old man!” He hissed dangerously. Pete got more and more agitated, screaming and yelling that it was all Rick’s fault. Then he made an expansive gesture with the hand holding the sword to shoo Reg away. Rick watched in shocked horror as blood splashed in a big arc, as Pete cut the older man's throat wide open.

“NOOOOOOOGO!!!!!!!”

Deanna’s scream resounded in Rick's ears. She jumped forward to cradle the slumped form of her dying husband in her arms. There was nothing to been done for the kind man that had helped building this community.

A man, who had constructed the walls, that had kept the people here safe for so long.

Even Pete looked completely shocked. All fight had left the tall man. With his shoulders slumped and his mouth hanging open, he looked like a toddler that just couldn't understand how his actions had led to... This!

The surgeon dropped Michonne’s sword and Rick jumped forward to contain the violent man.
Weapon drawn and pointing it steady on Pete's head.

*See Harry, no waving the gun needlessly around, like a maniac. Just ready to end the job.* And despite his overwhelming hatred for Pete, Rick made a show of waiting for Deanna’s decision and command.

And it was just for show, because he saw it in her eyes. She had understood him earlier and now she understood that there was only one way this could go.

Just one.

Like Carol had said.

“Do it Rick!” Deanna growled out. Her command hard and firm. *Good!*

*You deserve this! You deserve to die like this! You're a pig!*

Making sure to look Pete directly in the eyes, Rick took aim and fired!

The gun shot rang through the awkward night.

“What the hell is going on here?”

Standing in the entrance, looking worse for wear, were Aaron, Daryl... And Morgan!

All three men stared disbeliefing and thunderstruck from the executed Pete to Rick, who was still covered in walker blood from head to toe.

“Aaron!” Despite his broken ankle Eric made hastily but clumsy his way over to his partner, throwing himself into the scouts arms with a sob.

“Eric?!” Aaron asked wide eyed. He looked positively alarmed by his boyfriend’s behaviour and Rick could guess that this much PDA was unusual for the both of them.

“What's goin’ on man?” Daryl groused. His brother seemed on the edge and slated blue eyes scanned the assembled crowd, no doubt searching for unruly black hair and green eyes.

“Harry...” Beth tried to explain, while tears were running down her face. “We need to search for Harry. Pete he said... He implied... We need to... We need to find him!”

Daryl probing gaze demanded a clear answer from Rick. The former deputy sheriff forced himself
to meet his friend’s eyes. There would be no easy way to say this...

“Pete bragged that he has raped Harry... to get back at me.” Daryl reared back, as if physically struck.

“There's more... Pete he said that Harry might be dead.”

The hunter dragged a hissing breath in.

Repeating it out loud made it even worse. Rick felt, like they had failed Harry in every way possible. And looking at the pain in Daryl’s eyes, seeing the hurt and vulnerability in those eyes... It made him think that he had let his brother down, too.

“Ya sure?” Daryl growled, while he started to bit his thumb nail. Rick could feel his friends fear and concern.

“No... We don't know for sure.” Rick replied hesitantly. He knew Daryl… He knew his brother so well, Daryl would hope until it would him eat up. And if Harry was dead... “Then let's make sure. Stop wastin’ time.” Daryl hissed agitated.

“Daryl, just be prepared that... That this might end like it did with Sophia.” Rick needed to caution the hunter. Carol’s hitched breath was the only indication that she had listened to their conversation, while Daryl had clenched his eyes and hands. For a moment the hunter swayed so dangerously that Rick feared, he might collapse then and there.

But then an anguished growl tore itself from the archer’s grim mouth.

“He ain’t dead ‘til we see him dead. So shut it and get movin’.”

There was no sense in arguing with Daryl right now… And he was right dead or not. They needed to look for Harry.

They needed to find him.

Dead or Alive.

*Get a grip Grimes! Fall apart later! Now, there's stuff to do!*

“Ok... Ok. Michonne and Carol take the stable. Abe, Rosita and Eugene take the church. Beth, go with Eric and Aaron to their house, maybe Harry’s there. Jesse, the kids are in your house, take Tara and make sure they’re alright.” Rick instructed his family and friends.

“Daryl and I will look into Pete's house first and then we will cover the streets.” When he looked into Carol’s concerned face, he saw his own helplessness and hopelessness mirrored. They had seen too much, lost too much...

He just didn’t find it in him to believe that Harry had survived Pete’s attack in his weakened state.
“What are we supposed to do?” The chubby woman from the supply store asked, her voice small and hesitant.


With a nod to Daryl, Rick gathered himself and with a sharp intake of breath they got going.

****

They had searched for hours...

Sasha and Maggie had joined the search after Abraham and the others had found them by church with that fraud Gabriel. Glenn had come in shortly after, with Nicholas leaning heavily on his shoulder. Both men had looked beaten up and had been covered in blood and grime. There was a story there but no one had the energy to go into it at the moment. Not even Glenn and Nicholas themselves.

So they had searched.

But what they had found... That had told them only so much about things that had transpired.

When Rick had brought Daryl to Pete's house, the hunter had stopped a few feet away from the property. Solemnly the broad shouldered man had observed a patch of lawn, where dirt and grass looked a bit ruffled and out of place.

“That's where he took him... Kid was having problems walking... Ya see those uneven steps.” Daryl pointed out, voice raw with emotion. “There's a hand print in the dirt. He fell. That's where he took him... Dragged him off to the house... See them parallel lines in the grass?” Rick remembered, when Daryl had him shown his tracking skills for the first time… Back then they had searched for Sophia…

Rick pretended not to notice as the gruff hunter impatiently whipped over his face.

Looking into the house had been unnerving.

It had been deadly silent in there.

In the living room was a mess. There was no other word for it. Broking furniture everywhere… They walked carefully through shattered vases and torn cushion fillings. Rick wondered, how that had happened?! Some of the furniture looked as if it had exploded, fabric ripped and scattered all over the floor.

But Harry hadn’t been there. Not anymore at least.
They had found traces of a struggle and an alarming amount of blood on the floor...

Not much, but it had made Daryl curse violently. The Sheriff was quite sure that they had found the place where...

Rick had pointedly looked away, when the hunter had yet again fought down a traitorous wetness in his eyes. The tracker had paced like a caged lion through the room, furiously drying his face.

“He ain’t here. That's good. He ain’t dead.” Daryl finally growled out, glaring at Rick, when he opened his mouth. The message between them was clear.

*Shove it! I don’t wanna hear ya shit!*  

Rick's pity must have shown on his face because his friend had hissed at him.

“Stop killin’ him, ‘fore we know! ‘t might be different this time.”

In the kitchen looked nearly as battered as the living room… one of the cupboard doors hung crooked on only one hinge and there were a lot of broken dishware lying around. The former deputy felt reminded of their searched for Merle in Atlanta.

Here in this beaten up kitchen, where they found a cut rope and something that looked like a gag. Small splashes of blood decorated the bonds and the sink.

“Walkers ain’t cutting their cords off.” There was a small, proud smile playing on Daryl’s thin lips. And with that the archer stood taller and less weighted down.

*He hopes! He thinks that Harry is alright… That this won’t end in a complete disaster…*

Rick wanted to feel the same but he just couldn't bring himself to return the confidence that things might be alright.

The uneasy dread Rick was feeling, was still there.

***

When they finally came back to the house, everyone else had gathered there in the living room.

To Rick It looked like those first nights, they had spent here camping out together. But when he looked into his family’s faces, he could find none of the hopeful confidence, they had radiated back then.

They all looked exhausted and dejected. Rick immediately searched for Carl, who sat by the window with Judith in his arms. His son seemed bleak and withdrawn, Rick felt for his son, who
had lost another friend to this messed up world.

“Have you found him?” Beth asked hopeful.

“Nah, but there were signs that he left that ass’ house aliv’. Ya?” Daryl inquired. He looked disappointed.

There were uneasy glances...

“We figured that out, too... That he left Pete's alive. I found this in the bathroom...” Carol told him, her face pinched and closed off. The grey hair woman was obviously fighting for composure, as she pointed to a stack of clothes on the table.

Those were Harry’s clothes, Rick recognized.

But there were two sets...

Surprised the ex-deputy looked at Carol. “Go on, look at it... Maybe you come to a different conclusion, than we did.” She sighed tiredly.

With the first set came the shirt, Harry had worn this morning. Holding it up, Rick nearly dropped it again, when Daryl cursed violently behind him. Blood was splattered all over the front of the shirt, starting from the neckline of the shirt to the ending of the sleeves.

Carefully Rick folded the arms of the shirt up, trying to comprehend the pattern of the blood trail. It looked like...

“How he been spitting up blood?” Rick asked in concern.

“Seems like it...” Michonne replied darkly.

“Pete said Harry had been weakened.” Carol remarked drily. Rick noticed how, Carl had flinched badly at those words. He could understand his son… They should have seen how sick the teen had gotten. Hell, Rick had seen it this morning… and he had been an ass about it.

The second set of clothes was in a worse state... While they were less blood stained, the placement of the red discolorations had Rick's heart sinking. Blood and other fluids had soiled the shirt and on the pants. On top of that the trousers and the shirt had been torn open with force. He didn't doubt anymore that Pete had indeed raped Harry.

The evidence was clear.

And judging the angry and forlorn expressions of his family they all had guessed the same. God, there was a storm brewing on Daryl’s face. Rick could watch as the hunter closed himself of more and more by the second. His brother was at his straining point. And the Sheriff wasn’t sure if Daryl would ever recover from losing Harry like this.

Somethings couldn’t be fixed…

Rick closed his eyes.  Get a grip! Just a bit more. Get the full picture. Daryl needs this. Your
The blue eyed man took three calming breaths and tried to analyse the situation.

“So Harry coughed up blood, went out and got taken by Pete... And after he came back here? But where is he then? What have you found?” Looking around the living room, Rick noticed that two vases lay on in heap of tiny shards.

“Had Pete broken those, as he had stolen Michonne’s sword?”

“The mirror in the bathroom got shattered.” Carol muttered. “I found his clothes by the shower…”

“We were in his room. Nothing seemed to be missing.” Beth said solemnly. Her beautiful blue eyes were filled with tears. Noah had pulled her into a one-armed hug.

“Maybe he's just scared? And he's hiding somewhere? Maybe we'll find him tomorrow?!” Tara's hopeful babbling, felt even more devastating.

Carol had pinned Daryl with a stare that was heart wrenchingly sad.

This would be like the search for Sophia...

Only the wall behind him seemed to hold the hunter upright anymore.

“Goin’ up.” Daryl mumbled his Georgian accent, so velvet soft that Rick nearly didn’t catch his words. Watching his brother drag his feet over the carpet, eyes averted and his shoulders hunched, burdened by an invisible weight, Rick thought his heart was going to give out.

The atmosphere was heavy between them. They all felt too drained by the day’s happenings, too worried about Harry, to ask questions or to think about who was to blame for this mess. That would come later...

Right now, they were all caught in the same numbness of shock that muddled their thoughts.

Oppressing silence settled between them.

....

Suddenly, heavy cursing and hasty steps could be heard from upstairs.

Fearing the worst Rick sprang to his feet, getting ready for a fight.

But it was Daryl, who came running down the stairs, a wild look in his eyes and a crushed envelope with a few pages clenched in his hand.
Daryl’s face was pale and his normally narrowed eyes were wide and vulnerable in fear. He opened and closed his mouth a few times without making a sound, all the while he was waving the papers in his hands.

Finally he found his voice, rasping and broken.

“Ma ol’ huntin’ knife is gon’. An’ found this. He's... He's gon’!”

**

Harry had left them a letter.

“My dear family,

if you read this I will have left Alexandria behind.

I apologize for going away like this but I was afraid you wouldn’t let me. That you would talk me out of it or that you would force me to stay and I’m in no condition to fight my way out.

I need to leave. I have been getting weaker and sicker in the last weeks since the seizure. I haven’t told you but I fainted quite a few times since then and today I started to cough up blood. A lot of it. None of us needs to be a doctor to know that this is means I’m dying.

It won’t be long now.

And I can’t die caged up in Alexandria.

I don’t want to be afraid every night that I might not wake up any more. That a walker with my face could hurt Carl or Judith. That I could hurt any of you.

But most importantly I don’t want you to watch me wither away, asking yourselves every day, if today is the day, you’ll have to put me down.

You broke every promise you ever made to leave me behind, should I endanger you. You made me family and became mine in turn. You gave me a place to belong to. A feeling I hadn’t since forever.

And I love you all for it.

Because of that your happiness and wellbeing will always come first to me, so I came to the conclusion that this time I needed to be the one to leave you behind.

I’m so sorry but I... I vowed that I wouldn’t fall prey to anyone else, never again. That I would grow stronger but I failed. And I tried. I promise you. I tried to be better and stronger, to deserve the trust and love you showed me.

Today I haven’t been able to keep my vow any longer. Today I was too weak and too distracted to look after myself. To protect myself like you have all shown me... I’m so sorry that I failed you all like that after you trained me so well.
Pete... He... He raped me...

* 

Here Rick had to stop reading as tears obscured his vision and his voice broke. Placing the letter on the couch table before him, he buried his head into his hands and sobbed. Carl and Beth joined him on either side. It took only a moment before all of them were huddled together, seeking comfort in their puppy pile. 

“You want me to read the rest?” Michonne asked. She had cried but her voice was steady that was more than Rick could say for himself, so he just nodded.

* 

I can barely write it. May hand is shaking so bad... But I need you to know, so you could watch out for each other. He wanted to hurt Beth! Be careful! I... I... I'm so angry at myself that I made it so easy form him... that I was so stupid. It was my fault that he got to me... I have become more of a burden than ever before to you all.

A liability and a danger. You probably don’t even understand how much.

But I can’t stay.

I want you to know that I was happy with you.

Daryl, someone said to me once that “to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure”. I am prepared. I have been for a long time.

I knew for a long time that I was existing on borrowed time and I had accepted that. When we met, I was tired of fighting and ready to give in. But you refused to let me go. You saved my life in so many ways in those last months. And I don't just mean surviving but you showed me the road to living again. You lead me to a family.

Since we've met, you have given me the hope and the courage to hold on.

And made me want to be alive.

I really apologize for nicking your old hunting knife but taking it with me, makes me feel braver. And it makes me feel safe. Like you always did.

I beg you to respect my decision to leave now. Don’t come looking for me, Daryl. There will be nothing for you to find. I’m going to make sure that you’ll never come across a walker with my face.

Please, don’t worry for me. I'm going with a light heart.

Tagging along with you all has been taxing and difficult at times but I wanted to see this through with you. And all of you made me want to follow you on this journey. To walk as much as possible
of this road together with you.

You made this happiest time of my entire life. It took the journey to another continent and an apocalypse but I found my peace and a home with you.

I don't regret anything.

I'm sorry for putting you through this now but this is the end of the road for me.

I love you all.

Thank you!

Harry

*

The green eyed boy was gone. And he had taken nothing but Daryl’s old hunting knife.

Harry had left them a letter

Chapter End Notes

Again, thank you for all your kind and wonderful comments and kudos!!! ^^

Next Chapter will about the grieving family and then finally some answers!!
Chapter 16

The loss of Harry had been a constant ache in Daryl’s chest. People always said that grief would mellow over time but for the hunter it never did.

* 

From the moment Daryl had found his old hunting knife missing and in its stead a fucking envelope, he had felt dread settle around him like a cloak. He had forgotten how to breathe for a bit. The stupid paper had looked so innocent laying there.

But Daryl had panicked immediately.

Until then he had been exhausted and desperate. He had been afraid but he hadn't panicked. He had held onto that last bit of hope that Harry could be alright.

 Somehow! Somewhere!

That the kid had just hidden well. That they would find him tomorrow. Then Daryl would get another chance to protect the frail boy. Another chance to do, what he should have done all along: staying in Alexandria and looking out for Harry.

He hadn’t wanted to think about the alternative...

But there had been that fucking envelope. It had felt like a punch to the gut.

So he had panicked.
Like an idiot he hadn’t been able to read the letter by himself, giving it to Rick. When the Sheriff had started to read, their eyes had met and Daryl had wanted to be sick. His brother had tried to dampen his hope all evening but the anguished pity in Rick’s face, when he scanned those first sentences… By god! The hunter had felt his knees buckle.

He’s dead Darlina! Ya los’ him too. Like tha’ littl’ girl by the farm. He’s a roamer now. Ya useless as always. Merle’s voice had taunted him. But it had been soon drowned out by Rick’s reading…

And damn, all shit Harry had written! About being thankful and how Daryl had saved him...

What a laugh?! What a fuckin’ joke?!

Daryl had done shit! Harry was...

What did it matter, what he had done, when Harry wasn't there anymore?!

The hunter would have screamed, if he hadn't been so fucking numb.

Daryl remembered that he had mindlessly stumbled back up to the attic room, after they were done. The others had stayed in the living room, seeking comfort in each other. But Daryl hadn’t been able to stand the stifling atmosphere. He hadn’t been able to look at his family, afraid of the all those chaotic emotions and thoughts running through his head. So he had fled to the attic.

There, he had stood with blurry eyes, staring down at the nest of pillows and blankets that Harry had built for himself.

It looked all fluffy and shit. Like a pillow fort for a child. Comfy...

But what had shaken him, was the centrepiece of this little safe haven... Daryl’s own blanket.

Harry must have nicked that, too… He thought absentminded. His head producing unbidden pictures of Harry snuggled into his blanket.

Sleeping peacefully…

Feeling safe…

Think about Daryl…

A punch to the nuts hurt less than his thoughts, playing with the impossible…

Tears had started to spill unhindered over his cheeks and with shaky movements he had crawled into the cosy nest, careful not to disturb it too much.
Surrounded by all those cushions that created a small wall against the outside world, Daryl had felt oddly protected. It was soft and cuddly.

And it smelled like Harry.

A sudden meow altered the hunter to a small, tabby cat, looking disgruntled over edge of a pillow. Slated, blue eyes met displeased, yellow ones.

The damn thing seemed so fucking prissy to find him here instead of Harry that Daryl couldn't suppress a wet and miserable chuckle.

“Sorry... He ain't... He ain't here anymor’.” His voice broke.

A questioning meow answered him.

Daryl closed his eyes and buried his face in Harry's pillow, wanting to rest just for a bit.

Suddenly a light weight stood on his chest, peeling one eye open, he saw that the little fur ball had decided to get a closer inspection on him. All the while huffing in obvious annoyance with the present human. The fucking cat finally settled down on his chest with an air of sad resignation.

Yeah... Daryl could understand that.

So he clenched his eyes shut and just concentrated on the comfort the fluffy pillow fort provided.

Maybe it would keep the reality away for a bit longer.

*

It had taken a few hours of uneasy sleep and haunting nightmares of Harry killing himself with his hunting knife, combined with waves of new tears, until the brunt of his grief really hit him.

It hurt.

It was all too much. There were so many emotions assaulting him all at once that he couldn't grasp one to hold onto. And despite his emotional chaos, he felt empty... Lost!
He didn’t know, how long he had laid in the soft comfort of the pillow fort but at one point Carol had come up to the attic.

Her face had been pale and sad but she had looked so put together... Clean, ironed clothes and this fucking flower cardigan!

“Pookie?!” Just one word but it had held so many different messages.

Are you alright?

I’m so sorry.

I’m sad too.

You have to get up.

It was like that between them.

With something that was hopefully a withering glare, he wordlessly turned his back on her.

Go away!

I’m not ready!

An exasperated and sad sigh followed. “Just this once! I will let you get away with this, for now.” He didn’t turn around but he could see her before his inner eye, all concerned disapproval with her hands stemmed onto her hips.

“I’ll be back later. “ That was a promise... And a threat!

Fuck!

Carol wouldn’t allow him, to hide himself away. With a last sigh she addressed his back.

“We’re not dead. That’s what you said. You’re not dead. I know you. We’re different. I can’t let myself feel. But you… I know you. You have to let yourself feel it. You will.”
Fuck that woman! He cursed as his nails bored themselves painfully in his arms and tears fell from his eyes.

How could he ever face a world without Harry?

* 

Dragging himself out of that little nest had been harder, than Daryl had expected.

Facing reality wasn't appealing.

And when he finally collapsed in a kitchen chair next to Carl, the atmosphere had been awkward and heavy. The teen had stared at his cornflakes with a closed off expression, avoiding all eye contact. Daryl could relate to that need of shutting intruders out.

Guilt and shame were weighting him down, dragging him under into a stormy sea of emotions drowning him. Sadness was paralyzing him, leaving him helpless against its force. Nothing anyone would say, could make this better.

Rick and Michonne had thrown skittish glances around like Daryl or Carl were time bombs, about to go off at any moment.

In the peripheral the hunter could see that Rick opened his mouth a few times... wincing every time, not saying anything in the end.

Probably because Michonne had kicked him under the table.

Michi was good like that.

Sitting there in the kitchen… so normal… but not.

It was then, that the anger came... It flooded Daryl. And it brought all those unfair questions with it. Urging him to scream and to insult and to injure...

To make everyone else feel this unbearable hurt.

“I never want to be alone with his man.” Harry had told this Daryl after meeting the scumbag surgeon for the first time.

So why haven’t you looked out for him? Why didn't you protect him?

How come that we’ve been all so fucking blind?

Why haven’t you done your job with Pete right in the first way, Sheriff?

Why was he alone, Carl?
Why did I leave him here?

You promised me that he would be safe here, Rick!

Daryl’s anger was directed at Pete, at Rick, at Michonne, at Carl… and at *himself*.

Suddenly he jumped out of his chair, because he knew deep down, that pointing fingers would not help anyone. With rigid steps he stalked out of the house, fighting to keep a tight lash on his slipping control.

Ignoring Rick's surprised shouts, the hunter marched through the streets.

Daryl’s mind was reeling... It was hard to think clearly.

The last time he had felt like this, he had found Merle’s walking corpse. His stupid asshole brother. Putting down Merle had been one of the hardest things he had ever done. He hadn’t wanted to… but he hadn’t been able to turn his back and leave his body roaming either.

He had been so angry, sad, desperate and so fucking helpless!

*Why did I go with Aaron? I shoulda staye’ in Alexandria!*

Like Harry should have done! The boy should have waited for Daryl to come back… He should have asked for help.

Damn Harry, for making this decision, to leave them behind, on his own!

“I beg you to respect my decision to leave now. Don’t come looking for me, Daryl.”

*Respect my decision! My ass!*

...  

*Maybe it wasn't too late?*

Maybe Daryl could still find him. Could bring Harry back home!

Looking up, he saw that his feet had carried him to Aaron’s garage. His bike, maybe he could look for Harry?!

He didn’t stop to think about it… he couldn’t! Nothing seemed to make sense, besides leaving to look for Harry. Right now Alexandria felt much too small for the hunter, as if its walls were already closing in on him…

Knocking a bit too loudly and too vehemently on Aaron’s door, Daryl started nibbling on his
Wha...? Daryl?” A very pale Eric had opened the door. The auburn haired man tore immediately up at the sight of Daryl.

Shit, the archer couldn’t deal with this…

He thought that Carol’s composure or the awkwardness in the Grimes household had been bad but this… Witnessing this overwhelming grief that resonated with the open wound in his chest, it felt unbearable.

“Come in, come in.” Eric ushered the hunter inside, while trying to dry his face with the sleeve of his shirt.

“You look like shit.” Aaron commented darkly from the kitchen counter. Bitter lines were twisting around the usually smiling mouth.

“Ya, too.”

A small hiccup escaped Eric, as fresh tears fell from his eyes.

“I'm so sorry. I'll try to get a grip. It's just... Harry!”

Daryl’s heart twisted painfully.

Yeah... it was just... Harry!

Aaron was about to say something. Probably giving shitty condolences and Daryl didn't want to hear them. Couldn’t bear it.

“Want ta take the bike. Need ta get out.” He rasped quickly over any bullshit the scout might want to say.

“You want to leave?! Now?” Eric squeaked in disbelief.

Aaron didn’t seem to be so surprised. The curly haired man just looked at the tracker thoughtfully, until he nodded.

His face serious and solemn.

“Ok. Be careful.”

****

The loss of Harry weighted heavy on Rick. At night he laid awake, thinking about the irony. At their first meeting Rick had felt Harry behind and now Harry had been the one to leave them. Rick
had been ready to kill the nameless child in front of him back then and Harry had nonetheless saved him that day. Trust had come much later, but it had grown.

Harry had become part of their life's and their family.

A family, that had protected each other. They relied on each other.

Fuck, they had always looked out for each other!

How had he missed all the cues? That Harry had been dying, for god’s sake?!

But who are you kidding, Grimes?

Harry had told them again and again that he was worried… The kid had hinted at it after the seizure. He had made it clear that it wasn’t wise to let him sleep in Carl’s room any longer. That had been the reason, why the green eyed teen had started to sleep in the attic on his own.

Harry had told them and had warned them.

Hell, the British teen had taken protective measures for weeks, because the boy had feared for their safety.

Harry had shouldered this responsibility alone… because Rick missed to step up. Rick had failed to take the consequences of Harry’s health serious.

He had yet again thought that he would have more time. Like he had procrastinated, lost in his own shit, when he should have talked to Lori back at the prison.

It had been too late, then too…

All because he had been too busy. Doing stuff… and things.

Jesus, he had stuck his noses into the marriage of the Andersons, because Pete had abused his family! And because he liked Jesse. And because it had been the right thing to do… And he had gone for it in the worst way possible.

Rick had stirred up the hornet’s nest and lost track of his own people.

Daryl hadn’t talked to him, yet. Hadn’t yelled at him…. yet.

His brother had just stared at him with these haunted eyes that asked so many questions. Rick had seen the turmoil in Daryl.

The anger, the despair… the grief.

And it hurt.
It hurt that his brother wasn’t talking to him… Rick could deal with angry shouting or even a fight. If he was honest, he ached for one, but this silent treatment was torture. And before any air could be cleared, Daryl had driven off on his bike…

Maybe this was the kind of punishment Rick deserved. Harry and Michonne had both warned him that his need for a fight, his hunt for it, would bring trouble to them all.

And now Harry was gone…

Another worry on his mind was Carl. His son was very quiet and withdrawn since that day. The teen barely spoke to anyone anymore. Michonne had been able to get him up open up a little, but the teen had clamped immediately up, when talk came to Harry.

Rick had wanted to sit the teen down, but Michonne had intervened and told him that they couldn’t force Carl to talk about anything. Everyone needed their time to grief in their own way. And Carl had already lost a lot in his young life, to lose yet another close friend and family member, was bound to shake the teen.

She reassured him, that Carl knew, that he could talk to them, when he was ready. Carl had always bounced back…

Michonne and Rick hoped it would be the same this time.

But there had been one mourning sorrow, Rick hadn’t been expecting and that had hit him like a truck.

Judith.

His baby girl had been fussy for days, refusing to eat, shoving her bottles from the table, crying in displeasure. She had been inconsolable.

Nothing had worked to calm her down, she just wouldn’t settle.

They all had been at loss what to do. Beth had even come over to sing to the little girl. It usually calmed her down, but that day she had screamed in protest and had pushed a hand tiny hand against Beth’s mouth, to make her stop. Wide eyed, they had eventually sat the baby down on the floor. They were exhausted and absolutely clueless about what to do.

The baby had used the opportunity to crawl through the living room, obviously searching for something…

…or someone.

His daughter had been searching for Harry. Deeply unhappy she had sat in front of the stairs and bawled her eyes out, not able to understand, why her favourite person was coming to comfort her.

She was missing him, too.
The weeks after the deaths of Reg, Pete… and Harry were hard on all of them.

They were in shock.

Glenn wasn’t even sure what about… they had known that Harry was sick, that it might be terminal. Hell, after the seizure they had known that he was getting worse.

Maybe none of them had wanted to see the truth.

Harry hadn’t been just getting worse… the kid had been dying. And each and every one of them had been too caught up in their own drama to recognize it. Blind to what was in front of them.

Surprisingly the loss of Harry could be felt all over the community.

The teen had managed to integrate himself more in the everyday life of Alexandria’s residents than anyone had noticed at first. Since the polite teen had taken to walk around Alexandria every day, he had always taken time to talk to the children and elderly of the community. To Glenn it felt strange to see all these strangers share part of their grief…

Beth had cried for days. His sister-in-law had felt guilty for spending less time with the green eyed teen, after his last major panic attack. She had known that Harry had started to speak to the local psychiatrist… The blond girl had shamefully disclosed that she had been glad, because she had been able to spend more time with Noah.

Glenn and Maggie had shared a look at that.

They too had been busy. Glenn had kept an eye out for Nicholas and Maggie had worked a lot with Deanna. Planning and negotiating. Smoothing out smaller displeasures between their group and the community.

They hadn’t sparred Harry’s situation much thought. Happy, that he seemed to get better. Maybe they should have looked closer.

The green eyed teen must have been lonely without Daryl and they should have… done something… anything!

Beth had told them about Harry’s warning about Pete before the meeting and they had heeded that advice. The girls hadn’t gone anywhere alone and had carried knifes with them.

But why hadn’t they looked out for Harry, too?
Now both farm girls had taken over the care for Harry’s horse and cat. It helped them with their grief, they had said. Much to Glenn’s dismay… he was allergic to cats!

And this one was very displeased because her owner had left her behind. Tilly was the devil on velvet paws!

But he knew better than to argue with his wife.

Abraham, Tara and Rosita had their own explosive way of dealing with their grief. Together with Sasha had had gone on walker hunts. They went out at the crack of dawn only coming back in the late evening covered in walker blood and guts.

But not all of them had handled the loss of Harry so loudly or clearly. Carl seemed sad and moody most of the time now.

Lonely… and withdrawn from them. Avoiding the topic of Harry’s death completely.

Things between him and Ron had been tense at the best in the last weeks. But that was to be expected, when your dad executed your best friend’s abusive father…

Glenn remembered that being a teen had been bad enough, without such fucked up shit. Really! But he had spotted Carl a few times with that strange girl Enid… so what did he really know…?!

Glenn could also see how guilty Rick and Carol felt about everything, but those two were frightening tough. As shaken as they were, they didn’t allow themselves to fall to pieces like the rest of them. They were already moving forward. The young Korean didn’t know, how they did it, but they seemed to hold it together by sheer force of will.

And they had to…

Daryl had come back yesterday with really bad news.

A quarry with a surrounded herd of walkers… thousands of walkers! Thousands of walkers had would be contained by the quarry for much longer. When this herd would break free… Alexandria wouldn’t stand a chance.

They were in deep trouble.

Daryl had been the one, they had worried the most about after the loss of Harry. And for a bit Rick and Carol must have feared the worst… When everyone else had exploded and been overwhelmed with grief, Daryl had…for the lack of a better word… imploded.
After he had left his lock down in the attic, where Harry had slept in the last weeks, the hunter had gone out…

He had taken his bike out of Aaron’s garage and had driven off. The stoic man hadn’t talked much to Aaron, the scout had later revealed to a furious Rick and Carol. The archer had apparently just stared at Aaron with hollow, red rimmed eyes, before he had fled from the suffocating community.

Carol and Rick had nervously danced around the topic for weeks and Glenn was sure, that they hadn’t been sure, if their friend would have come back. Glenn had seen it in the worried and sad glances, they had shared, had sensed it in their hushed whispers and their tense postures, when yet another night fell without a trace of Daryl.

Yesterday the tracker had come back.

Dirty, bloody, rough… his long brown hair had obscured most of his face. On his hands the hunter sported a dozen new scars… circular burn marks.

But Glenn’s heart was still aching with the despair and defeat that Daryl had radiated. Never a shatter box, the hunter had taken to communicate mostly in grunts and monosyllabic words, when they had tried to greet him. Only Carl’s desperate question had broken through Daryl’s wall of pain.

“Have you found anything?”

That had stopped the tracker for a moment.

“Naah. Had his track… Lost it, ‘cause of the weather. He’s… He’s gone, man.” Daryl had dropped his head at this admission, to hide his face.

Only his tense shaking shoulders had betrayed his tears.

****

Rick... was a hard man. There was no other word for it. A warrior.
A moment of doubt had occurred to him, when Rick had started to ask him questions about his camp and how many walkers he had killed. But Daryl had been so quick to shut his companion down with a drawled out “Naah, not him.”

That Paul had stopped to think about it. This was the next world! And you had to be careful. He had learned that. The hard way!

And these two dirty and sweaty guys that looked like a wild cowboy and an even harsher biker redneck...

There hadn’t been anything trustworthy about them.

It had been only in the truck and in confrontation with the manual gear box that Paul had really questioned his decision... Fuck, having spent most of his time in bigger cities had always fiend him of the need to drive a car himself.

And honestly he wasn't quite fond of the experience.

It brought bad memories back.

In all honesty Paul was a shitty driver… unsure and as it turned out, fucking slow!

Proof had come, when Rick and Daryl had managed to catch up with him... On foot! These two had run after him.

On foot! For miles!

Shows determination!

That's not something you do just for yourself…

They had ambushed him, when had stopped to check on the truck. And despite his martial arts skills, two against one had him at a disadvantage. They had held him at gunpoint and damn his smart mouth for baiting them.

Because shit, they really had the ammo to go through with their threats. And neither of them had wanted to back down. They had all wanted these supplies...

The wild cowboy had been clear that there were a lot of them on the truck. And Paul had gotten the unmistakeable impression that Rick and Daryl were both determined enough to shoot him over the truck. If it had to come down to that…

*Hard asses!*
They had obviously been pissed at him. Daryl had bristled and cursed under his breath like an angry cat, but they hadn't even tried to seriously hurt him.

Hell, the worst they had done to him, was Daryl throwing him a well shaken soda can. With a petty 'in case ya get thirsty' snarled back at the bound Paul.

The scout had gotten interested then. He wanted to see, where they were going. And getting out of these ties had been child's play.

He had to cover a hearty laugh, when Daryl had made a rude gesture and yelled a 'so long, ya prick' out to him, as they drove off… Not knowing that Paul had already snug on the truck’s roof.

Cute.

Although they had discovered him a bit faster, than Paul had anticipated… But hell, running over a flied playing catch with a sourly Daryl had been pretty fun. Even if it had earned him a punch to the nose, when he had saved the grumpy man from an approaching walker and well... until the truck’s door had knocked him out.

That had hurt!

And again they hadn't killed him... hadn’t left him behind as walker bait. They could have, would have been easy enough. But no, they had taken him back with them to their home. Their community, Alexandria.

The drive back had been incredibly fun for Paul, even when his head had throbbed quite viciously.

Daryl was a very tempting person to tease, his grouchy reactions were delightful. And Rick seemed to think so, too. After the cowboy had turned on the worst country music the scout had heard in a long time (against Daryl’s loud protests), he had proceeded to drive purposefully so, that Paul’s unconscious body had fall again and again on Daryl. Paul had fought very hard not to start laughing, at the way the grumpy man next to him had bristled at that.

Adorable!

God, on the whole drive Paul felt like a boy in the kindergarten, wanting to pull the pigtails of his crush.

It was a dangerous habit to have! But shit, Paul loved the thrill. He had always been too much of a cocky smart ass. Together with his small stature and his sexuality that had gotten him more often, than not in deep trouble in his teenage years. He had lost count of how many black eyes, bruised ribs and split lips, he had collected that way…

In the end his martial arts training had helped him, to deal with a lot of shitty anger. So he had
stopped unnecessary brawls and maybe he had learned not to bite off more, than he could chew. He had learned to hold himself in a fight, without getting his ass handed to him all the time.

In his twenties he had calmed down enough to stop looking for fights at all, but he was still quite a tease. He loved to get a rise out of a person, especially such harsh and gruff men like Daryl.

To his surprise their community was equipped with a holding cell... Well, that was impressive.

Not that it held Paul for a long time.

Just long enough for Paul to enjoy the glass of water and the delicious cookie, Daryl had left him in the cell. The rest had been easy, getting out of the cell that been no challenge at all. One guard couldn’t cover two exits or third floor windows. Knots untie and locks get picked. Entropy comes from order right?

So with a happy hum Paul had used the opportunity to explore Alexandria.

In all honesty the whole compound was surprising...

Electricity, plumbing... And fuck hot water!

Heaven!

They had a considerable amount of weapons and ammo in their arsenal but their food supplies... Shit, those were worryingly low for such a large community. No wonder Rick and Daryl had been so dictated to take the truck home. They would have needed it.

There couldn’t be done anything about that. Damn.

Coming to a decision Paul tiptoed to Rick's house.

Finding him and beautiful black woman in bed hadn't been his intention. But well, he wasn't complaining, when both of them jumped out of bed, butt naked. Rick certainly wasn't hard on the eyes and Paul held a fair amount of respect for anyone, who could repress any acquired modesty and just grab their weapon ready to fight without covering up their junk. And even if Michonne did nothing for Paul, he could appreciate that she was certainly a sight to behold.

He had given the two of them time to get dressed, when he looked over the pictures in their hallway.

No great art but nice decorations.

But one stood out. Paul took it of the wall to inspect it.

It was a black and white photo of a teenager. The resolution wasn’t great but all in all a good shot. And to Paul's surprise it had to be recent... Because it had been taken in this house’s living room and Rick could been seen in the background. Rick’s tick southern accent indicated that he hadn’t been from here... so, very recent!
The boy in the picture’s foreground was looking directly into the camera with incredibly big eyes, framed by the geekiest glasses Paul had ever seen. He was pretty. A shy smile stretched over thin, nicely shaped lips and dark unruly hair curled around an oval face with high cheekbones. It was a captivating and beautiful face with fine features… A bit too pretty for a boy but Paul could relate to that. He had grown a beard for a reason!

The Hilltop scout couldn’t lay a finger on it but something looked a bit off with the boy… not quite healthy…

“Hell, you’re doing in our house?” The clicking sound of safety being loosened altered Paul.

What was it with these people, that everyone carried a gun?

Carefully glancing up Paul noticed that A) This had to be Rick’s son. The similarities were uncanny and B) this wasn’t the boy on the photo...

“I’m sitting on the steps looking at this photo.” Which seemed to be the wrong thing to say, because the gun now nudged his head a bit more forceful.

“Why the hell not?” and sent a winning smile at the kid. “Hi. I’m Jesus.”

The boy raised an unimpressed eyebrow and his mouth had turned into a hard line.

At the same time Daryl and two other guys stormed the hallway weapons drawn and ready.

Well shite!

His escape had been noticed quite fast… And the young Asian and the bulky red head accompanying Daryl looked, like they could hold themselves in a fight. Together with Rick and his samurai lady… not to talk about the trigger happy youth behind him, this was an unusually big assemblage of obvious capable fighters.

In addition to their well-equipped armoury this could be a good community to trade with and maybe… just maybe they could help them with an even bigger problem…

“Get your hands already off that picture!” Carl suddenly barked at him, making every one flinch. Paul could feel the weight of their combined looks on... Well, not him directly but on the photo in his hands...
As slowly and non-threateningly as possible, Paul turned to Carl. Carefully holding out the framed picture, only to have it immediately snatched out of his hands.

“I’m sorry. It was just curious. I mean no harm.” Placating he held his hands up in surrender but no one was really looking at him. The group was busy, watching with haunted eyes, as Carl meticulously hung up the photo again, making sure that it was secure in his place. And with a last glare at Paul, the teen whipped some fingerprints of the glass.

The atmosphere in the hallway had become tense and suffocating with something Pail knew all too well…

Grief.

Paul observed curiously, how Daryl seemed unable to tear his eyes away from the person in the photo…

For such a world hardened and battle-ready group this seemed surprisingly emotional. But it proved to the scout that these were good people and a good community, who still cared about others.

The clearing of a throat broke the spell.

“You said we should talk. So let’s talk.” Rick rasped out, as he tore glassy eyes away from the picture.

So back to business.

These people had yet to understand that their world was about to become a whole lot bigger.

**

Looking out of the window Denise watched as Daryl and Rosita strolled through the streets of Alexandria.

The hunter reminded her often of Dennis...

Brave and angry.

He had gotten a bit better in the last few months, since Harry's death but not much... Denise knew that Daryl had left the community for a while and although he had come back, he was still obvious hurt.
The gigantic herd in the quarry and the attack by the wolves had forced Daryl back to life and to fight. It had given him the necessity to pull himself together.

The soul worked like this… A threat from the outside could hold the flood from inside at bay. Soldiers didn’t develop signs of PTSD in the field. No, the symptoms started on the plane ride home. Grief could be the same… it needed space and air to play out. It could fester, if people were too afraid to allow their emotions such room or if circumstances on the outside forced the mourning person into a mode of functioning.

The discovery that they weren’t the only community out there, that there were others, good and bad, it had pushed them all into a mode of survival and caution. To kept it together or fail. It had left next to no room to deal with pent up emotions, so yes Daryl seemed to do better even, if he was still moody and silent.

But there was an underlying aggression and bone deep sadness in him that made Denise fear for him.

In the beginning she had shied away from his snarkiness and rough behaviour but she had also remembered what Harry had told her about his family. How much he had loved them all.

Especially Daryl.

Very carefully she had dared to reach out to the hurt man. And he in turn had surprised her with his kindness. He had gone out of his way to bring her soda for Tara. He had been kind to her. and had supported her in his own way. Never doubting her in her new role as Alexandria’s doctor, Daryl had always taken her serious. He had reminded her of Harry in that aspect.

It had been soothing that sat least some people had trusted her skills in those first months. It had been hard. Pete's death her pulled her into the front row and forced her to step up as a doctor, to face her fears finally.

Sometimes after a hard day in the infirmary, when she handled a patient well, she asked herself, if Harry would be proud of her...
a cup of tea to her. It was a non-therapy day but Harry had started to come over nonetheless. More as friend, than a patient, but who cared about that any more. The younger teen was fun to talk to and he listened to her. He took her serious. And nobody had done that in a long time.

“Of course she knows who you are. You treated her head wound. And I heard she flirted with you then.”

“That's not very reliable... She was badly concussed back then. She hasn't spoken to me since.”

Harry smiled patiently at her. “You've taught me to scrutinise such negative appraisals.”

Denise mock glared at him.

“What? Not ready for your own medicine?” He laughed good-naturedly at her.

“You know, when I would try to flirt with someone who in turn never reacts to it... Well, that wouldn't encourage me. I would probably thing that I read the signs all wrong...” The British teen teases her further.

“Harry, stop making sense!” The young therapist threw a couch pillow at the grinning boy.

“Would it be so bad, if I were right? Or is this it, what you’re really afraid of?” He asked her in that carefully light tone that she often used with him in therapy.

“I'm the therapist here.” She tried to deflect him but Harry met her face earnestly.

“Well my dear, I'm here two times a week, working my ass off, facing my shit. I'm meeting my biggest fears heads on, because you showed me that it’ll be worth it.”

Denise had to swallow as these big green eyes challenged her.

“Can you honestly say that same about yourself?”

+++Flashback end++++

Tara and she were couple now.

The night after their first kiss Denise had gone to the memorial and had stared at Harry's name for hours. She had felt overwhelmed with the need to tell him... Tell him that she faced her fears now. As a doctor and with the woman she liked. But Harry hadn't been there any longer to see it...

And wouldn’t have been the whole truth, wouldn’t it? Denise still hadn't found the courage to tell her girlfriend that she loved her. Paralyzed with doubts, she had let Tara go. Denise had refused the offer to go with, because the psychiatrist had been too afraid to leave Alexandria’s walls.

So in way of compensation Denise had started to look out for Daryl a bit after that night at the memorial. Because the gruff hunter had been important to her dead friend and the scruffy hunter
was a good person, who deserved help. She had seen his softer side in the way he cared for Judith and how he went out of his way for others. She had discovered, that if she approached him, he could be fun to banter with. Behind his rough front, there was a lot kindness and a surprisingly gentle person hidden.

Denise had witnessed, how her twin had ended... Brave but, oh so angry all the time. She owed it to Harry, her brave patient, to gear up and at least try to change something for the better.

Making up her mind Denise grabbed the map, she had prepared and moved out to intercept her targets.

**

Denise desperately started into uncomprehending eyes. Willing them to understand, why she had dragged them out here! Why she needed to be here!

“I asked you to come with me, because you're brave like my brother and sometimes you actually make me feel safe...” She implored to Daryl, whose slated blue eyes widened at that.

“And I wanted you here because you're alone. Probably for the first time in your life, and because you're stronger, than you think you are, which gives me hope that maybe I can be too. ...I could have gone with Tara. I could have told her, I loved her, but I didn't...because I was afraid.” There! Denise had finally said it out loud.

“Can you honestly say that same about yourself?”

Yes Harry, now I can finally say the same.

“That's what's stupid, not coming out here, not facing my shit! And it makes me sick that you guys aren't even trying, because you're strong and you're smart and you're both really good people. Harry has always been so sure about that. He believed in you and if you don't wake…“

Something was wrong... Not quite pain but there... Something hit my head... my face feels strange...

“…up... and face your...”

Daryl and Rosita looked so shocked. But everything was going blurry.

Have I lost my glasses?
I fought with myself if i should already spill the beans about what happened to Harry … or where he is. But I decided to reveal that later in the story, with a flashback ^^- Sorry! :p

And... Paul is finally there!! XD

I'm really sad that Denise died T.T I liked her a lot!
Chapter 17

*drum roll*
finally!!! I hope you'll like it ^^

I apologize beforehand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

Chapter 17

“Pissing our pants yet? Boy, do I have a feeling we’re getting close. Yep, it’s gonna be Pee Pee Pants City here real soon.”

A tall, lean man with broad shoulders, short dark hair and a salt and pepper beard.

That was Negan.

Fully equipped with skinny jeans, a leather jacket, a red scarf and a big creepy smile, twirling around a baseball bat wrapped with barbed wire.

This wasn’t just for revenge…. This was a whole fuck show!

Negan was taking his time talking and talking, turning up the pressure, as he strolled along the line of his kneeling captives, as if he was taking a stroll in the park.

“Hi, you’re Rick, right? I’m Negan. And I do not appreciate you killing my men. Also, when I sent my people to kill your people for killing my people, you killed more of my people. Not cool. Not cool. You have no idea, how not cool that shit is, but I think you’re gonna be up to speed shortly. Yeah, you are so gonna regret crossing me in a few minutes.”

Kneeling between Glenn and Michonne, Daryl was grinding his teeth.

Fuck all this shit.

His impulsive decision to leave Alexandria had led Glenn, Michonne and Rosita right into the arms of these pricks. On top of that, that asshole Dwight had shot him and had fucked up his shoulder.
And now they were kneeling before a mad man with a baseball bat.

Negan.

They had fucked up. They had thought they could take on these fuckers easily. That they would be done after the satellite station but they had miscalculated, badly. There had to be at least a hundred men here, whistling to the whim of their wildly grinning boss.

“You see, Rick, whatever you do, no matter what, you don’t mess with the new world order. And the new world order is this, and it’s really very simple, so, even if you’re stupid, which you very may well be, you can understand it. You ready? Here goes, pay attention: Give me your shit, or I will kill you. Today was career day. We invested a lot so you would know who I am, and what I can do. You work for me now. You have shit, you give it to me. That’s your job. Now, I know that is a mighty big, nasty pill to swallow, but swallow it you most certainly will. You ruled the roost. You built something. You thought you were safe. I get it. But, the word is out: You are not safe. Not even close. In fact, you are pegged, more pegged if you don’t do what I want. And what I want is half your shit.”

That son of a bitch sure liked to talk. And Rick was losing his shit! They all were losing their shit right now.

This was game over.

There would be no nifty solution, no quick thinking or opportunity to fight them out of this mess.

“We’re fucked.

“…you killed my people, a whole damn lot of them, more than I’m comfortable with. And for that, for that, you’re gonna pay. So now, I am gonna beat the holy hell outta one of you. This, this is Lucille, and she is awesome. “

Rick’s glassy eyes looked desperate at the bat with its barred wire. Jesus had told them that Negan had beaten a sixteen year old boy to death. Nobody was safe from this mad man.

There would be blood shed tonight.

“All this is just so we can pick out which one of you gets the honour… “ Negan seemed disgustingly self-satisfied with the whole staging. Taking his time to inspect his potential victims and talking to them in this fake friendly tone.

When he stopped in front of Maggie, he even joked to put her out of her misery...

Glenn threw himself forward at that to get to his wife. It was futile. Two thugs were there faster, than Glenn could reach out to her.
Under Maggie’s frightened shouts they punched her husband down and dragged him back to his place in the line, while he begged for her life.

And Maggie…Maggie looked bad, very bad.

Maybe as bad as Daryl himself. She had probably a fewer and shivering with cramps. Fuck, she could barely support her own body weight. There was obviously something wrong with her pregnancy.

She needed a doctor. And fast!

“Get him back in line.” Negan growled displeased. “Listen, don’t any of you do that again. I will shut that shit down, no exceptions. First one’s free. It’s an emotional moment, I get it. Sucks, don’t it? The moment you realize, you don’t know shit?” His oily voice had gone soft and understanding again. And yes that was it, wasn’t it?

_They had known shit!

“This is your kid, right?” Negan pointed to Carl with his bat keeping an eye on Rick’s reaction.

“This is definitely your kid.” He baited the former Sheriff and Rick snapped under the pressure.

“Stop!” Daryl got the impression that Negan had been waiting for that… Had looked for an angle, because he immediately snapped back at Rick.

“Hey, do not make me kill the little future serial killer. Don’t make it easy on me. I gotta pick somebody. Everybody’s at the table waiting for me to order. I simply cannot decide.”

Apparently deep in thought, Negan skipped along their line.

Like a very satisfied cat, playing with its food.

“I got an idea…” The bastard announced in a giddy voice with a big ass smile and Daryl couldn’t remember, if he had ever hated someone this much.

“Eenie meenie miney mo…” There was only horror in his friend’s faces…

A counting rhyme. Son of a bitch!

“…catch a tiger by his toe, if he hollers, let him go… my mother told me to pick the very best…”

_Carl “… one…” “Glenn “….and…” Maggie “…you…” me “…are…” Michonne “…it…”

_Abe!!_
Unmoved, Abraham held Negan’s gaze. Head held up and steadfast.

Negan had stopped smiling at that. Holding eye contact with the tall red head, he addressed all of them. This time his voice was ice cold.

“Anybody moves, anybody says anything, cut the boy’s other eye out and feed it to his father, and then we’ll start again. You can breathe, you can blink, you can cry. Hell, you’re all gonna be doing that.”

Daryl watched in numb shock, as the bat moved through the air and came down on Abe’s head with a sickening crunch. But the tall red head was one tough son of a bitch and just refused to go down, dragging himself up from the dirt.

“Suck… my… nuts!”

Negan laughed mockingly at their friend. “Look at him! Taking it like a champ!”

But Daryl couldn’t take it.

Abe was paying the price for their shared arrogance. They had believed that could take them all. That they’d be able to overcome any obstacles, by sheer force of will and violence.

They had failed to consider that there might be a bigger shark in the tank.

Daryl felt exhausted and guilty and desperate and angry. Had been feeling like that since they had lost Harry. Rage had driven him forward more often than not in the last few months.

And now the familiar red of fury clouded his vision and his thoughts.

*How dar’ this fucker ta tak’ another member of their family?*

*How dar’ he ta mock them for their tears an’ their grief?*

Rash impulsiveness propelled him up and pure adrenaline had him ignoring the wound on his shoulder, as he punched Negan square in the jaw, before the man could swing his bat a second time at Abraham.

But Daryl’s vindictive satisfaction was short lived, as rough hands grabbed him and pushed him down. That scarred fucker Dwight kicked his gunshot wound for good measure, while he aimed the hunter’s own crossbow at him.

“On no. That… oh my! That is a NoNo.” Rubbing his sore jaw Negan glanced at Daryl. “The
whole thing, not one bit of that shit, flies here.” He growled at the injured man, before he switched lighting fast back into his fake benevolent bullshit.

“Any way that’s not how it works. I already told you people. First one is free. I knew what I said. I said, I would shoot that shit down. No exceptions. I don’t know what kind of lying assholes you’ve been dealing with but I’m a man of my word.”

Daryl felt strangely calm. So Negan would kill him.

*Good.*

Was this relief he was feeling?

He wasn't afraid to die and maybe it would keep Rick and the others out of the line of fire. *That would be good. Yeah.*

Was this, what you were supposed to feel, when you were about to die? He couldn't remember being this calm ever before...

*“After all to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure…”* 

*Harry! Maybe I can see Harry again.* Peace settled over him at that thought. He was ready...

Until Negan motioned at two of his minions and dragged someone else forward.

*“First impressions are important.”*

*No, no, no, no!*

“I need you to know me."

*Why?!* Daryl had been the one to punch Negan. Daryl should be the one facing the punishment. Not... Not... *Glenn!*

“So… back to it.” That bastard was enjoying it.

*God, no!* Daryl could hear Maggie screaming and begging.

Pregnant Maggie. Glenn's wife.

Glenn, who was only out here, because Daryl’s egoistic and impulsive decision to leave
Alexandria. All sounds narrowed down to Glenn's erratic breathing and Daryl's own ragged and
pained exhales.

Negan’s shit eating smile filled his vision.

The barbed bat swung up in a wide arch. “Don't look away!” Negan taunted in a sing song voice.

The bat came down.

Blood was rushing in Daryl’s ears. He waited for inevitable sickening sound of the wood hitting a
skull and the splatter of hot blood on the ground...
.
.
.

But nothing came.

Building up courage, Daryl dared to glance to the side.

Negan’s bat had stopped an inch before Glenn's face.

For a ridiculous moment Daryl wanted to shout at the bastard for playing with them like that. But
then he saw it.

How Negan’s knuckles were turning white, where the asshole was gripping the handle too tight.
Carefully looking up, the tracker observed, how Negan’s muscles strained under his leather jacket.
Trailing his gaze further up, Daryl noticed wide eyed that the cocky son of a bitch had finally
stopped smiling.

Instead his mouth was pulled into a feral snarl but in his eyes there was fear.

“What... What the ever living fuck is going on here?” More straining. “Why the hell, can't I
move?” He yelled out in frustration.

Daryl’s eyes nearly budged. Asshole was right... He couldn't move either.

*The fuck?!*
“Boss... I think... I think no one can...” Simon stuttered out

An enraged scream tore itself from Negan’s throat. But there was panic in the man. And Daryl couldn't fault him for that... This was beyond frightening.

And he heard soft rustling sounds of moving fabric behind him... A large fabric.

*Who was that... when no one else could move?*

The quite scrunching of leaves indicated someone, who knew how to move with skill and care through a forest... A hunter.

“Who are you?” Negan growled at the approaching person. He tried to sound tough but Daryl could see him quivering.

Whoever it was, they neither acknowledged the question nor the barking man himself.

The soft steps came to a halt and out the corner of his eyes Daryl could see a mass of black...

A cloak? With a hood?

Not the most practical clothing choice for a walk in the woods.

The black clad person carefully plugged Daryl’s crossbow out of Dwight’s stiff fingers and something was whispered but so low that the hunter wasn't able to hear it properly. Damn.

The scarred man had turned very pale and he tried to strain his frozen body as far as possible from the stranger. That must have been one hell of a telling off, if the fucker was spooked.

And then the stranger turned to them.

The upper half of their face was shadowed by the large hood of the cloak and lower half was cover by black bandana.

Leaving no clues, who they were...

Just that they were small no more than 5 feet 5 and slender. They move in sure but nearly silent strides, until they had reached Negan.

The bastard was breathing fire and brimstone at the unknown figure.

“No, the hell do you think you are? I am Negan! We all are Negan. We are the Saviours of this god forsaken world.” Negan bellowed.

*The prick’s a fuckin’ psycho, that’s what he is.*
Suddenly there was a gust of cold wind and the grinding noise of working wood.

A sound, that was gaining volume in an alarming rate. The bat had been frozen until now but started shaking.

And Daryl was somehow very certain that it wasn't Negan who caused it.

_Fuckin’ shit! What was goin’ on here?_

A sharp, loud crack echoed in the meadow and Daryl could see a large rupture forming on the baseball bat.

Fuck!

“Glenn! Close your eyes!” He just managed to ground out before the bat burst into...

Sawdust?!

“Lucille!? Lucille! You killed Lucille!” One could think that a person had been turned into dust, by the racket Negan was making.

What a lunatic?!

“Silencio.” The cloaked person whispered, their voice muffled behind the bandana. The effect was instant. Negan’s mouth still moved but no sound came out.

_Just what was goin’ on?_

With a sweeping gesture the stranger moved his arms in a wide circle “Confundus.”

A warm light illuminated the meadow and the woods around it. The light hovered in front of Glenn and Daryl but didn't touch them directly…

Something had changed after the soft luminescence had dimmed, Daryl could feel it. And he could see it in Negan’s glassy eyes.

_Fucker looked stoned._

“These are not the people, you have been looking for. This was a group that pissed you off. They destroyed your precious bat and you annihilated them for it. The job is done. You will leave now.” The muffled voice was compelling in its command.
And with a disturbing empty expression Negan stepped back and shouted to his lackeys “Pack up boys. This was a damn eventful night for the Saviours. We’re going home.”

***

Maggie couldn’t move. None of them could move. And this person the in dark cloak was the reason.

That person was still standing there. Utterly still. Just watching as the Saviours left the meadow behind.

Negan and his men didn't even take notice of them any longer...

They just left.

After everything they been put them through, they just left.

How could that be?!

Maggie saw the same disbelief in Glenn's s face. Glenn, who had been nearly beaten to death. Beaten with a bat that had stopped only one inch from his face and then had burst into tiny pieces.

Somehow that cloaked figure had done all that...

Maggie could see how they bend over Daryl, touching his shoulder and his face...

It looked like a picture of death collecting souls, she had once seen in a children's movie, just missing scythe. Another wave of pain and fever shook her body and clouded her thoughts...

*The reaper has come for us! We have sinned and now he is here to take us. Maybe we’re already dead...*

The grim reaper was now moving swiftly to a wheezing and groaning Abraham. The tall red head had fallen and blood was still running down his face.

Sasha and Rosita were both uncontrollably sobbing, calling out his name again and again. The fabric of the wide cloak whispered, when the stranger kneeled down before the ex-soldier. Maggie couldn't turn enough to see what was going on but there was it again… a small blue light illuminating the night.

And then... Abrahams sounds of struggling for life just... Stopped.
Ice cold fear gripped Maggie's heart.

“Abraham...!?" Sasha desperate scream ripped through the night and through all of them.

Beside her she could hear Rick heaving. He looked bad. Sweating and panicked.

A man about to break.

_We’re going to die! We’re going to die!_

Hot searing pain laced through Maggie's stomach that had her whimpering in pain. 

*Good god.* She was going to lose her baby!

Soft steps came quickly closer to her. And Glenn’s and Rick's worried shouts filled the now silent night.

The Saviours were gone. Abraham was deadly quiet.

When black boots filled her vision, she looked up but there was nothing to see just shadows and black fabric.

In careful and deliberate movements the stranger crouched down in front of her. Desperate tears were flowing down her cheeks, fever and pain fogging up her brain.

“Please! Please don't hurt me. I'm pregnant. Please!”

A black clad arm raised itself and a pale filigree hand peeked out of a wide sleeve reaching out to touch her.

“Get away from her!” Rick growled out. But their leader didn't sound threatening. No, he sounded desperate and defeated.

“Hush!” The figure mumbled. A fearful sob bubbled from Maggie’s throat.

“Hush, poppet. It's alright.” Soft finders brushed caringly over her wet face, drying her cheeks.

All thoughts stopped.

Was her mind playing tricks on her? That voice!? That accent...
And under the sleeve... A glimpse of familiar scars circling a thin wrist.

“Wh.. What?” She choked out.

“Shhh... Calm down. It's me.” And with that the stranger pushed the wide hood of his cloak a bit back and pulled the bandana obscuring his face off. Revealing a familiar thin face with high cheekbones and big bright green eyes framed by a pair of ugly flower patterned glasses.

“How... Harry!?” Several surprised shouts followed. Rick seemed to have stopped breathing all together.

“Am I dead?” Maggie wondered out loud.

“Hi!” Harry smiled shyly at her. “And no, I don't think any one of us is dead. But to keep it that way, could you please calm down and let me check on you?”

Maggie couldn't think any more... It was just all too much. Her head was empty. So she just nodded.

“Splendid.” With a warm smile Harry pulled out a wooden stick and started to whisper until another soft blue light glowed around her belly. All the while her eyes traced the look of deep concentration on his face.

This is Harry! Without a doubt! But he looked different...

Slowly the light vanished and Harry smiled reassuring at Maggie.

“How are you feeling now?” He inquired softly.

Maggie blinked... “Better.” And really she felt a million times better. The pain was gone, as were her shivering and the fever. She felt good, if not a little weak and exhausted.

“Very well!” He grinned at her. “I'm glad, I could be of assistance ma'am.” He saluted her with a teasing wink.

And suddenly the force that had been holding her back vanished. And she did the only thing that made sense right now...

She tackled him to the ground! Hugging and holding onto him for dear life.

“My god... My god. I can't... I can't believe it.” She cried into his shoulder.

It was Harry! It was really him.
She knew it from the way, he had tensed up, when she had thrown herself at him. Apparently even after six months apart from them, he couldn't stand such spontaneous physical contact. Awkwardly the brunette woman pulled back.

“Sorry! I... Just... God!” She sniffed her dirty hands cradling his face. “You're alive. We thought we lost you.”

Glenn was already by her side pulling her away from Harry, worriedly checking her over.

“Glenn. Glenn, sweetheart. I'm alright. I think... Harry did something that helped. Both of us.” She patted her belly meaningfully and her sweet husband dropped his head onto her shoulder in relief.

“I’m so glad. When I saw you there and you looked so sick… I… Jesus, I was so scared for you both.” Glenn whispered into her shirt and she buried her head into his hair.

How she loved that man!

“We mourned you.” Meanwhile Rick croaked out at Harry. “We... We had a funeral. Your name is on the memory wall.”

Guilty green eyes locked with bright blue ones and with a sad smile Harry picked himself up from the ground... or he tried to…

Because he immediately started to stagger and sway dangerously. Only Daryl’s quick reaction prevented him from stumbling to the ground.

“Uff... Bloody... So maybe that took a bit more out of me, than I expected.” Harry mumbled a little dazed. “Thank y... “

The teen trailed of when he found himself confronted with Daryl’s stormy scowl and hurt eyes. Maggie felt for the two, this had to be hard. Daryl had suffered in the last months and they had feared that they would lose Daryl, too.

And Harry… well, Maggie hoped the boy had a good reason to put the hunter through all of this.

With a rueful sigh Harry straitened and stepped a bit away from the archer, who continued to frown silently at the forest floor.

Suddenly it occurred to Maggie that Daryl had caught Harry without any problems… What had happened to the tracker’s bullet wound?! Had Harry healed him too?

“I'm sorry. I know I owe you all an explanation... For disappearing and... Well, all of this.” The little Brit made an all-encompassing motion over the meadow.

“But not here. We shou...”

“What... What have you done to Abraham?” Sasha whispered behind them.

It had them all whipping around. The sniper kneeled next to her boyfriend's hulky form, with silent tears running down her face and shaking fingers running through red hair.
“He's alive.” Sasha sounded completely wrecked. “I saw how Negan nearly bashed his head in... Abe... He was in a bad shape. Dying. And then you did something... and his wounds... They are gone. And he is alive. Damn, I think he's snoring right now.” She sobbed brokenly, half crying half laughing.

“Good, that means I didn't mess it up too badly.” Harry sighed in relief. A warm smile stretching over his face.

“But as I was trying to say, we should bring Maggie and Abraham to a real doctor. Healing a bullet wound in a shoulder is relatively easy. And I should have been able to take care of any major problems but a head wound and a pregnancy need a bit more medical knowledge, than I can offer. So I would suggest finding some kind of medical practitioner. Enid told me that was your reason to be put here in the first place.”

“Yes... Yes it was...” Aaron stuttered still staring at Harry like he was a ghost.

“You were in Alexandria?” Rosita looked at him frowning.

“Oh yes, I met Beth and Noah. They told me that Maggie had problems with her pregnancy and that you were on the way to an allied community.” A bit mirthful the green eyed teen grinned in Carl’s direction, who stood secluded from the rest of the group, starring at the ground.

The brim of his hat casting a shadow over his face.

“Maybe I should also tell you that Enid was not amused to be locked into supply closet?!” Harry teased his fiend kindly.

At that Carl looked up and Maggie hadn't seen the boy this upset since Lori. His beautiful blue eye was swimming in unshed tears and he was nearly as pale as the dressing over his right eye.

Across from her Harry inhaled sharply that the sight of Carl's messed up face.

“Merlin, what happened?”

“I... It was Ron. He tried to shoot dad and... He missed. Hit me instead.” Carl closed his eye a look of agony on his face. He seemed to be waiting for something.

“Oh, Carl...” Harry whispered in empathy. The one eyed teen was drawing his shoulders up in defence.

“I... I'm so sorry! Losing a friend like that is awful.” Harry held his hand out to the younger boy. With that Carl's shoulders dropped visibly and he just jumped into Harry's arms.

“I'm sorry. So sorry. I didn't mean it.”
“I know. It's ok.” Harry whispered comfortingly back.

“No it’s not. And you were right. You warned me about Ron. Told me to be more careful around him.”

Rick looked, as if someone had punched him in the gut. So he hadn't known about it. That Harry had given Carl the hint to stay wary of Ron.

*Damn.*

“I wasn’t listening. I was such an ass, for saying all those stupid things to you. That you were messed up and jealous... You’re not. And I was sorry immediately after. But then you were gone.” A breathless hiccup shook Carl. “And... And...”

Harry awkwardly patted the lanky teens back while Carl sobbed into Harry's shoulder.

“Hey shhh shhh... it’s alright. I know. I'm not mad. Never were.” The older boy tried to reassure the younger one.

“I’m so glad you’re alive.” Maggie couldn’t see Carl’s face but she could hear his nearly silent admission.

How long had Carl kept all of this bottled up?

Maggie's heart ached for the poor boy and looking at the tears running over Rick's cheeks, he had to feel the same. Carl had refused to talk to anyone about Harry. Had kept them all out with stony silence and teenage moodiness. And yet he had nearly bitten Jesus's head of for touching that photo of Harry in the Grimes’ house...

He must have felt so bad, when Harry disappeared directly after their argument...

“Not to disturb the happy occasion. But how did you find us out here?” Eugene interrupted the hugging boys in his usual deadpan staccato, without any sense for social appropriateness.

“Uhmm... Enid and Beth said that Maggie’s condition was dire. And that Daryl had stormed of and that Glenn, Michonne and Rosita had chased after him. First I wanted to wait for you but I had... Hunch, that I should follow so… Noah gave me the directions and… I did?!?” Harry scratched the back of his head nervously.

It felt like such a... Harry-thing to say! A hunch... To look out for them.

“Hiiiiiiiiiiii...” Startled Maggie looked at her husband, who had covered his mouth with a hand. Sadly that did nothing to stifle the hysterical giggles that bubbled uncontrolled from Glenn.

“Hiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii...”

“Glenn! My god, get a grip.” Maggie admonished him with a jab to the ribs.
“Hiiiihhiiii... Hiiiihhiiii... So sorry guys. Hiihhhhhiihiiii.... It’s just…. I just noticed… hiiihhiiihiii… I always knew you’re a Jedi! Hiiiihhiiiiii. "Those are not the people you are looking for!"... Shit. Hiiiihhiii...” The Korean mimicked Harry between giggles.

“Technically he looks more like a Sith Lord right now.” Eugene corrected emotionless.

**

“Jesus!” Kal shouted from his place in the watch point on their wall. The young man sounded worried. Alarmed Paul ran over to the wall, climbing up the ladder to get a better look at whatever Kal was pointing at.

_The RV! Alexandria’s RV! Shit!

Paul watched with dread churning in his stomach, as the RV came to a halt close to gate and people started spilling out. The first light of the beginning day illuminated their figures. There had have been some kinds of trouble...

Why else would Rick have taken the long way to Hilltop in the dark upon himself? And why with so many of his people? His best fighters?

They were carrying the body of a tall man out of the vehicle... Red hair and a big moustache shone through the last morning mist.

Abraham! Was he dead?! What had happened?

They all looked incredibly dirty and exhausted... Ready to drop.

Was that blood on Abraham’s a face and shirt?

_Shit!_ The uneasy feeling that something had gone definitely wrong was nearly overwhelming.

And then another person stepped out of the RV... Clad in a long black cloak with a big hood. They looked, as if they belonged in to a Lord of the Rings movie.

Jumping down the ladder Paul ran to the gate. Coming face to face with Rick, revealed the horrible extent of the night's events.
Rick looked... Defeated.

His eyes were blood shot and glassy, the stench of cold sweat filled the air around him. Gone was
the hard assed warrior that had been so sure of himself, in his stead stood a man stripped of all his
armour.

Naked, terrified and oddly vulnerable.

Haunted sky blue eyes starred into Paul's cyan ones.

“We... We miscalculated. Jesus, we underestimated them.” Grim sadness wavered off the usually
so self-assured leader.

The implications of that two sentences left Paul reeling...

Fuck! Negan?! How was this possible?

Just when he opened his mouth, trying to find the words to ask Rick what was going on, a soft
British voice interrupted them.

“Pardon me. But maybe we should delay this discussion a bit. Maggie and Abe are still in the need
of a real doctor. Priorities, Rick.”

Wasn't that a surprise? Paul blinked.

The ring wraith could speak English and was fucking polite on top of it! And with such a pretty
accent. Paul had always been a sucker for a British accent. So the unknown was from the old
world, definitely male... And probably young?!

Rick seemed to shake himself out of his dazed state. Paul could see how he tried to build himself
back up with a shaky exhale. And it worked. Small parts of Rick's armour snapped back into place,
making the blue-eyed man less terrified and a bit more put together looking.

“Yes. Yeah, you're right... That's first. Thanks.” Rick nodded to the cloaked male, before he
looked back at Paul.

“You think Carson could look them over?”

“Yes sure... I'll get him. You know where the medical trailer is.”

**

They had all gathered before the infirmary on the ground in a huge pile, waiting for news on their
friends. Nobody was talking, they just sat at there... Tired, drained and worn out.
Carl was sitting close to the cloaked young man his head was resting on a black clad shoulder. Paul thought that they looked cute together, not in a coup-ly way, but like family. Close...

It brought back a familiar ache that had accompanied Paul since that horrible day 23 years ago that had ended in wreckage.

He had been wary to enter such deep bonds ever since.

Getting close and connecting with somebody, also meant the danger of losing them again. How many boyfriends had he lost over his inability to open himself up? Because he had failed to build an emotional commitment beyond his superficial Jesus persona...

He could still remember the hurt in Alex eyes, when he had realized that Jesus hadn’t been interested in a serious long term relationship. Paul had always tried to play with open cards but maybe Alex had hoped that things would change. They had agreed to part ways but things had been pretty strained since then.

Looking at Carl cuddling so close to the other young man made him long for such companionship. And while it was unusual for male teens to seek so much body contact in public, Paul could understand that this had to be a very emotional moment.

He had recognised the thin face with the pretty fine sculptured features, as soon as the British male had dropped his hood.

It was Harry, the boy from the photo in Rick's house. A boy, everyone had thought had died...

+++flashback +++

The atmosphere in the RV was tense on the way to the Hilltop. These people were a lot of suspicious pricks and Paul wanted to bang his head against the car window. This stifling air was driving him mad.

It reminded him of the tense times, when a new kid had come to the group home or when he had had to go to yet another foster family.

This first phase of acclimatization and familiarisation, when everyone was eyeing everyone trying to gauge reactions, weighting each other, checking for angles. It was taxing and it made Paul's skin itch with the need to run. It brought an old patter to light in him, making hide Paul behind Jesus and friendly chit-chating.

“Can anyone tell me why Rick's son was about to blow my head away for looking at a photo?” He chirped into the tense silence of the vehicle.

He had thought that the question had been innocent enough but the fact that Rick had just fucking slammed on the brakes, causing Jesus and Aaron to land in a heap on the floor, might be an indication that he should have asked something else...
Harsh blue eyes glared at him from the rear-view mirror but it was the almost feral growl Daryl gave in his direction that had his blood freezing.

He sighed in relief, when Daryl finally left him off the hook with a last bit of glowering and kicked the driver’s seat instead of his head.

“Eyes on the road, Grimes. Ain't good for Maggie, givin’ us a shake like that.” The moody man barked at Rick.

_Ooookay... There had to be a story there. About the boy in the picture._

And then a terrible thought occurred to Paul. He had already guessed that the kid in the photo was most likely dead...

But what...? What if these people had the same problems as the Hilltop? What if Negan had found them before Jesus?

_Good god! What if the kid in the photo had ended like Rory?_

Sweet, know-it all, 16 year old Rory.

Who had begged Jesus to take him on runs and whom Jesus had always waved away with a hollow smile and platitudes?

Rory who had died brutally with his head bashed in by a fucking baseball bat.

It would explain so much... Alexandria’s low supplies, their determination to get that truck and even their deep suspicion.

But the guns... Surely Negan wouldn't leave such a well-equipped arsenal behind.

To his absolute surprise, it was Aaron who answered him in the end, ripping him out of his worried thoughts.

“Well, I took it off the wall to get a better look. It looked like a nice work and I liked art... Well, before everything went to shit. But it's a recent picture, isn't it?” He couldn't help but ask further. But Aaron was now scowling, too...

_Great. Damn._
Paul just couldn't stop putting his foot in his mouth. But everything was better than the tense silence before. But what the hell was it with this picture?

“I made that picture.” Aaron replied finally, sadness and bitterness were radiating of the curly haired man. “I made photos of Alexandria and its residents to show them to possible new recruits.”

“His name was Harry.” Maggie whispered suddenly. The brunette woman had curled up next to her Korean husband, both showing matching expressions of grief.

“That ain’t none of this prick’s business!” Daryl hissed aggressively at them but Paul could see that the rage was just a front. Like a hurt and wounded animal would hiss and growl at you, when you came to close, because they were frightened of more pain.

“We lost him a few months ago.” Maggie was definitely a braver person than Jesus, because she ignored Daryl’s mood.

“And not talking about him, will not change that.” She added softly. The redneck scowled grumpily at her before he looked out of the window with a huff.

“He was family to all of us, saved even some of us... And we...” Maggie voice broke.

“We failed him, when he needed us the most.” Glenn revealed while he pulled his wife into a comforting hug.

“He had been sick since before the turn but we... I don't know. I think we didn't want to see it. And Harry was the type to keep things to himself, never wanting to burden others.” A small mournful smile stretched over the Koreans face. “Have you ever met someone you just really, really wanted to survive all this mess? Just… because they were that good.”

“Yeah... I have.” And indeed he had. It were those deaths, that weighted the heaviest and longest on his conscience.

“I'm sorry for your loss.” He told them sincerely.

“He was like that. In the end he thought that his condition had become too much of a fucking safety hazard. Tough, little shit left the walls to end it on his own terms.” Abraham looked very pensive.

“Does that mean he could be still out there?” Paul asked wide eyed.

Heavy silence was his answer...

“No. No, when he left he was much weakened by his illness and... And... “ Aaron fought for words. Gathering himself the other scout said. “He had been assaulted... Sexually. Right before he left... by the community’s surgeon.”
Paul felt his stomach drop. *Fuck.*

A sick kid, that had been raped in his own community and after that had decided to opt out. “Shit!”

“Yeah. ‘e left an’ only thin’ he took with him was an ol’ huntin’ knife.” Daryl rasped out. “He ain’t out there anymor’.”

This was a horrible way to lose someone these days. It was one thing to lose them out there to walkers and out right attacks but this... This was shit! Having your family hurt by in an environment that should finally be save...

It had to be a shock.

+++++++ 

“Since we're waiting right now... Might anyone of you please be so kind to explain to me, why that man was trying to bash in your heads, with a bloody baseball bat no less?” Despite the light inquiring tone, there was an underlying sharpness as Harry's green eyes bored into Rick.

Fuck Paul had been right... Negan!

Paul was kind of glad that these intense orbs weren't directed at him. They held an uncanny quality and seemed to see through all barriers a man could have built.

And so Paul wasn't surprised, when Rick complied and relayed the events that had lead them to this moment. The truck, meeting Jesus, the Hilltop, learning about Negan... The satellite station...Maggie… road blocks… a staged execution...

Afterwards there was a loaded silence.

“So let me get this straight... You fight with an unknown man over a truck. A man that nearly outwitted you and Daryl. A man that lets himself be called *Jesus.*” At that sharp green eyes fixed themselves on Paul. The deadpan look had him flush in light embarrassment.

“So let me get this straight... You fight with an unknown man over a truck. A man that nearly outwitted you and Daryl. A man that lets himself be called *Jesus.*” At that sharp green eyes fixed themselves on Paul. The deadpan look had him flush in light embarrassment.

“Uhm... Or P... Paul. Paul Rovia. But my friends used to call me Jesus. Your pick.”

Fuck, when had been the last time he stuttered like that at his own introduction. The fact that Harry turned to Rick with a ‘Are you both idiots?’-look in his eyes, certainly did not help him to keep his composure.
Damn that kid was pretty!

And Rick had taken to fidget in discomfort. “He seemed trustworthy and we came here prepared with ammo. We needed help…”

“Umhum... So you went to this community. You learned that there is a mad man running around playing feudal lord to the whole region... and then decided that the best option for an alliance was to offer yourselves up as sellswords?”

Rick gulped and nodded a bit jerkily.

“So you thought that although, that dangerous man, who had obvious the resources to play at being a feudal lord… and let’s not forget that no one had been able to tell you how many men he really had... But you thought that it would be a good idea to storm his base guns blazing in the dead of the night and to kill them all... With next to no further information?!" Harry was ruthless when he listed of their mistakes in a light tone. Paul repressed a wince that sounded really stupid.

God, they had been so stupid.

“And now it turned out that said mad feudal lord is a fully grown sociopath that enjoys big dramatic executions with a bloody baseball bat and that commands at least a hundred men, probably more. Yeeesss, that really sounds like no trouble at all.” Harry finished with a light, cheery tone but his eyes betrayed his exasperation.

Rick and Daryl had both blushed to the tips of their ears. It was endearing to see these two tough and hard assed men looking so thoughtfully reprimanded by a small teen.

“If you summarize it like that, it sounds even worse.” Michonne groaned. “It's a right mess, isn't it? If you hadn't come tonight...” The woman looked haunted at the memories of tonight's events.

“Yes…”Harry closed those expressive eyes at the imaged pain.

The opening of the trailer door broke them out of their conversation.

Maggie and Carson were walking out of the infirmary. And while the brunette looked quite happy and satisfied, Carson was shaking his head, as he left the trailer after his patient.

“I don't understand it.” Carson grumbled as he walked over to them. At the concerned looks he got at that he held his hands up appeasing.

“Maggie had an Abruptio Placenta. I could see it in ultrasound but... It's stable…. somehow. I just... I can't explain it. It shouldn't be... I don't know, how she got that stable on her own.” The man had obvious problems to explain his findings. Shaking his head again and again.

“She and the baby are fine now, but since something like that could happen again it would be advisable to keep her here. Same for Abraham... He had obviously suffered a serve head trauma.”
Carson pinched the bridge of his nose. “Like he got forcefully hit with something... Like a baseball bat...”

He glanced at Jesus when he said this.

“Honestly after what Maggie told me about the initial injury, he should be dead right now or at least dying. Not snoring in my office. He's sleeping now, if there are any lasting damages can only be said, when he wakes up.”

“When? Not if?” Rosita asked.

“Right now I'm very sure that he wakes up.” Carson replied.

“That's fantastic!” Sasha sacked in overwhelming relief.

“Yes it is, but it's also completely impossible. Never in all my years as doctor have I seen anything like that.” The good doctor was very confused and seemed to be a bit miffed by the riddle.

_Sounds a bit like magic._ Jesus thought with a bit of amusement at the ridiculous idea.

_But no wizard would ever risk the statue of secrecy like that..._

But now everyone was looking expectantly at Harry.

“Uhmm... Yes... I promised you all some answers.” Harry sighed. And to Paul he truly looked uncomfortable for the first time.

Afraid.

“Is there somewhere we can speak in private?” Now Paul was the one confronted with a dozen questioning eyes.

“Uhm... Sure. The library, in the main house. Nobody will be there right now.”

“Good, lead the way. “Rick nodded.

Leaving Harry pointedly behind with a forlorn expression of hurt and sadness, it was a hard look to see on the teens face and Paul's heart constricted in sympathy.

“Are you alright?” He carefully implored laying a hand on the young Brit’s shoulder.

Too big, teary, green eyes framed by thick dark lashes looked up to him and shit...
Attraction had never hit him that fast or hard. It felt like punch to the gut. He watched mesmerized as white teeth bit on a plump under lip and Harry swallowed.

*Wow, Paul you're a fucking creep for pervning on an underage boy with pretty eyes.*

Visibly gathering himself Harry gave him a wobbly smile. It was the most heart-breaking and most beautiful thing Paul had ever seen.

“No, but he has every right to be angry with me... I know that but it doesn't mean that it hurts any less.” Inhaling forcefully Harry sent him a wry smile.

“Thanks but I think it's time to face the music.” Worry clouded the thin and pale face.

But what took Paul by surprise was Daryl, who had watched their interactions and glared at him from slated, narrowed, blue eyes.

*Oho, things were bound to get interesting.*
Chapter 18

“I leave you to it.” Jesus smiled encouragingly at Harry.

“Thank you.”

“Stay, Jesus.” Rick suddenly said.

“What?! Rick?” Harry furrowed his brows at their leader

“We trust him. He should know what was going on in that forest.” Rick answered calming.

“So you decided that it’s OK to trust him with my secrets?” The green eyed teen asked incredulous.

“He ain’t lied to us, has he?” Daryl growled from the back, where he scowled out of a window, shoulders drawn up.

“Daryl...” At harsh accusation Harry had reared back, obvious hurt. Rick could see that his brother winced a bit at that expression on Harry’s face... And even more likely at the thought, that he had been the one to put it there. The hunter took a small step forward, as if to comfort the teen but then he pulled back with an agitated hiss and continued to stare out of the library window.

Harry had gone very pale and when he opened his lips, his voice sounded small and vulnerable.

“I have never lied to any of you. I edited some things, I couldn't tell you about but I never lied to you. I swear.” Harry looked at them with a desperate plea, while one hand messed up his hair. Only tense silence answered him

With defeated sigh Harry took his cloak off, before he plopped down in one of the armchairs. Now without the enveloping fabric Rick really looked at Harry for the first time.

He just realized, how different the boy looked.
Harry wore a decent, dark green shirt and long black pants. Both fitted the kid really well. The outfit showed the teen’s slim stature that would probably always border on skinny but for the first time since Rick met the kid, Harry didn't look like a stiff wind would knock him over...

His skin, while still pale had lost its grey shadow and clammy quality. And although he looked worried right now, he didn't seem to be as haggard as before. In short the British teen look good...

Somehow more whole, than Rick had ever seen him.

It brought one heavy message home. That's, what Harry had been supposed to look like... Glowing, with sparkling eyes. Healthy.

Glenn had been right. They had deluded themselves, thinking that Harry would be alright somehow.

They had been blind.

And apparently something else had changed...

“Your tattoos!? What happened to your tattoos?” Carl cried out in surprise.

At closer inspection Rick saw it, too... There under the sleeves, where the ink was supposed to be, were now only familiar scars, but the dark entwined lines with the mysterious signs were gone.

At Carl's shout that Harry looked up, green eyes guarded and careful.

“Yes they are gone. They vanished on my 17th birthday...”

Jesus made a small choked sound in the background.

“What's got that to do with it all?” Maggie asked confused.

Harry gave them all a small rueful smile.

“Everything. Because I'm a wizard.”

Stunned silence filled the library.

And just when Rick thought that someone would laugh or that Harry would call it a joke, Jesus made had same choking sound again...

Maybe a little more panicked.
The long haired ninja hippie sprung to his feet eyes and head snapping around hectically, like he expected that someone or something would materialize out of thin air.

“The hell!?” He hissed in Harry direction. “You can't just... Say stuff like that. What about the statue of secrecy?” Rick would have thought that Jesus was in on pulling their leg but he looked honestly afraid.

Still tensely looking around.

Harry starred as stunned at Jesus as the rest of them but apparently for a totally different reason. “You're a wizard, too?!”

“Tsk.... Shhh!” Even in his complete bewilderment Rick could hardly suppress the slightly hysterical giggling that bubbled in his throat, at Jesus’ jumpy movements indicating Harry to stop talking.

The sigh Harry let out was long and deep. “You don't need to worry. Nobody will come.” Harry said to nervous man, his voice equally calming and... Sad?

“What? What do you mean, nobody will come? You can't mean...”

“That they're all gone? Yes. That is exactly what I meant.” Harry's face spoke of grim resignation, while the usually calm and quirky hippie looked just aghast and speechless.

“Fuck!” The Hilltop ninja cursed loudly, absolute defeated.

“Ok stop that! I can't follow! What the hell are you talking about?” Sasha growled at them, fists pushed onto her hips and a fire burning in her dark eyes, promising pain if they didn't start to make sense soon.

“Oh! Uhm... Sorry you're right. I should probably start at the beginning.” Harry quickly apologized. When he looked to Jesus, the long haired man gave him just an absent minded nod to continue, still looking very shocked.

“My name is Harry Potter and I was born with magic.”

With that he pulled a polished wooden stick out of his sleeve and with a little swishing motion, one of the books on the table turned into ten pretty blue butterflies. One of them even settled on Maggie's hair, where Glenn bravely poked the insect. Only to jump back when the insect fluttered with its wings in response.

“Holly hell! It’s real!” Glenn squeaked.

“And very pretty!” Michonne observed another one. “So what you did to protect us from the saviours... That was magic?!”

“Yes.” Harry cocked his head to the side in agreement.
“What else can you do?” Carl asked in excitement.

“There are few limitations to magic. It can be as good or as bad as the person who uses it. It can heal, create and I power but it can also torture, kill and destroy.”

“But what is magic?” Eugene asked. “It has to be something! It has to follow some laws.”

“Uhmm yes... it's, well, it's energy. A highly emotion and intention based energy. Wizards are humans born with a magical core. Our own power plant. And sometimes it enables us to use the energies around us. It's our life, our soul.” Here Harry stopped speaking, frustrated he buried his head into his hands.

“I'm sorry! I have the impression that I'm doing a bad job at explaining it.” Harry said unsure in Jesus direction. The ninja hippie looked a little less lost and had intendedly listened to Harry's words.

“No... My grandma said something similar... about it.” Jesus seemed hesitant, when he said this, his cyan eyes gauging the teen’s reaction. Harry made an understanding sound a soft smile on his lips.

“I'm glad then. Magical theory was never my strongest suit. My talents always laid more in the practical part. My grades have certainly confirmed that over the years.”

“You're kidding right?!” Carl blurted out and Rick snorted at the betrayed expression on his face. “You went to school? But you're a wizard?!” His son seemed to find a lot more unbelievable that the existence of magic itself.

“Uhmm yes, I went to a magical school...”

“Wait, you're telling me that big fancy boarding school you talked about is a school for wizards? Why does nobody know about that?” Glenn

“Yup. Wizards have founded their own separate societies, ministries, laws, law enforcement, shopping districts and banks... Intentionally telling or showing a non-magical person about our world is considered capital offence.”

“You’re kidding right?!” Alarmed Rick glanced back and forth between Harry and Jesus. Both looked very serious. It would explain the initial panic Jesus had shown.

“Sadly, no... America has even one of the strictest laws considering the relations between wizards and Muggles or no-mag.” Jesus told them with a frown.


“Discriminating? Racist? Yes, because it is. Relationships between wizards and Muggles were forbidden in America until 1990. Even in Europe only a spouse is allowed to know about the magical society. Anyone else, who learns about magic without explicit permission, will get their memories whipped.” Harry explained looking at all of them. Rick head was reeling with all the information.
“Shit! Like men in black?” Glenn shouted out eyes wide eyed. Confused Harry looked at Jesus, who nodded with a smirk.

“Uhm... I have no idea about ‘Men in Black’… but uhmm... Yeah?” Harry answered unsure.

“Wow!? That amazing! And terrifying!” Glenn exclaimed, eyes sparkling.

“So they divided the world in wizards and Muggles?” Michonne asked, brows still heavily furrowed. At this question Harry threw himself in an explanation about pure-bloods, who had apparently no sense of genetics, (“Well, let say if two British pure bloods marry, they are most likely at least second cousins.” Harry had said. “Uhug! Please tell me you’re pulling our legs.” Rosita had begged.), half-bloods and muggle-borns. He told them about an underlying discrimination.

“Funnily enough wizards think muggle’s discrimination based on skin colour, se, or religion absolutely ridiculous.” Harry deadpanned.

Rick looked at a wide eyed Daryl. His brother hadn’t spoken since Harry had started his explanation… None of them had expected something like this.

*A whole hidden society.*

“Muggle-borns are no less powerful, my best friend Hermione was on top in all classes. While my mate Ron came out of an old pure-blood family and he was a lazy bum and mediocre student.” Harry looked sad when he talked about his friends with a forlorn and slightly teary smile.

“But how can there be any muggle-borns.” Eugene inquired thoughtfully.

“The most likely explanation would be Paul over there.” Harry pointed to Jesus

“Huh? What why?” The long haired man looked betrayed at Harry.

“You're a squib, right?” The teen asked kindly.

“Yes... Third generation. My granny on dad's side was the first.” To Rick Jesus looked very uncomfortable with this admission. It was a strange expression on the self-assured and cocky man.

“What’s a squib?” Eugene asked, cocking his head curiously at the term.

“A squib is a magicless child out of a magical family. If a child doesn't show any talent before their eleventh birthday, their considered a squib...” Harry sighed sadly.

“What happens to them then?” Rick felt, like there was a bigger story behind this.

“Honestly... Most of them get cast out from their families and out of the community. They’ll be given into the Muggle foster system. Very few get to stay and even then they hardly lead happy lives there. The some of the darker families found the shame of a squib child too great... a lot just vanished.” Harry looked at Jesus, when he explained this. The long haired man had pressed his lips together and nodded at wizard’s explanation.
“Fuck! That's fucked up.” Rosita spat out.

“But what you mean is that over the years Squibs integrated themselves in the Non-Magical world and that their descendants might have developed a talent for magic again?!” Eugene seemed excited by the idea.

“It could be possible.” Harry smiled, before he sobered up again. “That's the political climate I was born into, my dad came from an old family and my mom was a Muggle-born.”

“So your dad was really working as law enforcement? That wasn’t a lie?” Carl asked.

“He was an Auror, the equivalent to a police officer and mum worked for the ministry.” Harry told them quietly. The green eyed teen looked out of the window, as the story about the death of his parents and a man called Lord Voldemort unfurled before them.

“He was a magical Hitler, who believed in total pure-blood supremacy, wanted to extinguish all Muggles and Muggle born. Said that they had no right to their magic. Magic is might and all that bullshit. He terrorized the whole country, gaining followers left and right. People, who worked against him, were targeted... And vanished.” Rick thought that he distantly remembered the news some twenty years back about terror attacks back in Britain.

“… when he tried to off me too that night at our house… the magic rebounded, destroying his body instead. My parents were dead, our house destroyed and I was got hidden with my Muggle aunt. Whatever mom did, it created a blood protection that activated by her sacrifice that night. But aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon weren't very fond of their freaky, little nephew, who had floated his bottles around and had been able to let his hair grow back over night after a bad haircut.”

“They hated you because of your magic?!” Aaron sounded stricken. Rick remembered how the scout had revealed the abuse he had suffered through his own mother.

“They thought that punishing me, would stomp the freakiness out of me.” Harry revealed softly, sharing a knowing look with Aaron.

So that was the answer. Rick had wondered so often what had driven Harry’s relatives to abuse him like this…

Magic.

At the window Daryl made a strangled sound. The hunter was scowling at the floor, biting viciously on his thumb.

“But accidentally magic is normal for any wizard child! You can't stomp it out of them, that's dangerous! Didn't anyone tell them that?” Jesus argued in alarm, causing Harry to sigh in resignation.

“The thing is, I believe my aunt always knew... She just hated me. It might have started with my mom... My aunt had no photos of her in the house. I didn’t know what my parents looked like until I started Hogwarts at eleven.”

What followed was an awkward silence. Rick couldn’t imagine what it meant for a child to grow up hated by his guardians, abused, starved and locked away… not even allowed to know what your
parents looked like.

“You said his body was destroyed but you told us he came for you when you were in school... Just how is that possible?” Sasha interrupted the tense atmosphere. Harry winced at the question.

“Voldemort had broken some of the most sacred laws of magic in his search for power and immorality, diving deeper into the dark arts, than anyone before him... He broke himself down and what was left was changed and twisted.” Rick shuddered at Harry’s vague description of this Voldemort person.

Because of that, he did not die that night but he wasn't really alive either. A half existence, a wraith... Only a little more substantial than a ghost. One of his old followers came for him, helped him to get his body back when I was thirteen. He let his men kidnapped me a year later. Me and Cedric.” Yes, Rick remembered the story about Cedric. It seemed like years had gone by since the British teen had confined in them on a parched road on the way to Alexandria.

“Voldemort took my blood that night for a resurrection ritual. Afterwards he kept me... I spend four weeks in captivity.”

Here Harry stopped. He looked to be far away... Like he saw things that no one else saw.

A dark wizard, abusive guardians, kidnapping, the death of a friend, a resurrection ritual... captivity...

“The Claimers... They weren’t the first to hurt me like that.”

Four weeks in the hands of dark wizard, Harry had described as a magical Hitler, Rick’s brain couldn’t start to comprehend what must have happened to Harry in that time.

Fuck!

He saw his own horror mirrored in the eyes of his family. Daryl looked ready to storm out of the room.

“But your godfathers got you out and that man Voldemort finally died.” Michonne said firmly, breaking through their shared, speechless horror.

“Huh?!” Harry blinked and rubbed his forehead, as if he had woken up from a long sleep. “Uhm yeah, they got... Me out, but I lost them.” Harry sighed, grief hanging over him like a dark cloud.

“How old where you?” Aaron asked carefully.

“Fourteen... Just a few weeks, before I came to Atlanta. I got the tattoos then... When the dark lord fell, his powerful network hadn't fallen with him. My headmaster was afraid that I might be in danger of retaliations. And my relative’s vacation abroad would have compromised all safety measures he had put in place... So he tweaked an old ritual to lock my magic away. It manifested as
the tattoos on my wrists.” He gestured to his scarred wrists.

“He did what?!” The absolute haggardness in Jesus face was alarming. The long haired man jumped up and took carefully hold of Harry’s delicate wrists, inspecting them and the scar tissue circling around them.

“Is that bad?” Carl asked worried.

“Yesss.” Jesus hissed, his fingers still caressing Harry's scarred skin. Rick thought that Daryl was about to have a stroke with the way his eye lid was twitching. Someone was definitely not okay with Jesus being so friendly with the green eyed wizard.

“As Harry said magic is a wizard’s life, his soul. To lock it away from them, is a death sentence.” Jesus said absentminded still inspecting Harry’s frail wrists.

The air in the library got a bit thicker at the explanation.

That would mean Harry’s headmaster had protected him from one threat by hurting him in another way.

“It was supposed to be my magical witness protection just for the vacation... Magic can trace only magic. The tattoos made me practically invisible to any other wizard.” Harry tried to pacify them.

“My headmaster changed it enough that it didn't kill me like it normally would have. I couldn't use my magic but it was still there, fluctuating just under my skin, out of reach. Since I was only fourteen, when the seal was placed on me and my core was still growing. It was a so designed that it would break, when I reached magical maturity. My 17th birthday. Not that I was supposed to wear them that long…” Harry looked at Rick. His big green eyes ancient with years of pain and hardship.

“That my friend sounds very worrying.” Eugene interrupted Harry in his usual deadpan staccato. “You said magic is energy. I quote ‘highly emotion and intention based energy’. If it was still able to fluctuate with your emotions and intentions but could not be accessed, that would create dire problems. Where did it go?!” The genius seemed very agitated.

Apparently he had already understood something Rick and the other had not yet realized. “It’s the principle of the conservation of energy. Energy doesn’t just get lost! What you described, are two antagonistic energies, one building up, pressing outwards with your intentions and emotions and the other pushing inwards, binding the first one. But where did it go!? With no way out, it means that this energy had to build up. That would be a very taxing process for the vessel. It would probably damage the host over time... Until...” Eugene had rambled all this down rapidly fast but now he slowed down and starred wide eyed at Harry.

“Until what?” Daryl growled.

“You are really intelligent, Eugene.” Harry smiled pained at stocky man. “It took me so much
longer to come to this conclusion.”

“Harry, what conclusion?” Rick hissed.

“That the battle between his magic and the seal in his tattoos was ripping his body apart…” Jesus whispered, eyes still locked on the vicious scars. “That's why you tried to cut them out, right?”

“Yes, at first the pain was... Good. It helped me against the grief for the people I had just lost. Hurting through the seal made the pain in my chest a bit easier to carry, because it felt like I deserved this agony.” Out of the corner of his eyes Rick could see, how Daryl traced the circular burn scars on his hand. These two were so similar sometimes.

“But then the world went up in flames and I needed to try... It was useless.” Harry confirmed Jesus’ guess, why had taken a knife and who knew what else to his skin to remove the tattoos.

“Your sickness, the weakness and the fainting… Good god, the seizure and the whole coughing blood thing… That were the tattoos hurting you?!” Glenn cursed.

“So you weren't dying?” Carl asked unsure.

“Oh, he damn was. There's no doubt. The antagonistic energies were wrecking him. But that wasn't all, right?” The man with the mullet deadpanned.

“No it wasn't... Eugene was right. The bound magic had built up inside me and seal was getting weaker, as my birthday drew closer. I wasn't sure anymore, if I would survive until then. But on top of that my core had matured and my magic had grown additionally. The longer I observed the changes in my magic... I had a foreboding. A bad one. I started to ask myself what would happen, when the seal was going to break…”

“Oh my!” Eugene rasped. “Like an uncontrolled break of a water dam! The magic was going to burst out of you!”

Fuck!?

Rick had probably understood only half of what Eugene and Harry had told them but the gist was… that the build-up magic hadn’t been just tearing Harry apart but could have damaged anything else in the process of breaking free?!

Harry had needed to leave or he would have exposed them all to this uncontrolled magic.

“Yes, so when I got weaker and wasn't able… to look after myself any longer, I decided that I needed to go... I wasn't sure what would happen, if I would live to see 17… or if I would survive the release of the binding… but I wasn't going to take chances.” The big green eyes behind those ridiculous glasses were burning with determination and Rick could only guess how much all this had weighted on the kid.
How hard that decision had been…

“Where did you go?” Michonne asked in sympathy.

“As far as I could. I did what I had done before. Slept in trees, trusted my instincts and I had the knife. And when the 31st of July came…” Harry choked.

“Wait the 31st of July?” Jesus asked wide eyed.

“Uhm, yes…” Harry flushed a little.

“How...! It was you, wasn't it!? Your magic burned that forest down, didn’t it?! Three acres of trees demolished.” Jesus rasped.

Shit, shit! Shit! Something like that...

“That would have annihilated Alexandria. Swift and clean. No survivors.” Eugene analysed clinical.

Rick felt like someone had punched the air out of his lungs. Harry had saved them... He had been right to leave, as much as it hurt to admit that.

“Why didn't you tell us that?” Glenn tried. The young Korean looked hurt by Harry’s lack of trust in them. Harry was softly shaking his head, before he searched for Glenn’s gaze and asked with a bitter smile. “Would you have believed me?”

Rick watched how Glenn tried to find words, opening and closing his mouth a few time. The kind wizard sighed softly.

“I wished I could have told you, Glenn. But honestly I thought that the moment, I started to talk about magic, seals and potentially exploding in a burst of uncontrolled energy, that you would be convinced that I had lost the rest of my marbles.” He smiled ruefully at them.

“And I have to admit that I was more than a little afraid that Carol would give me a last cookie, before she would tell me to look at the flowers... I love that woman, but she is bloody scary! And was the best case scenario my head conjured... My biggest concern was that you would lock me in some nice room out of worry that I could be a danger to myself or others and that I wouldn't have to the strength to get away in time…”

Rick winced, both scenarios sounded like something they might have done.

Ahh, fuck!

He could see it the faces of everyone else that they were thinking alike.
“But why hav’ ya not come back ta us after? 31<sup>st</sup> of July was month ago.” Daryl asked lowly. His brother sounded less angry now, just vulnerable.

**

Daryl hated this.

Hated feeling this vulnerable. Being angry at Harry for lying to them, had been so much easier...

The moment the cloaked figure had touched his shoulder in the meadow, he had known. Had known that the person, who had left him behind and who he had mourned with a bleeding heart, had lied to him. Played him. Like an idiot.

Harry was alive! Had been alive all the time, Daryl had cried over him like a dumb piece of shit.

*What did ya expect ya fucking dump ass? That he’d rid’ into the sunset with ya? Stuff like that doesn’t happen’ ta ya!*

He had burned with anger and yet... at the same time his stupid heart had done somersaults at the sound of that dumb posh accent. Tears had burned in his eyes, because Harry was alive and for whatever reason he had come back to them.

The British teen had looked so different in that meadow... The same dark and unruly hair, the same fucking ugly glasses with the pink flower pattern that framed ridiculous big green eyes...but more...

Substantial.

Glowing from within.

*Healthy.*

The realization had brought another wave of anger. A self-hatred that was as old as the scars on his back. Kid had obviously been better off away from them...

Harry hadn’t needed them and they hadn't done enough.

Seeing Harry like this meant for Daryl that the boy could have been better all along.

They had failed him. Daryl had failed him, if the kid had to leave them, so he could get healthy... To *live*!
Daryl knew that he was behaving like an ass but being close to Harry, looking into his bright shining eyes full of hope and nervous joy, it had turned his stomach with guilt and shame and self-loathing... and so much fucking anger.

He had tried to keep his distance, because he had been afraid of what he would say or do to Harry in the light of all those emotions, pulling him in different directions. His nerves frayed and everything in this fucked up night becoming just too fucking much.

Nothing made sense anymore.

But hell, it had been hard to stay away, when that ninja hippie bastard got all starry eyed and friendly with Harry. He wanted nothing more than to rip that pick’s paws off, when started to touch his... Fuck! That asshole had no business in getting so close to... well damn, anyone Daryl cared about.

And now that Harry had explained.

Magic...

It sounded stupid to Daryl but it made also sense in a strange way. What had happened... The hunches, Harry's talent of navigation even, when he had been still blind as a bat. Why he had been sick all the time and why nobody had been able to make it better...

Why he had to go...

And Harry had been right there had been no other option, than to leave them. They wouldn't have believed him back then, not without prove. Something he couldn't have given them back then.

It had stripped all that boiling anger away from Daryl, leaving him naked and shivering with raw emotions.

_Harry had protected them. Harry loved them... But why hadn't he come back to them?_ 

The last time he had felt like this, had been when his mom had forgotten to fetch him from the kindergarten, because she had gone on a bender. He had felt so discarded, so lonely and afraid, sitting next to an irritated teacher, fiddling with his dirty and worn shirt. He had refused to talk to her or to look up, because he had been too embarrassed for being apparently so worthless that not even his own mother cared for him. It had been late in the evening, when Merle had finally showed up to collect him and Daryl had cried like a baby in relief.

This here, looking at Harry, hoping for an answer, felt just like that. A tiny child hoping that it wouldn't be left behind.
Harry looked at him with deep sorrow in his beautiful eyes. The message was so clear now between them.

*I'm so sorry! I know you’re hurting. I understand.*

The moment was broken by Rick.

And Daryl just didn't want to hear his voice.

He...

He didn't know what he wanted...

“Harry you said the tattoos worked as a magical witness protection. That meant, when they disappeared and the seal broke…” Rick ever the Sheriff. His brother was on a case. Daryl knew him long enough to recognize Officer Friendly in work mode.

“…That my protection had ended as well, yes.” Harry finished for the blue eyed man.

“So anyone looking for you, could have found you?!” Carl asked in alarm.

Harry snorted in mirth less amusement.

“When the seal broke and my magic erupted… It was like a beacon of light in the deepest darkness. No one needed to search for me. Anyone knowing about magic would have noticed such an outburst. It should have altered them all… Friends, foes and the official law enforcements. Called to my location like moths to the flame.”

“Who came for you?” Jesus asked tightly. The hippie had his brows furrowed in worry over his pretty cyan eyes.

“I waited three days… Partly because I had been unable to move… But…” Harry looked with haunted eyes at his family and Daryl felt his stomach drop. “…Nothing.”

*Huh*?!

“Ya said them rules are strict… That they would protect that statute…” Daryl asked with a frown, that didn’t fit what the wizard had told them.
“Yeah, at the very least the MACUSA should have come looking. And when they didn't come...”
Harry sighed. “Compared to Muggles, there are only a few wizards in the world. The communities
are small and spread all over the world... Easy to overrun.” Absentmindedly Harry started out of
the window.

“But how?” Glenn asked aghast. “I mean with magic...? Shouldn’t they have been protected?”

“Magic isn’t the answer to all problems and a false sense of security can be the key to disaster.”
Harry replied heavy-hearted. “I had been out of touch with the magical world since before the dead
started to walk, so I knew nothing.”

Green eyes bore into slated blue ones and Daryl had to swallow heavily at the intense emotions he
saw in Harry's face.

“I couldn't come back... Not without knowing what I might lead back to you.”

“Ya needed answers.” Daryl grumbled shoulder slumping...

It felt like a heavy weight was lifted of them and the tight ball of anxiety in his chest was finally
loosening. He could understand that. He didn't like it, no... not one bit! But he understood.

“Ya couldn't come fer help, because we couldn't help against them wizards? Might have whipped
our memories clean?”

“Yes.” The word was spoken so softly in relief that it was almost a sigh. A wonderful grateful
smile illuminated those fine features, smoothing out the worries.

“So where did you go?” Rosita asked

Harry gave her an awkward grin, as he scratched the back of his head. “I went to the only place I
could think of to get reliable information... The MACUSA.”

“The what?” Aaron asked blinking.

“The Magical Congress of the United States of America.”

“But... But that's in New York?!” Jesus called out completely flabbergasted. Harry’s only answer
was an apological shrug.

Ok. Fuck...

“Are you telling me that you went to New York? On your own?” Rick asked eyes closed and
pinching the bridge of his nose. If Daryl heard right, Michonne had started to count from ten
backwards and was starring pointedly at the ceiling, her mouth was doing a funny thing, switching
between a scowl and a smirk.

Daryl could relate to the sentiment... There was something close to a nervous laugh bubbling in his
chest, right above to a new uneasy clump of worry balling in his stomach.
God, insanity must feel exactly like that. Emotions all over the place, so that you thought that your head was about to explode.

“The journey was a lot easier with my magic helping me... Although I have to say that too much of it attracts walkers. I think they notice the energy or maybe it’s the light.” Daryl watched as Rick just dropped his head into his hands and Carl patted his father's back as consolation.

“I didn’t do much of it, because my wand was still in England but I managed small things and I was no longer sick. That helped immensely.” He smiled brightly at them, like it made it easier to stomach that Harry had wandered the whole way to fucking New York City on his own.

“Oh, and I had this!” In a grand gesture he presented them…

Daryl’s old hunting knife.

Now the boy was positively beaming. “It protected me quite well on my way to New York.” Daryl could do nothing to fight small wave of possessiveness that flooded him at the knowledge that his Knife had been with Harry all the way.

“What did you find?” Jesus looked sad, they all suspected the answer.

“Deserted ruins and walkers. Lots of them. All of them wizards. The ministry had fallen right in the beginning.” Harry revealed gloomily and Daryl already missed the happy sparkle in the teens face.

Jesus cursed colourfully. “Do you have an idea what happen?”

“Huh? A bank? Why that? You said all people were dead, what could you possibly find in a bank?” Glenn asked in confusion. Daryl wanted to know that too. Money was essentially useless now, so what could be found in a fucking bank?

“You're right all the people were dead. But the wizarding bank is run by goblins.” Harry smirked a bit at their gobsmacked looks.

“You're kidding right?” Glenn blinked and Daryl watched, as Harry huffed a small laugh at the Koreans expense.

“No, the American branch of the bank is hidden in New York and if anything can survive the end of the world, it will be cockroaches and goblins.” The green eyed teen deadpanned.

“Goblins are highly intelligent, paranoid little fuckers and nobody can handle money and gold better than them. Therefore, they control the wizarding economy to a large extent. Their banks and wizarding schools are probably some of the most secure places in the world. The fact that they’re also bloody resentful and vindictive is an added bonus. Everybody knows that you don't mess with goblins. They are vicious and they enjoy to torture those who disrespect it break their rules. It
makes then perfect bankers. The relationship between wizards and goblins is quite strained... there has been conflict, mistrust and fault on both sides.”

“What?! OK, stop! Why would they operate a bank for wizards, if they hate them?” Michonne asked wide eyed.

“Because they like gold more than they hate wizards. And I suspect, they like the power, they gained that way.” Harry shrugged uncomfortable.

“So you went to Gringotts? And were the goblins still there? You found them?” Daryl found it incredible, how quick Carl had bounced back from last night’s events and was now all big, curious blue eyes and wonder.

“Yes, they were not really pleased to see me there and it took quite some negotiations before they let me in.” Grinning grimly Harry shook his head, it was a strained expression.

“But after a hefty fee, they were very forthcoming with information about the state of the wizarding world, not only in America but in the world. They loved to gloat about it. And the short answer would be the magical communities have all fallen.”

Harry looked very grave at this.

“One by one.”

“But how? My gran she used to tell me about magic and what it could achieve, how wizards protected themselves with wards, how safe all those places were?!“ The hippie prick was completely aghast.

“Most wards are designed to keep out living threats... Not dead ones. Wizards are completely ignorant about the happenings in the mundane world and apparently it took them much longer, than the Muggles to grasp the whole extent of the disaster. That you can solve most problems with magic makes you quite reckless. You tend to forget that there are things that magic can't solve.”

“So the wards didn't keep the walkers out?!“ Aaron asked tightly.

“Yes and even worse the parents panicked and pulled their kids out of the schools.” Harry shook his head.

“Isn't that a good thing?” Rick frowned and looked at Car. It seemed like a sensible thing to call your kids home.

“No because there so few of us, children are generally held in high regard... Most magical families used to teach their kids at home. It was quite a feat to convince them to send their kids to a school at all. So these schools are probably some of earth's most secure places. Off the grit, hard to find, century old wards in multiple layers, good supply ways...”

“Ideal places in a world full of walkers, damn. When they got them home...” Rick, the leader and strategist, closed his eyes in pain.
“Yes. Fear shrinks the brain.” Harry shared a joyless look with Aaron.

“There goblins let their clientele sign in blood so they can keep track of possible inheritances. They know, when someone dies... They said that only two percent of their clients are left and they are scattered and far in between.”

“But there are some left...?” Hopeful Jesus looked up.

“Hmmhmm. Harry hummed. “Some of them in Britain. I... I needed to know if my friends were still alive. I needed to make sure that...”

“... That the people who hurt you were really gone.” Rick finished for the green eyed teen with soft eyes. “You needed closure.”

Harry nodded with a heavy sigh. “Yeah... So I negotiated with the goblins to send me to their London branch.”

Glenn choked. “Really you travelled over the Atlantic?!”

“Not directly. I used an international portkey, instant teleportation.” Harry smiled at his stunned surprise.

“Wicked!” Glenn grinned.

“Yes quite!” Harry joked. “From London, I went to Surrey to my aunt’s old house and retrieved my wand and some personal stuff. From there I flew to Scotland.”


“A wonderful firebolt! This state-of-the-art racing broom sports a streamlined, superfine handle of ash, treated with a diamond-hard polish and hand-numbered with its own registration number. Each individually selected birch twig in the broomtail has been honed to aerodynamic perfection, giving the Firebolt unsurpassable balance and pinpoint precision. The firebolt has an acceleration of 150 miles an hour in ten seconds and incorporates an unbreakable Braking Charm.” Harry quoted rapidly, green eyes a bit dreamy.

Silence.

“Oh my, this is precious.” Aaron cooed. “You really fly on a broom, like Sabrina.”

“Yeah but he talks about it, like Daryl about his bike”

“Ma bike doesn't go 150 miles and certainly not in ten sec.” Daryl groused. “Sound like a death trap.”

“Only to those, who don't know what they’re doing.” Harry grinned broadly, a wicked glint in his
eyes. “I'm really good flyer. I only fell once but that was because of special circumstances.”

Right now he looked like a normal reckless teenager, wild and carefree. It was an addicting look on
him, Daryl decided. And if the blush on the hippie picks face was anything to go by, he wasn't the
only one who thought so.

Asshole better not try anything.

Jesus had a teasing smirk on his full lips. “Oh so your good on a broom? There are not many men
confident enough to claim that.” He practically purred with wiggling eyebrows.

Harry's reaction was instant, with wide eyes and pale as a ghost he jerked away from the flirting,
long-haired bastard. Daryl felt hot anger in him, how dared that bastard?! Growling madly Daryl
started to move...

But before anything else could happen, a paperback book swished through the group and hit the
wannabe ninja Jesus on the head with a dull thump.

Harry gave a startled hiccupping laugh, as everyone else starred at the fallen book completely
stunned.

“Turn the heat down or I'll be forced to throw a bucket of cold water on you.” Aaron chided the
handsy prick with narrowed eyes. “We don't make such badly worded sexual innuendoes at Harry.
It's bad taste.”

For a moment Paul looked bewildered, before all colour drained from his face and his cyan eyes
widened in horror.

He had forgotten...

Daryl was a bit envious, he would never be able to forget about the terrible things Harry had gone
through.

“I'm sorry freaking out over such a small thing.” The teen bashfully tried to apologise.

“No! No, I'm the one, who's sorry!” At least the ninja hippie prick seemed genuinely sorry.

What followed was a tense and awkward silence, with Harry and Paul fidgeting.
Until Sasha cleared her throat. “Why did you go to Scotland?”

“Oh... Uhm my old school is there.”

“You went to your school? Whyyy?” Carl whined.

“For the books.” Harry laughed at Carl's disgusted expression. “Let's not forget that I had only four out of seven years of education. And I’m not talking about math or literature. No I'm talking about potions, charms, transfiguration, runes, defence, healing... Magical theory and important practical knowledge. Magic can go horrible wrong, if you don't know what you're doing. So I had no choice but to make sure that I’ll learn what I need to know. So yes books!” Harry’s expression was wistful.

“But also because Hogwarts has been my first home. My refuge. The first place I felt anything close to belonging for the first time. If for nothing else I needed to say goodbye.” Harry’s expression was wistful.

“Have you found what you were looking for?” Sasha asked in sympathy.

“I found a lot more than I had hoped.” Harry admitted. “The school wasn't as empty as I had feared.”

“Three professors and the nurse were still there looking out for maybe a dozen of their pupils. Under them was one of my best friends, Hermione.” At the bright smile on Harry's face, Daryl felt his stomach drop, maybe Harry wasn’t here to stay, maybe he had just come to say goodbye to them...

And after that he would leave them behind, vanishing back to a place, where Daryl wouldn’t be able to follow him. Swallowed up by the world he belonged to...

His first home. His best friend. Education. Safety. A past and a future.

How could old, dirty, redneck Daryl compare to that?

***

Carol wanted to get away from these nutters.

The Kingdom and the King!

Idiots the whole lot of them. It reminded her of Sophia and how she used to pretend that she was a princess and that strong, brave knights would come on white horses and save them from Ed.

It had been a sign. A sign that she hadn't done enough to protect her daughter or herself for that matter. Back then Carol had hold steadfast to the belief that Sophia would be alright as long as Ed didn't beat her too.

But how could any child be alright, when they heard how their mother gets beaten until she cries...
and screams in fear, when they see how their father insults and ridicules their mother every day?!

Carol understood now that the answer to those questions was an easy one: They can't be!

When she thought back to these days she didn't recognize the weak woman she had been anymore. It was like she had said to Daryl once, back in the prison she had become the woman she should always have been. But it had taken the dead of her abusive husband and the shock of losing her precious daughter to get there. To find that strength in herself. She wished every day that she could have changed earlier that she could have been stronger, when Sophia had needed her!

These people here at the kingdom, they looked like fools to her. Like children playing pretend.

But Morgan seemed to like them. He could relate to the peaceful atmosphere here, something that filled Carol only with doubt and distain. Where he saw a future and harmony, she could only detect weakness and futile illusions. So she had called upon that fake mask, she had adopted for those first months in Alexandria.

She would play the meek house wife, weak and inconspicuous, and with that pleasant smile she would become invisible again. And when the time came, she would leave this foolish place... Without Morgan.

She didn't want to love anyone any more. To love meant, that she would have to kill, to protect, who and what she loved. And she just couldn't do that anymore. She couldn't be that person anymore. And she wouldn't.

So she sat among piles of washing in this stupid wheelchair and listened with a friendly smile that was starting to hurt her cheeks, as a plumb girl with caramel skin and a Hidschab tattled on and on about other residents.

“And just who might you be?” A haughty voice sniffed behind them in a distinctive British accent.

What?!

Carol hadn’t heard that accent since… Harry. The sweet teenager that had saved her family more than once and that had become part of said family himself. But in the end Harry had been integrated into a growing list of children, that had had died under her care and watch...

Sophia… Patrick… Mika… Lizzie… Harry… Sam… I tried to look out for them but in the end I lost them all. Forever the mother without a child...

A glance over her shoulder confirmed that this time the source of the British accent was female.
The woman behind her was very... stiff. She was tall and very thin with a rigid posture. Her dirty blond hair had been pulled into an old fashioned bun and her lips were pressed into a thin line. Her face and her neck were both a bit too long to be attractive and her skin just too sallow.

“Hello Petunia! How are you today? This is Carol. She's new.” Nabila greeted the woman good naturally.

*Petunia?!* Carol recognized that name…

The British woman dragged a dismissive glance over the plump younger woman, before she turned her attention at Carol with an obviously faked interest.

“Hello Carol. Do you intend to stay here?” Petunia asked noisily and a forced smile revealed too big teeth. Nabila insecurely stuttered and blushed at the blatant refusal from the older woman to acknowledge her.

*Bitch!*

“Hello. Glad to meet you. Your accent is very nice where are you from?” Carol forced herself to greet the rude woman.

Petunia looked even less friendly than before, her expression pinched and sour that Carol had dodged her prying.

“England. I used to live in Surry close to London.” She snipped.

“Oh. How did you end up here?” Now it was Carol’s turn to ask inquisitive, giving her voice a harmless and empathic tone.

“We came to America for a vacation. With my fam... My husband and my son.” Suddenly Petunia’s pale complexion nearly turned a greyish yellow, when she spoke about her husband and son.

Fighting for composure Carol forced herself to exhale.

*Petunia. Form England. Here for a vacation with her family…*

That sounded like a lot of coincidences. But Carol had to be sure, if this was indeed, who she thought her to be…

“What happened to your family? Are they here with you?” Carol inquired carefully, since she already guessing the answer, she whispered in apparently shared pain.

“No...” The horse faced woman replied with a wobbling under lip. “They... I lost them both.” She sobbed. “Oh, My husband and son were both such handsome and well-built men. The food
rationing and what we're eating here. It would have been impossible for them. My husband liked things to be orderly. That we are forced to live with such utter nonsense, he wouldn't have stood for it.” The horse faced woman lamented.

Nabila stiffened beside Carol at Petunia’s dismissive attitude towards their home and shelter. And she was right too! Even if all of this was foolish, people lived well in this community! There was no reason to complain about the food.

“That must have been dreadful. All these terrible things were happening and to be this far from home!” Faking as much sympathy as she could Carol cooed at the stupid bitch. “I lost my Ed too. God I miss that stupid, wonderful man very day. But he liked his food and drink little too much sometimes. He had a bit much around the belly. He wasn't as fit as he should have been in all this.” Carol shook her head in mock grief.

“Real men need a bit meat on their bones, you know.” Petunia assured her quickly. It seemed that Carol had struck the right chord. The British woman was now switching into a model of an upper middle class house wife. Staidly and subservient to her husband and dictated to a strict demand of smothering, conservative normality.

“Here I have a picture of them.” For a little moment, there was small light on Petunia’s face, giving her a nicer look.

Looking at a picture from a theme park near Atlanta, Carol had to bite back an incredulous snort... ‘Handsome’ and ‘well-built’ were hardly the words she would have used to describe the certainly obese blond man with the walrus moustache and the also heavily overweight, blond teenage boy in the photo.

And another cue, Atlanta!

She felt sick at the thought that this woman had withheld food from Harry but her own son nearly looked as wide as he was high. Trying to keep her composure, she coughed a few times before she smiled at the British woman.

“Yes, very handsome; both of them. How did you lose them if you don't mind me asking?” Carol wasn’t letting up, giving Petunia the feeling that they were the same...

“Oh my Vernon and Duddley!” A sob rattled the skinny woman.

Vernon! Aunt Petunia and uncle Vernon. There was no doubt, this had to be Harry’s aunt! And yet she hasn’t even mentioned her nephew. Didn’t even admit that he was with them...

“We went to Washington, but then there were road blocks everywhere and Vernon tried to make these people understand that we needed to get through! But they wouldn't listen. And then a whole
herd of... These things came and he tried to protect us, our son and me. They tore him to pieces. And Duddley and I were running, as fast as we could but he... There were so many of them. I held his hand as I ran, because I was afraid to lose sight of him... I held his hand!” A desperate and haunted look flew over Petunia’s face.

“I didn't let go of his hand, I didn't! I didn't! And when the knights found me I was still holding it. I never let go of his hand! I still had his hand. I buried it here!”

There was something insane in Petunia’s eyes as she relayed her story. The madness of a grieving mother that had lost her child in the most horrible way... It was a state of mind that Carol knew all too well.

The grey hair woman had to grind her teeth. She didn't want to feel sympathy for his awful woman that had abused, neglected and locked away her nephew in a cupboard. But the grief over losing a child, like that... It resonated in her, making her eyes water and her chest uncomfortable tight.

She might have abused her nephew but she also loved her own son dearly...

“My deepest condolences.” Carol choked out. “I lost my daughter... Sophia.”

The facade was crumbling so she did the only thing she could think of… She fled without another word from the other women, not stopping even when Nabila called out to her in worry.

*

Dressed in stolen clothes and packed with some necessary supplies Carol was getting ready to leave this farce behind.

There was just one last thing she had to do...

One last visit to be made.

She found the room easily enough. Even in her sleep Petunia Dursley looked like a stuffy housewife, dressed in a long white monstrosity of a frilly dressing gown. The only thing missing was the head full of curlers...

Carol looked down at the sleeping woman before her and felt torn and sick, gripping the handle of her knife tightly. She must have made a sound because suddenly Petunia woke with a start. Quick as viper Carol pressed the sharp blade to a thin and long throat.
“I would advise you to stay very quiet.” Carol hissed.

Pale and frightened Petunia stared at her out of watery blue eyes. With a cruel detachment Carol compared the woman before her with Harry.

It was an unfair comparison. There were next to no similarities between the tall but plain and unattractive woman and Harry with his small stature and his fine sculptured features. Only in the shape of the eyes and the form of high cheekbones Carol could detect the smallest hints of shared family traits.

“Why? What do you want from me?” Petunia shivered. “I don’t know you! I haven’t done anything!”

“You and I know that you hadn’t come to Atlanta with just your husband and your son, Petunia. We have a mutual acquaintance.”

Whatever colour the British woman had left in her face seemed to drain out of her.

“I don’t know what your tal…”

“Don’t lie to me! You’re bad at it anyway.” Carol whispered coldly, while the knife’s blade pressed a bit more insistent into Petunias overlong neck. Dark red spots appeared on the other woman’s pallid skin and her face transformed from shock to an ugly grimace of open distain and hatred. It was an astonishing change. Carol was somehow thankful to see it… to remind herself more firmly that this wasn’t just another grieving mother and wife but a woman that had hurt her own nephew since he had been a toddler.

“That freak is still alive?!” Petunia spat out. “How is it fair, when good upstanding people like our wonderful husbands and my lovely children had to die when this… abortion got to live on?!?” Watery blue eyes were narrowed in contempt, glaring fierce up at Carol, when there had been nothing but fear in the weak housewife before.

“My husband has been a bastard that abused me and my daughter just like your wonderful family did with Harry.” Carol hissed at her, it only earned her a dismissive snort.

“We tried everything to make a normal person out of the boy, but he was already rotten at the core, like his parents. Freaks the whole lot of them. Has he sent you to finish me off, now?”

Something close to hatred boiled in Carol. How dared that woman to speak about Harry like that?! Harry who had been so soft and had cared so much about others? What made a woman hate a child with such… dictation?

“He isn’t alive. Not anymore at least…” Carol told Petunia and a fresh wave of regret and grief washed over her.

A disturbing mixture of consternation and grim satisfaction played over the face of Harry’s aunt.

“Good riddance!” She hissed in cold spitefulness.
In the face of such blatant disregard for someone as sweet as Harry, who had been through so much in life and got so little out of it, Carol felt something snapping in her.

That was the reason she couldn’t love anymore! This burning feeling in her chest, as if her heart had been replaced with red hot iron.

To love meant to burn, whenever the people close to her heart were hurt like this. And Carol was no longer a woman that could stand by and watch… hoping everything would be alright. That weak woman had died with Sophia.

That woman killed those, who were a threat to her family!

*  

Petunia Dursley. Widow. Orphaned mother. Sister to a green eyed witch. Aunt to a beautiful boy that she had never wanted to meet, let alone to raise.

Ever since the headmaster had replied to her letter, telling her that she couldn’t go to Hogwarts, the only thing Petunia had ever wanted was to live normal. It was the only thing she could have, when magic had taken her sister, the attention of her parents and when it had filled her with steady a fear that this family secret could turn everyone else she loved also away from her.

Magic was the problem. It made freaks out of people! Vernon and her had tried all they could to stomp it out of the boy!

But with no avail and then he had procced to bring… this travesty into her life! Into her home!

When she had come to the kingdom she had lost everything! Had lived through nightmare after nightmare.

But right now she felt only paralyzing fear, as she looked into the icy blue eyes of Carol Peletier.

A fellow widow and orphaned mother.

A woman with steel in her eyes and in her hand.

Chapter End Notes

So the explanation! Chapter 18 was a monster to write, only surpassed by chapter 19
so far ^^’
I hope I didn’t mess the explanations up but too badly.

As for the last part… When I started this story, I had already killed all the Dursleys in my head but then a reader on asked for a confrontation…
And it got me thinking… I liked the idea of Carol and Petunia in a confrontation...
Those two very different mothers, meeting each other. After that the idea stuck and I had to write it. I hope you like it!
Chapter 19

(A few months ago)

Harry couldn't remember much about those first days after he had left Alexandria. His body had been a mess of bruises inside and out. Pete hadn't held back, when he had attacked Harry. The ass had choked him, until the teen had lost consciousness.

+++Flashback++++

Merlin, waking up hurt!

Greedy and choking, he had inhaled precious air.

He had been alone then…

He had barely registered what happened around him.

The ripping and tearing sounds of exploding cushions, seemed to come from far away. With his throat and neck on fire, coughing and hacking he stumbled into the kitchen, where he freed himself from his bonds.

He had ignored the shattering of every glass in the cupboards, letting his wayward magic lay ruin to the house.

He had been to numb to really process everything but damn! He could feel the house around him shaking... The tattoos burned like hot irons on his wrists.
Tick... Tack... Tick... Tack...

He had been practically crawling on his way back to the Grimes house, his head still dizzy and his thoughts all over the place. He hadn't felt this bad since forever... Disgusting and broken.

“…I refuse to fall prey to anyone ever again. Be it walkers or men!” What a bloody laugh.

He stumbled under the ice cold shower, carelessly throwing his clothes on the growing heap next to it. He washed himself mechanically. He did not dare to look at his body and without the mirror he didn't need to face the scarecrow in the reflection.

Clear your head! Clear your bloody head! Don't lose your shit now! Keep it together! Just a little bit longer!

Tick... Tack... Tick... Tack...

Outside in the living room he heard the distinct sound of another vase breaking. The taste of magic heavy on his tongue, small jolts of electric energy were sizzling over his skin, burning like invisible flames and hissing like angry snakes. The overwhelming pressure of his magic raging against its bonds and the vicious rise up of the seal against it... The antagonistic energies were pulling him apart. Harry felt frayed at the seams and ready to burst under its force.

Merlin! He felt dazed and intoxicated by the power flooding his system, drowning him...

Tick... Tack... Tick... Tack...

A tile cracked before his eyes.

Bloody hell!

He was losing control... He couldn't get a grip on his magic. At all!

Fucking...

He was running out of time! He needed to leave.

Now!

Before he would burst like a pinata... And destroy the only important thing in the world he had left,
is family.

He had to stop procrastinating and he needed to man up.

He needed to leave.

Harry couldn’t remember how he had made his way to the attic but when he came to his senses he stood transfixed before Daryl’s hunting knife. Battered and used. If he left now... He wouldn't even be able to say goodbye to Daryl. Daryl would come back and find him gone...

Tears were blurring his sight and without thinking Harry pocketed the blade. It would be the only thing he would take with him. The only comfort he would allow himself. With its subtle weight resting in his pocket, he was already feeling a bit stronger.

With a renewed resolution and heavy heart Harry took a piece of paper and a pen.

It was time to say goodbye...

“My dear family...”

*

The days after were horrible... Spend in a painful daze.

Stumbling onwards...

His only conscious thought to get away from Alexandria as far as possible.

*Keep walking...*

Tick... Tack... Tick... Tack...

His wayward magic boon and bane at the same time... The energy seemed to attract walkers but also used the corpses an outlet. Calling and disbanding danger at the same time.

Tick... Tack... Tick... Tack...
Harry lost the track of time but he could tell when the 31st of July had arrived...

Tick... Tack...

Tick...

Tack...

The now ever present pressure had him coughing blood in the morning and a pain as horrible as the Cruciaturs Curse bloomed from his left shoulder down to his right hip bone...

Tick...

Hot, searing, wild agony... It filled everything he was... His head, his body, his heart and his core.

*Tack!

He felt something in him giving away... Shrieking, twisting, burned alive, torn apart until nothing was left of it...

Dying.

He felt relief as a soothing darkness started to creep into his vision...

++++Flashback end++++

* There was it now, the silhouette of a large medieval stronghold, seven-story high with its towers, looming before the full moon. He stood by the black lake starring at the mighty castle and its reflection on the in the glittering water.

Even now, still holding his broom in his hands, observing it from the shore, his mind had already started to reminiscent the great hall, the classroom, the hundred and forty two staircases throughout its many towers and turrets and very deep dungeons on the inside, supported by magic.

Old and beautiful! Magical! His school. His first home.
He could have flown right up to the gate but he had hesitated... He had wanted to enjoy the illusion that the castle was still bustling with students, alight with laughter and warm. Now that he was here, he balked at the reality, that his safe haven had become a still and lost ruin.

That everyone he had loved once was gone now...

He did not know how long he stood there just watching, breathing in the sight of the old towers and the familiar shapes that defined Hogwarts.

But suddenly he blinked... Was that his head playing games with him? Wishful thinking?

No.

There! In the Gryffindor tower... A small light!

_Merlin! Someone was in the castle!_

Before his brain had caught up, Harry's feet had started moving.

Running.

Forgetting that he was a bloody wizard and had one of the best racing brooms in his hand.

Harry was running!

There was life in Hogwarts! Nothing else mattered!

Over the grounds, along the black lake, past the green houses and the whipping willow, his feet were practically flying over the stones of the viaduct, until he stood in front of old heavy gate flanked by the two checkpoint towers that guarded the Entrance Courtyard.

As he laid his hand on the ancient wooden door, he felt Hogwarts’ magic...

Familiar, warming him up to his core...Singing and humming in delight the castle recognized him as one of its own, like a mother hugging and greeting her long lost child, it settled over him.

It was an exhilarating feeling that brought tears to his eyes. To be welcomed home with such joy...

Under Harry’s tender touch the gate opened with a loud creaking noise, revealing a covered stone cloister with an open colonnade running around the quadrangle on the inside.

As he stared at the familiar structure, Harry remembered sunny days, when he had sat there in those alcoves, watching as Ron and Hermione squabbled about homework. Looking around the
In the courtyard, he could hear the echo of childish laughter as the Weasley twins had thrown snowballs on him and Ron. Tears of happiness and grief were running down his face, as he stood in the place where Hermione had help him learn....

“Who are you? And how did you get in here?” The stern demand had him wheeling around.

There was a woman with him in the courtyard. She was tall, rather severe-looking and most likely around seventy years old. Her light skin showed more wrinkles than the last he had seen her but her hair was combed back into its usual tight bun.

“Professor McGonagall!” Harry couldn’t trust his eyes.

“Mister Potter!? Oh merlin!! Merlin, my dear boy! You're alive!” She stammered as she walked briskly to him.

“Mister Potter...” She whispered again her voice tight with emotion, as she reached for him with shaking hands. Harry flinched back from her in conditioned instinct. The obvious elusión of her touch seemed to sadden her.

“Oh my, what happened to you Mister Potter.” Her mouth was thinning and tears were swimming in her eyes, Harry could see his former professor fighting to keep her composure.

“It's good to see you, Professor!” He smiled ruefully at her.

“We thought, we lost you. We lost so many!” McGonagall breathed out, carefully dabbing her eyes with a large tartan patterned handkerchief.

“I...”

“Oh my goodness! Harry?!” A shrill yell rang out. And before he could move, he got enveloped into bear hug, his vision completely obscured by bushy brown hair that tickled his nose.

The closeness of the sudden physical contact nearly choked him, making him dizzy and light headed. He was about to start hyperventilating, when the young woman in his arms noticed his predicament.

Small but deft hands grabbed his shoulders and shoved him far enough away so the young woman in front of him could look him in the eyes.

Inhaling greedily, he catalogued her face... It had been easier with McGonagall, because to Harry she had always looked old.

But the girl in front of him was in her late teens now, her hair a frizzy mess, her incredible intelligence shining through her soulful brown eyes and her smiling lips revealed front teeth that Harry knew had been a lot bigger once. She looked different after two and a half years but there was no doubt... This was Hermione Granger.

His best friend. His confident. His sister, in all but blood.

She was alive!
“Mione!” He choked out.

“Oh Harry, you look awful. What happened? Where were you? Dumbledore said you were in America. That the Dursleys had taken you with them on a vacation... He said that he couldn't... That you were... That you were probably dead... And I... We...” She rambled nearly in his hysterics.

“Hush, Hermione! Breathe!” Despite his inner tension he couldn't hold back a chuckle. This was his friend.

“Dumbledore was right...” Harry started to say.

“Professor Dumbledore or Headmaster” Professor McGonagall admonished in a crisp voice. Harry frowned. “Yes Professor Dumbledore was right. He bound my magic...”

“... HE DID WHAT?!” Both women shrieked in appalled disbelief.

“... To hide me from any fugitive Death Eaters. It was only supposed to be for three weeks. But then well ...” Harry waved his hand around with a sigh.

“Yes, the inferi.” Hermione nodded.

“The what?” Harry blinked and Hermione switched promptly into full lecture mode.

“An Inferius is a dead body, reanimated by a Dark magic. Inferi are created through Necromancy spells. Due to their status as being unfeeling dead, the Inferi are immune to bodily damages such as slashing, and have great physical strength, enough to kill a human or drag them away. Due to their superior strength and surprising speed, they are especially dangerous en masse. Its limitations are, however, obvious; it has no will and no brain of its own, and will not be able to think its way out of unforeseen trouble. Inferi are creatures of the dark, they dislike light and heat. No spell has been found to render dead flesh impervious to burning.”

All those information were rattled on in mind boggling speed, so obviously quoted from a textbook with a light air of a haughty know-it-all attitude.

Merlin, how he had missed her! A broad grin stretched over his whole face.

But when Harry thought about her actual words… He started to frown.

“Those aren't Inferi, Mione!”

“What? Of course they are, Mister Potter! We might have failed to locate the dark wizard who created them, but surely...” The old woman looked down at him with a disapproving expression.

“Have you seen them?” Harry asked them aghast.

Both women shared an uncomfortable look.

“No we've heard the news about them... How they attacked and killed so many people but few
have come all the way to Hogwarts and we haven't left...” Hermione admitted.

“The students and teachers that left, never came back, Mister Potter. So we decided to stay behind and to protect Hogwarts and the handful of students that haven't been called home. Severus goes down to Hogsmeade to get rid of any... threads.”

The stern professor told him, her bewildered expression told him more about their lack of knowledge over the state of the world, than all their explanations probably would have.

“And he hasn't told you that these ‘Inferies’ out there have absolutely no problem with light or fire, on the contrary it draws them in, it attracts them. As do strong smells or loud sounds. They are slow, not fast. And even if have no intelligence, they are driven by a need to feed. They travel for it... And they form herds for it.” Harry shook his head at them.

He couldn’t believe it, had he really come to Hogwarts, to find them completely ignorant of the state of the world around them.

“They feed?” Hermione asked, her pale and horrified expression a stark contrast to the morbid curiosity in her eyes. “What do they eat? An Inferi does not need to eat!”

“They eat the living.” He told them with ruthless candour.

How could they not know!? These were the two most intelligent people he had ever met. How could have turned a blind eye on the things around them!?

“They do not just attack people, they eat them. And their bite is infectious. Their bits and scratches can be lethal.” He looked straight into Hermione’s eyes, when he said those words.

They needed to understand!

His friend paled even more at this, eyes wide as saucers, while McGonagall made unbecoming stuttering sounds for such a normally collected woman.

“But Harry...” He could see the wheels turning under Hermione’s bushy hair.... “That sounds like an infection...”

“Because it is! The Muggles have started to look into it. After a person dies the virus is still active. They were not sure if it's viral, bacterial or fungal but it attacks the brain like meningitis but it restarts the brain stem.”

“Mister Potter, I'm not as acquainted with Muggles science, as I used to be as a young girl but are you telling us that these things are alive?!” McGonagall had pursed her lips.

“Maybe not alive per say, because the main part of their brain remains dead... But if the brain stem is indeed active it certainly means that part of them lives and Harry is right. It means they are not Inferi. It's a disease.” Hermione was already deep in thought, her eyes unseeing and her feet already moving in the direction of the library.

“Yes, and it's airborne.” Harry said, knowing he was driving the last nail in the coffin but how
could he not, when they were so utterly clueless!

**

But Hermione wouldn't have been Hermione, if she hadn't started to ask questions... Millions of them.

“Where have you been? What happened to you?

*Oh my god, you’re so thin! Have you been sick?

Why did Dumbledore bind your magic?

*How did you survive? What else do you know about those things? How can they be killed? Is there a cure?

*I need to go to the library! There has to be a book on that!”

All those questions asked in rapid fire, filled Harry with fond exasperation and a fair bit of anxiety. He loved his sister and he had missed her dearly but right now, confronted with this over motivated interrogation, he longed for Daryl and his silent understanding. The hunter would have sensed his mental overload and would have made sure that very one else would back off.

“Oh Harry, why are you crying?” She had asked him in worry as silent tears had run down his cheeks.

Because Hogwarts was home but not...

Because Hermione was family but not...

Because...

Because Harry worried about Rick, Carl, Judi and all the others...

Because Harry missed Daryl so much, it made his heart hurt...

Because he couldn't find the words to tell Hermione any of that.

After that the bushy haired witch had forced him to Madame Pomfrey. The mediwitch had taken one good look at him, before she clicked her tongue in clear displeasure and ushered him resolutely onto one of the beds. With a few well practiced wand movements and incantations a very long list of diagnoses and health issues appeared in the matrons hands. As she scanned the paper, the formidable woman had cursed as colourful as Abraham on his best days and even Harry had blushed a little.
“You will stay right here in this bed!” She had commanded rigorously before she stomped off to the potions cabinet, muttering angrily under her breath about foolish old man and reckless plans.

**

As it turned out besides McGonagall and Madame Pomfrey, there were Snape and Flitwick still left in the castle as well as a handful of Muggle-borne students that whose parents hadn't called them back home when the virus had started to spread.

And most surprisingly Neville and a girl named Luna, who was a bit odd.

And man, if he had thought that Hermione had changed, than Neville was barely recognizable. At 5 feet 10 and with broad shoulders he had lost all of that chubby baby fat and... Well he looked good.

“My gran said that Hogwarts was the safest place for me. She refused to take me home. She stopped writing a week after.” Neville had confined to him a few days later.

Ron and the Weasleys… well that had been another story. Molly had apparently called all the kids home because Arthur had been hurt on an assignment. As an employee for the Ministry in the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office, Arthur had probably been one of the first wizards to encounter the undead. Hermione said that the letter that had called Ron, Ginny and the twins home had spoken of a bad fever… Nobody had heard from any of them after that.

Hermione cried when she told Harry this, before Harry had told her about the walkers she had hoped... That maybe...

Harry’s mind conjured the picture of a reanimated Mr. Weasley attacking his sleeping family.

Harry grieved with her. The Weasleys were gone. Their friend was dead.

When Harry had carefully asked after her parents the girl had just shaken her head. The last time she had tried to send them a letter the owl had just turned its head away….

Dumbledore had apparently left the school, when the ministry had fallen and had never made it back...

His portrait had been tight lipped about it, only speaking to Snape much to the new headmistress’ obvious displeasure. Harry learned that it had been on the late headmasters’ order that neither staff nor the remaining students had left the school grounds after the disease had broken out. Most likely to keep them protected in the well-warded and isolated castle.

They had been completely out of touch with the world, blind, deaf… ignorant. The teachers had paled when Harry told them about the MACUSA and the information he had gathered from the goblins. They had hoped that part of the silence in the wizarding world had come because most wizarding’s communities had gone into lock down, to hear that they had been overrun, that only two percent of the goblins clientele was still alive…
It had left them all badly shaken.

*Seeing Snape in the Great Hall for the first time had been a painful shock. Harry hadn't seen the man since the night Voldemort had fallen and the teen had avoided thinking about him as far as possible.

“Look at me.”

Harry had to grit his teeth. Of course it had been necessary that double agent had kept his role up or the Death Eaters would have killed them both in that cell.

Harry knew this… But Merlin, he was allowed to be angry and disgusted with the potion master, even if the man had probably saved his life in the long run.

Too bad for them both that the old, but sneering bastard was Harry’s best shot at getting answers…

Snape had tried to avoid Harry, like the plague since the teen had set foot into the school. But the green eyed boy had made it his mission to hunt the old dungeon bat down and had decided to corner the evasive man before his quarters.

“Potter!” The man uttered Harry’s name like a curse.

“Good morning, Severus!” Harry greeted nonchalantly.

“You insolent…” Harry glared harshly at the greasy haired man.

“I think we have left such nonsense behind us in a dungeon in Little Hangleton, don't you think, Sir?” He could keep neither the sharpness nor the light mocking out of his voice. Snape was grinding his teeth, his pallid face contorting in an angry grimace. “Now, you listen…”

“I'm not here to talk with you about those four weeks I spent in Voldemort’s tender care…”

“Don't say his name!” The potions master hissed.

“... I want answers. What happened to the remaining Death Eaters? What happened to Hogwarts? And don't give me that bullshit you told Professor McGonagall. You're too intelligent and you know too much about defence to mistake a walker for an Inferi. So what did you and our late headmaster play at?”

“Arrogant little…” Harry was getting sick of this. This was the same old bullshit that Snape had always tried with him.

“Oh save your breath. I'm tired of your shit and diversions, sir. I went through hell thanks to Dumbledore’s schemes and I demand to know what for! I was captured and raped by a band of
degenerates for months, without any means to protect myself. I deserve to know, why I had to go
through all that!” Harry growled ignoring Snape’s violent flinch.

The older man closed his eyes as his sallow face lost even more colour, lips pulled into a thin line.
Snape had never looked that old and defeated to Harry.

“Dumbledore swore that you would be safe... We used the time to hunt the remaining Death Eaters
and… other things… We got most of them, but then came these things. They were attracted by
anything loud, bright, strong odours and magic. They... I saw them devour Diagon Alley. I got
barely away... St. Mungos and the ministry fell in the first week after the outbreak. Nobody
understood these strange Inferi-like things. Nobody thought that they could be infectious. The
parents were in panic most of them called the students home. But normal wards don’t keep them
out... They are dead… and not magical… they got just through. We couldn't do anything but to
hide our remaining students. So I agreed with Dumbledore to stay here and to keep everything
under lock and key. There is no sense in fighting a losing battle. This plaque will most likely
eradicate most if not all muggles. We just have to wait until this whole thing has run its course.”
Harry wanted to scream!

Those utter fools, no wonder they were all gone! Any place with less protection than Hogwarts or
in a more populated area, would be long gone by now...

“You idiot! You had not all the information! The infection is airborne. We're all infected! You
can't just sit this out, because it won't stop. This won’t be the end of all Muggles, this is going to be
the end of mankind and humanity.”

“Merlin!” Snape heaved.

“Yes, you miscalculated, again! Now tell me what you and that senile fool have done.” Harry
hissted.

“It might be best if we relocated this conversation to the Headmaster’s office.” His old Potions
Professor sighed.

Harry raised eye brow.

“Dumbledore’s picture is there.” Severus bade him to follow.

The Headmaster’s office looked just as Harry remembered it. A large and beautiful circular room,
full of funny little noises. A number of curious silver instruments stood on spindle-legged tables,
whirring and emitting little puffs of smoke. The walls were covered with portraits of old
headmasters and headmistresses, most of them asleep in their frames.

But there was a new large painting, portraying …

“Harry, my boy!” Dumbledore called out pleasantly surprised.

“Don’t call me that!” Harry glared at the old man.

“Harry...” The old man looked forlorn. “I see... I feared that the last years have not been kind to
“You think?!” Harry snarled bitingly at the portrait. “Without my magic, lost in a foreign country with my aunt and uncle, who couldn't ditch me fast enough, when the world went to shit! Yes! My last few years were just peachy.”

“Harry... I...” Harry didn’t want to hear those stupid and empty phrases.

“Headmaster, I'm not here for your apologies. They could never make up for damage I sustained there.” Harry interrupted the old wizard coldly. “And despite all that, I found people that cared for me, saved me from withering and rotting away alive. People, I endangered with my mere presence, because the weakening seal turned me into a walking time bomb, when my 17th birthday approached.” Harry hissed with barely concealed anger.

Dumbledore and Snape both had paled drastically at his last words.

“What?! Your magic was bound the whole time!? Foolish old man!” Snape sneered in rage at the portrait. “You said you protected him! That's no protection!”

“Severus, forgive an old…” Dumbledore lowered his head in earnest dejection.

“I don't care about your quarrels! I want answers! What happened? And why was my magic ripping me apart!? Why did I die for a minute?”

“You died for a minute?” Harry hesitated at Dumbledore’s... hopeful tone. Perplexed he looked at Snape, who starred scowling at the carpet, but seemed... oddly relieved.

“What the bloody hell is going on here?!?” Harry growled at them, he was so sick of all this secretiveness.

“But both men ignored Harry's apparently useless raging, because they were much too busy staring at his forehead.

“What....? What's going on?” Why hell could these two never just fucking answer?

“It's gone!” Dumbledore breathed.

“Yes, it's gone.” Snape just slumped into a chair robes billowing around his tall form, head resting in one of hands. The old wizard in the picture was resting his body on the floor. Relieve wasn't enough to describe the feeling both Dumbledore and the ex-spy radiated.

“What is gone? You will tell me this right now!” Harry thought he was losing his mind.
Finally Dumbledore looked at him with grave blue eyes.

“Harry, do you know what a Horcrux is?”

... 

The following discussion was mind boggling... Horcruxes! Pieces of a soul stored away, an anchor to life, a mortgage to immortality. 4

Voldemort had ripped his soul apart by ice cold murder, intentionally. Seven fucking bloody times!

Snape and Dumbledore had spent months after the Dark Lord’s fall, hunting down Death Eaters and five of these dark artefacts...

Because Harry had already destroyed one... The diary!

That had left a locket, a ring, a cup, a diadem and Nagini, the snake...

The dark enchantments on two of the Horcruxes had weakened Dumbledore so much that he had fallen, when the dead had come for the living... The headmaster had died in the atrium of the ministry, ripped apart by the walkers flooding the building. It sounded much like what had happened in New York to the MACUSA.

It had left the last Horcrux...

Voldemort had made *Harry* an unintentional Horcrux! Because of a bloody prophecy! Harry had carried a piece of his parent's murderer in his body!

He was close to hyperventilating.

...until said piece had effectively died on Harry's 17th birthday. Hysterical laughter alternating with desperate snobs shook his body!

*He was a freak! Merlin! His whole life was just one big freak show!*?

How could anyone deal with so much shit!

And Dumbledore had known all this... He had known and never said anything. Harry had asked so many times and had been fobbed off with well-meaning platitudes and empty promises.

“All those years... You raised me like a pig for slaughter, haven't you?” Harry asked numbly,
beside him Snape flinched at the accusation.

“Harry, I’m so sorry.” At least the old man sounded really sorry…

“What exactly are you sorry for? That you left me with the Dursleys, that you lied to me again and again, that I lost Sirius and Remus, that you bound my magic?” Harry asked without heat. He felt so incredibly tired.

“I thought you would be safe, as long as you lived with your aunt. Maybe you weren't as well cared for as I hoped but at least you would be safe from Voldemort there. I watched you bravely struggling through so many trials each year at Hogwarts. Harry, you endured so much already, things grown men would have balked at... I should have told you, why Voldemort had marked you, why he came after you as a baby. But I didn't... How could I have beard to put any more pressure on you after all the pain you suffered? I thought I would have more time. I...”

“Stop talking, please.” Harry spat. He couldn't take this anymore. He was sick and tired of all this. “I know you meant well. But your good intentions are inconsequential now. I don't care anymore!”

“Oh my boy! You care so much you feel as though you will bleed to death with the pain.”

“Shut up!” Harry barked.

“He never does.” Snape huffed darkly. “He never knew when to shut up.”

Harry shook his head in frustration.

He needed to leave... He needed to breathe and to think.

***

Sleepless Harry haunted the castle corridors at night, silent and pale, the ghosts his only company, as he moved like one of them. Rest evaded him since he had set foot over Hogwarts threshold.

Nightmares about the Claimer and Pete plagued him as soon as he closed his eyes. And since he was back in Britain... The memories of those four weeks in Voldemort’s dungeons were a persistent presence in his mind, too.

Whispers of ‘Look at me’ and a voice screaming and begging, circled through his head, leaving him feeling raked and exhausted.

Hermione and Madame Pomfrey had both threatened to force feed him some dreamless sleep but Harry had vehemently refused.

He had been able to sleep in Alexandria!

Damn it!

Yes, snuggled up in Daryl’s blanket. His traitorous mind supplied.
So he forced himself back into the regimen Denise had once designed for him. He even went regularly to the infirmary, where the nurse would pester him with nutrition potions, potions and spells to stabilize his bones, fix the damage the seal had done to his body and his magical core.

It was taxing...

Pomfrey’s and Hermione’s hawk eyes saw every dark shadow under his eyes and catalogued every flinch and each avoidance of body contact. Harry was sure they had come to their own conclusions. The way Hermione would stare at him sometimes, a heavy sad frown on her face and the hint of tears in her eyes. The way Pomfrey clicked her tongue in frustration at his behaviour but had begun to announce whenever she even moved in his direction...

They knew...

But Harry couldn't bring himself to talk to them. Not like he had talked to Denise or Eric… or Daryl…

He just couldn't find the words to tell his sheltered sister about the feral wildness that ruled the world now. He couldn't bring himself to destroy the girl that had once knitted hats for house elves... He just couldn’t.

He wanted to preserve that girl. The know-it-all, with too much respect for authorities, the kind girl, who thought everyone should be treated fairly.

And at the same time he resented her for all that. Her ignorance, her normalcy and her pursuit to make him the boy he once was...

And who he could never be again.

And who he did not want to be anymore.

He spent his hours studying in the library taking lessons with McGonagall, Flitwick, Hermione and Pomfrey. Snape and he gave each other a wide berth. Both still weighted down by the memories of those four weeks...

And they were both dead set on evading the topic as long as possible.

Transfiguration, Charms, Potions, Ancient Runes and even Arithmancy.

Learning Disappearance was awful... How was it that wizards travelling methods were all so disorienting... and stomach turning?

Harry studied without pause, tried to learn as much as possible. It gave him something useful to do and eased his inner unrest.

It took his mind of all the uncertainties that rules his life at the moment.

But it still left him with the question...
What now?

The Wizarding world was effectively gone. Overrun and decimated by the dead.

The Death Eaters were expunged... Either taken out by Dumbledore and Snape or they had been killed by the walkers. They were effectively gone...

Snape and Dumbledore had destroyed all the Horcruxes that had could have tied Voldemort’s shadow to the living realm and Severus had been able to confirm that Harry’s Horcrux had been destroyed, when the seal broke.

So what was he doing here?

The longer he was roaming through his old home the less it felt like a home... but an overly large cage.

This place belonged to another Harry Potter. A younger, more innocent boy, full of wonder and hope. Not this jaded creature that was filled with angst, despair and horrible memories.

He was lost and he missed his family.

He missed Tilly and Buttons.

He missed Daryl.

So why was he still here?

The answer was as easy as it was embarrassing.

Harry was afraid.

Plain and simple. Paralysed with crippling fear.

Now that he could to go back, he didn't know if he would be able to....

Would or even could his family accept him for what he was? Because Harry couldn't not deny his magic again… And he refused to lie to them or himself like that.

So what if they reacted like the Dursleys?! What if they came to distrust him? What if they started to resent him? To hate him?

Would Glenn and Tara still joke with him? Would Carol and Rick still look out for him? Would Daryl be still...?
No wonder he wasn't sleeping!? Harry rested head on a cool brick wall as he starred out onto the black lake.

Fuck!

***

Hermione couldn’t concentrate. She had read the same paragraph for the fourth time in a row and she would need to read it fifth time…

She watched how Harry sighed for umpteen times. He looked much better, than that first night in the courtyard. Poppy had worked wonders on him, forcing positions and food down his throat, helping him regain his health, at least physically.

He had gained much needed weight, his skin had lost its waxy parlour and his eyes seemed clearer. But emotionally...

Her friend was slipping through her fingers.

Arg... Bloody hell, who was she kidding... Looking at those darkening shadow under his eyes, taking in the wary slump in his shoulders, she had never really gotten him back in first place.

Yesterday she had found him in the early morning, sitting on a windowsill in the fifth floor just starring at the grounds under the rising sun and humming “Hey Jude” under his breath. He had been so lost in thought that he hadn't noticed her right away and Hermione had been able to see Harry's unguarded face for few precious minutes, when he did not hide his feelings from her.

*Harry was sad.*

*Being at Hogwarts made him sad.*

That realization had hit her like a ton of bricks.

Her best friend, her brother was depressed and she didn't even know why, because he hadn't confined in her... He had outright refused to talk to her about what happened to him.

But Hermione had little doubt that Harry had been hurt... Badly. Harry had always been small and slender and the Dursleys had never been kind to her friend, but he had never looked as famished as when had arrived in Hogwarts. Harry had always been shy about physical contact, as if he was unsure if he was aloud such interpersonal comfort, but now he would cringe at the smallest touches, would flinch at every unexpected noise. Constantly searching for personal space and more comfortable in solitude than in company.

Hermione ached for the old, easy companionship, they had shared once. At first she had hoped that it would come back to them...
But now...

She wasn't sure, if Harry even wanted things to be like that again. She knew him still well enough to detect his disapproval, when she had told him that they had hid away from the Inferi. That they had gone on lockdown and had forgotten about the outside world.

Inferi that apparently were no Inferi... but walking undead infected by a disease. A disease that hadn't been researched enough but was most likely airborne and infected them all.

Before, Harry would have been vocal about the things he thought wrong, he would have opened up to her... Wouldn't have isolated himself behind stiff smiles; empty, haunted eyes and insecure but dismissive platitudes... His muteness about all this and his time in America hurt Hermione more than anything else.

He was walling her out.

Even now, when he was sitting beside her, immersed in a book about wards and protective runes. He might be next to her physically but his mind was miles away from Hogwarts.

And she didn't know where...

And Hermione Granger hated not knowing things!

With an impatient huff she slammed her book on the table, violently startling Harry out of his readings. Wide and troubled green eyes stared at her before they glazed over in forced neutrality.

“What's wrong?” He mumbled.

“What's wrong!?” She hissed. “Your practically sleep walking through Hogwarts. You're not really here! And I don't know what I did wrong or how to help you!” She watched him flinch as if she had struck him physically.

But this time she felt grim satisfaction at his reaction, at least now he was looking at her! And while she had feared that he would cloak himself in his muteness and neutrality, he was now scowling heavily at her.

The muscles in his jaws were working but she refused to back down, meeting his glare heads on.

“Tell me, Hermione, what do you see when you look out of that window?” He pointed to library window.

Surprised she let her gaze travel over the school grounds.

“I see Hogwarts. What else would I see? What do you see?” She asked in confusion.

He just sighed at her and stood up to walk over to the window.
“I see a well-protected place, secluded, easy to guard against the dead and the living, with good supply of water and food, enough space to build houses. I see one of the best places for a safety zone, but there is no safety zone, why Hermione? People are dying out there.” Sad green eyes implored to her.

The young witch opened and closed her mouth in wordless helplessness.

“Professor Snape said it was too dangerous to leave the grounds and that the Inferi... Dumbledore was dead... There next to no witches or wizards left... Professor McGonagall said that we needed to protect the school and the International Statute of Secrecy...” She stammered but what hit her most was the sheer disappointment on Harry's face.

“You lived in such a community, didn't you?” She asked carefully. His expression darkened considerably, lips pressed into a thin line. He resembled a displeased professor McGonagall.

“Harry! Please, talk to me.” She pleaded, observing how he fidgeted under her desperate gaze.

Scowling at the floor he started to nibble at his thumb... Something she had never seen him do before... When he suddenly froze and glanced down on the thumb. Very slowly he removed his hand from his face still starring at it, his expression a heart breaking mixture of surprise, grief and longing.

Tears were painting wet trails over his cheeks, but else he was completely still... Transfixed.

Lost.

She could see the cracks tearing through her friend’s composure as more and more soundless tears rolled from his wide green eyes.

This was the way it had to look like when a dam broke. Hermione thought. Tentatively she approached Harry, her hand outstretched in silent comfort.

“Harry?” She whispered carefully, handling him like a nervous hippogriff. But it seemed to be enough...

The dam burst. Emotionally and magically.
The window behind them shattered, blowing the glass shards outwards. Hermione had just the split part of a second to notice Harry’s buckling knees before they gave out under him. Without thinking she gathered him into her arms, pulling him close to her chest, hoping that she could hold him together in all the ways that mattered.

Sobs rattled his slender and small body... Shorter and thinner than her own, fragile in such heart-breaking sadness...

Her friend, who had already endured so much in his life, who had prevailed against so many odds that she had started to take it for granted. But confronted with the breaking dam, she asked herself if maybe Harry couldn't be fixed anymore...

Stroking his unruly raven hair she couldn't help but ask. “Are they dead?”

A shuddering hiccupping inhale and fists that clenched in her robe, Harry froze.

The time, until he exhaled, seemed to stretch uncomfortably long.

“No...” He whispered. “At least not when I left... Now I don't know. It's been months. The world has gotten so dangerous... Maybe they are all dead right now.” He sounded panicked and breathless. Hermione tried to comprehend what he had told her. Life had gotten so uncertain that you couldn't be sure, if your friends and family were still there, when you left them for a few months... Bloody hell!?

“I'm so sorry, Harry.” She said, running her fingers through his tick hair.

But he didn't stop there, like a flood words started to spill from his mouth... About the seal, the Dursleys, being sick and alone in America, the Claimers.... Hermione wanted to retch at the things he hinted at...

And Harry told her about the people who saved him.

Rick, the sheriff and his son, Carl. Michonne, the samurai. Abraham, the soldier. Rosita and Tara. Eugene, the lying genius. Carol, the warrior mother and Sasha, the sniper. Glenn and Maggie. Beth and Noah.

Daryl. The kind but gruff hunter, who made him feel safe and who tended to bite on his thumb, when he was nervous.

Harry had found a family and he had protected them by leaving, without being able to tell them anything.

It was yet another instance in Harry's life, he had shouldered all responsibilities alone. He had tried to do the same for her, but she was glad, he had finally caved. She would sleep badly for a while but it was worth a few dark circles under her eyes, if Harry wasn’t as alone anymore.

Hearing him say all this told her also something else...
“You're not going to stay here, right?” She sighed in defeat.

Harry's head snapped up at her question. Hermione’s heart ached at the vulnerable insecurity in his eyes and the nervous way his teeth worried over his lips.

“I...” He stuttered out.

“It is alright, Harry. These people have become your family. You never had that. The Dursleys were awful to you and the whole mess with Sirius... You're entitled to have a bit of happiness.” She tried to reassure him with teary eyes. The young witch hadn't been prepared for Harry's bitter snort.

“No one is entitled to experience happiness, Hermione. I learned that you have to fight for it or let despair swallow you. Good things don't happen just because you want them to.”

“I... I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you...” She wasn’t sure how she could make any of this right. What to tell him?

“I know you didn't, but that's just the thing... I got the answers I needed. There is no immediate threat left that could endanger them... Nothing holding me back. Just...my own doubts and fears.”

His admission hurt a bit. He wasn't struggling, because he was torn between two homes and he didn't consider her something worth staying for.

He seemed to have noticed her sadness, because he sighed and his eyes had gone soft with sympathy.

“I'm sorry. You will be always my friend but I don't think I can be this person anymore.” He made a wide gesture encompassing the library... No Hogwarts as a whole...!

Hermione closed her eyes against the new flood of bitter pain. He wasn't telling her anything that she hadn't guessed already.

“That boy, you knew... he got lost in the dungeons of Riddle Manor and died on the streets and in woods of Georgia. I changed. I had to bend or I would have broken under the strain of the storm.” He told her, green eyes solemn.

A sad laugh bubble out of her. “The Reed and oak?”

“Yes.” He smiled at her tenderly. How she loved him!

“OK.” She told Harry firmly, smiling in determination.

“What?” He looked at her in bewilderment.

“I said, OK. What do you need?” She asked again.

“What? Hermione?” Harry’s green eyes were so wide behind his dorky glasses.

“What do you need to go back? What do you need to fight for your happiness? Because as much as I would love for you to stay, I sure as hell won't be able to stand the sight of you fading away in
grief and sadness.” She really couldn’t, keeping him here would mean nothing if he was unhappy.

“Mione!” For the first time she could spot a flicker of hope in his eyes, as he sighed her name.

He swallowed heavily, before he rested his body against the cool stone wall behind him and worked through something that looked like a breathing exercise.

“What if they don't want me anymore? What if they react like the Dursleys?” He forced his worries onto the light.

Fury and pity coursed through her.

*Damn those monsters that they had left someone as sweet as Harry with such self-esteem issues.*

On the other hand being a witch had started to weight on her relationship with her parents, too. Living and experiencing such rudimentary different worlds... It had changed things and now her parents were most likely dead.

There was no guaranty that Harry’s new family could handle magic. There billions of ways this could go wrong.

They could be envious, suspicious... Exclude him... Dismiss him. They could try to hurt or kill him.

They could try to use him as a weapon, to exploit him.

Even without anyone enforcing the statue, this was problematic.

So what could she tell him?

“Are they worth it?” She settled for.

“What?” He started at her in bewilderment.

“Is this ragtag group all the trouble worth? Are they worth the risk.”

“Yes.” The answer came promptly, easily. “They're worth it! They're my family”

“Good.” She smiled encouragingly at her friend.

“Then we have much work to do! You missed three years of important education. We need to get you on back on track! And time is precious!”

***

(Back at the Hilltop)
“Why hav’ ya come back, if ya found yer people? Shouldda stayed, where yer were then!” Harry flinched at Daryl’s angry growl. The hunter was pacing like a hungry tiger in front of the old bookshelves.

“Daryl!” Carl hissed in anger at the hunter.

Harry observed older man, who had started to nibble on his thumb, glowering and snarling at his family’s protests. Daryl shoulders were hunched, the handsome face scrunched up in a mask of aggression…but something seemed of. Harry had seen Daryl angry.

But this…

For a split second green eyes met slated blue one, before Daryl avoided his gaze again to glare at the carpet.

Oh! There! Underneath all that aggression… Harry was sure he had seen it. A flicker in those usually so guarded eyes.

*Fear!*

Daryl was afraid… and for one terrible moment Harry thought that Daryl might be afraid *of* him. That would mean that his worst worries were coming true.

There were no words to describe the painful way his heart constricted. And then Daryl glanced back up… eyes flickering between an angry and confused Rick and a pale Glenn, before his eyes flittered over Harry again… nervous and concerned…?!

“Whot? I’m right, we ain’t needin’ him here?” Daryl growled at them all.

At last the penny dropped!

Daryl wasn’t afraid *of* him, but *for* him!

*Karma is a bitch*… a cynic part of the brain whispered. Hadn’t Harry tried the same, to drive Daryl away when they had first met?

But this was different! They weren’t strangers anymore, they were family.

“We’re making it together or not at all!” Glenn’s words resonated in his head. And a new kind of emotion raised its head in Harry.

*Anger.*
Bastard! How dare he?!

“Stop!” Harry snapped back at Daryl. The hunter raised abruptly his head, eyes wide in surprise.

He expected that I would run because of his bullshit. Did he really think that I would balk that easily? Harry thought indignantly.

“Stop, talking!” In long, angry strides the little wizard stood in front of the hunter, forcefully gripping the front of Daryl’s shirt. He had to crane his neck but he made sure to look the asshole strait in the eyes.

“Do you have any idea, what it costed me to come back to you? What I went through to make sure you would be safe?” He snarled angrily. Daryl looked totally transfixed.

“I…”

“Keep your mouth shut, before I hear anymore bullshit!” Harry cursed at the man with narrowed eyes. “I spend weeks agonizing over the question if you would allow me to come back.” Empathic pain flashed over Daryl’s face. “I already lost one family to their disdain for my magic. My own blood abhorred the air I breathed and the ground I walked on. They abused me for it. They locked me it a bloody cupboard for it!” Daryl closed his eyes and gave a strangled sound.

“Oh no, look me in the eyes!” Harry barked and when Daryl opened his eyes again, the wizard could see the uncertainty and the struggle in the hunter’s gaze.

“Do you know, how afraid I was? How much I wanted to run away, so I never had to face you looking at me, like I was nothing but a freak?” The desperate fear of rejection that bubbled so close to the surface made Harry’s voice softer.

“Do you know how much courage, it took me to come here? To tell you all of this?” Tears were prickling in the corners of his eyes.

No, he couldn’t be that weak right now!

“I came here ready to leave, should you decide that you couldn’t stand the sight of me anymore. But I wanted… no I needed to fight for it first, I refused to give up. Bad things don’t just go away and good things don’t happen to you, just because you want them to! You all were the first good thing that happened to me in so long! You are my family! So I forced myself to be brave!” Harry could see the muscles in Daryl jaw and neck working, as he swallowed nervously. The hunter switched between scowling, frowning and looking desperately sad and afraid.

“I will accept it, if you’re sending me away, because you hate me. But what I won’t stand for, is you being a bloody coward!” Daryl tried to flinch back but Harry’s pull on his shirt held him in place.
“I faced my shit, Daryl, to come here! I was finally free to choose how I wanted to live and I decided to come here! So don’t you dare to piss on my decision, just because you’re afraid!” Harry snapped with a breaking voice.

* 

Daryl felt dumbstruck. Speechless.

A coward.

What could he say to that?

Well Darlina, kid ain’t wrong, is he? Ya pissin’ yer pants. ‘Cause ya missin’ the balls ta face ya shit, lik’ he did. Kid came back here, after all the shit he lived through, ‘cause he trusted ya ta hav’ his back.

Merle had always been able to poke his wounds like no other, be it in life or in Daryl’s head.

Jackass!

But that didn’t make it any less true… Harry had been as afraid as him.

Afraid to be left behind, afraid to be cast away for something he couldn’t control.

To hear that Harry had feared that they would treat him like his good-for-nothing relatives…

Shit, it had been a low blow, but one he had probably deserved. Harry’s eyes were glowing with that inner fire and strength, Daryl had always admired in the kid.

Bend but not broken. Even if he had every right to be.

Not backing down even, if Daryl was being a mean asshole, trying to drive him away. So what could he say…

Harry had carefully released his shirt but was still starring into his eyes, observing and cataloguing his reactions. Daryl was an open book for the teen.

The hunter watched as Harry took a calming breath, collecting himself.

“So either you look me in the eyes and tell me to get lost, because you are sick of me or you shut up. I will not accept anything else!” Harry’s eyes refused to let him go, boring into his soul.

With a snarl the older man ripped himself away from those bright, glowing eyes and started to pace in agitation. He tried to find the word and the resolution to bite Harry away, to say what was
necessary, but every time he looked up and into Harry determined face, he lost his voice. Unable to say what needed to be said.

Out of the corner of his eyes he could see Rick holding back Carl. The younger boy glared with his one blue eye. Aaron was frowning in clear disapproval and had a calming hand on the ninja prick’s shoulder, who wore a pinched look on his face.

Harry seemed to be the only one getting calmer the longer he paced. The tension in shoulders was loosening and the little Brit seemed less desperate or sad.

Fuck, Daryl knew that expression. He had seen it countless times on the teens face. When the hunter had been sad or angry or frustrated, Harry had taken him to Button’s stable, just sitting next to Daryl, waiting patiently for the hunter to work through his emotions.

And now the little shit was doing the same, waiting patiently for Daryl to calm down and come to the conclusion the teen had already seen.

The hunter couldn’t suppress the grudging smile that tucked at his mouth, before he came to an abrupt halt.

“What Imma suppose’ ta say now…?” He groused in resignation. “Ya said it yerself. We’ve made a mess.” Daryl looked scowling out of the window. “Starvin’, runnin’ and fightin’ for our lives. Nothin’ ever settled… Ain’t what I wanted for ya…! And now yer got an alternativ’.” He mumbled, shyly glancing at Harry.

“Safety. Friends. Education… That would be better, wouldn’t it!” Daryl felt a blush creeping over his cheeks. Admitting this, giving Harry an honest reason, why he should stay away, made him feel so much more vulnerable, than shoving him angrily away.

But Harry just smiled at him, sweet but haunted.

“Maybe more comfortable, yes… But not better, no! I spend months in Hogwarts. Being there… I can’t tell you how much it hurt to be there. I might grow old there but it would kill me on the inside. I don’t just want to exist, I want to be alive and I’m ready to fight for the good things in my life.”

The blush on Daryl’s face deepened.

None else had ever considered him a good thing in his life. Something worth fighting for.

He blinked the tears in his eyes away, using his fringe to cover his weakness, but he nodded at Harry, who just grinned knowingly at him, before he turned to the rest of the family.

“If you’ll have me?”

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 19 *cheers* this was hard work. I never wanted to write all those Hogwarts scenes ^^’ but somehow Harry needed them…

As for Hermione and the staff… well the staff always seemed a bit passive to me after Dumbledore’s death in the books. Their priorities lay always with Hogwarts and the students. As for Hermione, in this story she lost Harry after the tournament, she never had the fifth year opposing Umbridge… Hermione learned a lot in that year, it changed her blind faith in authorities… The Hermione in this story missed all those things, her friends and her family gone, what else had she left…

I hope you’re going to enjoy the chapter!! ^^
Rick stared at his brother.

How the tracker tried to push Harry away, because he was afraid for the teen’s safety. Last night’s events had shaken them all but for Daryl to bark and bite at Harry, like an injured dog…

Damn!

Rick had to pull Carl back, before his son threw himself between Harry and Daryl. And Aaron had put a calming hand on Jesus’ shoulder. The long haired hippie had only just met the British wizard, but he had very obvious taken offence on Harry’s behalf for Daryl’s behaviour. It seemed a bit unusual but Rick knew for himself how fast Harry could inspire feeling of loyalty.

To hear Harry display his fears and how much bravery it had taken to confront them, it had rattled them all. The little wizard had been afraid that they would hate him like his aunt and uncle had. And maybe the existence of magic and a whole hidden community would have been harder to stomach if they hadn’t encountered masses of walking corpses that tried to eat your face if you weren’t careful…

The confrontation between Daryl and Harry had been tense and incredibly awkward to watch… a bit like a … lover’s quarrel…

Rick cringed at that thought. It felt strange to think about 40-something Daryl and 17-year old Harry like that. And Rick was very careful not to think about the fact that Harry was just a few years older than Carl and that Daryl had most likely a few years on himself…
At the same time it made kind of sense in a strange way, if you watched them interact.

These two were close. And as much as Rick tried to stay clear of such thoughts – for the sake of his own sanity – he was quite sure that there was no… physical component to their relationship.

_For now…_ a traitorous voice in the back of his head supplied.

*Good grief! Stop it Grimes! At least now Harry counted as an adult in his world.* It would be a small relief for Rick conscious if they started… Whatever… Arg!

*As long as those two are happy, it’s none of my business!* The former Sheriff firmly decided.

And Rick felt happy for Daryl to have built such a close connection with someone but at the same time a part of him felt almost… jealous.

Not in a romantic sense, but about this closeness, about the way Daryl had fallen to pieces, when Harry had been gone…

They had opened up to each other in ways that went beyond brotherhood and friendship. Rick and Carol had barely been able to reach Daryl in his grief and that had been frightening beyond belief. Daryl’s behaviour in the last months had varied between sleepwalking depression and erratic aggression and Rick was sure had sooner or later they would have lost him.

One day Daryl would have went into the woods and wouldn’t have come back… Either dead or swallowed up but by a growing need for isolation.

Seeing these two arguing right now, pushing each other’s boundaries, hurting each other, it was filled with raw emotion.

And finally after months of sleep walking, Daryl looked alive again. It seemed that Harry hadn’t fared much better in his school, away from them.

Jesus huffed beside Rick in irritation and watching their interaction in slight confusion and with pursed lips. It was a particular expression on the hippie ninja, Rick mused. The man had always seemed so smooth with a hint of mischievousness. To see him so ruffled for once, was quite hilarious.

In end Harry had broken Daryl’s resolve, which didn’t really surprise Rick. The hunter had always been a push-over when it came to the small teen.

But what shook Rick was Daryl’s continued hesitation…

They have really messed up! Daryl didn’t believe that they could handle the situation with Negan anymore. His brother, and friend, was scared. He didn’t trust Rick to keep Harry safe.
F*ck!

But he couldn’t fault Daryl for his doubts. The former Sheriff doubted everything himself.

God, Negan! The Saviours… F*ck! They were in deep trouble. Only Harry’s magic had saved them tonight… had saved Abraham and Glenn and who knows who else from that maniac.

The fucking bastard needed to be dealt with but that would mean war and bloodshed… They needed to gear up. They needed allies or they would fail.

They needed Harry.

“I don’t just want to exist, I want to be alive and I’m ready to fight for the good things in my life. If you’ll have me?”

“Of course!” Carl jumped forward, glaring nervously at the rest of them, daring them to say something against Harry, like Daryl had.

“You’re still family. And probably always will be.” Rick smiled at the wizard.

But his head was reeling…

Magic.

The possibilities and advantages it presented.

They had already seen part of what it could accomplish… What Harry could accomplish! It was frightening and exciting! With the British teen they could take on Negan and they could annihilate the Saviours.

“You said magic could achieve a lot. You did incredible things last night…” Harry nodded carefully, his expression going wary. “Daryl is right, we messed up with Negan. But the man needs to be dealt with.”

“Yes, after what you told me. He needs to be stopped.” Harry looked at him in hesitant agreement.

“You froze all of us…” Glenn mused out loud. “Why?”

The small teen grimaced at the question.

“I wasn’t sure how you would react to me or the magic. I feared you would panic… And I know you well enough that some of you have the habit to shoot first and ask later. I certainly did not want that.” They all winced. And he could swear that he heard Aaron and Jesus mutter a small ‘Amen.’ under their breaths.
“And why haven't you killed him? It would have been the perfect opportunity.” Rick pressed on.

“I didn't fancy the idea of slaughtering hundreds of people I know nothing about... Or when I wasn't even sure what the hell was going on. My priority was to keep Glenn's head whole.” Harry deadpanned.

“But you could have done it? You could have slaughtered them all?” Rick took a step forward fascinated by the idea, but whatever Harry had seen in his face, caused the wizard to move backwards, while his brother glared at him over an unruly black mop of hair.

“Rick, what are you asking?” Jesus hissed at him in warning.

“I will help you to protect our family and our allies, if that's what you’re asking.” Harry forced out. The teen’s uneasiness clear for everyone to see.

“But you could take him out?” The former Sheriff couldn’t let that thought go, an easy out...

“Rick! Stop right there! I'm a half trained school drop-out. It might take years to compensate for all the education I missed and to achieve the practical knowledge for the more complex spellcraft. I will fight with you. Merlin, I trained to fight with you. I will do my best to protect you all, but I draw a line at becoming your magical assassin.” Harry hissed at him.

Everyone flinched at the word... Rick shuddered at the thought of small and kind Harry covered in the blood of enemies. He wouldn't want this for Carl and he didn't want to force Harry into something like that...

But the possibility of an easy out of this mess had been so tempting.

“You don't know what you would ask of him.” A very pale Jesus told Rick.

Questioning they all looked between the long haired squib and Harry.

“Killing with magic is different. It's not just a tool, like a gun. You can't just pull the trigger and let the bullet do the work. Magic needs intention. You want to light a light, well then you have to want it. You have to feel it!” Harry waved his wand and a whispered “Lumos” and a bright light appeared on its tip. “You have to envision it or it won't work! Nox.” The light disappeared again.

“Of course there can be accidents, where magic is concerned. Lethal accidents. But to kill someone with magic... You have to focus on that. Righteous anger isn't enough. You'll have to picture it in your head. It’s not enough to pull the trigger, you'll have to become the bullet, piercing the flesh, willing it to drill its way through the body. You’ll have to want to extinguish that life. To snuff it out. To destroy. To annihilate. That kind of mind-set...” Rick watched as Harry shuddered. What Harry had just described... that mind-set it would twist people turn them into something unrecognizable.

Cold hearted. Blood thirsty.

A monster.
“We won't force you to do that.” Glenn spoke firmly from behind Rick. When he looked at the young Korean, he was met with haunted dark eyes. Glenn had never approved of their ambush on the satellite station in the dead of the night, killing all those people in their sleep... That night had costed the kind Asian a lot.

They all had crossed a line that night.

The serious and disapproving frowns on Daryl’s and Jesus’ faces were a clear warning for Rick not to force Harry to cross that line, too.

Paul felt relief wash over him when Rick finally nodded. Alexandria’s leader accepted that Harry would not kill for them... at least not with magic.

“You said, you trained?!” Rosita asked in curiosity. Her dark eyes scanned Harry’s slender form in confusion.

“Yes. When I decided to come back, my friend Hermione helped me to learn the necessary skills. Potions, spells, charms, means of transportation... and in exchange I took her and some others on runs with me, building up some of my strength and speed. They had never left the wards before and knew next to nothing about how to handle walkers, with and without magic. We learned which spells work best, which were useless and how much magic attracts them. I got much better with the knives”. Harry explained, grinning proudly at them.

Fuck that’s really cute.

Paul had to look away for a moment, only to catch Aaron’s knowing gaze. The mouth of Alexandria’s scout quirking…

The ass was laughing at him…

“What knives?” Sasha quipped up. “I don’t see any on you.”

“Ya kept it?” Daryl groused, his voice a bit breathy.

“Of course. It was my talisman on the road. It kept me safe.” Harry smiled adoringly at the knife and then at its former owner, who blushed to the tips of his ears.

Paul smirked a bit, who knew that Daryl Dixon was such a softy at heart. Oh, it would be so much
fun to tease him with that.

This was interaction between the wizard and the hunter had changed completely now and Paul started to understand that maybe this was the true nature of their relationship.

This soft and tender care they had for each other that left no room for losing each other…

Alone the thought of letting anyone this close made Paul’s heart ache in longing and paralyzing fear at the same time.

“Do you want to have it back?” The British teen asked Daryl adorably shy. The hunter only shook his head furiously, apparently unable to speak as big green eyes stared so innocently at him from behind nerdy glasses.

But suddenly something occurred to the hobby ninja.

“God Harry, please don’t tell me that’s your only weapon?! You can’t just rely on one old hunting knife and your wand. Both can be lost to easy!”

“Uhm…” Harry blinked at bit owlish at him.

“Damn! Harry!” Several shouts and groans of frustration could be heard in the library.

“Oh, calm down! Uhm… I have other knives. I’ll show you… but please, don’t freak out…” Harry looked at them a bit unsure before he rolled up his sleeves. Revealing at first his delicate, scared writs and then pale, wiry underarms…

And then he turned the underside of his underarms up form them to inspect…

Where, Paul had expected to see unblemished milky white skin, were two big Celtic tattoos riddled with runes innerving and curling beautifully in thin artistic lines over the arms from the elbows nearly to the writs.

This was an incredible and complicated artwork. Paul smiled widely at the ink, his eyes tracing the unmistakeable forms of two *knives* painted on the teen’s skin. “Wow!”

“So cool!” Carl groaned in obvious envy. “The design is similar to your old ones.” The one eyed teen observed after a while.

“Carl’s right! Does that mean these are seals, too?” Michonne asked with a frown.

“In a sense…” Harry traced the inked lines. “But they don’t seal magic.” He appeased them. Then the British teen flicked his right wrist with a small twist and a perfect real life replica of the tattooed knife materialized in his palm.

“I have other knives.” Very well!
Stunned Paul starred at the blade. Fuck this was…

“Awesome!!!!” Carl cried out surprised.

“Wicked!” Paul grinned.

“Sweet!” Glenn remarked seeming a bit awed.

Daryl had come over to look the blade. While Michonne had taken hold of Harry's other arm tracing the tattoo with the finger, causing Harry to giggle.

“That tickles.” But Paul could tell that the small teen was getting uncomfortable with all the people in his personal bubble.

Michonne must have noticed it too, because she backed away. Smiling gratefully Harry repeated the little twisting motion with his left hand and let the other knife appear, so the samurai could inspect it.

Main while Paul was peering over Daryl's shoulder to get a better look at the magical weapon.

“Looks a bit strang’ ta me.” The hunter grumbled. “Steel's odd.”

“Yes. These are goblin forged. They are very adept metalsmiths, ranked among the best in the world. And I got them to do the tattoos, sealing the knives in my skin. That's why the ink looks so similar to the seals I had on my wrists.” Harry nodded at him

Paul whistled. “Goblin forged weapons are rare... I heard they hate to sell them. What did you give them for it?”

“Uhmm... They hate to sell to wizards, because goblin’s idea of selling something differs greatly from human’s.” The green eyed youth agreed.

“Well, you see, goblins are a totally different breed of being. Dealings between humans and goblins have been fraught for centuries ... Some goblins believe that wizards can't be trusted in matters of gold and treasure, that they have no respect for goblin ownership.”

Harry looked very serious at them.

“How can it differ? When you sell something you sell it… No problem!” Rosita frowned in confusion, test the weapon Michonne had given her.

“Goblin ownership?” Paul asked with raised eyebrows.

“To a goblin, the rightful and true master of any object is the maker, not the purchaser. All goblin-made objects are, in goblin eyes, rightfully theirs.” Harry explained calmly. “So I’m merely renting those knives, not owning them. Those tattoos are also a contract, a vow to give them back when I die. While extremely handy the tattoos were one condition they set on me before they allowed me
to buy the knives.”

“An’ the other reason?” Daryl asked in concerned suspicion. Harry gave a short laugh.

“That was probably half the content of my vault.”

“You have a vault? Whatever for?” Rick asked blinking.

“Oh yes! Wizard currency is still, very real money… Gold, silver and bronze coins. Stored in highly guarded vaults and administered by the goblins.” Harry shrugged.

“Sounds like you paid them a lot of money.” Rick observed.

“Probably… but they drive a hard bargain. You know the law of supply and demand. I needed something only they could provide, so they made sure to get the most of it.” Harry laughed lightly. “It wasn’t a problem. My parents left me quite a bit and I had never much use for it… The Dursleys would have taken every single Knut from me if they had known. And I spend most of the year in a boarding school that provided me with almost everything I needed. So I could allow myself to splash some cash. It’s not like it means a lot nowadays.” Harry grinned mischievous at them.

“And that’s not the only thing, that’s brilliant about the knives!” The British wizard looked so young in at moment of mirth and made a sharp twisting motion with his right wrist. Suddenly Daryl yelped.

Fascinated Paul watched how the knife disappeared from the hunter’s hand and reappeared in Harry’s right one.

Daryl cursed colourfully in startled surprise.

Paul could see how nervous this reaction made Harry. The teen was still not entirely sure, if his family would be able to accept his nature. The Hilltop scout could relate to this kind of insecurity. The leap of faith it took to lay yourself bare before others, hoping be loved and cherished.

Paul himself hadn’t been that brave in a long time…

Instead he had become Jesus.

It had been easier. It had been safer.

It had been lonely.

So he carefully nudged the gruff man with his elbow and grinned brightly at Harry.

“This is wicked, don’t you think?” Daryl looked perplexed at the long haired man before his eyes widened in comprehension.
“Uhm… yhea, prick’s right! This is cool.” Somehow Daryl managed to sound incredibly awkward and completely sincere at the same time and Harry lost some his tension.

Paul stifled a laugh at the adorable way the tall scruffy man looked from Harry to Paul as if he wanted to know if he had done well.

Jesus barely kept himself from patting the hunters head in reward – but since he guessed that he would get his hand bitten off if he tried – he contented himself with nodding inconspicuous at the man and a warm smile. It seemed like this was a good decision, because Daryl seemed to puff out his chest in satisfaction at the unobtrusive praise.

*God, this was endearing.*

“This is really good.” Daryl watched as Michonne gushed at the blade in her hand, experimenting with small, swift movements. She hadn’t messed up and upset Harry like he had just done. Only Jesus’ intervention had saved him from putting his foot even further in his mouth.

“And that you can call them back is more than handy, it’s genius!” The samurai said excited.

“It’s not all.” Harry admitted shyly, holding out his hand for the knife. The teen moved to the side with the blade and threw it with a strong flick of his wrist in the direction of a book case, causing the little ninja to yelp in protest. But before the blade could do any damage, Harry moved his fingers in a certain way and the dagger stopped in mid-air… hovering!

They all stared speechless at the weapon. Another flick of his wrist and the knife was swishing through the room at an amazing speed until Harry caught it again with practiced ease. The little wizard could control the knives completely!

Fuck this was… mind-boggling!

The possibilities to use this against walkers and other threats… Shit!

When Daryl looked at Rick he could see the same realisation in his brother’s eyes. Harry would need no spells or other magic to be a deadly force out there. Just the knives would be enough.

“Can you use them while you move? Or does it interfere with your focus if you move around too much?” The hippie ninja inquired curiously.

It was a good question… Daryl realized.

It would be important to know that or it would make Harry an easy target for attacks. Magic seemed to be a nifty thing to have but relying on it too much, sounded risky. Harry’s people had nearly all died because they had been too sure of themselves. And the little wizard had admitted that too much of it would attract walkers.
“Uhm, I hadn’t gotten the chance to find out.” Harry shrugged at the question.

“Then you should do this… Soon. I worked as a martial arts instructor for kids, we could test it out.” The scout offered kindly.

Harry searched for Daryl’s eyes… not seeking permission but asking for advice. It felt nice to have his opinion valued like that. Daryl had experienced Paul’s skills in person, the man was good, even if he was a prick… The small ninja was probably the best to test Harry’s new skills.

So he nodded.

*

Daryl watched as Harry skipped over the small, secluded meadow they had chosen for their little training session. The kid looked excited and happy. Having his magic back, seemed to have stabilized more than just the boy’s physical health.

Daryl felt his heart flutter at way Harry laughed with Carl and joked with Glenn. He couldn’t remember when Harry had ever looked this carefree.

It was beautiful.

And when bright green eyes searched for his slated blue one and shone with so much emotion…

Daryl felt his heart stop for a moment.

“Ok let’s start with the stance.” Paul instructed and the moment was broken.

Daryl watched as Harry went into position. He recognized Michonne’s posture and her teachings immediately and she had too, if her broad proud grin was anything to go by. Daryl marvelled at how relaxed and easy Harry stood. The seasoned fighter in him could spot that the teen would be able to switch swiftly between offense and defence like that.

*Good*

He could still remember those first fighting lessons back when Harry was still so sick and weak that he could barely walk or keep up with them...

To see him now… Healthier, tougher, brighter…

How much he had grown as person. Daryl felt tears prickle in his eyes.

*Ya were always a sentimental fool, Darlina.*

*Ah, shut the fuck up, Merle.*
Paul blinked in surprise at the stance. “Looks good!” He complimented.

“I’ve had very good teachers.” Harry smirked at Michonne, who cheered at him.

“Come at me.” Paul gestured to the British teen, who narrowed his eyes in concentration.

Summoning his daggers Harry threw himself forward in a surprisingly forceful attack. Daryl noticed with a small amount of satisfaction how the hippie ninja got a little wide eyed as he got into the defence. Seeing those two rather small men mock fighting was...

Daryl had no word for it... They moved very graceful and in fluid motions. Both slender and bright eyed, but where Jesus was all well-defined muscle and broad shoulders, Harry was more on the skinny side.

Attacking and blocking. It looked a bit like a dance.

At one point Jesus had also pulled one of his knives to give him a better chance of countering.

The fight revealed so much about Harry’s physical improvement. With his fast movements his shirt would press itself against the contours of his body, showing of a slender but lightly muscular figure. Daryl felt his eyes linger a little longer than necessary.

“Christ. I wish Carol was here to see this. How good he has become.” Michonne whispered proudly next to him.

“He isn't our small, helpless kid anymore...” Sasha nodded. “He'll be able to hold himself in a fight, now.”

The ninja was still better, a bit faster, his attacks a bit more defined. So it was no wonder when Harry had suddenly lost both of his daggers. Breathless the green eyed boy stumbled backwards, still trying to defend himself against the older man with the cyan eyes.

This was going to be over soon.

But suddenly Jesus had to rear back. One of the knives had had nicked a lock of his long hair. And the second was back in Harry's hand.

Damn that was handy in a fight!

The wide grin on the ninjas face showed how much he enjoyed the whole thing. Cyan and green eyes locked in an intense gaze, assessing each other while catching a breath. Harry’s face was illuminated by a similar bright and excited smile.

It was a good look on the kid, but Daryl couldn't help the churning feeling in his belly... To observe how focused Harry was on the pretty and most importantly younger man... How they shared their excitement and those fucking bright smiles. Looking at nothing or no one but each other...

Fuck!
There was no denying it Paul Rovia was interested in Harry.

Daryl was no idiot. But what if Harry... What if Harry liked the prick, too...? Daryl had eyes Paul was very handsome. Clean, funny and probably a lot more experienced than Daryl was...

Where would that leave old, dirty and messed-up Daryl Dixon?

Until now Harry had always been the most comfortable in Daryl’s company... What if that changed? What if now that Harry was better, he wouldn't need him anymore...?

Fear twisted his heart as he looked at Harry and friendly, pretty Jesus. Something like jealousy settled like a poisonous stone in his stomach.

Stop that, ya ain't a fag! Merle hissed in his head.

Naah, ya just never wanted me ta be one... Made sure ta pressure me with the gals all the time. Daryl replied in his head.

Ain't straight either. But never been ta interested in anyone either. He could feel Merle’s ghost snarl in his head and his daddy scream at him. It felt good to admit that much at least to himself but it scared him at the same time.

Who knows if the kid can 'ven stand 'yone lik’ that after what he's been through. Keep it together and keep it in ya pants, Dixon. Daryl instructed himself harshly.

Ain't no of ya business who Harry likes or looks at. He certainly don't need no trailer trash like ya pinning after him. Daryl forced his thoughts to a halt but his fears wouldn’t shut the fuck up…

Suddenly Daryl was ripped out of his bitter thoughts when the little ninja swept Harry's legs out from under him and promptly tackled the little wizard playfully.

Or what was supposed to be playfully...

Daryl could sense it right away, something had changed. Maybe the manoeuvre had had taken the teen too much of guard... Maybe it was the feeling of being pinned down…

Shit!

The hunter heard how Carl cursed rather violently. Glenn and Rick had started to move just a second after Daryl had taken the first step to the place where the ninja prick held a stiff Harry pinned to the ground.

They all could still recognize the signs of an appending panic attack even after six months away from Harry.
Those hitched breaths and the tight coiled shoulders.

But before they could reach the two, an invisible wind practically blew the hippie away from Harry and threw him quite forcefully into the grass a few feet away.

So this was the knee jerk reaction of Harry's magic to a threat, the seals had always suppressed…

_Fuck..._

_That was..._

_Fuck..._ The wizard’s small body contained quite some punch.

Eyes big as saucers Paul gingerly sat up, rubbing the back of his head.

Rick and Daryl shared a look, silently communicating. Before Rick and Glenn went over to the idiot-hippie Jesus to make sure that he hadn’t hit his cocky head too bad, while Daryl approached a cowering Harry. The youth’s bright eyes were unseeingly directed in Paul’s general direction, his ragged breathing sounded more and more hitched.

“Harry?!” Daryl called carefully out at the boy his voice firm but kind. Razor sharp Harry’s eyes zoomed in on Daryl. The hunter swallowed back curse as he found himself in the focus of glowing green emeralds.

_Fuck!_

As Daryl took another step forward he felt something like an electric shock sapping him on his biceps. With a hiss he immediately stopped walking, it hadn't hurt him per se but that had clearly been a warning shot.

Daryl took a calming breath and tried to relax his posture a bit.

He could feel the pressure, as if a storm was brewing, the air tasted like lightning and thunder. And there was a barely noticeable sound of angry bees buzzing in his ears.

So this was what magic felt like... Highly emotion and intention based energy... Heaven help!

“Harry.” He mumbled again. “Harry... It's OK. Ya did well, no one's going ta hurt ya. Hush.”

Maybe he was imaging things but Daryl thought that the buzzing sounded a little less angry now...
It had taken a more... Humming tone... Calmer... Satisfied...

He blinked in surprise as the sharp electric sensation got softer... Gentler... More relaxed...
Recognizing him...?

Daryl would forever deny the undignified yelping that escaped him, as suddenly the magic settled over him. Fucking caressing *all* of his skin!

“Harry!” He squeaked out in embarrassment, face burning.

The magic seemed excited now... dancing in a tingling feeling over his skin... Happily greeting him, enfolding him warmly...

*God, it felt soo good!*  

Daryl would have sighed in contentment, if the emotional and physical intimacy of it hadn’t been so unsettling at the same time.

It called out to him, offering him warmth, comfort... Love?!

A place to belong to... Daryl felt his heart ache with the prospect of being accepted and cherished like that.

But the part of him that doubted everyone and himself – that thought him lacking and unworthy of such things – the part of him that found comfort in solitude, because then nobody could hurt him and he wouldn't have deal with all this confusing feelings... That part screamed in terrified fear.

As he stood there, he felt torn between closing the distance and bolting...

“You're a coward Daryl Dixon! Do you have any idea what it took me to come here? How afraid I was?” Harry’s words resonated in his head.

Yeah... Yeah he was getting it now...

So Daryl did neither, but instead forced himself to exhale very shakily and stayed where he was.

“Daryl?” A very pale Harry blinked at him.

“Yeah. I'm here.” He tried to reassure Harry despite his own inner turmoil.
“They are dead. They can’t get to me anymore. Rick, Michonne and Daryl killed them all. It’s been 197 days since I’ve been last raped. I’m safe!”

Daryl cringed at the mantra. There should be more days in the count... Christ, he hoped Pete burned in hell for this!

Finally Harry’s gaze cleared fully. The small teen let eyes run over the meadow taking in Daryl and his probably traitorous red face. Harry blushed furiously.

“Oh my... I'm... I'm so sorry!” He stammered. “My magic can get a bit... Uhm.. overzealous.... Merlin!”

Suddenly the purring magic around the hunter pulled back. He shivered a bit at its loss but he also breathed a sigh of relief as these intense feelings in him calmed a bit down.

“It's alright.” Daryl grumbled, awkwardly clearing his throat, as his voice was tick with emotion. “Ain't no harm done”.

But he couldn't hold Harry gaze for too long, because the reminder of the intimate caresses on his skin brought renewed the flush on his face.

Distracted he started to bit his thumb nail, while he hid his heated face behind his fringe.

Harry's magic poked him again...

It felt... Teasing? Glancing at the wizard, the boy shrugged in apological bemusement. The little shit was laughing at his expense. So Daryl growled playfully back at him.

Out of the corner of his eyes he saw the others approaching them and observed how Harry scanned them with a new caution.

Daryl watched as Harry blanched, when he took in the wide eyed and ruffled looking hippie ninja...

“Oh Merlin! Are you hurt?” “Are you alright?” The little Brit and the prick blurted out at the same time.

“I'm sorry!” “I'm so sorry.” Both spluttered

“It's not your fault.” “That's not on you.” Both shook their heads.

Fuck, this was ridiculous!

Harry looked tearfully on the floor. While Jesus crouched down before the smaller youth and placed very slowly but deliberate his hand on Harry’s.

“I'm alright. Just a bit winded... I should not have tackled you like that. I'm sorry.” He told the
teenager very patiently.

Harry warily glanced up. “You didn’t know... I said it was OK to train. You couldn’t know I would freak out like this.”

“They others hinted at enough that I should have known better.” Jesus admitted with a hint of embarrassment, causing Harry to frown at his family.

“And you have gotten better.” Maggie quickly piped up. “Before you wouldn’t have been able to fight at all without having a panic attack.”

“Yes and you held yourself very well.” Sasha assured the teen

“What use do I have in a fight, if I freak out as soon as someone tackles me?” Harry sighed in disappointment.

“You were not helpless. In a real battle that would have been an effective move,” Paul encouraged the upset teen kindly. It was easy to imaging the man working with children. Daryl couldn’t help but notice that the prick was still holding Harry’s hand.

A nervous twitching started in his right eye lid.

*Smarmy git.*

Looking still a bit down trodden Harry nodded, before he picked himself up from the floor. But when the teen tried to stand he swayed lightly, causing both Daryl and Paul to step up to steady him.

Leaning in on Daryl, Harry blinked owlishly up at two men, one on each side of him, while Daryl and Paul stared at each other over Harry’s unruly black hair.

*Damn, the hippie’s really pretty and those bright big eyes, what kind of colour is that any way. His lips are...*

“Uhm... Thanks but could you please let go of me?” The soft British accent interrupted there staring contest, causing Paul to immediately step back.

*Was that a light flush creeping over the scouts face?*

*Good god, had Daryl been checking the other man out?!!*

*What the hell was wrong with him?*

*Yeah, definitely ain’t straight, Darlina...*
The weight of Harry’s body resting against his own, pulled him back into reality.

“Alrigh’?” Daryl huffed at the teen but he couldn’t quiet shake his worry over the sudden incident… it reminded him about all those months Harry had been dangerously sick.

“Uhm... Yeah, Sorry. Using wandless magic like that... It leaves me a bit dizzy. It will pass real soon. Don't worry.” Harrys nudged Daryl’s chest with his shoulder in reassurance.

Then he turned uncertain green eyes to cyan ones, swallowing heavily Harry gathered his courage to address hilltops scout.

“Paul, do you think... Do you think we could train again? So I learn not... Not to panic like that.”

Daryl felt a growl rumbling in his chest but Harry pressed his back unobtrusive into his front, a silent comfort and a silent reprimand to let Harry deal with his shit.

So Daryl sighed and backed down.

Paul seemed to be surprised by the teen’s request. “You want to try again?!”

“I think I need to. Running away from this will leave me or others vulnerable. I'm not inclined to risk that.” Harry sighed

Paul starred at the British teen a little star struck

“I'd like to help you.” The prick grinned brightly at Harry and Daryl.

Great...!

*  
Back at the Hilltop Harry was still embarrassed as hell. On the way back they had all agreed to keep Harry’s magic in the family.

Everything else would put one big target on Harry’s back. Every enemy would try to kill the teen first and there were enough dubious people between their allies that his family wasn’t ready to trust his secret and life to just anybody.

“What about your friend back at your school?” Carl asked out of the blue with a worried frown.  
“Was she alright with you leaving?”

Harry winced a little.

After Hermione had shaken Harry awake with their discussion in the library, a few things had changed. He had nearly forgotten what a good friend Neville could be, a boy so used to being pushed in the background and suffocated by his grandmother's demands, that he seldom stepped forward. But Neville had his own unobtrusive and solid way to show his support, shy and gentle, but reliable. And so he had been suddenly there, when Harry had made up his mind, ready to aid
Hermione and the green eyed boy in their quest. He had brought Luna into it, too.

The blond girl was... Well odd, but in a good way. Harry had the suspicion that she saw a lot more of the world than she let on, hiding behind strangely phrased sentences, talking about unknown creatures.

And while Harry could see the nervous twitching of Hermione’s jaw at some of the things Luna talked about, he could also detect a fondness for the younger girl in his bushy haired friend.

The three had helped him to prepare, but Harry had also been adamant teaching them what he knew about the walkers and the infection, taking them outside the wards, showing them how to fight without magic while they taught him what they knew!

Together with the things Hermione had researched, Neville’s knowledge of Herbology and Lunas ability to think outside of the box, those three had become a force to recon with.

But to their credit neither ever tried to convince him to stay at Hogwarts. Neville had asked him carefully about it once but Luna had just shaken her head with a dreamy smile.

“Harry would suffer under the Nargles and Wackspurts, if he stayed here. He needs to be elsewhere.” And while Hermione had huffed in exasperation that such things didn’t existed, Neville had nodded very seriously along with Luna and had patted Harry unruly locks in comfort.

Hermione and he had both cried that last evening in the Gryffindor common room, huddled together with Neville and Luna. She had even shown him sketches for a safety zone at Hogwarts that she wanted to discuss with McGonagall and Snape.

It had been difficult for her to let him go again, Harry knew that and he was still incredible thankful that Hermione had never outright begged him to stay. He wasn't sure if he could have been strong enough to leave if she had...

And maybe that was the reason she hadn't...

Looking at his family now his heart swelled with a bitter sweet love for Hermione, who had not only allowed but pushed him to be utterly selfish for once. She could have easily swayed him to think of her, Hogwarts, his duty to the wizarding world. But she hadn't. She had let him go, with a promise to write and to be in touch.

And he had gone.

With a lighter heart because she hadn't fought him on his decision and because he hoped she would be well in their old school, with Neville and Luna and the professors.

“She understood. Hermione is an incredibly strong person. I think, she and the other want to start looking for other survivors. I promised to stay in contact.” Harry answered Carl with a small smile.

At the Hilltop Carson awaited them with the news that Abraham had woken up and had apparently
had tackled the kitchen despite doctor’s orders to eat lightly.

When they reached the kitchen, they found the big red head eating a hearty breakfast. Behind him loitered a tall and thin man in a suit jacket, glowering at the former soldier with a haughty expression that reminded the British wizard uncomfortably of aunt Petunia, when she had thought that Harry had dragged mud into her pristine home.

Harry had never seen anyone looking so… well dressed up and styled in the apocalypse… Hair and face were clean, his beard clearly trimmed and the hands the man wrung in apparent agitation at their entrance were manicured and immaculate.

It seemed a bit *inappropriate* to Harry.

Especially when everyone else in the community wore the signs of hard labour and hardship… Harry had seen the FEMA trailer outside… While they certainly were a help, living in them was surely not that comfortable and Paul had told him that people bunked together in the Barrington House.

“Jesus…” The man started but was promptly interrupted by Abraham’s loud outcry.

“Holly hell! You’re pulling my dick, aren’t you?!” The broad man jumped up and pulled a laughing Harry into his arms spinning the much smaller youth around.

“You’re alive! Good god!” Grinning broadly Abe shook his head in wonder.

“Take it easy, you oaf!” Harry swatted a muscular arm. “Sasha will have my head if you overexert yourself, throwing me around.”

“HAH! You still weigh less than shit, kid. And ya haven’t grown an inch.”

Harry groaned. “Oh shut up… Even Carl is taller than me now. It’s so unfair.” Harry pouted.

“How…” It was clear what Abe wanted to ask but…


“Sasha can tell you later.” Harry whispered to Abraham.

“Hem… Jesus as I tried to say, you and your friends look a little rumbled. Please don’t forget to wash up. You know how hard it is the keep the house clean.” The man greeted the group with an oily smile. “You haven’t told me that Richard and his friends are here.” Despite the fake smile playing around his mouth, it was clearly meant as a reprimand.

It sounded dismissive.

“Hello Gregory, I didn’t tell you because you said that we should disturb you before nine in the morning.”

Merlin, Harry was impressed by Paul’s composure. His tone was light and neutral, stating a simple fact. Gregory in turn flushed unattractively and looked nervously around if anyone had overheard Paul’s statement.
“Ah yes, yes. Well, that seems to be a misunderstanding. Of course you’re allowed to inform me about such important matters, my friend. I’m the boss of this community after all!” He stammered out oily, while he smiled broadly at the cook, who had started to frown at him.

Merlin, help us all! They had another Cornelius Fudge at their hands.

“Natasha brilliant to see you! Here to make a new deal.” He gushed at Maggie with a wink. Harry did a double take at the blatant and narcissistic way Gregory flirt with Maggie… Using the wrong name! And in front of her husband none the less! Completely ignoring her harsh glare.

The nerve!

“Oh, you’re new!” Gregory smirked winningly at Sasha, reaching out to touch her arm. “Ouch!” The arrogant bastard yelped, pulling his hand away, shaking it in pain. “Haahhhhaaa… Static shock… You… you must be electrifying, my dear.” The man laughed nervously, when he caught Harry’s angry glare.

“All the more reason to keep your hands to yourself, don’t you think so?” The British teen asked in deliberate light and polite tone. A smile that would have made Carol proud stretched over his lips, but he made sure, to look the spineless rat firmly into the eyes, conveying another message. Gregory flinched back.

Good!

“And who are you?” The way the man let his eyes drag over Harry, made him absolutely uncomfortable.

“My name is Harry.” Harry really needed to get a grip. Such outbursts of accidental magic were dangerous, even if the douchebag had deserved it.

“Uhmm… Uhmm… well what are you doing here?” Gregory seemed unsure how to handle the situation.

“Negan is still alive, Gregory.” Paul said carefully.

“WHAT?!” The older man hissed.

“We saw him yesterday and a huge bunch of his men… Abraham and Maggie needed a medical… check-up.” Rick relayed to the other leader as calmly as possible.

“What?! OH GOD! You dammed us all. I knew it! I knew it! You said you would handle it. We gave you half of our supplies.” Gregory accused the Alexandrian party.

“We did handle it! We handled the satellite station and saved your life like we agreed to. And you were glad to us do the dirty work when it allowed you to keep your head. You didn’t know either that it wasn’t their only base.” Maggie hissed dangerously.

Gregory backed away. “And what are you proposing now?” The man looked absolutely panicked
Silence greeted him.

“We won’t stop now. We can’t. You can’t! This man has built a feudal system based on terror and violence. He will not stop and his lackeys won’t stop. He will hurt, kill and torture until he has annihilated all resistance.” Harry spoke up.

“Then why should we resist at all? We can find an arrangement with them.” Gregory snottily replied.

“They wanted to behead you…” Paul reminded the leader of his community, but the arrogant bastard just waved this argument away.

“That my friend was a simple misunderstanding.” Harry snorted.

“I don’t think that you will find an arrangement with them. We need to resist because people will continue to suffer and die if we won’t. Because we’ll lose our freedom if bow our heads now. We will resist because it is the right thing to do, not the easy one. But we’re going to do this right this time.” Determined green eyes judged the leader that proved with each passing second that he wasn’t a leader, at all.

“And what would that entail, Henry?” Gregory asked as if to appease the teen.

“It’s Harry and it entails, gathering all the necessary information. About the Saviours, Negan and where they live. We have to prepare ourselves. And we need to know our enemy before we can make another move.” The little wizard spoke firmly.

“And how you suggest we do this, Harald?”

“Scouting.” Harry forced himself to answer shortly.

“Scouting? Jesus is one of the best and he scouted for months for us. If he hasn’t found anything no one can.” What could have been a compliment sounded so arrogant and haughty that Harry bristled at the stupid short-sightedness the old coward showed.

“When is the next pickup due?” he asked instead.

“Tomorrow. They’re due tomorrow.” Paul intervened.

“Ok, leave the rest to us.” Harry glared at Gregory.

“Very well Hans, do what you want. But if they catch you, you’re on your own.” Turning his nose but at them the Hilltop leader stomped off.

Paul and the others looked uncertain at Harry. He was very sure that Rick and the others hadn’t gotten a plan on how to proceed with the issue.

“You have an idea? I hate to say it but Gregory is right, following them is dangerous. There is a reason I never found their hideout…” Paul said hesitant.

Harry smiled mischievously at the scout. “Oh I have a plan.” Skipping over to Abe, he snatched a bit of cucumber up from the man’s plate. “I will follow the debt collectors back to their base and then I plan to sneak in and spy on them for a while.”
“Naahh! Sounds ta dangerous!” Daryl growled through gritted teeth.

“It would be, if it would be one of you.” Harry agreed completely, because that would be incredible reckless.

“And how will it be different if you go?” Glenn asked in concern.

“Magic.” Harry made a shushing motion with his finger, eyes sparkling in excitement.

“But I since I don’t know the area, I think it would be good, if someone, who knows to navigate the surroundings, could come with me.” The teen admitted

“That would be me.” Paul offered. “I can come with you.”

Daryl grumbled. “How ya gonna do it?”

“From the air.”

* 

Air? Fuck!

A day later Paul had watched as Simon and his assholes had collected their share of supplies from the Hilltop, while he and Harry were hiding in the cellar, waiting for a chance to follow them. He had been bouncing on his heels in giddy excitement.

They were going to fly!!! On a broom!!!

Besides them were Sasha, Abraham, Glenn, Maggie.

Harry had covered them all in a Disillusionment Charm. The little wizard had tapped their heads with his wand and what had followed had felt like an raw egg had been cracked on them. Paul had felt like chameleon as his body had taken on the exact colour and texture of the storage shelve behind him.

So wicked!

As a child he had loved his gran’s stories about magic and wizards. He had been fascinated by all of it but it had also always with sadness that this world was closed for him. And now he could finally experience real magic…

“Son of a dick! This fucking, mind-fucking amazing! Sure I have no brain damage?” Abraham had cursed colourfully at the display of magic. The big man had taken Harry’s explanation and it existence of Magic completely in stride. Harry had just laughed at him and had covered himself in
the charm too.

Daryl had initially refused to leave Harry behind, even if four of their friends had remained at the Hilltop. But with Abraham and Maggie still in need of medical surveillance and their significant others staying behind, Alexandria would be four capable fighters short. And even if Harry had put Negan and the Saviours of their trail for now…

They knew that these fuckers were looking for them, were looking for Alexandria. They were out for revenge and Negan would stop at nothing to get them in line. It was just a matter of time until they would come knocking on their gates.

They were not ready. But they had to be! Right now! They had to be. Rick had looked like he swallowed a lemon, when he said this. So in the end Daryl had let himself be dragged home by the scruff of his neck, grumbling and cursing.

Harry had tried to placate the man with the promise that he and Paul would come directly back to Alexandria after their mission.

++++ Flashback+++++

Before they started on the way back Harry had put a few protective runes and spells on the RV in the hope to keep his family safe on the road. The British teen had then pulled Daryl to the side.

Paul had felt like a creep for watching, but he couldn’t help himself.

The picture those two made was… captivating in a sense. They stood close but weren’t quite touching, until Harry said something so low that Paul couldn’t hear it, but he could see the small quirk around the teen’s mouth and the warm look in his eyes. Whatever it had been, it made the scruff man drop his head, hiding his face behind his hair, except for the tip of his ears, which were flaring red. Mesmerised Paul observed how Harry slowly and carefully cradled Daryl’s face, resting their foreheads against each other.

“It’s startling to see them like that isn’t it?” Maggie said suddenly from beside him, making Paul jump a little. “Harry has come so far.” She continued with a soft look in her eyes. “You should have seen him when we first met him… skeletal, so sick and…” She shook her head. Paul cringed at the picture she described.

“Maggie, the mantra… What Harry said at the training ground? You said the community’s surgeon… But there were others, weren’t there?”

“Yes. Harry’s been hurt a lot in his live. It makes this, all the more precious to me. On first glance he and Daryl are an unlikely pair but those two mean a lot to each other. They get each other and they opened up to each other. You can guess that Daryl isn’t an easy person to get close to. When we thought that we had lost Harry… we all feared that we were going to lose Daryl, too.”

Paul watched as Daryl seemed to relax a bit, relishing in the small physical contact, while Paul’s own chest constricted at the sight. He couldn’t decipher his own feelings in this moment but
whatever it was must have shown on his face, because Maggie bumed her shoulder against his.

“Thank you for letting me and Glenn stay in your trailer by the way. I’m sorry it’s so crowded now for you.” Paul wasn’t an idiot. He knew this tactic, had done it himself a dozen times. It was said as a way to distract him, but Maggie looked so earnestly at him, that he didn’t mind. In fact a small part of him was thankful that he could escape his feelings.

“Oh, I grew up with a lot of people around. I’m used to it.” Paul didn’t know if he just liked the tough but kind woman or if it was his own vulnerability in this moment at lead him to disclosing this. Maybe both.

“Big family?” She asked carefully, unobtrusive.

“Na. Group home. I… I have found it hard to get close to anyone. Neighbours, friends,… boyfriends.” He offered carefully.

He might as well say it, all this staring at Harry had probably given it away long before and Paul had been out of the closet since he was 16, refused to crawl back into it now. Maggie just looked at him with such a warmth that made him want to duck his head.

“You should try it some time. Even if it doesn’t last. Life can be too short now, not to.” She told him, bumping his shoulder with her fist again. Her words left him feeling oddly shy and unsettled.

When he looked back to the RV, Daryl was stepping into it, determinedly not looking back. Probably knowing that if he did, he would have lost the resolution to leave with Rick again.

+++++ Flashback end++++

“Harry, are you alright with Daryl being back in Alexandria?” It was strange to hear Maggie ,but being unable to really see her as she whispered.

“Yes, I have the easy part. I have a clear task laid out for me that will need all my concentration. Daryl, he has the harder part, waiting… When the last time he went away without me, came back to find me gone, thinking me dead for six months. He’ll need to trust that this time will be different.” Harry whispered but Paul could hear the wince in his voice, when he spoke of Daryl’s discomfort.

Paul wondered again what their relationship was like… Were they really a couple? Maggie seemed to think so…

“I think the Saviours are done.” Sasha mumbled next to them.

“Good, let’s get going.” If Paul concentrated hard enough he could see the small ripples when the disillusioned nodded.

“Take care!” He heard Glenn whisper in concern.

“We will. Stay safe!” Harry mumbled back and he must have cancelled the charm because suddenly Paul saw himself confronted with four very serious expressions.
“See you later.” Harry tried to sooth them.

Paul jumped a little when a smaller hand grabbed his and pulled him to the cellar door.

Harry manoeuvred him onto the broom and told him to hold on tight.

Which wouldn’t have been half as terrifying, if Harry hadn’t been nearly fucking invisible!

It was one thing to feel that there was something in front of you but when you couldn’t see it your brain got really confused.

Paul had barely any brain capacity left to notice the tension in the younger man, when Harry had grabbed Paul’s arms to put them around his slender waist or the shaky exhale that had followed.

He was too occupied with the fact that now the broom under them had become invisible too!!

Paul couldn’t wholly swallow back the shout that escaped him when they started hoovering over the ground or the bout of slightly panicked ‘Oh my god’s and ‘Holly shit, I’m flying!’

After he had calmed a bit down he had felt the rhythmic twitching of Harry’s shoulders and for a moment he feared that he had triggered and missed another panic attack, but then he noticed those small chuckling sounds.

_The little wizard is laughing at me!_ Paul thought incredulously. But it was a nice sound.

“We’re still hovering. Ready to fly for real?” He could hear the wide grin and the good-natured teasing in Harry’s voice. Paul would have loved to stick out his tongue at the teen but that would be futile now, that they were both invisible.

So he settled for poking the British boy playfully between the ribs.

“Do your worst.”

He should have kept his stupid mouth shut…!

Somehow his brain had deleted what Harry had told them about the acceleration of his broom…

Fuck!

He could just hope that the wind had swallowed his slightly shrill scream…
And if Harry hadn’t been laughing before he sure as hell was now.

Thankfully the truck was a lot slower than the broom so Harry slowed down considerably. It was still unsettling to be that high in the air and only to feel the broom under him and Harry before him.

But damn the view was fantastic!

He tried his best to keep track of the roads the truck took. Harry had to cast a few warming charms on them, as the wind grew colder and harsher.

This went on for miles, tracking the truck, watching the landscape under them.

And Paul trying not to dwell too much on the fact that he was clutching Harry’s slender and detectable body tight to his chest… He was really thankful that apparently his brain had decided that he was too high in the air without any visible boundaries to get an erection right now…

Finally they saw it.

A factory. A big one.

This was a lot bigger than the satellite station.

Damn, dread filled Paul. The compound was huge. This had to be the main headquarters for the Saviours.

Other old and apparently empty buildings surrounded the main factory. Harry carefully circled the whole area before he chose a building near the entrance to land on. It was a good choice, Paul noticed. Close so they could watch and observe but would be also hidden from curious eyes.

Harry cancelled the Disillusionment Charm once they reached cover.

Harry had sat down on the roof and let his sharp green eyes wander over the compound. The factory was surrounded by a chain-link fence.

And fuck, had those bastards impaled walkers around the perimeter for added security?! People with shackles around their feet and in too big beige sack like shirts handle the dangerous task of putting these roamers in place.

As it seemed the compound wasn’t just a base but a self-sustaining community as well. From their flight they knew that there were gardens and chicken coops… and they had spotted what had looked like non-combatant members, working and taking care of the place.

Damn!

“Can you tell me again what you know of the Saviours and Negan? Harry asked carefully.

“Negan's the head of the group. As soon as the walls were built around the Hilltop, the Saviours showed up. They met with Gregory on behalf of their boss. They made a lot of demands, even more threats. And… as we hesitated… Negan showed up… Just once… And he killed one of us--Rory. He was sixteen. They beat him to death right in front of us. Said we needed to understand,
right off the bat.” Paul closed his eyes at the terrible memory and the horrible pun.

“So Gregory went with the deal?” Harry’s voice was carefully controlled and his face blank.

“Gregory’s not exactly good at confrontation. He’s not the leader I would’ve chosen, but he helped make this place what it is, and the people like him.” Paul admitted.

Harry frowned at him and for a moment Paul thought that the perceptive teen would call him out on his bullshit, but he didn’t.

Instead he settled on: “Leading people is a big responsibility. A commitment.”

_Ouch! Guilty as charged!_ Paul winced.

“Let’s take a look on the inside.” Harry nudged him. “Here take this.” The pretty teen handed him something. “I don’t plan on it but should we be forced to split up in there or should the Disillusionment Charm wear off, pull it over you.” Harry smiled warmly at Paul’s surprised expression when he touched the strange fabric. “It’s an Invisibility Cloak.”

Paul marvelled at the fine weave, it felt so strange to the touch, like water woven into material.

“Please keep it safe. It’s an heirloom.”

*  

Rick watched his brother pace around the meeting room. The man had nearly bitten his head on five instances since he had dragged him back with them to Alexandria. The fact that they discovered on their return that Carol had left the community, because she couldn’t deal with all the killings anymore and that Morgan had chased after her.

It had come to heavy blow to them all.

Rick’s had felt a little faint as he realized that they had left the community basically defenceless behind the night before…

Only Beth, Noah and Gabriel had been there to look after their people.

Fuck! Had the Saviours decided to attack them…

Daryl seemed to agree with Rick, because as much as he sourly had glared at them all, he hadn’t left to search for Carol.

It had been heart-wrenching to watch his friend being so torn. But at the same time this was the most controlled Daryl had been in months, listening to reason, seeing the bigger picture. Rick didn’t want to admit it but having Harry back already changed a lot.
Sadly Daryl’s agitation had only gotten worse, when Harry and Jesus hadn’t come to Alexandria the same night. In the end Rick hadn’t been able to deal with it anymore and had pushed Judith into the hunter’s arms. The hunter had glared something fierce had him but Rick didn’t care. When Judi had started to whinge and pull at Daryl’s unruly hair, he had started to hum to her and called her his littl’ asskicker. Rick had taken that as a crises averted, at least for the moment.

Now it was nearly noon and Rick feared that Daryl newly won restrain was running out.

Suddenly the sharp sound of a gunshot filled the air, causing Daryl and Rick to sprint outside. They found a wide eyed Michonne staring at Harry, who rubbed the back of his head awkwardly… and Jesus, who kneeled on the ground moaning and retching.

“What happened?” Daryl growled out apparently as perplexed as Rick.

“They just… they just appeared out of thin air!” Michonne blinked stunned at them.

“We apparated.” Harry supplied as he patted Jesus back with a sympathetic wince. “It can be a bit uncomfortable the first time.”

“Uncomfortable?!” Jesus hacked. “It’s … GOD, I have no words for it! It was like being pressed very hard from all directions. I could not breathe, my eyeballs were being forced back into my head and my ear-drums were being pushed deeper into my skull.” The Hilltop scout groaned out in something very close to hysteria.

That sounded dreadful. Rick looked questioningly at Harry, who shrugged.

“I always thought that it like being forced through a very tight rubber tube but you get used to it. Wizard transportation is really weird.” Harry shook his head with another wince. “But it was the fastest way back.”

Here the petit teen glanced at Daryl who flushed a bit, but Rick thought that his brother looked a bit pleased at Harry had hurry to make it back, even… or maybe more especially… when it made Jesus lose his usual graceful composure.

“You might want to call a meeting. We found some interesting things.” The Hilltop scout huffed out, finally gaining back some sort of control over his body and Rick thought that the man looked somewhat less green around the nose.

“You want some water?” Rick asked in sympathy.

“Yes please…” The man sighed in dismay.

So twenty minutes later Harry and Jesus relayed their findings to the community. And Rick couldn’t decide if he wanted to kiss them or cry…

The information they had gathered… Hell…

The Sanctuary, the big compound, the self-sustaining community that even held its own marketplace.

The workers, gardeners, janitors and doctors… hundreds of non-combat members, but also
hundreds of fighters...

The defence lines… the holding cells… fuck… the harem!

Harry told them that they helped one of Negan’s wives to sneak out… Sherry.

She had told them a lot about the system Negan had built and how he controlled his men and the other communities, before she had fled the area.

Not all of them lived there of their own free will but to survive they all had sworn to become Negan.

“We’re all Negan.” They were fucked!

Silence fell over the group.

“There is more.” Harry said. “I fear that they have more outposts… But right now I don’t know, where they could be. The trip showed one thing very clearly… We need more people, Rick.”

Rick knew that Harry was right.

Damn! Where were they supposed to find more allies?

“I think it’s time you meet someone.” Jesus grinned at them.

* 

Chapter End Notes

I noticed that i’ll probably have to up the total chapter count again ^^'  
When i sketched it out it seemed so easy. And now i noticed that it's impossible to fit all those things in a single chapter and get the character development right... :p
I apologize before hand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

I'm so happy to have finally finished that chapter!! ^^ It took me longer than usual to finish it. I hope you enjoy it ^^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 21

The Kingdom.

Two guards on horseback were the first outpost.

When the car had stopped, Harry had called Buttons to a halt.

The teen had enjoyed the opportunity to reconnect with the stallion and decided to take him out for a ride.

The horse and Tilly hadn’t wanted to leave him alone as soon as he had set foot in the stable. Both animals had demanded a lot of attention from him and Harry had relished in the calming effect of brushing down the beautiful horse and cuddling with the sassy cat.

As he had slowly relaxed, his nerves had caught up with him.

When he had come back to Alexandria he had feared that Rick and Daryl wouldn’t listen to him, wouldn’t want to hear his explanation as to why he had lied to them, left them, not come back immediately…

Instead he found them in a building conflict with a feudal lord, who terrorized other communities by violence and fear… who had nearly killed part of his family and whose men had killed Denise…

So instead of sitting down with his family to reconnect, he had flown of with a squib descendant to infiltrate the enemy’s base.

All that…
It left him reeling and drained for the moment. It would have been so easy to let himself be pulled into all those dark thoughts and doubts and sorrows.

“**Well, tell me what went well so far?**” Denise’s voice asked in his head.

A sad sob had constricted in his chest. Denise. Sweet Denise, who had done so much for him…

With a calming breath he had collected his thoughts.

*I found them.*

*My family is alive.*

*They listened to me and they believed me.*

*They still want me. Daryl still wants me around.*

*We’re together in this.*

*I can help them.*

*I will find ways to protect them.*

In that moment Buttons had nibbled encouragingly on his hair, causing Harry to laugh lightly.

Yes, things weren’t perfect, but they didn’t need to be. He hadn’t come back for perfection but for his *family.*

Two men came to them on horses…

“Who dares to cross into the holy land of…” Now Harry looked questioningly at Paul, who had jumped out the parking car. It sounded very theatrical.

“Holy hell! That you, Jesus?” The other guard called out, all noble attitude gone. The long haired ninja with the bright cyan eyes laughed, when he saw a middle-aged man wearing armour, coming their way. “Richard!”

The man greeted back but froze at the sight of the rest of the group. “Who are these people, Paul?”

“Friends, allies from a likeminded community.” Harry would have preferred it if Paul would have spoken a little more clearly and it seemed like he wasn’t the only one.

“You said their a likeminded community. Likeminded how?” Richard inquired suspiciously.

“We live, we trade, we fight the dead… sometimes others.” It was the last part caught Richard’s attention.
What followed between Rick, Daryl and Richard fell under the usual pissing contest at meet strangers. Testing each other, making sure, that both parties knew, that you were serious and no push overs. Harry wanted to roll his eyes at these alpha male interactions.

Catching Paul’s twinkling eyes he got the feeling it was a shared sentiment.

Harry starred at the old school surrounded by yellow busses and steel walls. This community held a totally different vibe than the Hilltop or Alexandria… looking at the jogging knights, Kingdom didn’t hold the air of nativity had made Harry so uneasy in Alexandria at first more… but it was harmonic… happy?!

The British wizard wondered how they had achieved that innocent atmosphere.

Paul had told them that the Kingdom was in fact a kingdom. With a King and knights, who had an affinity for melee weapons, such as spears. But guards also used firearms and they had well-trained fighters, like a standing army. They would be the perfect allies.

Like the Hilltop they had learned to be self-sufficient long before Alexandria had gotten the hang of it. They had many fields, houses and a theatre. Paul told them about the beautiful gardens and other agricultural areas that had grown enough to maintain the community and still give tributes to the Saviours.

The Kingdom was doing well. And they had at least some electricity. Merlin, there were movie nights taking place.

“Morgan!” Carl suddenly called out grinning all over his face, causing Harry to flinch at the unexpected sound. Morgan turned out to be a dark skinned man around Rick’s and Daryl’s age with a very kind smile, leaning on a long staff. Carl, Rick and Daryl ran over to him, with the former Sheriff clasping his shoulder in manly greeting.

“How do you know each other?” Ricard asked slightly suspicious of their friendly interaction.

“We go back right to the start.” Rick simply stated. And it was enough of an explanation. Nowadays there were few who could still claim that.

But Morgan had stopped taking notice of the others, instead he had taken to starring at Harry.

“You’re that boy from the photo in Rick’s house. Everyone thought you died.” Morgan remarked, looking very intrigued.

“My name’s Harry. Nice to meet you.” Harry introduced himself, but didn’t give away anything else. This was neither the time nor the place to disclose something like this.

“You find Carol?” Rick graciously changed the topic. Beside Harry, Daryl tensed up in nervous expectation.

“Yes. She wasn’t happy that I followed her. When I found her she had been shot, just a graze nothing major but I brought her here. They have doctors and threatened her well. She left a few days ago.” Morgan sighed in resignation.
“Where is she? She’s ok?” Daryl’s concern had sky rocket at Morgan’s words.

“She wanted to get away from everyone. From us. She lives in a small house half an hour away from the kingdom to the west.” The dark skinned man said solemnly.

Harry glanced at Daryl. The hunter was already nervously biting his thumb. His slated blue eyes were already searching out the western sky.

The youth couldn’t help but smile. This was so Daryl… a grumpy, loyal Hufflepuff, who would find no rest until he had seen Carol for himself.

“You want to look for her, don’t you?” Harry asked softly, carefully touching Daryl arm.

An indecisive grumble was his answer.

“Then you should go, the rest of us can handle the negotiations with the King.” Harry offered.

Rick looked like he wanted to protest but teen nudged him forcefully with the elbow.

“I don’t think we need Daryl starring the man into submission, when we have already Rick doing his thing.” Harry grinned at Morgan, while Rick and Daryl spluttered. The small wizard looked encouraging at the hunter. He was pretty sure that the man had already come to a decision.

“So be careful and greet Carol! Tell her to take care and that I miss her.” Harry smiled warmly at the stoic man, who nodded gratefully.

“Tak’ care, too.” Daryl rumbled softly before he gently ruffled the green eyed teen’s unruly raven hair.

“Sure!” Harry quipped up, trying to ignore Morgan’s surprised looks at their familiar interactions.

*

“Jesus! It pleases me to see you, old friend.” Ezekiel boomed into theatre in his best King-voice.

“It pleases him indeed.” Jerry mirrored his enthusiastic greeting, making the King wince a bit. Even in a play that would be a bit over the top.

“Jerry.” He hissed at his faithful steward. The message of ‘tone it down’ went unspoken.

“Tell me, what news do you bring, good King Ezekiel? Are these new allies you brought me?” The ragtag group behind Jesus was very particular…

They looked as hardened as alley cats. It was the look Ezekiel wanted to keep from his peoples’ faces.

“Indeed. They are, your majesty.” Jesus smiled winningly at him and turned to call them forward, only to be surprised when they looked completely stunned and hesitant behind him.

Nearly all of them starring aghast at Shiva who eyed the strangers from her spot beside his throne.

“Oh yeah, I forgot mention the tiger.” The bearded man rubbed his head, a little at loss.
Ezekiel startled, when around Jesus’ short and slender form an even smaller and petit figure poked its head around and snorted.

“Indeed you did, good friend Jesus.” A heavy British accented voice mocked laughingly in same theatrical way the King had spoken.

The person that came forward, was a very pretty boy with raven hair and a pair of flower pattered glasses. Jesus coughed but Ezekiel could see how his friend’s eyes shone bright with mirth and something else, while they tracked the boy skipping down the rows.

“This is Rick Grimes and some of his people.” Jesus pointed a man out who looked like the gunslinger from an old western, a cowboy.

Light blue eyes that were hard and determined surrounded by a scruffy salt and pepper beard and dark brown curls. A fighter and a man on a mission.

“I welcome you to the Kingdom, good travellers. Now what brings you to our fair land? Why do you seek an audience with the King?” Ezekiel kept to the script. The show would go on. He was curious to hear what they wanted.

“Ezekiel. King. King Ezekiel. Alexandria, the Hilltop and the Kingdom.” Rick Grimes started a bit unsure, his southern accent very thick. The demeanour of a King irritated most people enough to lose a bit of their composure. It was one of the reasons Ezekiel had kept to it. The other was… well… fun!

Fake it until you make it, baby.

“All three of our communities have something in common. We all are pressured by the Saviours. Alexandria already fought them once and we won. We thought we took out the threat but we didn’t know enough then. We do now! We only beat one outpost. We’ve been told that you have a deal with them. That you know them. They rule through violence and fear.” Rick stated firmly. Ezekiel couldn’t believe this! Angry he stared at Jesus and his young friend swallowed heavily.

“Our majesty, I only told them, because…” His expression was enough to make Paul’s cyan eyes go wide and to stop talking.

“Our deal with the Saviours is not known among my people. For good cause! We made you a party of that secret when you told us about the Hilltops travails, but not to…”

“We can help each other…” Jerry harshly interrupted whatever their Hilltop friend had been about to say.

“We brought you into our confidence, why did you break it?” Ezekiel demanded the betrayal of his confidence was hard to stomach. This was endangering everything he had built here.
He wanted to protect his people. He wanted to protect their peace of minds. They all had lost enough! The deal he had made with the Saviours for their safety… it would scare them.

It would bring the fight into their home, when he had tried so hard to keep it at the doorstep.

“Because I wanted you to hear Rick’s plans.” Jesus tried again.

“And what plans have you, Rick Grimes of Alexandria.” As vexed as Ezekiel was with Jesus about all of this, he knew it would be stupid not to listen, because they did share a problem, indeed.

“We came to ask the Kingdom, to ask you, to join us in fighting the Saviours, fighting for freedom for all of us.” Rick Grimes was a proud man, as he stood there in a confident stance, stubborn chin jutting out.

“Rick, what you ask of us, is very serious.” Ezekiel was getting a headache from all of this.

“My people are strong but there aren’t enough of us. We have a good arsenal but probably not enough.” The leader of Alexandria was a man used to command authority.

Good God, the man practically oozed the need for confrontation.

“We have people and weapons. If we strike first together, we can set things right before they get worse to the point we can’t handle things anymore. The time is now.” Suddenly Richard spoke up next to him. Frustrated that one of his most trusted knights challenged him like that, drove into an old argument before those people

“Morgan what do you say?” Ezekiel tried to buy himself time. But Morgan seemed to know Rick well, so his option could be helpful.

“Me? I… uhm…” The Aikido master stuttered out.

“Speak up.” The King imperiously pressed on.

“People will die. A lot of people not just the saviours… If we can find another way we have to… Maybe it’s just about Negan?! Capturing him, holding him…Maybe…” Morgan really tried to be true to himself. That’s why he liked the other man so well, because they both shared a vision of peace and without bloody conflict.

Ezekiel could see disappointment and resignation in the faces from Alexandria and in the faces of Jesus and Richard.

“That won’t work. He made them all Negan.” A voice piped up from his left side, making all of them jump in surprise at the interruption.

There next to his throne sat the British teen cross-legged, completely relaxed and comfortable, while Shiva’s big head laid in his lap.

Fuck! To the Lord and everything above! Shiva could kill the kid with one strong blow…
Ezekiel could feel cold sweat trickle down his neck.

“Harry?! Get away from there!” Someone squeaked in alarm, causing the tiger to growl threatening.

“Na, na! Hush! Everything is fine.” The kid gushed at the big dangerous animal, ruffling the big cat's fur behind her ear. Shiva just slumped back down with something close to satisfied groan and started to purr.

Loudly.

Ezekiel could still feel the adrenalin pumping through his veins… Shiva was picky with persons. A real diva! And she… she never let strangers this close to him without making a sound of warning. None of them had noticed that the boy had approached the throne, let alone the tiger… not even his own people…

“Dude this is so cool. Never seen her do this before.” Jerry grinned broadly at the boy.

His steward was apparently the only one not completely thrown or sick with worry that a teen had been able to sneak up on them and to tame Shiva.

“How did you do this, man?” The Hawaiian man radiated hyper curiosity.

Ezekiel wanted to groan. “Jerry, your words leave me yet again pitch-kettled.”

His big friend laughed. “Sorry, my King.”

“Well, I'm a wizard. It might have helped with getting close to her unnoticed and animals tend to like me.” Harry smiled back at Jerry, whose eyes went comically wide.

The King wanted to laugh at the ridiculous answer. How could he believe such baloney?

Magic wasn’t real! The boy was obviously out of his mind.

Rick and Jesus looked about ready to faint, as they stared pale and shaken how Harry cuddled with his tiger.

“What?!” Ezekiel finally choked out. This had to be a joke.

“I’m wizard. I can do magic.” The kid tilted his head to the side before he whipped out… a polished wooden stick.

Even Shiva stopped purring for a moment, obviously sensing that her new best friend was about to do something interesting. With a flick and a low muttered incantation Benjamin’s armour got changed into real metal instead of plastic…
“Damn, my man! Is this real!?” Jerry called out. The tall broad man looked close to dancing in excitement.

“It’s for now. Such transfigurations tend to wear off over time, so it should be renewed every few months.” The British teen stated very calmly.

Ezekiel’s head was swimming. He couldn’t process all of this right now…

“What do you mean that they are all Negan?” Richard asked suddenly.

“Paul… uhmm… Jesus and I infiltrated their main headquarter to gather information. Negan doesn’t just take in people, he forces them and he breaks them. They work for him or they die for him. He makes them his. He makes them Negan.” Incredible green eyes bored into Ezekiel’s. “Tell me about your handler, who comes to the Kingdom to collect the tribute.”

“Don’t call him a handler! We’re no animals” Ezekiel bit back at the teen in discomfort.

“Oh, you are to them. To Negan. You’re an educated man. You know the worth a peasant has to a feudal lord…” Harry looked at him firmly and unrelenting.

Ezekiel shivered under the scrutiny of this intense stare out of glowing green eyes. It made the hairs in the back of his necks stand up.

“His name is Gavin. He hard but he tries to be fair…” The King tried to ignore Richard’s mirthless snort but what got to him was the kid cursing darkly in response.

“What’s wrong with that? It shows that we can make this deal work in mutual respect.” Ezekiel tried to reason.

“No this means, you’ve got lucky and that Negan doesn’t care how his men get their results as long as they get them.” The leader of the Kingdom felt his stomach drop at these words.

“You say this is the lucky deal?” Richard snapped at the boy who was still calmly stroking Shiva’s fur.

“Well, nobody tried to bash in your peoples’ heads, or did they?” Harry asked conversationally back.

Ezekiel felt his stomach churn at the prospect. He had talked to Jesus about all of this. The Hilltop scout had confided in him about the brutal methods the Saviours had used to oppress them.

“No. But everything that you see here. It came at a cost. Lives. Arms. Legs. The peace with the Saviours is uneasy but it is peace. I need to keep it. I need to try.” He sounded grave and desperate even to his own ears.

“But that kind of peace will break, sooner or later… Luck tends to run out at the worst possible moment.” The British youth reminded him unfazed. Those bright green eyes had taken an uncanny quality.

Ezekiel shivered at the unholy prediction. Grinding his teeth he tried to defend his decision. “I kept my people safe. I kept them happy and protected their innocence.”
But one look at Harry’s disapproving face told him that this time he couldn’t fake it until he made it… The boy was calling him out on his bullshit.

“No you didn’t. You kept them ignorant of an imminent danger! And ignorance is a bliss that can wipe out whole communities these days. Your Majesty!” The pretty kid chastised him and Ezekiel had to swallow at the accusation these ancient eyes laid on him.

“Your people don’t know that they aren’t free. That their lives and their work belong to someone else. You think you’re protecting them but all you do is pulling a cloth over their eyes. Keeping them blind when they need to see things clearly for what they are. Whatever you decide to do after this meeting, you should think about that at least… Kids sneak out of protective walls all the time and they can run into the wrong people much too easy…”

This could have sounded like a threat but it was said in such earnest and grave way that Ezekiel felt the weight of truth settle heavy on his shoulders.

“He who loses wealth loses much; he who loses a friend loses more; but he that loses his courage loses all.” Harry quoted Miguel de Cervantes.

Ezekiel wanted to drop his head into his hands. This was an impossible situation!

“You gave the King much to ponder. I invite you all to sup with us and stay to the morrow. You gave me much to think about… I will tell you my decision in the morning.” He needed time to think.

“Listen we can’t stay…” Rick started to protest vehemently.

“We can and we should.” Harry interrupted brightly starring at his leader, who frowned uncertain at the small boy.

“Really?”

“Yep, we waited for worse in worse places. Besides Daryl will probably take a while until he comes back from Carol’s.” The little wizard stated with a shrug.

“Carol?! You know her?” The King couldn’t believe it.

“Yes she lived in Alexandria. She’s a good friend of ours. But I understand that she was seeking solitude?” Harry replied. Ezekiel nodded perplexed at this new information. These people knew Carol. But hell, they had the same hard ass aura the grey hair woman possessed.

“So it’s good that only Daryl went to visit her. They were always very close. He will understand and respect her wishes the most.” The king got the impression that Harry hadn’t said this to him, because a winning smile was directed at the Alexandrian group…

A smile like Carol’s.

Maybe it was the smile or something else but Rick caved after unspoken messages were being sent
The green eyed youth then gently pushed a grumbling Shiva from his lap and stood beside his throne.

Christ, what a small thing he was. Harry bowed before him.

“Think about what was said today. But know one more thing. You might play at being a king but I certainly do not play at being a wizard.”

Green eyes glowed with power.

* 

Daryl looked at Carol. His sister. His soulmate. His wounded friend.

He couldn’t have held back the tears when he saw her on that porch even if he tried, pulling her in a crushing hug, holding her close. When he had come back to Alexandria to find her gone…again…

He had cursed all gods.

He had just found Harry again but at the same time he had lost Carol.

It had felt like a punishment, like too much good had just happened to him that Daryl Dixon didn’t deserve.

That lost little boy had in his head raised his voice again, screaming begging not to be left behind. And now that he found her… now that he really looked at her, he didn’t know what to do… what to tell her…

About the situation… About the Saviours… About Harry… About anything…

So he said the only thing he could think of.

“Marvin said you just left… Why did you just go?”

It was easier to ask her this outright than it had been with Harry. Maybe because he knew her longer or maybe he knew she would be able to look after herself. That she could take on any threat.

“I had to.” She whispered. “I couldn’t lose anyone. I couldn’t lose you. I couldn’t kill them. I could, I would… if they hurt any of our people. That’s what I would do… And I wouldn’t be anything left of me after that.” Daryl could barely stand the tears in her eyes, to see her this vulnerable it hurt him too.
“The Saviours did they come?” She sounded so broken and small.

“Yeah…” He groused hesitantly.

He knew her inside out. As he watched her struggle, he knew that this was the point of no return. She would come with him if he pushed now but she would break for it.

“Did anyone get hurt? Is everybody ok…? Did the Saviours…? Is everybody, back home, ok?”

Her voice was desperate, pleading him to tell her that things were alright. That it was ok to be selfish for once, because she would lose herself otherwise.

They were so similar sometimes, finding strength in each other. But at the same time it seemed like they were both cowards.

Afraid of hurting. Of getting close to anyone. Thinking that it would be easier to push those they love away, than face their shit and their hurt.

He remembered the intimate touch of Harry magic, the promises it made and the invite it proposed… to take the leap… to…

For Carol and him love had also always been pain. And now both they shied away from it.

He realized in that moment that she was hanging by a thread, barley holding on. Carol was trying to find something to hold onto.

After all the struggles she had faced and all the losses she had endured, she had decided to leave Alexandria and them, because she was breaking herself apart for them.

She had made that hard choice…

And so Daryl made up his mind to tell her what she needed to hear…

“They came but… we got away… Everybody is ok.” He couldn’t tell her about that night on the road, couldn’t tell her what they had called upon themselves. The lie meant nothing the moment he saw her shoulders drop and her face smooth out in overwhelming relieve.

Sobbing she sat next to him, shaking and all armour gone. Daryl realized that it had been a while since she had allowed herself, just to be… Carol.

What was the sense of dragging her back into their mess if she would lose herself over it in the end?! He could lie to her if it kept her safe.

“Ezekiel? Is he ok?” He asked instead.

“Yeah, I think he is.” She smiled at him and for the first time in a long while he thought it was a real smile.

“Harry’s back.” He blurted out.

Carol beautiful blues went wide as saucers.

“Harry lives…!?” She asked in disbelieve. Daryl just grunted in confirmation.
“Oh my…oh my God! Harry is alive? Just how is this possible?” She looked completely aghast.

And so he told her about Harry, about magic, about his insecurities…

“Oh, Pookie!” She caught his face between her hands and placed a soft kiss on his forehead. “What do you want to do?”

When he just shrugged helplessly and continued to look at the table, she huffed at him and hit his arm.

“Don’t give me that. Tell me, what do you want!”

He couldn’t find the words but he did dare to look but at her, let her see his eyes and the flush over his cheeks. She didn’t reprimand him, uttered no doubts, just smiled at him with an incredible warmth.

“There you have your answer, Pookie. Take that leap when you’re both ready. You deserve it, both of you.”

“I think he knew I needed ta see ya before a knew maself. As soon as he heard from Morgan that yer here, he told me ta visit ya. Said ‘Greet Carol! Tell her to take care and that I miss her.’ He step on Rick’s toes ta make him shut up. And send ma on ma way.” Daryl grinned fondly.

But Carol had gone ghostly pale. “He is here?!” She yelped.

“Yeah. He came with the rest of us… Why?” He asked flabbergast.

“Oh… damn, Daryl you didn’t say he was here. Oh my god!!!”

Without another word Carol grabbed her weapons and ran out of the door, Daryl tried to ask, what the ever living hell was wrong but she just kept running…

Back to the Kingdom.

*

Just when they were getting ready for dinner Harry spotted her…

He noticed her unmistakable long silhouette first, even before he heard her shrill voice and the familiar British accent.

It threw him back to the years at Private Drive, ducking away under frying pans, being dragged around either out in the garden or back into his cupboard under the stairs. In his mind he heard the five bolts on his bedroom door clicking shut.

He saw his aunt, standing in a little shag on a small island in the middle of a storm on his eleventh birthday and remembered how she had spat her distain for him and his mother out that night.
“Harry!” Carl, Rosita and Paul were looking concerned at him. The one eyed teen had even carefully placed a hand on his shoulder.

“You’re… you’re really pale. Everything alright?” Rosita asked. “You wanna sit down?”

“Uhm… you see that woman there? The blonde one with the long neck.” He pointed her out to them.

“Yeah” Carl frowned as he glanced at her. “What about her?”

“I think that’s my aunt.” The British teen whispered, feeling a little faint.

“You’re kidding right?” Rosita growled, while Carl just stared uncomprehendingly at the tall and thin woman. Without another word Rosita sprung to her feet with an expression on her face that called for a fight and carnage.

“Wait! Wait! What’s going on here?” Paul asked in alarm, when he saw the murderous face the tough Latina was making.

“Harry’s family abused him because of his magic since he was a baby. They came to America for a vacation and when the whole thing with the dead happened… they just left him behind on first opportunity!” Carl had caught on, now also glaring fiercely in Petunia direction.

Harry could hear Paul cursing under his breath… at the same time he forced himself to get a fucking grip.

It was just Petunia! Merlin be damned! He had faced worse!

“Stay here!” He choked out. “Really, stay here! Please!” Harry sighed in relief when his displeased friends stayed, while Paul looked torn.

“What do you want to do?” That was the question wasn’t it?!

“Just get me out of here… the less fuzz we make the better. We certainly don’t need a hysterical scene right now. Not when Ezekiel hasn’t made a decision yet…” Harry wasn’t ready to deal with this he just couldn’t.

***

“You!”

Just when they had left the dining hall, a shrill shout rang out in the courtyard of the kingdom.

“Fuck!” Sharp nails scratched over Harry’s cheek, as Petunia threw herself at him in a fury leaving bloody trails on his skin.
“You should be dead! You… you’re worthless freak, just like your mother. Abortion!” She shrieked at Harry like a harpy.

He flinched back from her, his hand pressed against his aching cheek. Maybe it was the pain or the adrenalin rushing through his blood after the attack but he felt a lot more grounded now. Since the moment he had spotted her, he had felt out of control, small and vulnerable.

Like the skinny little waif had she had thrown in the cupboard, right now in that moment with his cheek burning something happened…

Petunia seemed to shrink before his eyes.

His aunt had always been that tall, commanding adult to him, so much bigger than him… But right now, she seemed somehow less than before…

Maybe because she was missing he usual hairdo, her pristine dresses or blouses, her pearls… but this mad woman who had lost all composure or decorum, wasn’t the terrifying aunt he had feared all his childhood.

“Where are Vernon and Dudley?” Harry asked neutrally, pressing a hand against his hurting cheek.

“They are dead! They are dead and you’re here!” She snarled at him. Harry felt strangely empty at this revelation.

He had thought that he would feel something… satisfaction, anger, relief… sadness… Anything, besides this disturbing numbness.

“You say this as if this was my fault, Petunia.” His voice sounded so far away to his own ears. An old hurt pressed on his chest, but it was dull. His existence had always been enough to make him the guilty one… she had never needed a reason to blame him.

It hurt but it also had lost it sharpness… It didn’t devastate him like it used to.

“Of course we left you. You were sick and a burden, like you have always been.” Behind someone gasped and Harry could see how Rick’s and Paul’s expressions had turned into stone. Sky blue eyes searched green ones and unshed tears spoke of an old understanding between them. The former deputy finally understood.
“Now you’re our sick kid! You’re family. And family will always come first! We look out for each other. None of us is going to leave you behind.”

Yes, Harry had a family now. They weren’t blood but what did that matter.

Taking a deep breath he took a step forward so he could look Petunia Dursley in the eye.

“Why?”

It was the one question he wanted to know for all those years.

“Because you and your mother always tainted anything normal and good in my life. Nothing I did, could have been special after her! And then she got herself killed and we got loaded with you. The same as her, poisoning my perfectly normal family with your weirdness, making me afraid that people would notice.” Her pale eyes were narrowed in contempt, as she spat those words at him.

“You were jealous?! So you decided that it would be better to lock me away in cupboard for ten years, to starve and punish me just for existing?” He couldn’t believe her. That was supposed the reason he had suffered so much?

Because his aunt was petty?

“We tried to stomp it out of you! We did nothing wrong. We clothed and we feed you, from the goodness of our hearts.” Petunia was spitting fire and brimstone now, a utterly mad glint in her eyes.

“You dressed me in your son hand-me-downs, that were holey and three sized too big on me. You only feed me when you remembered or with what was left. What I don’t get is, why have you kept me?” Harry asked bitterly, his stomach was in knots.

Anger, rage and disappointment filled him. If she hated him so much why hadn’t she brought him to an orphanage?

“Because he promised me that if we’ve kept you our family would be safe from the people who killed your parents.” His aunt hissed.

He couldn’t help it… Harry laughed mirthlessly at that.

“Haahhaahaa… That old, manipulative fool!” The green eyed teen cursed violently. “We both would have been better off, if you had dropped me off at the next orphanage.” He could only shake his head.

Petunia’s only response was to spit at his feet.

And as she opened her mouth again… a loud yell interrupted the confrontation.

“OH my ….! HARRY!”
Carol and Daryl were running to them. At the sight of the grey haired woman Petunia reared back in fright, breaking out of the hold Rick and Paul had now her.

“Stay away from me!” She shrieked in real panic.

“So you two already met?” Harry asked with raised eyebrows, looking from Carol to his aunt, to which both women looked uncomfortable.

“That crazy bitch threatened to kill me, after she discovered who I am.” Petunia hissed further inching away from Carol. It was strange to see her so frightened after she had attacked her own nephew with her bare fists and nails.

“You did?” Harry blinked at the grey haired woman in surprise.

“Yes… but I… I couldn’t. I wanted to! I really, really wanted to but I couldn’t. I’m so sorry. After everything she did to you… I…” Carol looked completely distraught.

“I’m glad.” Harry interrupted her, smiling softly.

“What?” Their den-mother’s bright blue eyes turned to him and Harry’s heart broke a little for the tears that had gathered in them. This woman had been more of an aunt to him than Petunia had ever even tried to be. The British wizard wanted her to be alright.

“That’s why you went away, right? Because you needed a break, because you didn’t want to kill anymore.” He said gently.

“Yes, but…” Carol looked so vulnerable right now. Harry understood her need to take care of her family. He knew how much she loved them all. But she would tear herself apart if she continued on that path of destruction.

“So yes. I’m glad, that you didn’t do it. I’m glad and I’m proud. Killing her wouldn’t have been worth hurting yourself over it.” He told Carol warmly. “Killing her now what would that change? I won’t take back all of those lost years. She can’t hurt me anymore. And I’ll have to accept that she was unable to love me. That there was never anything I could do to change that.” Harry smiled at his honorary aunt sadly.

“‘I thought you were dead when I decided to let her go… She shouldn’t go unpunished. It doesn’t seem fair. Doesn’t feel right...’” Carol mumbled through clenched teeth but the teen shook his head. He didn’t want Carol to dish out his revenge.

“She has to live without the two people she really loved, Vernon and Dudley. I don’t think that there could be a greater punishment for her than that. I won’t say that I will grieve for Vernon, but I am sorry for Dudley. He still had the chance to grow into a better person than you raised him to be.” Harry looked directly at Petunia, when he said this.

And maybe he shouldn’t have, because the woman flipped.

“You’re foul little freak. You cursed us. It’s your fault. You’re the one that should be allowed to live.” She tried to claw at his eyes again, looking insane and unhinged.

“That’s enough, Petunia.” Ezekiel growled commanding but she paid her community’s leader no
Gripping swiftly one of Paul’s knives she threw herself at Harry. But the petit wizard had learned enough from Carol and Michonne to instinctively intercept his aunt’s attack. Before he could register what was happening he felt a sharp pain on his shoulder and the sacking weight of a body in his arms.

She had attacked him and had reacted in trained instinct… Fuck!

She was losing too much blood. In rising panic he looked at Rick and Ezekiel, who had matching expressions of shock and… pity.

No! Numb with shock Harry dropped his knife and pressed his shaking hands over the wound.

“You cut true. It’s too deep. There’s nothing you can do of her anymore.” The king sighed resigned, closing his eye at the picture before him.

Gruesome gurgling sounds escape a dying Petunia, as she glared at him.

“That’s not what I wanted…” Harry whispered. “I… I’m sorry that it couldn’t have been different…” His voice was giving out on him.

Fuck!

That’s not what he wanted! Why had she come at him like that? Why…?

Harry wanted to close his eyes, cover his ears with his hand, just to drown out the picture and sounds of his aunt bleeding out in his lap, fading away.

But some torturous part of himself wouldn’t allow him to look away and to block out her struggles.

*You did this to her. Now you don’t get to look away.* His mind seemed to scream at him.

And when he had thought that it was bad to watch her go through death door, it was nothing on the moment she went… just… still.

Carol inched closer to him with a dagger in her hand obviously wanting to make sure that Petunia’s corpse wouldn’t reanimate but Harry waved her off absentminded.

“I hope you’ll find some kind of peace. I will be no longer a punching ball for your jealousy and fears. You were a hard-hearted and bitter woman and what you did to me was wile. Good bye Petunia. I’m done with you.” Gently Harry closed her eyes, before he stabbed her temple.
“Can’t hurt ya anymore…, some bullshit.” Daryl snapped angrily from the side. He glowered threateningly down at Petunia’s corpse, as he crouched down next to Harry.

“Yer shoulder’s bleedin’” Harry could only nod numbly and despite his angry grumbling the hunter pulled him tenderly away from the body.

“We’ll show you where Harry can clean up. Benjamin, could you get some clothes for Harry?” Ezekiel’s voice was soft and Harry noticed that he had forgone his usual theatrical way of speech.

“Yes of course.” The young blond man next to the King nodded.

Moving mechanically, Harry let himself be let through the Kingdom, Petunias sticky blood cooling on his skin and clothes.

He barely registered as the doctor patched him up or as Carol shoved him into a shower. He had yet to find his voice to talk but he felt the weight of his family’s stares on him, heavy with concern.

When he left Benjamin’s bedroom dressed in fresh clothes, they were all waiting for him. Carl and Daryl were watching him like hawks, while Paul and Carol seemed overwhelmed with guilt. Rick, Ezekiel and Benjamin just seemed concerned and pitying.

Harry stopped in front of the King, unable to look him into the eyes the teen starred at the man’s chest instead.

“I’m sorry! For all of this… I was prepared to just walk away from her… I didn’t want to burden you or your community with all this drama… I didn’t want to kill her…” Here the wizard’s voice hitched.

“Harry… none of what happened tonight was your fault. She attacked you, twice! You defended yourself, if you hadn’t, she could have killed you.” Ezekiel rumbled soothingly at the teen. Suddenly Harry couldn’t have held his tears back even if he wanted to, sniffling he rubbed at his eyes.

“Bloody… I said I wouldn’t grief so why…?!” He cursed. His voice sounded small even to his own ears.

“Is this first time you killed some?” Benjamin asked in sympathy. Harry just shook his head.

“Is there something we could do to help?” Ezekiel asked.

“Would it be alright… if I went into the stables?” Harry’s request seemed to surprise everyone but Daryl, who just hummed in agreement to idea.

“Yeah sure…”

“Thanks.” The green eyed youth mumbled in exhaustion.

In a small procession they walked to the stables where Harry made immediately a beeline for Buttons. The black stallion greeted him with a soft nudge to the head, its breath ruffling Harry’s raven locks.
Daryl handed Harry the brushes for the horse’s fur without words. But the hunter made sure to let
his fingers linger on Harry’s skin for a moment, before he plopped down in the hay making himself
comfortable.

Harry felt warmth spread through him at this. It felt like a ritual between them, giving each other
room to sort out their thoughts and emotions but staying close.

Together withstanding the others inner turmoil.

The rest took the hint and sat down, too.

With each brush stroke something settled in Harry, like a storm calming down, and with that came
the words.

“It was stupid to think I could just walk away from her, wasn’t it?” Harry asked in to the silence of
the stable.

“Harry…” Carol started but the teen didn’t stop talking.

“I really thought that maybe it would work… that I could turn my back and just forget that she
lived here. After everything that happened, she was still my mother’s sister. The only blood
family I had left… I thought it would count for anything… I had to try…” He glanced at Ezekiel.
The man looked grave at these words and their meaning.

“But this… it was bound to happen, wasn’t it? Because it didn’t matter what I wanted, she could
have never let her grudges go…” To utter this insight out loud left him empty and drained… and
unbelievable sad.

“I’m so sorry!” Carol and Paul blurted out simultaneously, causing Harry to snort.

“You two have nothing to be sorry for. It was my own naivety that brought this on. Carol, I stand
by what I said in the courtyard. I’m glad, you didn’t do it. This was a confrontation you couldn’t
bear for me but I had to face her myself. It was necessary… or I would have never seen things
clearly. It’s not your job to protect us from every hurt.”

The grey haired woman buried her face in her hands as sobs shook her. “She could have killed
you…”

“But she didn’t. And I rather have her blood on my hands than on yours.” Harry told her earnestly.
And he meant it, if anyone should shoulder this death it should be him. He didn’t want this on
Carol.

“It was my knife…” Paul whispered. Harry just threw a fist full of hay at the long haired man with
the knitted beany, causing him to splutter in stunned surprise.

“Stop the pity party, Paul. It doesn’t suit you. You couldn’t have stopped her more than you could
have stopped me from throwing hay at you.”

Harry teased him, as Paul blinked at him in astonishment, before he suddenly narrowed his big
cyan eyes and tossed two hands of straw back at the wizard wizard’s face.
With a small smirk and a flick of his wand Harry retailed by heaving half a bale of hay at his lounging family, covering them almost completely in the dried grass. Daryl reacted promptly by dusting off over Ricks head, who in turned whinged that straw would catch in his curls. Ezekiel just levelled him with an unimpressed look pointing to his long dreadlocks, where several dried grass blades were poking out.

Carol giggled, as she started to tickle the usually grumpy hunter with an especially long piece of straw, making him squeak and jump away from her, only to lose his footing and plop back into the heap, stirring up even more of the straw.

Carl and Benjamin were now busy with chucking more hay at Harry and Paul, while Buttons stayed completely unimpressed by all this commotion.

The horse used to opportunity to pluck his food comfortably directly out of Harry’s hair, causing the British teen to laugh out loud at the tickling sensation.

The ensuing straw fight left them all breathless and giggling like school children. Benjamin, Carl and Harry had turned on Rick, Ezekiel and Daryl, while Carol was acting as a double agent, sometimes working for one team and then the other. Together they slumped into another heap of hay while Harry tidied the stable with a swish of magic.

Ezekiel watched in fascination as a broom swept through the hallway on its own accord.

“You’re really a wizard.”

“Yes I am.” Harry told him softly, patting down Buttons. Out of the corner of his eyes he could see Ezekiel staring at him in wonder but instead of commenting further on the matter the King just shook his head after a while.

“This is a really beautiful horse you have. How have you acquired it?” He asked kindly.

“Thank you. We found it outside of Alexandria and brought it in.” Harry said softly, which caused Daryl to snort loudly.

“That’s one way ta say it… Kid gav’ me an’ Aaron nearly a heart attack ‘bout the horse.” After that Daryl launched in a rumbling retelling, how Harry had convince Buttons to follow them home. In the end Carl and Ezekiel seemed to be the only ones impressed with his reckless stunt.

The King even let out a booming laugh.

“Reminds me of how I got my Shiva. I was a zookeeper. Shiva, she fell into one of the concrete moats in her exhibit. It was empty, the vets were on their way, but her leg was ripped open. She was gonna bleed out... The sound she made... She was in so much pain. I knew the risk. I had to try. And I got my shirt up around her leg... saved her life. After that, she never showed so much as a tooth in my direction. Keeping a tiger isn't practical -- I know. She eats as much as ten people. She could yank the chain out of my hand -- hell, she could yank my arm right off. But she hasn't. She won't. I lost a lot, just like everybody else. She was the last thing left in this world that I loved. She got me here, made me larger than life. And I made this place.” Ezekiel remised with a small smile.
A peaceful silence settled over them all, lying in the hay, leaving reality for tomorrow. No one wanted to address today’s struggles again.

And somehow the green eyed teen had the feeling that it would be futile to do so…

Like Harry, Ezekiel needed to try, against all caution and better judgement. He would need to try, to keep the peace he had gained by dealing with the Saviours intact. Until he would have to realize that it didn’t matter what he hope for or how much he worked for it all to work out, if the Saviours would sooner or later stop doing their part…

Harry just hoped for the kind man that the price wouldn’t be too high in the end.

“Hey Harry?” Carl brought the wizard out of his musings.

“Yeah.”

“Would you sing for us? Like in the old days?” The younger teen asked carefully.

Humming in agreement Harry summoned a harmonica, charming it to start the melody.

“Oh I like this one.” Paul mumbled.

“\textit{It's nine o'clock on a Saturday}\\
\textit{The regular crowd shuffles in}\\
\textit{There's an old man sitting next to me}\\
\textit{Makin' love to his tonic and gin}\”

Harry started softly. The harmony filling the break between the lyrics, before Paul chimed in for the second verse.

\textit{"He says, "Son, can you play me a memory}\\
\textit{I'm not really sure how it goes}\\
\textit{But it's sad and it's sweet and I knew it complete}\\
\textit{When I wore a younger man's clothes"}

Paul’s voice was really nice Harry decided a bit of tune but enthusiastic, happily singing along.

„\textit{La la la, di da da}“
La la, di da da da dum“

Ezekiel and Carol added their voices in the mix.

“Sing us a song, you’re the piano man

Sing us a song tonight

Well, we’re all in the mood for a melody

And you’ve got us feelin’ alright…”

Rick joined them, terrible off key… but it didn’t matter. To Harry it sounded incredible nice and he thought that he could even hear Daryl’s velvet deep and smooth rumbling in the background.

Relishing in this small moment of peace and happiness Harry closed his eyes.

Tomorrow would come soon enough…

* 

The next morning Ezekiel had offered them trade and help should ever they need it at any point but he for now he would not join their fight.

And Carol had used the opportunity to press the truth about Negan and the saviours out of Rick, like the badass she was. After a long explanation about what had occurred that night on the road and how only Harry’s arrival had saved them, she had levelled Daryl with an odd look that was somewhere between anger, disappointment, love and adoration.

To Harry it was a confusing message but Daryl seemed to get it, as he shrugged at her, half in apology and half in defiance, while his eyes spoke of a warm softness.

The relationship those two shared was a complex one that needed few words to convey the most important things between them.

Harry had seen Carol struggle after all this new information, so he had just flicked her forehead gently.

“Stop fretting! It’s going to be okay. I’ll promise to look after them. Do what you need to do, Carol. We all love you too much to watch on as you tear yourself apart for us.”

The grey haired woman hadn’t given him a verbal answer to this, just pulled him into a bone crushing hug, nodding into his shoulder.
Afterwards she had hold Ezekiel in a no-nonsense voice that she would stay in the community from now on.

No one had been really surprised by Carol’s or Ezekiel’s decisions. They had all expected it in a sense. And despite Rick’s and Daryl’s sour mood, Harry had still thought they had made progress, even if the King wouldn’t fight with them or Carol came home with them right away.

Forming the alliance hadn’t been in vain.

They had to plan this carefully and for the long run. This wasn’t a conflict that would be over in one ambush…

If things escalated with Saviours… that would mean all-out war!

Surely they had to know that?!

The looks on their faces, when Harry had said so, had shown something else… shock, fear… but also stubborn determination! They would not back down.

They had come too far, fought too hard to get to this point, to find a life, freedom and a future for themselves, just to hand it over to maniac with a baseball bat.

Paul had decided to travel direct back to the Hilltop from the Kingdom and Ezekiel had lend him a horse for the way. The longhaired scout had vehemently refused Harry’s offer to apparte him, after his last experience with the travelling method.

At Daryl’s teasing Paul had made it quite clear that there was no room for judgement until the hunter had experienced the sensation of being squeezed through a straw himself. Before that Paul would reject any mocking!

Harry laughed at their interaction and had handed Paul his Invisibility Cloak… just in case he should run into trouble on the way.

As soon as they had passed Alexandria’s gates Rosita and Daryl jumped out of the car at the sight of the young brunette awaiting them.

Tara was back.

*

The afternoon had been dreadful, filled with tantalising explanations about the loss of Heath and Denise, the Saviours, Negan, Carol and the Kingdom… and Harry.

To say that Tara had been shocked would have been understated.
For a long time she had just starred at young wizard with unfathomable eyes.

“You could have saved her if you hadn’t been hiding away in a castle in Scotland.” She whispered. “You had always hunches if one of us was in danger… why didn’t you come to save her, too?!” Tara demanded in angry desperation.

Harry felt winded in the face of her grief and her accusations, speechless he opened and closed his mouth, as guilt tried to swallow him whole.

She was right, wasn’t she? He had lost track of time at Hogwarts as he had procrastinated out of fear… Would he have been able to save Denise if he had been here?

“That ain’t on him, Tara.” Daryl hissed in agitation as he paced in Rick’s living room. “Bastard shot her with ma bow! With ‘n arrow meant for me… Asshole missed. Should hav’ been me, not her.”

“And she was out there to help Daryl and me to face or shit… To face her own shit… She wanted to be braver. To tell you that she loved you, too.” Rosita added solemnly.

“This isn’t on any of you.” Michonne interrupted them gently. “She wanted to be out there, although she knew that it was dangerous. She was a good person, who wanted to help. And even if Harry had been here, he isn’t almighty. We can’t expect him to safe us all… Negan and his men killed Denise. No one else.” The samurai said firmly to Tara but she also fixed Daryl, Rosita and Harry with a harsh glare that dared them to disagree.

Heavy grief settled over them all like a dark cloud.

“Fuck, I need a drink and a smoke.” Tara sighed dropping her head into her hands.

“Ok, just a moment.” Harry flicked his wand. “Accio cigarettes and Firewhiskey.”

Daryl blinked when a pack of cigs and a bottle with amber liquid floated down the stairs.

“Where did that com’ from?”

Tiredly Harry rubbed his forehead. “Remind me to unpack tomorrow… I brought tons of stuff back with me. This was just a gimmick.” He caught the bottle. “Wizard liqueur.”

At Rick’s raised eyebrow and Harry shrugged. “For a wizard I’m officially of age.”

The green eyed wizard conjured eleven shot glasses and then proceeded to poured everyone a portion of the magical whiskey.

Raising his glass, he looked at a crying Tara.

“To absent friends.”

“To absent friends.” They all echoed the sentiment and then drowned the burning liquid.
Heavy coughing followed.

“Holy shit!” Daryl rasped. “Did just smok’ com’ outa our ears? Feels lik’ drinkin’ fuckin’ fir’.”

“I always thought that it seemed to burn the feeling back into me, dispelling the numbness and sense of unreality. Firing me with something close to courage.” Harry grinned at the redneck hunter.

Daryl huffed a laugh at that, while Tara gave Harry her glass.

“Well, then we all should better take another one.”

*  

It was a week later when Paul came back to Alexandria. He was still overwhelmed with its suburban luxury every time he came here.

He greeted Eugene at the gate and the man informed him quite monotonously that Rick and the others were at the Grimes house. Paul strolled over there only to find the whole family on the porch, together with Aaron and Eric, with an odd atmosphere hanging around them.

“What’s up gu…?!?” The Hilltop scout greeted them.

**BOOMMM!**

An explosion rattled the house!

Well not nothing… because the curly haired man send a look full of exasperation to the sky, while Michonne patted his shoulder in silent comfort. The rest of the family glanced at the house in various states of amusement and slightly uneasy concern.

“What the hell is going on here?” Paul asked them, eyes budging.

“Apparently having a young still learning wizard in your house is a very… loud thing… with a lot of stuff blowing up.” Rick groaned looking a bit desperate.

“Oh my… that was Harry?” Paul asked in honest alarm. “Is he alright? Won’t anyone go looking for him?”

“Nope… Done that, burned one of my eyebrows of. After that he told us to stay out of the room, unless called in.” Noah replied rubbing over his left brow, causing Beth and Carl to snicker in mirth.

“Stop whinging. Harry grew it back and as far as I know he always tidies up after himself.” Aaron
laughed in amusement.

“But he’s alright? What’s he doing?” Paul was really curious now.

“Yes and no fucking clue. He refused to tell us.” Tara grumbled. “He just set up something that looks like a mixture of old fashioned laboratory and a library. He locked himself inside five days ago. Since then we haven’t seen or heard much of him besides the occasional explosion and heavy cursing.”

“Which ‘e did only after ya told him that ‘e failed ta save Denise.” Daryl reminded her growling. Paul noticed that the frowning hunter was the only one looking really worried, one knee bouncing nervously, as he sharpened his knives.

Okay… so there was some tension. Tara grimaced at Daryl’s harsh tone.

“I apologized.” She sighed. “I thought he was ok… He said, he was ok.”

Daryl just grumbled at her but it had lost heat.

**BOOOMMM!**

Another house shaking explosion rang out making them all flinch.

“God damn it! We’re going to have a million walkers at the gate if he keeps this up.” Rick groused.

“Was the fifth today! That’s enoug’, man.” Daryl mumbled but before he could stalk inside probably to drag Harry out… The attic window got ripped open.

Worried they all glanced up.

*Holly shit!* Paul snorted in disbelief. *Was this a cloud of neo pink glitter fuming out of the window?*

Loud coughing could be heard from somewhere in the cloud. In the lifting smoke Paul spotted Harry’s wild raven hair sticking up in all directions, his dorky flower patterned glassed sitting askew on his nose as the teen tried to wave away the glitter cloud.

Looking around at everyone else stunned and gapping faces, Paul did the only thing left to him… He cracked up. Loudly!

“Oh!” Harry looked down at them surprised, readjusting his glasses. “Hey guys! Hi Paul! Great timing! I’m just done here. Wait a moment I’m coming down! I’ve got something I wanted to show
you.” He chirped at them smiling widely.

A few minutes later the teen stumbled out of the front door, still adorably rumbled looking in an oversized sweater and a basket hanging on his arm.

A wide, very proud grin stretched over the little wizard’s face as he handed them all something small out of his basket.

Paul intentionally inspected the flat round thing that fitted comfortably in his palm, laughing at the WWJD inscription and a comic version of a dancing Jesus on it.

“Is this a pocket mirror?” The scout asked in confusion as he flipped the mirror open.

“Yep” Harry popped the “p” still grinning at them, bouncing in excitement.

“Okaaay… Honey, don’t mind me asking but why are you giving us cute accessories?” Michonne inquired gently. When Paul glanced at the other mirrors he laughed out again. Michonne’s was red featuring Mulan, while Rick glared dismayed at snow white and Tara cooed at Tinkerbell.

“Harry?” Beth starred at her mirror.

“Yes?”

“Did Alice just wink at me?” The blond girl asked perplexed

“Ahh… I told them to behave!” The green eyed wizard groaned.

“You told them to behave?” Carl asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Sure. When you infuse muggle things with so much magic… well, let’s say they tend to develop a bit of an attitude!” Harry scratched his head, messing up his hair even more as well as stirring up some more neo pink glitter.

“So ya… magiced… them ta move?” Daryl starred suspiciously at the small cartoon badger rolling around on his mirror.

“No, this is more of a side effect, albite a cute one, I admit.” Harry grinned, but he finally took pity on their mounting confusion. “Here, I’ll show you.”

With that he produced a red mirror with Nala on the cover from his pocket, opening it a flourish and then said loud and clearly.

“Beth Green.”

The blond girl besides Paul yelped in surprise as the mirror in her hand started vibrating and Alice waved in excitement at her.

“Open it.” Harry encouraged.

They all watched over her shoulder as she carefully unclasped the pocket mirror but instead of showing the young woman’s reflection they were seeing Harry.
“It’s a two way mirror. I read about it in my dad’s journal. He and my godfather had something like this when they were at school, so they could talk while they were in separate detentions for pranking. It took me a while to get it right, hence the explosions… But I needed to tweak somethings so they would work for you too.” He explained them brightly. But faced with their probably completely stumped expression, Harry started to look a bit uncertain.

“What you said about Denise’s death it got… me thinking. That I couldn’t be everywhere and I realized that we had no means of communicating in case of trouble… So I thought this might be a… good idea… You think it stupid?” Worried green eyes looked at them all.

“So you basically created magical mirrors for us so that we could make video calls?” Rick looked gobsmacked at the green eyed boy, who nodded jerkily.

“Uhm… yes. I thought it would be handy.” Paul really wanted to smooth out those worry lines on Harry’s beautiful face, but he was still too busy getting his brain to work again.

Tara was the first to react, pulling Harry close. “Thank you! This… This is awesome! You are awesome!”

“Tara’s right but I have one question – Why the hell got Carl the only simple black mirror?”

“He’s a growing teenage boy. He needs the credibility.” Harry told them seriously.

Chapter End Notes

Mirrors:
Harry – Nala (Lion King)
Daryl – cartoon badger (Hufflepuff)
Paul – WWJD (What would Jesus do?)
Rick – Snow White
Michonne – Mulan
Maggie – Belle (beauty and the beast)
Glenn – Bambi
Sasha – Tiana (Kiss the frog)
Abraham – Ariel
Ezekiel – Bagira (Jungle book)
Carol – Snake (Slytherin)
Noah – Fabius (Ariel)

Rosita – Pocahontas

Aaron – Tigger (Winney the Puu bear)

Eric - Jiminy Cricket (Pinocchio)

Tara – Tinkerbell (Peter Pan)

Eugene – Eagle (Ravenclaw)
“Where is Carl?” Harry asked.

Judith was tugging playfully on his locks as she snuggles deeper into his arms. Harry couldn’t believe that she had still recognized him after all those months but she had hardly allowed him to set her down. Getting her to sleep in her own bed had been a nightmare recently and had caused quite a few temper tantrums in the last days.

“Oh, Carl started early with Tara, Beth and Enid. They wanted to visit Maggie and the others.” Michonne told him, while she prepared breakfast.

Harry sighed. He could understand the need to see them. Especially after Paul had told them that Negan had set a herd at the hilltop just the night after they had left for the Kingdom...

Apparently only Maggie stepping up had saved the community. The young woman had taken charge of the situation while Gregory had hidden away in the main house. That a pregnant woman had saved them by singlehandedly organising the protection of the place and by driving a tractor over a car that had played loud music to attract walkers, had apparently irked the cowardly leader of the Hilltop.

Gregory had even wanted to turn their friends away after that. Paul suspected that the man feared that Maggie could take his leadership.

And despite that the rat had still dared to make an inappropriate pass at Sasha!

Abraham had nearly torn the bastard apart...

The big soldier was now suffering from reoccurring headaches and had developed some slight
problems with his short-term memory. He had a difficult time remembering new things or recognizing newer faces.

Paul had been very quick to assure Harry that Dr Carson thought it possible that Abe might recover further and that such symptoms were considered normal after such heavy head trauma.

Harry was still very worried that he had somehow messed up Abe’s brain.

The young wizard hoped that the enchanted mirror he had sent to Hermione would reach her soon. Maybe she and Madame Pomfrey had an idea to help Abe. He missed talking to the know-it-all girl.

It had been quite a hassle to find an owl to the deliver the packet, but in the end Daryl had helped him to track a beautiful short-eared owl. The hunter had told him that this kind migrated a lot so Harry had offered her the job. She had nibbled his ear and then she had held out her leg dutifully.

Daryl had just shaken his head in mystified wonder before he asked Harry if he had ever seen a Chupacabra.

Paul had taken the six extra mirrors Harry had created to their four friends at his community and to Carol and Ezekiel at the Kingdom.

Which had led to a tearful and long chat between Maggie and Beth via the new devices. Talking about the pregnancy and everything that happened at the Hilltop, Maggie and Glenn had revealed that Gregory hadn’t just tried to throw them out but Paul as well. But it seemed like the people in the community hadn’t backed their leader up, refusing to throw a pregnant woman and whose who had help her to protect their home out.

Not to mention that those people loved Jesus too much. Every threat against their local philanthropist was not well received.

How the scout had spoken over his leader and supported his new friends. Grinning like a cat that got the canary Maggie also described how Paul had flushed and fidgeted when the Hilltop residents had backed him up in loyalty.

It was sweet picture. Paul deserved some loyalty.

He worked hard for the community.

But Harry couldn’t shake the worry that Gregory was ready to go such lengths because he feared for his grasp on power…

Fear made these kinds of cowardly and power-hungry men immensely dangerous. When said this to Maggie, she and Glenn shared a look and nodded seriously back at him.

They would be careful!
A day later Harry had gotten privy to an awkward and somewhat one-sided call between Carol and Daryl, that consisted mostly of a lot monosybilic grunts on Daryl’s part and good-natured chatting and teasing through Carol. Harry had been happy to notice that the woman sounded much better than the last time they had seen her.

Staying at the kingdom had been the right decision for her.

So, yes Harry could understand the need of the girls and Carl to check in on their friends at the Hilltop but he felt a small shiver of unease… Something felt dodgy today…

Rick, Michonne and Daryl seemed to sense his strange mood sharing glances between themselves.

“I’m sorry!” Harry could help but apologize, nervously biting his lip. He was making things strange.

“Don’t apologize, Harry! It’s not your fault. Want to tell us what’s wrong?” Michonne asked kindly, giving him a cup of tea.

“I…” A sudden vibrating sound interrupted them.

Ricks mirror! Alarmed the blue eyed man answered the call.

The face that greeted them was Paul’s, his cyan eyes wide and fearful, his skin a worrying shade of white.

“Rick, thank god! Carl…”

Harry could feel dread spread over him like a blanket. Whatever it was… it wasn’t good, not at all!

“Jesus calm down! What’s with Carl?” Rick commanded an absolute authority in that moment.

“The saviours came today for another tribute. We hid everyone from Alexandria… but Carl and Tara… They’ve gotten out! They jumped in the truck that drives back to the Sanctuary. They’re on their way to Negan!” Paul sounded desperate.

They all exchanged shocked stares. This had to be a bloody joke!

Surely Tara and Carl couldn’t have been that stupid or reckless.

“Shit! What were those two thinking?” Michonne cursed.

“I’m so sorry!” Paul apologized, sweeping a hard over a face lined with honest worry.

“Not ya fault!” Daryl sighed.

“What are we’re going to do now?” Michonne looked at a still shell-shocked looking Rick.
“I can find them.” Harry mumbled.

“What? How? You said only magic a find magic?” Rick frowned finally coming out of his rigour. Harry pointed wordlessly at the mirror in bearded man’s hand.

“You can’t find Carl und Tara but you can track their mirror, because these are magic?!” Michonne caught on, with a relived smirk.

“So haven’t given us just some nice communication devices but also a magical GPS?” Rick raised an displeased eyebrow.

“Well, you all tend to get into a lot of trouble, you can’t deny that.” Harry deadpanned. “It helps me sleep at night to know I have a way to find to if someone starts on a stupid, reckless solo kamikaze- mission”

The three adults in the kitchen open and close their mouths obviously trying to find words to contradict the small Brit… but one after one they winced, shoulders dropping in defeat.

“I will apparate to the Sanctuary and try to intercept them with as little fuzz as possible.” The small wizard told them.

“You can go alone!” Paul argued through the mirror in alarm.

“I have already Tara and Carl to look after in there and I can disapparate only so much people with me… I have to go alone and hope that I’ll manage without attracting too much attention.” The green eyed boy tried to reason.

All of them frowned at him.

“I don’t like that!” Rick admitted in defeat.

“Me neither! Your Apparation is quite loud. You need to be extremely careful.” Paul cautioned.

Daryl was silent but the storm brewing on his face talked very loudly.

“I will be.” Harry promised before he looked at Rick. “It’ll best if you head to the Hilltop. I will bring them there, just in case there are injuries that need to be treated.”

Giving Rick and Michonne a last nod, Harry turned to Daryl. The hunter seemed to be on the edge, gently Harry laid a hand on the older man’s defined biceps. Harry could feel the muscles twitch under his hand.

“I’ll be back.” He promised softly.

When Daryl finally met his gaze those slated blue eyes were warm and soft.

“Ya better be.” He huffed out before he pulled Harry close. Just for a moment but long enough for the green eyed youth to rest his forehead over Daryl’s rapidly beating heart.

“Take care.” Harry whispered into the soft flannel fabric of Daryl’s shirt, the hunter’s hand just held him a bit tighter before letting him go completely.
Harry bit back the sigh at the loss of contact and summoned his cloak and two extra guns and some
ammo from the attic.

“I’ll meet you at the Hilltop.” With a last look into slated blue eyes, he visualized the roof of the
building near the factory him and Paul had used the first time they had sneaked into the Sanctuary
and disapparated.

**

Harry landed on the roof and was immediately greeted by the sound of gun fire. Cursing he quickly
took cover, until he noticed that nobody was shooting at him. Peering down in the yard below the
slender teen cursed again, a lot more colourful than before.

There were Carl and Tara!

“Stay back and drop your weapons!” He could hear Carl calling out in the yard.

“We only want Negan and Dwight. He killed my girlfriend.” Tara snapped at the stunned men. “No
one else needs to die.”

Harry couldn’t believe those two idiots, standing on the truck bed and holding Saviours at gun
point.

A sharp and drawn out whistle answered Carl’s and Tara’s angry demands.

Harry spotted him easily.

Negan!

Walking slowly through the lines of his men and women, looking very relaxed.

“Damn, the man was good! Negan was taking perfect cover behind his people, no chance to shoot
him without hitting someone else.

“You are adorable.” The bearded man grinned widely. “You picked those guns because you
thought they looked cool? You totally did, didn’t you?”

Both Tara and Carl starred at the cocky leader, while two men used that moment to tackle them to
the ground. Harry recognized the lanky blond man with the heavy burn scars in on his face as the
guy that had had Daryl’s crossbow.

That had to be Dwight, Denise murderer.

Harry grinded his teeth as he watched how Carl and Tara were disarmed.
“Dwight. Easy.” Negan called the man back like a dog. “That’s not a way to treat our guests.” The grinning man held a hand out hefting Carl up, before he leaned in close mock whispering. “I remember you, little future serial killer. We’ve met in that nice, little meadow. I’ve had you all lined up for me. Nice and dandy. I had a very fucking nice conversation with your dad, that I remember. And then… Well, pardon me young man, excuse the shit out of my goddamn French but then I fucking left without finishing the damn job and until now I didn’t even know I had fucking forgotten about you all. Seriously man, I am burning to know, how the fuck that happened!?”

Shit!

Shit!

Shit!

Harry had feared that the Confundus Charm might break if Negan saw Carl again!

Here went their advantage down the drain… Fuck! Harry watched as Negan led the boy and Tara inside the big factory!

Dammit!

Quickly Harry covered himself with his Invisibility Cloak, running as fast and as silent as possible.

Sneaking through corridors, and over the courtyard, forcing locks to open for him with whispered Alohomora’s, flinching back from approaching guards and prisoners.

Sweat started pouring down his back when a walker close to the gate seemed to notice the unlocking spell, turning its milky, dead eyes on the point where Harry was, snapping rotten teeth at him. Three other walkers started to join in as Harry slipped through the yard.

The growing uneasy in his chest meant nothing good.

It meant Harry needed to hurry.

The green eyed wizard decided to follow his guts, letting his magic and hunches guide him to where he needed to be.

Right.
Another corridor.

And then he heard Tara scream.

*Fuck!*

Sprinting around another corner he saw them!

Two Saviours were pinning the struggling young woman to the ground, one of them had ripped her shirt open, revealing her bra to leering faces.

Harry didn’t stop to think.

Something in him just snapped at the sight of Tara’s terrified face and those two men holding her down.

One of the bastards was just about to fondle her breast when a goblin dagger slit his throat.

Silent the man made a grabbing motion to his throat, looking stupefied with horror at his companion, only to find him in the same predicament.

“As both men slumped to the side slowly bleeding out, Harry ran to Tara’s side taking of his cloak in the process.

“Tara!” He whispered urgently at the paralyzed young woman. She was still starring at the cooling corpses of the two men that had assaulted her. “Tara!”

Dazed she finally looked at Harry.

“Harry.” Tears were gathering in her eyes. “Harry… I… they… Oh my god…!” The wizard felt heart constrict in sympathy for her pain and confusion.

“Hush, I know. I know…” Carefully he pulled her close, covering them both in the cloak for safety. Taking a moment to comfort the upset girl, he rocked her shaking body and ran his fingers through her messy hair, until her breathing calmed a bit.

“Tara, look at me. We need to get out of here, fast! I need to find Carl first but it’s important to leave soon.” She looked exhausted but her beautiful dark eyes had gained some of their sharpness back. She nodded in understanding.

*Good!*
“Ok, I need you to do something. Can you cause a distraction? I’ll get us all out then but we need an opening, ok?” Tara starred at the two dead men. It wouldn’t be long now before they would roam the halls, but that wouldn’t be enough…

Pressing her lips to a thin line she nodded in determination. “Yeah, I can do that! I’ll think of something.”

“Good. Take the cloak, it will keep you invisible but remember that people can still run into you and the walkers can probably still sense you so be careful. And here I brought this…” Harry explained, handing her one of the guns and some ammo.

“What about you?” The brunette woman asked.

“I don’t need the cloak to stay out of sight. I’ll try to find Carl as fast as possible. You have still your mirror?”

“Yes they did think to take it.” She pulled it out of her pocket. Harry sighed in relief.

“Good! Make sure to hold onto it. It’ll help me to locate you when it’s time to go.”

Clasping her shoulder a last time in reassurance Harry was about to go when…

“Harry?” He turned back to her. “Yes?”

“Thank you. For coming. For protecting me. Denise dying that wasn’t on you. It was a mean thing to say. I’m sorry.” Harry’s throat felt tight but he nodded in understanding.

“It’s ok. Stay safe!”

A Disillusionment Charm later he was rushing through the main building, searching for Carl.

**

Carl felt sick.

This wasn’t what he and Tara had planned. They had thought this would be easy a surprise attack.

*In. Negan dead. Out. Stupid!*

And now he didn’t know where Tara was. They had taken her somewhere else while Negan had paraded him around the fabric as if he was an old friend of the family. Switching effortlessly between being friendly, talking as if there were pals and being openly threatening.

“You do the same damn stink eye as your dad… except it’s only half as good, cuz, ya know, you’re
missing one eye.” The man had smirked down on the blue eyed teen.

“Now, boy, where were we? Oh, yeah. Your giant, man-sized balls. You came here without a by your leave and killed six of my men. And I realize that I fucking know you… That I was about to bring up your wayward father into the family of the Saviours. That I was kind enough to show you how things get done now in this new world order. What happened in that meadow? I remember some things… All it bit fuzzy. But someone made me and my men leave that night, made us fucking think the job was done. Someone killed my Lucille that night. And I want to know who that asshole was?” There had been a big ass smile on the man’s face but his eyes had screamed murder.

Carl hadn’t been able to help himself and had flinched back from the man in fright.

“Oh don’t do that kid. You’re came here a total badass, don’t mess that up by be afraid now.” This had been said a lot more harshly than before, Negan’s eyes hard and serious.

“I’ll show you my home.”

And that he had…

The harem… Good god!

Harry and Jesus had told them about the wives but they hadn’t seen them themselves. The young woman, named Sherry, had told them about them, but to see it with his own eyes that was… Carl shivered in disgust.

The punishments… the hot iron…

Negan had made sure to show Carl how exactly he ruled his people.

Fear and violence. Rules and harsh consequences. His own code of fuck up honour.

The man was frightening.

And now they sat in the man’s bedroom and he had been forced to uncover his empty eye socket to this maniac. Carl wasn’t able up keep the tears of fear and humiliation at bay any longer.

“Ah fuck. I’m sorry. I was just messing with you. You know just pulling your dick, breaking your balls a little bit. Sometimes it’s hard to remember that your just kid.” The older man was so confusing. Negan sounded honestly sorry right now, his eyes somewhat solemn.

In that moment that was an urgent knock on the door and a chucky, sweaty man came in… with a baseball bat and…
"Harry!" Carl rasped out.

He had been afraid before but now he was in panic. There was a thin trail of blood running down his friend’s temple and he looked dazed.

"Fat Joe?! What have you brought me here?" Negan asked with a cheeky smile, his tone a sing-song that promised nothing good.

The fat man stuttered in nervousness. "I brought your bat and I… I swear there was nobody and… I just tried a few swings in the hall. And then he was there suddenly. God, I swear the boy was just there. He wasn’t before. But I felt the bat hit him and then he was there! I swear!" The man looked absolutely panicked, clearly not sure if he would be punished for the incident.

Negan just stared at the probably concussed Harry. Carl cringed when slightly unfocused green eyes landed on him. Harry had come to get him and Tara out and now he was hurt.

"Shit!"

“How fucking curious!?” Negan purred, a broad smile illuminating his face. “My Lucille No.2, Fat Joe!” The man in the leather jacket commanded. “You’ve been nice to her I hope? Gentle? Kind? She’s my new Lucille. I hope you treated her like a lady. I’m the only one who should pet her pussy if you know what I mean?” Negan smirked like a hungry shark at his lackey.

Sweat was pouring down Joe’s face. The man obviously didn’t know what to say or how to react, until Negan suddenly laughed.

“Easy, just messing with you. A baseball bat doesn’t have a pussy. Leave now.” The fat man practically flew out of the room as fast as he could.

“That’s what I’m talking about. Men breaking each other’s balls. This is the shit your dad’s supposed to be teaching you.” Negan twirled his new bat and pushed Harry next to Carl on the couch.

“My, aren’t you a fucking pretty riddle! You weren’t there and suddenly you were. Like I was busy bashing in some heads to make a point and suddenly I wasn’t, driving home, thinking I took out a group that killed my Lucille. Sounds a bit similar don’t you think? You wouldn’t happen to know something about that?” Negan laughed at Harry, who just cringed in pain.

Close up the stark contrast between Harry pale skin and the red trail of blood covering the left side of his face was even more worrying.

Carl sucked in a breath as Negan pushed his bat under Harrys chin to lift up the little Brits head to get a better look.

“Holy shit, what a pretty face! I’m a sucker for those eyes. Shit, man! I’ve always been a pussy-man, all my life, dicks and asses never did anything for me. But hell, even before I would have risked a look or two at such a hot little thing like you. These are desperate times maybe I should take on a husband for once” Negan hooted at the sight before him.
Carl felt dread and red hot anger boil through him at those words. A picture of Harry dressed in one skimpy black outfit huddled together with the women in the harem flashed before his eyes.

_No! Never!_

“Get away from him!” The blue eyed teenager growled.

“Ah protective of him are we? You’re boyfriend? No wonder you weren’t interested in my girls but looking at him I can understand. He’s special.” Negan leered at Harry.

“Stop talking bullshit.” Harry suddenly grounded out. His voiced sounded still a bit muzzy but his eyes were a bit more focused.

“Well that tickles my balls, you’re British! Surprise! Surprise! Your mouth may say ‘No,’ but your eyes say, ‘Fuck me until your dick breaks off inside me and fuses into some kind of Barbie doll crotch.’” Negan peered down at the boy in growing interest.

Harry all but threw himself back in a purely instinctive reaction. Carl could see how the boy next to him turned an alarming shade of green. His eyes behind his glasses very wide and his breath shallow.

And then the little Brit did something Carl hadn’t seen him done since before Alexandria… he bashed his head with a lot of momentum back into the wall behind the couch, causing both Carl and Negan to jump up in alarm.

“Fucking hell, kid!” The older man yelped, but Harry just fixed him with glared that reminded Carl strongly of Daryl.

“It’s been 215 days since I’ve been last raped. They are all dead. Rick, Michonne and Daryl killed them all.” Harry mumbled under his breath.

His mantra revealed a lot about him and Carl feared what Negan would do with this information but to his surprise the bastard backed off, his expression grave.

Like when had realized that he had hurt Carl’s feelings and had apologized for laughing and joking about his messed up face.

“I’m sorry to hear that, kid.”

Harry answer was mocking snort. “You are? Interesting!”

“Protecting the weak is the whole fucking basis for civilization. If you're not protecting the weak, you're not civilized. I am trying to build something here. I will save the fucking world.” The leader of the Saviours boasted.

“How generous of you!” Harry glared up at the man.
“Who the hell are you? Tell me.” Negan whispered eyes sharp as he used Lucille No. 2 to stroke carefully over Harry’s forehead revealing the lightning bolt scar under his fringe and caressed the teen’s cheek with the bat.

Carl didn’t dare to breathe, the memory of the heavy swing that had hit Abraham in the meadow still fresh. The sickening crunch of hard wood breaking bone and skin…

But Harry just remained unmoved, his breathing calm as he held Negan’s gaze with piercing, green eyes.

“Oh you don’t scare easy! I like that! I really, really like that. Together we could rule the world.” Negan pulled suddenly back. The man started to pace the room, doing playful swings with bat.

Carl flinched every time.


Abraham and Glenn kneeling before this man, swishing sound of the bat moving through the air, a sickening crunch, Maggie sobbing, Rosita and Sasha crying and screaming, the clammy wetness of the forest floor creeping through his jeans, the smell of blood and sweat and fear.

A cool hand gripped his own in silent comfort.

Harry!

Carl’s breath hitched.

Negan grinned at them again. “How cute! Holding hands?” But whatever rise he tried to get out of Harry… the British wizard refused to give in, again. He initial panic under tight control.

Carl wondered if Harry had a plan.

With a frown Negan took suddenly two large steps back to the couch.

“Oh pretty. I like ya. But this look in your eyes that won’t do, it won’t. I can’t have anyone looking at me like that.”

Harry just titled his head. “Will you kill me for it?”

“Oh I would hate doing that, sugar. Not because I hate killing, no… I like killing people. Oh. Well, I… I say it’s about killing the right people. But you, I fear killing you… you might be not the right person to kill, but you’re definitely a too dangerous person to let go…

So what is uncle Negan to do with you two?” The benevolent broad smile on Negan’s face rubbed Carl the wrong way.

“You sound a lot like my third grade gym teacher. Spend a lot time that year hiding from the creep.” Harry informed them in a deadpan voice, causing Carl to choke and Negan to narrow his
eyes.

“I don’t know what you’re trying to sell here… All I see, is you playing feudal lord.” Harry cut straight into Negan.

“We’re saving people! Killing one person, making others understand how things work now, it saves hundreds more. So, you kill the right people at the right time… everything falls into place. Everybody’s happy. Well, some people more than others.” Negan shrugged nonchalant.

“So that’s what you tell yourself to sleep at night. That you’re saving people? What the hell from? I wondered, you know?!” Harry answered calmly.

“Oho, you’re feisty!” Negan hissed. “Sing for me!” He switched the topic.

“What?” Harry and Carl asked in confusion.

“I said sing for me. I like to hear some music.” The man with the baseball bat demanded again with a chilling smile.

Carl watched as Harry looked pointedly from a CD player to Negan, calling him out on his bullshit.

“Don’t make me bash in Carl’s head.” The man tooted grinning winningly at the teens.

With raised eyebrows Harry fixed and unreadable look the leader of Saviours, before he stared to sing.

“It’s always funny how a little ‘Holy shit! Somebody’s gonna die!’ lights a fire under everybody’s asses!” Negan smirked.

“…Once I rose above the noise and confusion

Just to get a glimpse beyond the illusion

I was soaring ever higher, but I flew too high

Though my eyes could see I still was a blind man

Though my mind could think I still was a mad man

I hear the voices when I'm dreamin', I can hear them say

Carry on my wayward son

For there'll be peace when you are done

Lay your weary head to rest

Don't you cry no more.
Masquerading as a man with a reason
My charade is the event of the season
And if I claim to be a wise man, it surely means that I don't know
On a stormy sea of moving emotion
Tossed about I'm like a ship on the ocean
I set a course for winds of fortune, but I hear the voices say

Carry on my wayward son
For there'll be peace when you are done
Lay your weary head to rest
Don't you cry no more

Carry on, you will always remember
Carry on, nothing equals the splendor
Now your life's no longer empty
Surely heaven waits for you…”

Carl shivered.

Negan was gritting his teeth. The text could mean a lot in the light of their current situation…

“Careful my green eyed beauty, did your mother sing that song to you? Where is she now?” Negan hissed, twirling his bat.

“My mother is dead.” Harry answered with narrowed eyes.

“Ah, damn. I’m sorry. It’s a hard world now. Were you here on vacation?” Again the switch to a benevolent and concerned tone. This man was so confusing!

“My parents died 16 years ago, when someone attacked our home. My mom died because she refused to stand aside for the madman trying to kill me. The world has never been easy.” The wizard stated clearly, in a no-nonsense way.

Negan seemed stunned by this unexpected answer.

“I grew up with my aunt and uncle and yes, let’s say they took me on vacation.” The smile on Harry’s face looked bitter. “I killed my aunt in self-defence a few weeks ago because she tried to stab me.” He looked Negan directly in the eyes.
To Carl the man seemed rattled and confused by Harry.

“You’re a strange little thing. You look so sweet and fragile but you’re sharp as a razor cutting right to the bone. You remind me of someone I knew once…” Negan growled but not exactly unkind.

“What are you trying to protect?” Harry asked again.

“I am strong as shit. I took this place, and it was a damn free-for-all… A loose confederation of assholes, an army made up of gangs of animals, and I brought it all together. The last guy that was in charge, he wasn’t in charge of shit. He allowed people to be weak. They did what they wanted. They just fucked who they wanted without asking. I don’t allow that. I make them strong, which makes this world strong.” Negan evaded the question again.

“And you think that makes this entirely ok? Condemning rape and forcing some ground rules of human behaviour on them, that’s enough to justify killing everyone in your way.” Harry asked with narrowed eyes. “Killing people to stay in charge, forcing other communities to work as your vassals, by being the biggest bully on the school yard?”

“Like I told you… we’re saving people! And I don’t allow mindless slaughter. People are resources.” Negan hissed in agitation.

“No you’re just enslaving them. The Kingdom and the Hilltop, they would live perfectly fine without your intervention, you’re not protecting anyone but yourself and your own power.” Harry shrugged Negan’s ideology off, his bright green eyes alert and sharp. “You’re not going to last, even if we don’t get you. A system like that… it’s bound to fall. It’s already history. People will rebel sooner or later.”

Harry said this so coolly, that Carl shuddered.

“What does Lucille think about all of this?” The green eyed teen asked hauntingly soft.

“What kind of question is that? Lucille is a bat she doesn’t think anything.” Negan laughed but to Carl it sounded choked and strained.

“I don’t mean the bat, obviously. No, I mean the woman? Is she still alive?” Harry starred intendedly at the Saviour’s leader, who had gone every still.

“No? Ah, I thought so… Was she the kind of person that could have lived in this place, in the world you’re trying to build? Could she have lived knowing you named a bat, that you use to execute people with, after her?” Carl shivered at the cool and calm tone and how completely nonchalant Harry seemed.

Fuck, the little Brit could be really creepy if he wanted to.

_Good god!_ It was like observing how someone poked a hornet’s nest with a stick.
If Carl had thought that those creepy smiles on Negan’s face had been bad, this… this empty, icy eyes over an angry, snarling mouth… this was worse.

“Tell me who she was and I might tell you who I am?” Harry offered unfazed by the rage Negan directed at him, the man’s hand spasmed around the handle of his bat.

For the longest time Carl feared that Negan would refuse to talk and would just bash in their heads.

“She was my wife. My first wife.” The man finally hissed out. “Now stop looking at me like that.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.” Harry offered his condolence with the same earnest tone that Negan had showed him earlier. It seemed to hit the man harder than a punch or mocking would have.

“Save ya breath, kid.” He snarled at Harry. “I don’t deserve it. Not for her.”

God, Carl couldn’t believe this Negan was fighting for composure.

“Lucille was a real wife. My only real wife. Till death did us part and all that shit. It was before this. I lied to her, I screwed around on her. She never … She was good as gold, never called me out on my shit. She had cancer. Wouldn’t even tell me about it, she just… She just waited for me with that fuck sad, heart-breaking smile. And I didn’t deserve her. And when she went… When she went, it was during this. I couldn’t put her down. I couldn’t find the guts to do it. I broke very promise to cherish and care for her I ever gave her, in life and in fucking death.”

“You’re right! You probably didn’t deserved her love or her loyalty.” There was nothing but cold assessment in Harry’s voice. “But we seldom get to have a say in who loves us. It’s one of those tragic things in life… We just don’t get to choose who we love and who loves us back. Feelings are just stupid like that sometimes.”

Harry looked straight into Negan’s eyes. “So what are you trying to protect or are you’re just trying to redeem yourself? To annihilate your own weakness by becoming the strongest? By making others stronger?”

Something shifted in Negan’s face…

Just when he was about to say something a loud alarm shrilled through the compound. A panicked Saviour ripped the door open.

“Negan, the all the captives are out and the armoury is locked… “

“Ah Carl, this is our signal to go. Thank you, for your hospitality.” Harry said very politely to Negan, who looked utterly speechless.

Carl could feel how the small wizard pulled him close and then everything was spinning. The one eyed teen nearly crashed to the floor when they landed in the courtyard.

“Tara!” Harry shouted loudly out, looking around in hectic.

“What the fucking hell was that! Don’t let them go!” Negan screamed from above. The man was glaring out of the window, looking absolutely livid!
“Tara!” Harry called out again a little more urgent as more and more Saviours streamed into the courtyard guns trained on them.

“Shoot them!”

“Tara!” Harry cursed as bullets started flying. Before he did something that made the projectiles ricochet.

“I’m here. I’m here! Sorry.” Carl yelped in surprise as Tara materialized from under a strange fabric, part of her visible, part invisible where it still covered her.

“Wow! This is so cool!” He couldn’t help but gush.

“Yes, thank you. It’s very nice and all… but not right now! I don’t know how long the shield will hold.” Harry interrupted him impatiently, roughly grabbing both of them.

“Hold on tight and for fuck’s sake don’t let go of me or the cloak!” He hissed, still peering worried to where the shield had started to flicker under the assault of bullets.

“What followed was the strangest experience in his life. Everything went black. Pushed together, Carl thought that his body must have changed its form permanently. It would be impossible to regain his usual from after this kind of twisting and turning it had been doing.

And as soon as it had started it was over. He felt his body crash merciless into the ground.

The blue eyed teen heard heavy groaning from where Tara was lying in the grass, heaving. Yeah he could relate to that every time he thought about standing up his stomach kicked up a fuzz.

The sound of dirt crunching under boots had the teen glancing up.

He knew those boots… and the disapproving face that looked down at him.

“Uhm… hi, dad!” He greeted meekly.

Shit!
Paul had been the first to recognize the familiar sound of Harry apparating in. The younger man had sprung immediately to his feet and had raced to source of the noise, Rick and Daryl hot on his heels.

Slowly the three of them had approached the groaning heap consisting of Harry, Tara and Carl. They looked to be alright.

*Good! That meant he could kill his son now!*

Carl glanced up when he heard him and Rick saw the wince as his son recognized him. He had lost his eye patch and his one blue eye managed to convey worry and obstination at the same time.

*Well this was bound to be a fun conversation.*

Behind them were now also Maggie, Glenn and Enid.

Harry was the first to get to his feet… Shit was that blood on his face?

Damn! He could see how Daryl was already paling but before his brother could start in full mother hen mode…

Tara cheered a bit, getting on her feet. “Phew! That was incredible.”

Harry had pressed both hands into his sides, glaring down at the other two.

“Up with you! Both!” The small wizard snapped at them suddenly, making both Tara and Carl flinch in surprise.

His voice was tight with barely controlled anger and those green eyes emitted sparks.

“What the hell were you thinking? Of all the stupid, reckless things you could have done, you decided to just jump into a truck and start shooting.”

Rick looked at Glenn and Maggie and whispered: “Watch and learn this is going to be parenting gold! Someone else telling them off, so you get sparred the trouble of not being listened to.”

“It was a good plan! Tara argued. “We needed to do something! Negan has to die!”

“You can’t just kill Negan! Have you not listened to one thing Paul and I told you about the Saviours?! He made them all Negan! A lot of them are indoctrinated! It’s not enough to kill Negan. We need to think about all the Saviours! What to do with them? How disband the group and their ways or we’re just taking one head of and risk two others growing back.”
Carl and Tara exchanged slightly guilty glances.

“We had to try. Let least he will think about crossing us.” Carl said stubbornly.

“No you didn’t have to try!” Harry hissed in anger. “You exposed us today. They remember the meadow now! Negan knows that he still wants Alexandria to fall in line and now he knows about me! We lost all elements of surprise we had over the Saviours.”

Rick and everyone else exchanged horrified looks.

Shit! This…

“And what’s worse: you could have died today! What would have happened if I wouldn’t have found you?” Harry didn’t shout but he didn’t need to, his tone was sharp as a knife.

Tara flinched violently at that, getting very pale, but Carl wasn’t ready to admit defeat.

“I knew you would come for us if things went bad.” As soon as the words left his sons mouth they all cringed.

Harry reared back, staring blankly at the other teen.

“So you were not only ready to risk your own lives without telling anyone, but you hadn’t the decency too inform me that you were setting mine on the line, too?” Harry voice was carefully controlled and light, but his eyes were blazing. He looked very pale.

“Shit, Harry… No… I…” Carl stuttered.

“I think we’re through for today.” The British teen interrupted the younger Grimes brashly starring at the other boy with an immense air of disappointment. Shaking his head the slender wizard snatched something out of Tara’s hands.

And then something caught Rick eye…

“Harry…” He made a step towards the green eyed boy, who was swaying a bit.

The former Sheriff glanced over Harry’s body, cursing lightly under his breath when he spotted a growing wet patch on the boy’s black shirt.

As Harry tried to turn to Rick, he lost his footing, crumbling to the ground.

Jesus was just the fast enough to catch Harry.

“Shit he got shot! Quick get Harlan. He’s bleeding quite badly…” The long haired ninja called out in alarm.
“When did that happen?” Daryl growled at Tara and Carl, who both had gone ghostly pale.

“I… I… we…”

“Carl! When did this happen?!” Rick asked a little more harshly.

“He… he did that transportation thing two times… We… had to collect Tara… in the courtyard. They were shooting at us but Harry did this incredible shield thing but it started flickering when we…” Carl made a strange hand motion.

“He must have gotten hit then…” Tara whispered.

“Harry was already hurt when he found me…” Carl admitted softly, closing his one eye. “Some lackey hit him by accident with a baseball bat while he was invisible… nearly knocked him out… I think he already had a concussion after that.”

Rick just stared at his guilty son, before he pulled the distraught boy close.

“What I am supposed to do now dad? Harry was right I messed up and… And now he’s hurt because of that.” Carl whispered.

“Start grovellin’ after ‘e wakes up.” Daryl growled, eyes worried on Harry’s pale and unconscious form.

* 

Daryl watched as Jesus fidgeted.

Carson had taken Harry into the medical trailer to take care of the bullet wound and the bleeding. While Rick had pulled Carl and Tara away from the trailer and had forced them give a full report about the things they had seen in the Sanctuary, trying to fill gaps from Harry’s and the prick’s scouting trip.

And Aaron had taken one good look at Daryl’s scowling face to make the swift decision that he was needed elsewhere.

As soon as everyone had cleared out Daryl and Jesus had been the only ones left waiting for Harry.

Daryl was used to turning inwards in such situations, brooding to the point of self-destructing. Carol and Harry were usually the best in dealing with his funk. They always seemed to know what to do or to say or when to keep just quiet…

The ninja’s leg just wouldn’t stop bouncing!

As soon as they were alone, all zen-like composure had left the Hilltop scout. Daryl glanced at the man beside him. There was still Harry’s blood on his clothes and hands. Every time those big cyan eyes fell on the red stains, he flinched terribly.
With a sigh Daryl walked over to one of the water butts, dipping his old red handkerchief into the cool liquid. After wetting it thoughtfully he went back and held it out to Paul. The scout just stared at the worn cloth, as if he couldn’t comprehend what to do with it.

“Come on, man. Clean yerself up,” Daryl rasped at him.

Abruptly the bouncing leg stopped, and those incredible eyes looked up at him. The Georgian man had to swallow heavy when he saw the unguarded fear in Jesus’ face…

“I should have gone myself. Maybe he wouldn't have gotten hurt then.” Paul whispered dejectedly as he carefully took the rag from Daryl.

“Bullshit. No one could ‘ave gotten Carl and Tara tha’ fast back. Yer wouldn't even be there yet. And non’ of us could have take’ them that directly from under Negan’s nose like Harry did. No sense in overthinking it now.” Daryl scowled at the scout. “Ya not responsible for everyone. Ya can't be.” The hunter sighed as he watched how Paul’s hands shook, plopping down next to the other.

“Giv’ that ta me.” Taking the wet cloth back, Daryl took Paul’s hand into his own and started to clean the blood from it.

He could feel those beautiful eyes on him, confused and imploring but Daryl kept his gaze firmly on the scout’s hands. He noticed that the other had taken good care of them, nails neatly trimmed and clean besides the blood crusting them now. They looked very out of place in his own bigger, calloused, dirty, scratched and scarred hands.

Paul eyes were slowly dropping. Tension bleeding out of the man, as Daryl carefully cleaned his hands. It left an exhausted and worried look behind on the usually smiling and bright face.

Daryl could relate to that. Seeing Harry, like this… bleeding and unconscious… This was the stuff right from his worst nightmares.

The things Paul said where the same he mulled over and over in his head as he drove to the Hilltop with a tense Aaron on the backseat and an ever tenser Rick next to him.

But in the end he had to admit that Harry would have gone there one way or another. The little wizard had been clear that in the Grimes kitchen that he wouldn't be able to take more people to the Sanctuary and to bring additionally Carl and Tara back with him.

It didn't make it easier to watch Harry getting hurt.

But Daryl doubted that there was anything that could lessen the deep ache in his chest besides the sight of those bright green eyes alight with life and happiness.

“God I’m sorry. I’m not usually such a mess, I swear.” Paul finally sighed, shoulders dropping.
“’e’ll be alrigh’!” Daryl mumbled trying to convince himself as much as Paul.

“You don’t know that. It was stomach wound and he was bleeding a lot. What if he needs surgery and Carson can’t do it…” The younger man whispered in agitation.

Daryl shivered at the line of thought.

“’e ain’t dying! Shut ya trap. He just came back, he ain’t dying!” Daryl hissed back. Aggression trying to cover his own fear. The look of pity on Paul’s face told him just how transparent he was being.

“Listen ta me! Harry survived against all odds. Always! He ain’t going out like that! One of Negan’s men shot me in the shoulder that night, Harry healed it in seconds! He’s not going to die!” Daryl couldn’t allow himself to think anything else.

“He told me… he told me…” He stuttered. The hunter couldn’t repeat out loud the words Harry had said before he had left with Paul on that scouting trip to the Sanctuary, but they had burned themselves into Daryl’s brain.

“I meant everything I wrote in that letter, Daryl. You’ve given me the hope and the courage to hold on. Knowing you were still here, it drove me to come back. Please, trust me! It’ll be different this time…”

This was as close to an ‘I love you’ Daryl had ever gotten. From anyone.

“It’ll be different this time. It has ta be. There’s no alternative ta me.” Daryl stated firmly.

This was as close to an ‘I love you’ he had ever uttered.

“Does he know how much you love him?” Paul asked a strange look on his face.

Daryl flushed. “I… I ain’t…”

“You’re not what?” The damn hippie arched an amused eyebrow.

Yeah Darlina, yer ain’t what? Ya were so big on tellin’ yerself ya ain’t straight. Merle mocked in his head. But Daryl didn’t know if he was ready to admit all those things out loud to anyone.

“It’s not like that.” He finally mumbled his ears burning in shame.

“Really? Maggie and everyone else seemed to think so…” Paul probed gently. Daryl starred wide eyed at the scout.

They all thought… What?!
“Jesus Christ! He’s just 17… It… ain’t like that. Ya don’t know what… I don’t think he would…” Daryl stuttered in embarrassment.

“Wow full name and all.” Paul laughed at his flustered expression, before his face turned softer. “Have you ever really noticed how Harry looks at you? One could think you hung the moon and the stars.”

Daryl blushed even more at that. “He’s been hurt a lot… might never mean anything…” Paul snorted at this, looking incredulous.

“Whatever will happen between you on a physical level or not… I think you’re both well past the point that won’t mean anything. It already seems to mean everything, doesn’t it?” Paul looked a bit downtrodden when he said this, his leg bouncing again.

“It’s nice to see how close you are…” The Hilltop scout added after the a little pause.

Daryl glanced at the younger man, whose hands were now as clean as they could get with a wet handkerchief, sitting down next to him.

Paul didn’t exactly look as if he thought about something nice. More as if he had seen something that scared him shitless.

Daryl sighed, fishing through his pockets. He was getting desperate for a smoke. Wordlessly he offered one to the scout, who grimaced but took one any way.

“My gran used to tell me about magic.” Paul said suddenly. He looked as if he was far away. “I loved her stories, my brother hated them. Said he didn’t want anything to do with people casting out gran. But I was so fascinated and I thought that she liked talking about it too…” Daryl lit both of their smokes. He watched as the younger inhaled shakily.

“She died when I was nine. We had a car crash only a year later. Tom… my brother… my twin… he threw himself over me. He covered me during the crash… I was the only survivor that day.” Paul’s voice hitched. Daryl’s chest hurt, losing family like that it was shitty.

Paul looked numb, nothing like his usual cocky self, but he continued talking.

“I… when I was 21, I demanded to see the file about the accident. We got hit by another car, the other driver had apparently been stoned with something they couldn’t identify. Until that point I used to smoke and drink quite a lot, doing all kinds of shit when I was sad, angry or lonely. After that I couldn’t stomach it anymore. Cut down on the bad habits quite a bit and started to train. It helped me to clear my mind. I still get queasy driving in a car…” Paul whispered hollowly.

Daryl wasn’t good comforting people. He had never learned how to… and Harry was different… So he said the only thing he could think of. “Explains why ya drove like shite with that truck, man.” Causing the long haired man next to him to laugh out in surprise.

“Hey! I just told you my sob story.” Paul hit his shoulder playfully.

“I don’t smoke in doors.” Daryl confessed. “My ma… she fell asleep smoking, probably piss drunk. Burnt ta nothing, together with tha house.” Even after all those years it still hurt to think or talk about his ma.
“Shit! Daryl, I’m sorry!” The scout whispered.

Daryl just shrugged. “Sometimes I wonder… Our neighbour said something back then I didn’t understand, was ta small. But it came back ta me when Lori, Rick’s wife, been preggers with littl’ asskicker. Was in a bad place back then. On the road, no roof, no food, always movin’… She… she had problems sometimes… depressed, ya know, ‘bout havin’ a littl’ one in all this. Sometimes she had that look. ‘minded me of ma mum before she… My ma was pregnant again, I think. My daddy was an asshole, we had nothing… and now I wonder, if she did it on purpose.” Daryl rasped out. He had to close his eyes against the onslaught of emotions.

“Fuck!” Paul rasped out. “How old were you?”

“Seven.”

“I’m sorry. How did you cope?” Paul asked gently, drawing his legs up to rest his chin on his folded arms. He looked young and haggard.

“Not at ‘ll. Dad went on a bender. Ma brother Merle came back from military for a bit and then he left ‘gain. Life went on. Took care of maself, huntin’, livin’ in the woods. Stayin’ outta ma daddy’s way and when Merle came back… I followed him.” Daryl shrugged. “What happened to ya after?”

* 

“Group home. It was ok… A lot of people coming and going. And I… I was a brat.” Paul admitted, messing up his long hair. “I didn’t want anyone replacing my parents or my brother. I did a lot of shit… running away, picking up fights, drugs, liquor… men.”

Good god! He wasn’t sure why he had just said this.

Daryl looked like a deer caught in the headlights. It was such a stunned and innocent expression on the seasoned man, that Paul felt a bit dirty for saying it.

“I… I’m sorry! I don’t why I just said this! Fuck sometimes my mouth just runs away from me.” He was rambling.

Great...

Daryl opened his mouth, when suddenly the door of the infirmary opened and Alex came out. Paul tensed at the sight of his ex-conquest.

The nurse was tall and handsome… and well really good in bed… and he had been more invested in their relationship than Paul had allowed himself to be.

Just now the blond man frowned disapproving at the cigarettes in their hands.

“I thought you quit smoking!?” Alex asked. Paul felt a bit speechless at the way the question was asked, it sounded possessive and… jealous?
“We were waiting for news on Harry.” Paul tried for a calm response.

From the corner of his eye he could see Daryl’s frown deepening, looking assessing from Alex to Paul.

“Why are you waiting? Seems quite committed to be waiting here because of some strange kid from another community.” The nurse remarked snappishly. His brown eyes were narrowed in suspicion and jealousy.

Fuck that hurt! He could feel Daryl bristling besides him. Only then Paul noticed how close he sat to the other man. Their arms were nearly touching.

“Listen asshole, ya have news or not? Ain’t interested in hearing ya other shit!” Daryl growled out.

Alex glared at the ruff older man, sending another disapproving frown at his Ex. But before he could anything else Carson poked his head out of the door.

“Harry is better. The bleeding is under control and he’s sleeping right now but I want to keep him under surveillance for tonight.” The kind doctor informed them.

“I’ll keep guard.” Paul offered immediately

“What?” Alex raised his eyebrows incredulously.

“We ain’t doing shit here. Let us take guard over the kid at the least.” Daryl offered, too.

Carson glanced confused between Alex’s and Daryl’s scowling faces and Paul’s concerned one.

“Oh, but you should both clean up, while I tidy somethings in here and then you can take shifts. I could certainly do with a good night of rest.” The doctor tiredly dragged a hand over his face.

“Come on. We can shower in my trailer. Maggie and the others are probably still in the main house.” Paul motioned Daryl to his trailer, ignoring Alex’s heated glare burning in the back of his head.

* 

Paul tried to keep his head. He had hope that he would be able to think a little more clearly after the shower, but his thoughts were still all over the place.

*God damn! All the things he had just told Daryl! Fuck! Why!?*

He was close to hyperventilating. It had been ages since he had told anyone about Tom. About his parents? Sure.

About the group home? Sure!
About being a little shit? Yeah why not!?

But Tom? Tom had been his secret.

His twin brother, that had always looked out for him, protected him. Rude ten minutes older but hell it had made him behave like he was ten years older. Paul had hated it whenever Tom had lorded these few minutes over his head… until he had woken up after the terrible crash covered in his brother’s blood and Tom’s sightless eye staring up in his face. The same face he saw every day in the mirror, looking back at him slack and indifferent in death.

It the first day of the apocalypse he had started to dream about this moment again but this time his brother’s eyes had slowly turned from their shared cyan blue to a milky white and Tom had started to groan and growl. Before he would have buried rotting teeth in Paul’s throat. He had lost count how often he had woken up screaming but even then he had never talked to anyone about his brother.

Hell, Paul had made sure that there was nobody close enough to him that he would open up to.

And Jesus, while an agreeable character had never stayed around for long. Even here at the Hilltop he had jumped in and out of the community, going on runs, scouting, running around in the community chatting but never really connecting…

Alex had been nagging him about that all the time and instead of changing his ways he had stayed away even longer…

Since he had pulled Alexandria into their alliance, since he had to defend Maggie’s, Abraham’s and his own damn place – Thanks, Gregory! – He had had really become a part of this for the first time…

Looking into the mirror of his bathroom, he stroked over his wet beard. Under all that hair was a softer face, a bit too pretty… It had gotten him in trouble in his youth – together his smart mouth – but the real reason he had grown a beard and liked his hair long was that he had looked so different with it.

It had finally set him apart from Tom. Only his cyan eyes were connecting them now, the rest was a lot harder to detect.

It was his very own every day masquerade…

Trying to clear his head he pulled his long wet hair into a messy bun, only to curse under his breath…

He had been so fucking rattled by today’s happenings and talks that he had forgotten to bring fresh clothes with him in the bathroom, too busy to hide himself away, so he could think things through.

With a desperate look at his bloodied clothes he shuddered… his shirt and trousers were still drenched in the red liquid. Even these days he tried to avoid getting covered in blood as much as possible.
It always brought back the weight of Tom’s cooling body on top of him and the metallic stench of death. He remembered his panicked screams and sobs for Tom to wake up, for his mom and dad to do something.

His own fear of dying.

He remembered the shocked faces of the horrified firefighter that cut him out of the wreck.

Paul’s memories were hazy after that. The months in the weeks in the hospital and the first months in the group home he could barely recollect.

So he stood here in his bathroom in a FEMA trailer having a bitter break down because of bloodied clothes he couldn’t bring himself to wear right now.

Shit!

Frustrated he made a decision! Tying the towel as tight around himself as possible he knocked against the door, before he poked carefully his head out.

Daryl was sitting in one of his kitchen chairs raising an eyebrow at him.

“Ya finished?” He grunted.

“Uhm… yeah… but I forgot to take fresh clothes with me, sorry!” Daryl coughed a bit and turned his face away, trying to hide a light blush under his fringe.

“It’s ya trailer. And ya don’t ‘ave anything, I ain’t ‘ave seen ‘fore.” The hunter grumbled. Paul took this as his cue to hurry out of the bathroom and straight to his small closet.

As quick as possible Paul tuck a pair of boxers on and when he looked up the kitchen chair was empty and the water in the bathroom running.

With a light blush and a sigh he got properly dressed.

Only then he noticed the book on the kitchen table. A small smile tugged at his lips…

“The Hobbit”

The picture of Daryl reading a fantasy classic like that at his kitchen table… dressed in a soft shirt that hugged his impressive arms, a look of captivated concentration on his handsome face…

Paul’s stupid stomach did a little somersault.

It felt calm… domestic… but not enough, in a sense…

And suddenly the image changed, well more like it expanded. Harry was now sitting beside the gruff hunter, relaxed and smiling, his feet resting in Daryl’s lap.
Paul heart constricted.

Imagery Harry looked up at him and his bright green eyes shining with a warmth that pulled him in, made him part of them.

*Shit! He... he wanted that!!* He didn’t want to be with Harry or with Daryl... He wanted to be part of what they had *together*.

“Ya ok?”

Paul jumped, his heart beating a mile a minute. Daryl stood behind him. Clearly freshly showered and his hair still dripping wet.

“Yeah” Paul breathed. “Uhm... Your hair is still wet. Wait... Let me!” Carefully Paul took the towel he had discharged earlier and started to dry Daryl’s hair.

The taller man tried to flinch back from him at first but Paul raised himself on his tiptoes and caught Daryl’s head gently.

“Hold still. I’m just drying you’re hair. It’s getting too cold to go out like that. Virginia isn’t Georgia.” Paul felt Daryl’s unease but at least the man had stopped struggling.

Only very slowly some tension drifted out of the hunter, slated blue eyes were peeking curiously down at him through wisps of dark hair. The former martial arts teacher observed how Daryl clenched and unclenched his hands awkwardly.

“There better.” Paul mumbled gently. He had to keep himself from stroking a thumb over a thin bottomlip. So he stepped back clearing his throat.

To hide how bothered he really was Paul pointed to the book on the table.

“You liked reading it?” He asked trying to change the topic.

“Sorry, just foun’ it... Did no’ mean ta snoop.” Daryl flinched a little.

Paul smiled kindly at Daryl’s embarrassed and awkward demeanour.

“No problem. Did you like it?” Paul asked curiously. The taller man just shrugged non-committal, a nervous air surrounding him. But the hunter kept sneaking glances at the book on the table. As if he wasn't sure if he was allowed to read a book...

If he would be laughed or yelled at for it...

“You can read it if you like.” Paul tried to offer but this made the redneck hunter even tenser. Glaring at the book as if willing it to burst into fire.

“Ma pa never like ma reading.” Daryl gritted out after a while. “Fancy stuff for pussies. And merle used ta make fun of me poking ma nose inta books. Said a shoulda poke better it between a pair of tits.”
“Charming.” Paul deadpanned.

“Never been that interested in that through...” Daryl glanced unsure at him.

“Me neither.” Paul agreed lightly. The older man had seemed so adrift and defenceless when he admitted this that it tugged at Paul’s heart.

“Have you ever...?” Maybe it was stupid but damn, he had always been too curious for his own good.

“Nah. Never said it out loud before. Never... done much ‘bout it. Ta dangerous... Not brave enough to try... With Merle and ma pa ‘round.” Daryl shook his head. He looked so uneasy and uncomfortable admitting this.

“Oh…” That wasn’t much information. But the picture those snippets painted left Paul hurting with sympathy. His sexuality had been such an important part of his life and his sense of self that he felt suffocated by the thought of hiding it away from everyone and even himself.

The ninja got the impression that Daryl wouldn’t be comfortable to talk more about this.

This was probably the most he had said on the topic until today… So maybe it was enough for now.

“I could take the book with us to the infirmary. I always loved Tolkien and Harry might like to hear it, too.” Paul said as nonchalant as possible, deliberate not looking directly at the hunter.

Daryl directed a pair of wide slated blue eyes at him before he quickly ducked his head and gave a nearly imperceptible nod.

“…In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.”
I apologize before hand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 23

“…Weariness fell from him soon in that house, and he had many a merry jest and dance, early and late, with the elves of the valley. Yet even that place could not long delay him now, and he thought always of his own home. After a week, therefore, he said farewell to Elrond, and giving him such small gifts as he would accept, he rode away with Gandalf. Even as they left the valley the sky darkened in the West before them, and wind and rain came up to meet them. “Merry is May-time!” said Bilbo, as the rain beat into his face. “But our back is to legends and we are coming home. I suppose this is the first taste of it.” “There is a long road yet,” said Gandalf. “But it is the last road,” said Bilbo…”

Slowly Harry regained consciousness. A soft voice was telling him story... An adventure of magic and bravery and friendship... And a ring.

A ray of sunlight tickled his nose, lifting the last layers of sleepiness off him.

Despite the biting and sharp pain in his side Harry felt... Comfortable.

“I can tell yer awake.” A deep southern voice drawled velvet smooth from his right side.

Peeling one eye lip open harry peered at a slightly blurry but very relaxed looking form of Daryl lounging in a chair next to his bed.

Harry put a finger to his pursed lips

“No, don't interrupt Paul's reading. I want to hear the rest of the story.” He mock whispered with
a grin stretching over his lips.

Daryl huffed a light laugh.

“How are you feeling?” Paul asked kindly and the British teen thought that the man looked a bit shy.

“A little under weather...” Harry answered with a light frown. He lifted the hem of his shirt revealing a pretty big bandage. The green eyed youth could see Daryl’s scowl at the few red spots dotting the white fabric.

With a sigh and a hiss Harry probed himself up despite the twin protests from either side of him. He could feel two pairs of hands steadying him and the weight of their worried gazes.

“Could you hand me my wand please.” Harry groaned in discomfort.

“Here.” Paul reached under Harry's pillow.

“Good choice of placement.” The wizard complimented with a small grin.

“I used to hide my knives there so I could grab them quickly.” The hippie ninja smirked back at him.

Harry winced as he carefully picked the bandage of his skin, hissing in pain when his tender wound was pulled on and a new trickle of fresh blood trailed over his skin.

“Do you think that's a good idea?” Paul nervously cautioned, looking pale and uneasy at the sight of Harry’s injury. Steeling him himself the wizard chose to ignore the scout’s doubts. Instead he leaned a bit more firmly into the supporting arms holding him, gritting his teeth he muttered the incantation to heal his wound.

Both Daryl and Paul radiated absolute fascination at the way Harry's skin knitted itself back together.

“Damn...” Daryl breathed into his ears making Harry shiver a bit, while Paul's hand hovered uncertain over the healed wound.

Being so enclosed by the two men caused Harry breath to hitch. A tingling feeling coursed through his chest, not uncomfortable but... anxious... expectant... giddy...

Overwhelming!

A little too much!
“Cou... Could you please both back up a bit.” He asked in squeaky voice, his face felt like it was on fire.

The effect was immediate. Both men left his personal bubble and Harry felt his queasiness lessen.

“Thanks!” He whispered shyly and a bit embarrassed.

Paul smiled encouraging at him, tucking a raven lock behind Harry's ear. “Don't worry. It's alright. You're allowed some space.”

“Pricks right, ya know? Ya can always tell us ta back off.” Harry felt a bout of gratitude flood through him, his heart swelling with warmth at their uncomplicated and easy acceptance.

****

Still a bit tender Harry moved carefully out of the medic trailer under the sharp gazes of Paul and Daryl. Carson had given him a clean bill of health but the poor man had poked him for over half an hour testing the new scar tissue. He still looked a little vexed and exasperated by the fast healing.

When Aaron and Sasha had brought them some breakfast earlier, the tall curly haired man had pulled Harry into a tentative hug, obviously relieved to see him well.

Tara and Carl were waiting outside for them, both with hanging heads and matching guilty expressions.

“Are you OK?” Tara hurried to ask.

“Yes. I'm better.” He replied curtly. He was still angry at those two for being so bloody careless with all of their lives.

“Harry, please...” Carl begged. “We're sorry!”

“Make it up to me by never doing something so stupid, without talking to any of us. It's common courtesy to at least inform someone else if you lay their lives on the line.” The British wizard started up into Carl's blue eye, trying to make the younger boy understand. “Your actions have consequences for all of us...”

“Jesus!” Kal suddenly cried from the watching spot on the wall, making Harry stop in midsentence.

They all startled at the shout, running to the gate without further promoting. Climbing up the ladders they surveyed the land below.
Harry found the source for the commotion easy enough.

There was a lone man was running up the hill a dozen walkers hot on his heels. He must have been on his way for a while. He was definitely exhausted if not injured. His footing was unsure and he stumbled a lot.

His movements looked strange...

Hindered, as if he wasn’t moving his arms freely...

As if he was clut...

“Merlin’s soggy balls!” Harry cursed under his breath, making Daryl and Paul choke at the strange wording. Hurriedly the wizard conjured a small telescope.

Merlin! Fuck! He had been right!

In this moment the man twisted his ankle on unevenness on the meadow and Harry reacted without thinking – simultaneously summoning his knives and apparating right between the fallen and the walkers.

Damn there were still so many of them. Trying to catch his breath, a scream made him twirl around using the momentum to drive his blade deep into the walker’s head that had just buried his teeth into the shoulder of the man on the ground.

Kicking the corps away from the kneeling guy Harry swiftly grabbed the man other shoulder and used the small opening in the attacking herd to disapparate back to the hilltop.

Behind the walls he was greeted by the stormy scowl of one mad hunter and a troubled looking scout and a very concerned family.

“Monkey’s tits! What the fucking hell!” Abe cursed next to him.

“You're still injured!” Aaron admonished softly. “God damn it, you left the medic trailer literally only five minutes ago!”

“Harry, what the fuck!?” Daryl growled angrily.
“You can't just do shit like that. He was too far away and you had absolutely no back up.” Rick hissed in exasperation.

“I'm sorry.” Harry winced. He was still out of breath and a little winded from the fight and the more than unskilled and spontaneous disapparation. “But I just couldn't leave them out there.”

That brought the onslaught of cursing and chittering around him to a sudden halt.

“Them?” Rick asked confused.

On cue the shrill sounds of a baby crying filled the yard.

The bitten stranger gingerly uncurled himself revealed a squealing babe, dressed in a pink onesie, clutched in his arms.

“Is she OK? Did she get hurt?” Harry asked worried.

“N... No... I... Don't think so. I... Covered her.” He started coughing blood. Close up the man looked dreadful. He must have been on his feet for days, trying to bring his child to a safe place.

“Her name is Gracie.”

The small wizard watched as the little girl’s father tenderly caressed her plump cheek, hushing her as he desperately sobs. A man knowing that he was living on borrowed time with the infection spreading quickly.

“Hey there little princess we made it. We made it. Just like we promised mommy. Everything is going to be alright now, my darling.” The man rocked her whispering into his daughter's fine hair.

Saying goodbye, because he knew his life would be over soon.

Harry felt bitter tears rolling over his face, felling absolutely useless and sad.

After today that little girl would have lost both of her parents never truly knowing who they were, because he was a stranger to them.

A very pale Paul kneeled next to Harry putting a calming hand on his neck, like him the hilltop scout couldn't rip his eyes away from the father bidding his farewell to his infant daughter. Harry could feel the way Paul shared his mourning shivers, seeming as shaken and upset as himself by the sight.

Rick and Daryl looked just as wretched and haunted as he felt. Finally the former sheriff locked gazes with the British orphan. Harry could detect the fear of leaving and losing your children like that, in those teary blue eyes.

Rick gave him a short nod.
“I understand. You've done the right thing.” Was communicated without words between them.

“Please... take care of her.” The man begged holding the baby out. Aaron stepped forward and gently took the little one into his arms.

“I will! I promise.” Alexandria’s tall scout firmly vowed, clasping the man's hand in sympathy. “We will look out for her.”

****

Paul felt... disconnected – like falling but never really crashing.

To see Harry going after Carl and Tara, coming back wounded, talking to Daryl about his family... That pull he felt to Harry and Daryl... Not only to them as persons but this closeness they shared, the realization that he wanted... *Fuck!*... that he desperately longed to be a part of that!

It made his skin itch.

He made him want to fucking run, so bad! Mabey then he wouldn’t have to feel like this...

Like there was no ground under him... but just a never ending panic and fear of constantly falling.

He couldn't bear this floundering feeling. His chest felt so tight, as if it had been bound with an iron corset strangulating his air supply.

He needed the crash.

He craved the crash... Everything... Anything to make *this* stop!!

*Fuck!* Paul wanted to pull his hair out, scratch the skin off his arms.

He hadn't felt the need to *self-destruct* this strong in years.

But the picture of that father with his baby cradled closely in his arms. Saying goodbye. Giving her to Aaron to take care of her.

... *Unseeing cyan eyes starred at him from a slack face, so similar to his own...*
His own voice calling for his dad to help them... that Tom was hurt...

...Getting no answer...

Paul could feel Harry quivering under his hand, resonating with his own jumbled thoughts and shaken emotions. The warmth of the beautiful boy’s skin being the only sensation tethering him to the here and now.

Stabilizing and excruciating at the same time.

The imagery picture of Daryl and Harry sitting relaxed and inviting in his kitchen flashed again before his eyes.

Intoxicating and daunting at the same time.

God he... He couldn't... He just couldn't...

He needed out of his own skin, he couldn't bear this any longer...

He watched as Carson took the dying father to the medical trailer, while Aaron pressed the precious little bundle closer to his chest.

A bout of sobbing hiccups rattled through Harry's body, Paul felt his grief vertebrating in himself physically and mentally.

“Ya saved her…” Daryl rasped to the little Brit – sad but soothing – breaking the sullen silence. “Were both ta far from tha gate. If ya hadn't gone, she be dead, too.”

Harry just looked crestfallen at Aaron and Gracie before he nodded with a despairing grimace.

Paul felt like breaking apart. There had been times he would have gone on a bender if he felt like this, trying to drown his feelings with booze, drugs and faceless men...

Feeding everything to his damn craving but the one thing it really wanted...

Rather destroying himself than facing this overwhelming fear that swallowed him when he started to care.

The fear of losing anyone ever again…

Paul was an idiot like that. Being Jesus was a far safer bet!

Less jaded, nice, friendly and easy to connect to... But aloof never jumping into the deep end with
anybody.

Having friends and fun but never showing all of himself. Always keeping just one step out of touch...

It had worked so well! Damn it! He had been Jesus for such a long time! Had kept himself safe from this inner turmoil but right now he was spiralling out of control.

So he did the only thing he could do right now...

Alex.

It was the most stupid thing he had done in a long, long time. He let himself switch into Jesus mode, calm on the outside but on the inside his fear drove him, making him chase a distraction and release from his fear.

He felt like a hunter looking for his prey. When he found Alex all it took was one heated gaze. Part of him felt a bitter kind of proudness that one fucking look was enough to convey the message.

“Come with me. I wanna fuck.” Crude and without refinement but it worked just as fine.

Hell, Alex nearly tripped over his feet hurrying to get to Jesus’ trailer. Normally he would have been pissed about the pleased and possessive look in the tall nurse’s eyes but right now he couldn't care less, his head was a mess and he was desperate for a semblance of control.

He knew he was just trying to fill the torturous gap between wanting to be close to someone and keeping them at a safe distance.

He was using Alex.

A ‘This changes nothing between us.’ half hissed and half moaned as Alex started to attack his mouth in a frenzy, was Jesus’ last attempt to play with open cards.

But he needed the contact, the touch of another person. Fuck, he wanted to get off and for his head to stop spinning...

Not to lead Alex on... Not to hurt the other man.
But shit, who was he kidding this was the recipe for disaster. He just couldn't bring himself to care right now. He would deal with the fallout later when his chest wasn't hurting like it could burst open at any moment and his stomach stopped fluttering in mind-fucking panic.

At least now he knew what was happening...

He knew the rush of excitement. He knew the firm plains of Alex’s body, where he dragged his nails over. Eager hands and lips trailing over his own neck and stomach, invited him to let go.

Sex was easy like that for him, offering him a connection to another person, an easy out to his troubled emotions without the fear of getting too attached.

Jesus groaned as Alex expertly pinched his right nipple.

“Yes darlin’ I knew you would come back to me. Gonna make you feel so good.” Alex mouthed at his ear. Jesus whimpered, a weak breathy sound, needy…

Making his Ex moan in appreciation, pressing his smaller body more firmly against the trailer wall. Alex gripped both of Jesus hands and pinned them easily over his head with one hand, still nibbling on his throat.

Jesus’ dick was straining almost painfully in his pants.

“Let me take care of you.” The taller man murmured lowly, pushing his leg against Jesus crotch, drawing another desperate moan from the shorter man.

“God, please!” Jesus begged. Sex between them had always been somewhat rushed, frenzied and a bit on the rough side. And right now that’s what he wanted.

He wanted it fast and hard.

He wanted to forget, just drown in the pleasure. So he arched into Alex’s touch moaning wantonly, egging the other on to fucking touch him more.

Alex complied with his unspoken demand, nearly ripping his belt of. With skilled and practiced fingers he opened Jesus’ fly and swiftly shoved his pants and underwear out of the way. As his erection sprung free and cool air hit his heated flesh the long haired man cursed low under his breath.

“Fuck! Yess…”

“That’s the basic idea, isn’t it?” Alex teased, biting his earlobe. The nurse dragged his fingers over the sensitive shaft, chuckling at the noises that escaped Jesus’ mouth and the involuntary jerk his hips gave touch. “So needy.”

“Fuck, less talking.” Jesus strained against Alex’s hold pressing his mouth hungrily against the others plump limps.

Fired on the tall blond finally took a firm grip on Jesus’ rock hard cock, rubbing his thumb over the head smearing precum over it, easing the way, to push his fist up and down the stiff length.
They were both panting now. Somehow Alex had managed to pull his own cock out and was now using his big hand to rub both of them at the same time. Jesus keened at the feeling of their dicks touching.

This was it!

To sense how hard the other was, to feel the velvet soft skin of a cock dragging deliciously over his own, the friction eased by both of their precum and Alex spit.

Fuck, yes!

The delightful feeling as Alex pressed his taller and broader body more firmly into him, still holding him pinned to the wall. Muscular hips jerking rhythmically and cocks thrusting against each other, slicked with their combined juices and sweat, chasing both of their highs. An especially wicked sweep of Alex’s thumb over the sensitive bell end had Jesus moaning wantonly and throwing his head back in lustful pleasure.

Just a little more…!

Later Paul couldn’t tell anymore what caught his attention.

Maybe it was that small choked and breathy sound, nearly drowned out by Alex’s and his shared panting noises. Maybe it was the flash of black and green his hooded eyes had caught when he had moved his head.

But there behind Alex was standing Harry…

Paler than Paul had ever seen him, mouth opened in shock but what hit the long hair man like a bucket of ice cold water was the devastated look in those impossible wide open eyes.

As suddenly as the boy had been there he turned on his heel and practically flew out of the trailer.

Paul couldn’t remember when he had lost an erection that fast.

Fuck!

Shoving a confused and slightly frustrated Alex off himself, the hilltop scout fixed his clothes in a hurry.
“Harry!?"

Paul ignored his Ex shouting after him, his mind to fixed on chasing after Harry.

***

Harry stumbled back out of the trailer. He had knocked and when nobody answered... He had been curious... He hadn't thought that he would walk in on... This!

Curiosity killed the cat, Potter!

Shit!

His whole body felt like he was on fire.

Bloody hell!

Something like panic filled him and made his stomach churn. He didn't know where he was going. He couldn't think straight, everything was jumbled and with a shaky exhale he crouched down behind another trailer, resting his head on his knees.

Fuck!

He pressed his palms against his eye sockets, hoping it would diminish some of the pressure in his head. He tried to breathe even, to regain his footing but somehow it proved hard to realize...

“Heard?!” The young wizard flinched a bit at Paul raspy but worried inquiry.

Before his inner eye flashed the picture of Paul.

Long hair in disarray, flushed in arousal and head thrown back in pleasure, moaning and hips bucking as the nurse - Alex - worked his hand furiously between their bodies.

Harry felt hot all over, burying his head even more instantly into his hands.

“Heard, please! Are you alright?” The concern in Paul's voice made him tentatively look up. He regretted it immediately.
Paul... Paul... He...

Fuck!

He looked tantalizingly debauched. His usually straight and neatly brushed hair was a mess of tangles, his eyes still held the last glimmer of arousal and his lips looked kiss swollen. Hell, he had beard burns on his collar bones and Harry could see two love bites forming on his neck.

There was an unfamiliar tightness growing in his lower body that had him squirming with something he could not name... yet.

Instead Harry blushed so hard that he felt the tips of his ears burning ducked his head with an undignified squeak.

He could hear Paul approaching careful steps. The man was close enough that Harry could hear him swallow nervously. “Hey, should I get some one?”

Harry shook his head no.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to barge in like that. I knocked. I swear. So sorry!” He mumbled very quickly into his knees.

“Okay, sweetheart! You might want to repeat that.” The green eyed youth thought he could detect the hint of a smile in Paul’s voice but Harry couldn’t share his amusement. He could feel his throat growing tight and tears building up in his eyes.

“Oh shit, Harry. Don’t cry, please. I didn’t mean to tease you. Come one, tell me what’s wrong.” Paul was so close to him that the British wizard could feel the other man’s body heat next to him, not yet touching but comforting.

“I nearly killed him.” Harry finally forced out, making Paul choke next to him in stunned surprise. “Wh… What?!”

“I… I… knocked but nobody answered and… there was this sound… so I looked…” Harry peered up at Paul, catching his cyan eyes that starred at him right now with undisclosed concern and embarrassment.

“I only saw him. How he towered over you… how he had your arms pinned against the wall… How he moved against you…” Harry shivered.

Paul let his hand hover over his smaller one, giving him opportunity to draw away if he wanted to, before the older man gingerly took his hand.
“Must have looked awful to you.” Paul whispered. Harry could feel him cringe in sympathy.

“In the Sanctuary I found Tara first. Two men were assaulting her. They had her pinned to the ground her shirt was ripped open, one was about to grope her breast… I killed them both. I didn’t even stop to think about it… I just slit their throats.” Harry disclosed while shudders wrecked his body.

Reality was catching up to him.

This wasn’t like Petunia… He could have knocked these men out, but he didn’t! He had gone straight for the kill!

“Shit!” Paul cursed and impulsively he pulled Harry into an embrace, tucking Harry’s head under his chin. The small teen felt his body lock up for a second before he melted into the physical contact Paul provided so freely.

“You did nothing wrong, sweetheart. I promise. You saved Tara. These men were swine.” Apt hands were carefully running through Harry’s unruly, dark hair and the green eyed boy felt a knot on his chest loosening.

“If you hadn’t moved your head, if I hadn’t seen your face… that you enjoyed it… I would have killed your boyfriend today.” Hysteric was probably the best way to describe the feeling building in Harry’s chest. Beneath all the shame and anxiety of having walked in on that, now the violent shock surfaced…

*It had been so close! So bloody close!* He had been out of his mind.

When had slitting a throat had become a knee jerk reaction to him.

_Merlin!_

If Paul hadn’t made that *sound*… Alex would be dead right now.

To his credit Paul offered no empty platitudes to him. The older man just cradled him a little closer, holding him a bit more firmly.

“We’ll train. We’ll figure something out. You’ll learn to control it. You’ll get the hand of him.” Paul finally said.

Harry wanted to believe him. He really did.

And for a moment he allowed himself just that, soaking up the feeling of security, being encircled in those arms provided him with. The rhyme of Paul’s heart lulled him into calming down bit by bit. As Harry listened to the steady thumping sounds under his ear, he got the impression that the
Hilltop ninja also calmed down a little.

This felt almost calm.

“Alex isn’t my boyfriend.” Paul said suddenly. Harry thought he sounded shy about it, as if he unsure if it was ok to say it.

“He isn’t?” The slender teen wasn’t sure what to think about that.

“No, we… we used to hook up. But he wanted more than I did… so we broke it off.” Paul sighed. Harry turned in the scouts arms to look at the man’s face. He looked guilty.

“So why were you two…?” Harry mouth worked before his brain, blushing he retreated fast.

“Merlin, that’s none of my business…! Please, forget that I asked that.”

Paul just starred at the young man before him, his cyan eyes vulnerable and insecure. It was a strange look on the usually smiling and self-assured man.

“I… everything that happened since yesterday, Carl and Tara, you getting shot and that man and his baby daughter… it brought back some bad memories… I…”

Whatever it had been it had rattled the other man badly, Harry could see that.

Under that entire cocky attitude, the friendly but distanced Jesus mask and the apparently hollow affairs … there was just another lost boy hidden.

Drowning and desperately looking for something to hold onto… Like Daryl, like him.

“You wanna tell me about it?” Harry gently tugged on a long straight lock of Paul’s hair. The greened wizard felt the older man tense, swallowing heavily and for a moment he thought he wouldn’t say anything.

“My parents… and my twin brother died in a car crash when I was ten. Tom, he saved me. I never understood how he did it but he threw himself over me. He died in my stead.” When those wide cyan eyes started to drift to a time and place, where Harry couldn’t follow, the petit wizard tucked on Paul’s beard this time.

“Breathe! Don’t let the memories swallow you.” Harry instructed the other man. He had learned that lesson from Denise.

Paul looked surprised but complied. Exhaling a shakily before he drew a new breath.

Every slowly some of the tension bleed out of Paul.
“Thanks... I haven't talked about Tom in forever. Today reminded me of how I felt when I lost my family. I had no one else left. So I lived in a group home after. I...” Paul struggled for words.
“...There were always so many people, it was crowded... And loud. Nothing like home. There were always new people coming and... Going. Always going. I came and went a few times myself. The families that tried to foster me... Some were assholes but most tried to be nice and supportive. I hated them all. I didn't want them so it didn't matter if they were good or bad characters. I already hated them on the principle that they weren't my family! I wanted my mom and dad. I wanted Tom. I was scared of getting left behind again so I became the elusive one, I guess... “

Harry's heart ached in resonance to the pain Paul revealed. He knew this kind of desperate longing.

“When I was eleven a special artefact was hidden in the school. The Mirror of Erised. It is a magical mirror and according to the headmaster it shows one their deepest, most desperate desire of their hearts. I was a curious little shit, always were I shouldn't be and I found it. And it showed me... My family. My parents. My grandparents. Generations of my family. Smiling and waving at me.” Paul sucked in a small breath. “I didn't even recognize them at first, because I hadn't even known what they looked like back then. My aunt had no photos of them around, not even of mom or my grandparents.”

“That sounds awful. Not even having a picture of them. How do you know who they were?” Paul asked gently.

“I look a lot like my dad but it was the eyes that gave it a way... I have my mom's eyes.” Harry smiled wryly at the inside joke. Sometimes it felt like this was the only thing he knew about her.

“Magic is fantastic but this sounds...” Paul hesitated, involuntarily gripping the fabric of his shirt over his heart. Harry watched longing, love, grief and bitterness flutter over the scouts face.

“Yeah... I spent whole nights before the mirror just staring at them. It would have been so easy to forget the world and everything else over the bitter sweet joy of seeing them... Like an addiction. The mirror got removed a bit later and I can't describe how devastating it felt to see it gone. Having lost my only connection to them. The mirror was a piece of incredible magic but it was also very dangerous. The headmaster told me that men have wasted away before it, not knowing if what they have seen was real, or even possible...” Harry sighed. He could still feel the longing and the almost unbearable feeling of seeing his family.

“So you’re biggest wish was a family... if you looked into the mirror now would you still see the same?” Paul suddenly asked.

Harry blinked a bit taken of guard. “I... I honestly don't know... Maybe?” The young wizard frowned a bit. “I'll think about it.”

Paul sighed. The man looked still very pensive but it was nice to see him so open and without his masks.
“Will you go back to Alex now?” Harry couldn't help but ask even if his stomach cramped in unease at the thought. He tried to not to let it show too much.

Paul snorted but it was a mirthless sound.

“No, I won't. It was a dick move anyway to mess around with him like that. It was probably the best that you interrupted us before it lead to more... And he is most likely rightfully mad at me for walking out on him. It would be very bad taste to go back and just... Well, carry on.” The older man cringed at this own words but Harry felt oddly relieved.

“Talking helps you know?” Harry chose that spot between the ribs to poke his finger into, making Paul jump and yelp a little.

Stunned Paul stared at him out of bright eyes.

“Denise, Alexandria’s former Doctor, was originally a psychiatrist. When I got really bad, having panic attacks left and right, losing myself in flashbacks and disassociation, I started bi-weekly sessions with her. It helped a lot. Don't bottle everything up. You'll only end up hurting yourself and the people around you.” Harry revealed.

With a last gentle and teasing tuck on a lock of dark blond hair the teen stood up.

“If you'll need someone to talk to, you can use the pocket mirror to call me, if you want. We all have been through so much before and after the turn that we're all allowed to lose our shit once in a while. No one expects you to be infallible, Paul.”

For a moment bright cyan eyes shown with unshed tears and uncertainty before the scout quickly covered them with a hand. Harry watched in worry as the obviously upset man sat there with tense shoulders hunched in himself.

“Paul...“ Harry whispered, concern imminent in his voice. Paul flinched a little at the use of his birth name.

“Thanks, Harry. Really. I... I feel a bit better.” The scout swiped his hand over his face. The British teen frowned.

This was hard to believe. Paul looked anguished and the shaky smile on his face didn't do much to reassure Harry that his friend was alright. His scepticism must have shown because Paul smile turned a bit more genuine.

“I'm rattled and fuck I'm exhausted but yeah... I'm better. It was nice to talk about Tom and everything.”

Harry blinked. Yes he remembered feeling like this after talking to Denise.

Like he had been put through the grinder but relieved and a bit lighter.

So that was it looked like... Bloody hell...
Harry sighed in sympathy before he nodded in acceptance.

“Harry!” Daryl’s voice called out to him.

The hunter was leaning against the trailer, a cigarette hanging already half smoked between his lips. But it was the soft and patient look in his slated, blue eyes that told Harry that he had been standing there for a while.

“We're going?” the green eyed teen asked softly.

“Yeah, Aaron wants ta settle the little rocker at home. Her daddy just passed.” The rough looking hunter grumbled gently.

Harry balled his fists still upset that he hadn't been able to save her father. Forcing himself to keep it together now he nodded. “Ok.”

Looking back at Paul he sighed softly. “Are you coming with us? Or do you need a bit more time?”

“I need a moment.” The long haired man shook his head apological.

“It's alright.” Harry smiled. “Thank you, for looking out for me. Please, don't be a stranger.” Daryl gave an affirmative grunt.

Harry smiled adoringly up at the hunter. It wasn't often that his grumpy Hufflepuff was so approachable with people outside their family.

“So long, ya prick.” Daryl groused good natured, causing Paul to laugh and grin broadly.

“Good bye Daryl. See ya, Harry.” The hobby ninja gave them both a tiny wave.

“Take care, Paul.” The little Brit waved back. But just after a few steps he stopped again, looking back at the Hilltop scout.

“I think known what I might see in the mirror today. It would be still my family but there would be a lot more people there. Not just those that could have been my family by blood but those that are my family by choice now and for the future. I like I said in the library. I am ready to fight for the good things in my life. I don’t want to be alone anymore.”

Bright cyan eyes widened at that.

****

Daryl had been adamant that Harry took the car back with them. The teen hadn’t been able to hide his aggravated, still healing wound.

“Ya decided ta risk yaself ta save the littl’ rocker and her da and now ya gonna sit tight and rest. No more voodooing yerself away, where I ain’t seein’ ya.” The hunter had grumbled at him. Harry had blushed a little at that before he had complied with a warm, knowing look that had Daryl’s ears
burning.

So he sat in a car with Aaron, Harry and the little Rocker, while Rick took the girls and Carl back with him to Alexandria in another.

The hunter had been worried when Harry hadn’t come back after he had left to find the hippie prick. Little ninja had nearly run out on them when Harry had come back with the dying father and his baby girl. It had been oblivious to Daryl that Paul had been rattled by this.

They all had been.

Fuck, Daryl heart had missed more than a few beats when Harry had just popped away and reappeared in the middle of the small herd.

Too far away to run after him, too far away to give him proper coverage…

They all had been fucking helpless… and worst of all they had been useless!

Reduced to a bunch of frozen and frightened by-standers. Forced to watch on as Harry gracefully slashed his way through walkers protecting himself and the man on the ground.

Daryl had cursed up a storm, while Paul had shouted at the guards to open the fucking gate. The other man had seemed as panicked about the situation as Daryl had felt.

The hunter couldn’t remember if he had ever been so angry with Harry especially after the British wizard had just lectured Carl on reckless behaviour.

God, damn it!

And then he had suddenly grabbed the fall man and reappeared in the Hilltop yard. Along with a bitten man… and his infant daughter.

How could Daryl hold onto his anger at Harry if he would have done the same if he could have…? But the difference was that the rest of them would have been too late… By the time they would have reached them, both father and daughter would have been torn to pieces.

So yeah, his blind rage had vanished the moment he had realized was that Harry hadn’t taken such a high risk for a stranger but also for a helpless baby.

That man had died to get his daughter to safety. Something they all would have done for little Asskicker and Harry had done what they all would have hoped for if they had been in the father’s shoes.

Kid had stepped up.
It had torn Daryl apart to watch that man say goodbye to his child, giving her up into Aaron’s care.

It had brought memories back… of a pale and crying Maggie coming out of the prison holding a bloody new born baby in her arms. Carl looking haunted and numb, his beautiful blue eyes hard with unbearable pain. Rick losing his shit, just breaking apart… Of little Asskicker crying in hunger…

So yeah, he hadn’t surprised when the ninja had left quickly. The snippets of Paul’s story still ringing in his ears.

But he had thought the younger man was able to handle himself. So he had decided to look after Harry, to calm Rick and Aaron down...

The little wizard had been riddled with guilt.

Harry had hoped to saved them both… the kid always took too much on his shoulders like that… too much responsibility over things he couldn’t handle all alone…

Daryl couldn’t help the uneasy thought that Harry was gonna burn himself out in his need for saving people. The prospect of losing the kid like that… like he had come really close to just yesterday…

The thought alone was enough to take his breath away, making Daryl dizzy… he couldn’t go back to that fucking void his life had been when he thought that Harry was dead.

Daryl would make sure that he would do everything to keep Harry safe.

So he had searched for the wizard when he hadn’t come back form telling Rovia that they would go back soon. At the ninja’s trailer he had just found a dishevel looking and pissed off nurse that had cursed the very existence of the hippie prick.

Daryl had continued looking for the two he had found them cuddled together. Paul calming the younger one down. It was strange to see them so close.

And somehow it should have like his worst nightmare coming alive.

He had fretted over this a few days ago… But this it looked so natural. His heart went out to them both.

And the more the prick talked the more he became Paul… not ninja, not hippie, hell not Jesus… but Paul.

With all the fake bullshit falling off the pretty face, it revealed an honest and caring guy… and a young boy that was just as scarred by life as Daryl and Harry were.

Someone Daryl found himself trusting.
Someone Daryl found himself liking.

Someone Daryl…

*Ya getting a head of yerself babybro, ain't ya?*! Merle laughed in his head.

Fuck… yeah he probably was.

But at the same time it reduced some of his anxiety that whatever was building there between them would leave Daryl out in the open and alone.

And there was no doubt that something was changing.

But right now Daryl felt calm enough to let it happen, to see where this was going.

*

Being back in Alexandria wasn’t calm… No, as soon as they were back a nasty surprise waited for them.

Along with a car and a bloody large portion of their food supply. Just gone.

The only thing left was his bible lying on the floor and pretty ominous note in the supply book reading “BOAT”.

But to Harry’s astonishment Rick and Aaron seemed to pick up the hint. Apparently the missing supplies came from a house boat the two of them had scavenged just a few days prior.

They hadn’t told Gabriel or anyone else where or how they had exactly found the stuff… Harry shivered when Aaron admitted that he had taken an unintentional swim in a lake full of walkers and had nearly drowned for it.

Someone must have seen Rick and Aaron taking the supplies and this someone had taken Gabriel along with the food.

Merlin!

Rick was the only one who looked somewhat elated by the message. The young wizard dreaded to know why.

Seeing this determined and stubborn look on the former sheriff usually meant a reckless plan and
some kind of bloody fight.

And Harry didn’t seem to be the only one to know that…

Daryl had put his foot down and told Rick that Harry should sit this one out after all the trouble and injuries of the last 24 hours.

No protest there he was exhausted… emotionally, mentally and magically.

He yearned to cuddle up with Judi and Tilly. Some peace and quiet. And to recover some kind of inner balance…

But before he had wanted to go over to Eric’s and Aaron’s house to ask with they need help to settle Gracie in.

Harry had been able to hear their raised voices as soon as he walked up to their front door.

“You think this is about Gabriel but it’ gonna be more. It’s always more with Rick.” Eric’s agitated voice had reached him first.

“They need me. Gabriel needs me.” Sounding exasperated Aaron was trying to argue.

“You nearly drowned a few days ago! You didn’t even tell me! I could have lost you over a bunch of supplies. Please, please don’t go!” Eric pleaded.

“Gabriel is one of us. I have to.” The tall curly haired scout argued back.

“You just brought a baby home with you! You didn’t even ask me about it first.” Harry stomach dropped at that.

“We talked about it you said you wanted to… I thought… I… Don’t you want her?” Aaron sounded shocked.

“Of course I want her, you idiot! I held her for five seconds and I already loved her. But I didn’t just want a baby… I wanted a family with you! I want us alive. Both of us. Hell, the three of us!”

Harry could tell that Eric was close to crying. Had his mother felt like this when his father had worked for the aurors and joined Dumbledore’s resistance group?

“I need to help them!” Aaron sounded just as hurt and desperate to make his partner understand. So the little Brit came to a decision.

“No you don’t!” He spoke up.

“Sorry for interrupting… I just wanted to see if you needed anything. You know, to help Gracie settle in.” Harry told them feeling a little uneasy to barge into their lover’s quarrel.
“Harry… You can’t mean that I stay here.” Aaron spluttered in surprise.

“Rick knows the place where you got the supplies from?” The green eyed teen questioned.

“Yeah, but…”

“Then it’s completely sufficient that Rick comes with us.” Harry spoke over Aarons protest sharply.

“There won’t be enough of them…” The scout argued with frown.

“There will be, Aaron. Daryl will help Rick find tracks if there are any and Michonne, Tara and Rosita will be coming with us.” Harry stated firmly.

“Us? Harry, Daryl wanted you to rest and to stay low for a bit. You just got shot, didn’t you?” Eric protested, while Aaron looked at his boyfriend in a way that said clearly.

‘Now you’ve done it!’

“We’ll leave in 30 minutes, enough time to take some potion to help me heal.” Harry starred determined back at Aaron and Eric.

“Harry, listen! You have to know…” Alexandria’s scout tried again.

“What I know, Aaron, is that parents shouldn’t leave their children, unless they have to.” Aaron flinched back at the teen’s harsh tone. Harry softened his expression a bit.

“I’m sorry, but Eric is right! You just brought that little girl home with you. Merlin, her dad died to get her somewhere safe and you promised him to take care of her, Aaron. Your daughter just lost the last of her biological parents. Don’t risk her losing another father so soon.”

Aaron looked like he had slapped him.

“Just take your time. Get to know your daughter. Give the three of you time to settle. There will be times you need to step up… but that doesn’t have to be today.” Harry urged gently.

Aaron swallowed heavily and nodded, behind him Eric sagged in relief.

Chapter End Notes

Please, don't be too angry with Paul ^^^ he had a few very stressfull days. I promise there will be no futher hook up meetings with Alex ;)

I hope you enjoy the chapter! :) The next update might take a while... I'll have two partys coming up and I'm sewing
my own clothes... so that takes quite a bit time of my writing schedule ^^'}
Chapter 24

Exhausted, Harry leaned his head against the window of the car.

Now that his rage was finally subsiding all that was left was a feeling of cold dread, settling heavily in his stomach. His brain was starting to register the consequences of his actions might lead to…

Maybe Daryl had been right and he should have stayed in Alexandria.

Even if the potions had helped with his physical injuries and magical depletion, they hadn’t cured his mental exhaustion. Maybe he would have done something different if he had given himself more time to rest… maybe…

Nervously he was biting his lips. Today’s happenings had left a bitter taste in his mouth.

They had gotten Gabriel back and thank Merlin for that… but hell…

These people were dodgy. Scavengers.

“We take. We don't bother.”
Yeah, bloody Merlin! The young wizard had been able to see that. The memory caused a new wave of angry outrage to surge through his body.

+++Flashback++++

Harry shuddered as he took the massive junkyard in.

This place and those people…. Jadis and her tribe had caused a familiar sense of uneasy foreboding in the green eyed boy. Right from the first moment they had laid eyes on them, Harry had thought that they had seemed very changed by the apocalypse...

This large group had survived between bloody junk.

And what bothered Harry the most about this was the question of how?

For the love of god he couldn’t imagine a way that all those people could have found enough food or supplies just by scavenging.

At least if they had gone about this like Jadis had done with the stuff from the house boat... That would have been impossible.

Jadis would have probably made a glorious Slytherin. The woman was cunning as hell and patient to get what she wanted. She had waited months for someone to retrieve the supplies from the boat, so she didn't have to bother. And then she had sneaked into a large community to steal everything and had taken Gabriel with her.

“We take. We don't bother.”

This didn’t make sense! It bloody didn’t!

What did they take? What didn't they bother with? Or maybe he shouldn't ponder on the ‘what’ but the ‘who’...

Why had they bothered to take Gabriel with them? What had they planned to do with the priest?

Everything about this whole story gave the green eyed teen creeps.

A chill had been crawled over Harry when he had looked into Jadis cold eyes.

They were hard and borderline malicious.

Those were the eyes of a woman who was very sure that she had outsmarted them all.
Those were the eyes of a woman who had shed a lot of her former cultural boundaries… like a snake shedding its skin. In a sense they all had done that to survive but it seemed like Jadis and her people had given up on a lot of civilized behaviour and standards. Harry had the feeling that this about more than just the way they lived and spoke.

The detached way Jadis had inspected them, reminded Harry unpleasantly of Jared and Terminus.

Her gazes felt... assessing, weighing...

Not like a fighter would – no...!

And not like a butcher either...

More like how a salesman would assess his goods and their worth.

“It’s all about survival now at any cost. People out there are always looking for an angle. Looking to play on your weakness. They measure you by what they can take from you. By how they can use you to live.”

Rick had said this once to Deanna when they had started to live in Alexandria and Harry had never felt more reminded of those words than in the light of Jadis cold-blooded stare.

But it seemed that Rick had forgotten his own words, because he had started to negotiate an alliance with the red haired woman who only spoke in broken sentences.

At least Daryl seemed to have shared some of Harry’s unease, because the hunter had growlingly inched closer to Harry when he had noticed the way Jadis had dragged her eyes over the green eyed boy.

A greedy gleam had been flashing over her face.

To be honest… they all had been bloody queasy in the light of being so heavily outnumbered against that calculating woman and her tribe, with the exception of Rick and Gabriel. Only the blue eyed man had grinned like the bloody maniac he had proved to be at times. Harry had come to dread that wicked light in their leaders face...

The blue eyed former Sheriff was clearly on a war path. He had been tense as hell since the first confrontation with the Saviours.

Even if Rick had toned his fight reflex a bit down since their time on the road... It was still there – the reckless impulse just to go into any confrontation guns blazing and fuck the risks.

Get the job done! Annihilate the threat and forget the other solutions.

Rick would always choose heads on before covering in fear. Even if he had tamed that kind of reaction down a notch or two – like his beard – Harry mused a little nervous as he watched their leader negotiating for a deal.
But in moments like this he saw that wild man again who had lain under that bed in an abandoned house, vibrating with tension, desperate to make sure his family would live to see another day. A father who had been ready to bury his teeth into another man’s throat to protect his son and his friends…

And now their fearless leader had decided that finding Jadis and the Scavengers was an absolutely fantastic opportunity, because they had the numbers and the fighting experience, to make them perfect allies against Negan.

What had followed was the strangest and the most dangerous negotiation, Harry had ever witnessed.

After denying them any help Jadis had lead Rick on top of a mountain of junk only to push the blue eyed man into a pit. The green eyed wizard’s ears had been ringing with Michonne’s desperate screams for her boyfriend and Daryl’s shocked curses. Jadis had nearly killed Rick in her attempt to test his strength. Or maybe she had just thought it fun to watch Rick struggle against a walker with a spiked metal helmet in her self-build gladiator’s pit...

Or maybe she just didn't bother if he lived or died…

Neither option had installed any confidence or trust in Harry for this woman and her intentions.

If anything all of this had made Harry want to shake Rick and to drag the idiot away by the scruff of his neck.

_**How could they trust anyone like that?! After everything had had been through?**_

Well, apparently Rick could.

“We have a deal now?” Aghast Harry starred when the former Sheriff, who seemed very self-satisfied and confident after killing his opponent. Injured and under all of their worried gazes he was heaving himself out of the fighting pit the Scavengers had created for their pet-gladiator walker.

Unable to intervene or talk some sense into Rick the green eyed wizard had to watch as their leader, cradling a heavily bleeding hand to his chest, struck a deal with Jadis.

“Gun. A lot. A lot. Then we fight your fight.” She replied monotonously, her head cocked curiously to the side as she regarded the bearded man.

“Good! We’ll get you more guns.” Rick was nodding firmly, standing tall and proud before Jadis.
Then the red-haired woman levelled the former Sheriff with a look that made Harry deeply uncomfortable – like a hungry anaconda circling her prey.

The green eyed wizard wanted to shake Rick until his teeth rattled. He knew that beggar's couldn't be choosier, but bloody hell, this woman was bad news.

In that moment Rick looked down to them from the mountain of junk, a huge, happy grin on his face.

Harry felt his chest constrict painfully at the sight of the Sheriff’s elated expression…

With a strangely heavy heart he was starring at Rick’s slender form, his longish curls and his salt and pepper beard, his hand and shirt blood stained…

And before Harry’s inner eye another face laid itself slowly over Rick’s features –long greasy hair that framed limply a face so thin it was nearly skeletal, gaunt, sunken in cheeks and yellow teeth… a man that had none of the Sheriff’s straight posture and bowlegged swagger but had been hunched, raddled by the years of unlawful imprisonment and mental torture.

The young wizard couldn’t help and ask himself in that moment if Sirius and his father had looked equally triumphant as Rick did now, when they had decided to make Wormtail the Potter’s secret keeper.

So sure they had outwitted Voldemort and his henchmen… Not knowing that they had placed their trust on the wrong person and that their decision was about to destroy all of their lives.

Harry had no words for the overwhelming burning feeling that consumed him then so suddenly. Bitter rage was flooding his thoughts, as pictures of a quivering Peter Pettigrew flashed before his eyes.

The misplaced trust in one person had destroyed Harry’s family and his live… one mistake made by cocky young men that were too full of themselves to even consider that their weak and clumsy school friend could be a Death Eater.

Sirius had spent thirteen years in Azkaban for this mistake, scarred for live in body and mind. Harry had lost his parents to a mad man and Dumbledore had created another kind of jail for the green eyed boy in the suburbia in Surry, left behind to be abused and neglected at the hands his aunt and uncle.

An aunt and uncle who hadn’t been able to stand his mere presence, shunning his every existence. An aunt that had hated him so much in the end that she had even tried to kill him… And whose throat Harry had slit in a reflexive response…
Her warm and sticky blood had dried on his hands.

Trusting Jadis to keep her word...

It felt like history repeating itself! Rick was laying the safety and future of their family into the hands of a rat.

Vicious anger dominated every thought in Harry’s head!

The green eyed teen observed how Rick came back to the group with Jadis and her right and left hand man and how their leader looked at her again to confirm their deal again.

“We have a deal. We get you weapons and you will fight with us against the saviours. For all our freedom.”

Jadis had let her eyes suggestively trail over Rick's figure, a small satisfied smile tugging on her lips. “Sure. Bring guns. A lot. We fight.” She had replied nonchalantly.

There had been no remorse – fake or honest – for throwing Rick another human being into a pit to fight a walker for his life.

These people were rats! Untrustworthy rats! Just like Wormtail had been!

As pitiful snivelling and pathetic as Pettigrew had presented himself, he had always been a manipulative and self-severing bastard. It had been in his eyes. A calculating coldness that had belied every word he had said otherwise.

And as nonchalant as Jadis presented herself to be – her eyes held the same calculating coldness.

“We take. We don't bother.”

The last time the green eyed wizard experienced such anger he had tried to throttle his godfather, but the happenings of the last weeks, the dangers they were facing...

Blood was rushing in Harry’s ears as he balled his hands to fists.

Never again! I’ll never lose someone again like this!

“Lily! Take Harry and run!” Harry heard his father’s desperate yell in his head.
“No! Not Harry! Take me instead!” Lilly Potter was desperately begging her killer to spare her child.

“Silly girl, stand aside!” Voldemort’s high and cruel voice, drenched in coldness and total disregard for another human’s life.

“Her name is Gracie.” The scene of a man rocking a baby, whispering into his daughter's fine hair, flashed before Harry’s eyes. Saying goodbye, because he knew his life would be over soon.

“Please... take care of her.” A plea and Aaron’s firm voice promising… “We will look out for her.”

It all resonated in Harry’s brain, taking away his ability to breathe. He was shaking in barely restrained aggression.

Glenn, Daryl and Abraham nearly killed by Negan.

Finding Petunia alive… and then killing his own aunt by accident.

Tara and Carl recklessly throwing themselves head first into danger.

The feeling of the smooth surface of a baseball bat decorated with barbed wire caressing his face.

Getting shot himself.

Saving Gracie, only to watch her father die.

Paul. And Alex… that bitter, churning feeling of seeing them together…

Talking to Aaron and Eric about Gracie and making their new family a priority…

Harry’s own overwhelming need to protect them all to make sure that his beloved persons would survive and to ensure Alexandria’s continued existence and safety.
Never again! Harry was seething at this point.

It had become incredibly had to distinguish between past and present. The mind-numbing fear of losing even more precious people was overshadowed by a burning rage against all the people who had killed and hurt his loved ones.

When he looked at Jadis now the only thing he was able to see was a threat to his family and a possible traitor…

And the British youth absolutely refused to lose another person he loved – even if they decided to trust a bitch like that – not if there was something he could do about it.

Before he could think it through Harry was moving. The hot rage in his belly driving him forward. Resolutely he stepped in front of the tall, red haired woman.

“We risk a lot with this deal and trusting you. It's our family’s lives we're putting on the line here.” The tone of the teen’s voice was tense and hostile.

“Harry!” Rick hissed at him, but the British youth held his gaze fix on Jadis. She seemed amused by his behaviour, as she looked down on him.

“I deal with adults. No kiddy’s play.” She smirked at him. Green eyes narrowed dangerously but Harry refused to take her bait, besides him he could feel Rick twitch nervously.

“I want your word that you'll do as you promised.” Harry hissed at the cunning female.

“Pretty eyes. Good face. Want to draw you. Want a pinkie swear?” She was obviously mocking him, her voice velvet soft.

Around them the Scavengers chuckled.

“A vow.” Harry corrected firmly.

His magic was already following his call, burning as hot as his anger.

Without waiting for permission the young wizard gripped Jadis’ hand. “We promise to bring you guns. It's a sign of our trust in this new alliance. And in turn you’ll promise to fight with us against the Saviours.” Harry could feel the sizzling energy answering, rising around them both and curling around their clasped hand working the binding.

Arching a brow she confirmed. “Guns. Then we fight your fight.”

“What are you ready to swear on that you’re going to honour your word?” The green eyed wizard pressed on.

Harry could practically see the moment his magic pressed in on the woman and forced her to give her promise more worth and weight. For a moment her calculating eyes glazed over as the angrily burning energy between them demanded an equal exchange from her.

There was a vicious kind of satisfaction cursing through the British youth.
He wouldn’t let her double cross them! She would keep her part of the bargain!

He was going to make sure of that!

“My people’s lives.” Jadis finally whispered, her eyes going comically wide.

The small British youth watched her going pale. It was clear she hadn't meant to say this! But the magic was already claiming her stake. Harry felt how it latched onto all of the Scavengers…

 Fuck! His magic was really striving to even the odds.

Wide eyed Harry tried to pull the vow back but without avail. The magic wouldn't budge a bloody inch. Instead he felt the pressure in his head building, the vow wanted to be completed…

“So mote it be!” Harry gritted out through clenched teeth.

And like a rubber band the vow snapped into place. The pressure around the boy and the tall woman eased immediately, both of them shuddered under its loss.

With a frown Jadis quickly stepped back from him, looking suspiciously from her hand back to Harry.

“No trick. Now I really hope for the both of us that you keep you word.” The small wizard hissed at her. He was still so angry but underneath it all a new sombre feeling was building up..

“Bring guns. Keep word.” Jadis stated plainly. Her closed of face giving no indication to what she was really thinking or feeling.

“We'll be back.” Rick agreed firmly, his jaw and fists clenched in tension ready to take on the world to get this done.

To take out Negan.

Harry hoped that hadn't made a deal with the devil to achieve that.

He could feel the weight of the vow on his shoulders... They needed to find more guns and Jadis needed to keep her word.

Too many lives depended on it now.
When they turned to leave Rick grabbed the teen’s arm. “Harry! What… what was this?” He asked anxiously, flinching a bit when glowing emerald green eyes fixed themselves on him.

“Rick, I don't think we can trust those people. That woman just fucking threw you under the fucking bus.” The teen hissed lowly.

“We need them Harry! They just need weapons and then we can take on the Saviours.” The older man argued back frowning heavily.

Glancing at Michonne and Daryl he saw Harry’s scepticism and concern mirrored.

Neither of them seemed convinced that this was a good idea...

“You think this isn’t right?” He asked carefully.

Michonne was too loyal to outright call her boyfriend’s efforts of gaining some allies against the Saviours bullshit so she settled for uncertain grimace.

While Daryl just glowered at the surrounding Scavengers and grumbled non-committally. Harry got the impression that the hunter was still a little miffed with him for coming along instead of staying in Alexandria.

In a sombre mood they turned to leave the junkyard.

++++Flashback end ++++

“What did ya do with that Jadis woman? Ya never said.” Daryl grumbled lowly from the car seat beside Harry.

The green eyed youth just shook his head. Now that his anger drained away reality of what he had done was just catching up with him.

“I... Let's say I made sure that she's going to lose as much as we do if she decides to double cross us.” Harry sighed tiredly. The cool glass of the car window felt nice on his face.

“Ya really dinna trust her?” Daryl seemed worried now.

“I'm not sure. I… Better to be safe than sorry, right?” He looked into Daryl’s troubled eyes. The hunter frowned at his vague answer but seemed to sense Harry’s unwillingness to talk about it. Instead the gruff man inched a bit closer offering a broad shoulder to lean on.

“I hope it doesn't come to that…” Harry muttered softly.

He could neither hide his exhaustion nor his gloomy mood from Daryl or the others in the car and
he was grateful that they refrained from quizzing him further on the matter. Although he could feel Michonne’s trouble gaze and Rick's frown on him.

The hunter just huffed in something close to exasperation before he laid a gentle hand on Harry's neck squeezing it in silent comfort. The petite teen released a heavy breath at the tender gesture.

He... he liked it when Daryl touched him. The hunters calloused and scarred hands were always careful with him, hesitant in their approach and never out of bounds, ready to pull back at the slightest hint of discomfort on Harry's side. So he let himself fall into those big and tender hands.

Every time with a little bit more ease than before.

And Harry tried to do the same for Daryl.

Arms brushing, shoulders touching, hands laid gently on too often abused skin. It was slow, timid even, like two porcupines dancing around each other – just all too aware that one wrong move could hurt the other and yourself.

But it made Harry feel cherished and trusted.

***

Since Harry had come back to Alexandria he and Daryl shared the attic.

The small wizard had been ready to move back into Carl’s room. But when he had come up to the attic Daryl had already been there busy building Harry's nest of pillows and blankets back up next to a mattress on the floor.

The hunter had startled badly the teen had cleared his throat.

Harry had just cocked his head to the side while Daryl’s face had lit up in an interesting shade of red.

“Have you just brought the mattress in?” Harry had asked curiously.

“Hmm.” Daryl had hummed, turning his head so that his long hair had hidden most of his face but not the tips of his red ears.

The sight made Harry’s heart skip a beat, swallowing heavily the teen cleared his throat.

“So you don't want me to sleep in Carl's room? I thought... You might want... That you wouldn't want me to sleep up here anymore… It was your room first.” He stumbled clumsily through the words.

“Naah. We can share the place, if ya want.” Daryl mumbled shyly peeking at Harry through his over long fringe.
Harry's cheeks had hurt from grinning so broadly.

“Yes!” He had called out a bit too quick and a little too excited, causing Daryl to snap his head up. The look on his face had been one of stunned wonder and…

“I mean, yes. I would like that very much. I missed you. And you make me feel safe.” The British young man had replied a little more softly but firmly.

Now Daryl’s bed and Harry’s cot were so close to each other that they could easily touch one another at night if they wanted to.

Harry had slept a lot better for it.

Even if something was still missing...

After they had come back from the Kingdom the wizard had swiftly nicked Daryl’s blanket and replaced it with his own.

Of course the seasoned tracker had noticed this when he had gone to bed that night, even when Harry had hoped that he wouldn't... The covers looked the same.

But well, who was he kidding.

As soon as Daryl had plopped down on his bed for the night with exhausted groan, Harry had buried his head a little deeper into his textbook about warding runes. His big eyes only just peering over the edge of the book at the hunter.

Lately there had been a strange tightening the teen’s stomach whenever he looked at Daryl’s tan muscular arms or heard the older man talk in that deep smooth southern drawl and certain rumbling sounds would make Harry flush an embarrassing tomato-red.

Looking at the broad and rough man lying on his stomach – for one unwound and slack – his handsome face completely relaxed and framed by too long brown hair, Harry heart might have skipped a beat or two, before it had started fluttering like a little bird.

But then Daryl’s slated blue eyes had suddenly snapped open and he had blinked down at the duvet in confusion and astonishment. Not being able to help himself Harry had grabbed his stolen Daryl-blanket tightly and had pulled it a little closer to his chest, simultaneously he had hidden a little more behind his book.
Tense he had waited for the man to demand his blanket back but when nothing happened the wizard had dared to peek at his… roommate again.

Daryl had been staring at him. The expression of absolute wonder on his face had made him look ten years younger, more innocent and vulnerable.

And then a slow smile had stretched over the hunter’s lips. Not a grin or a smirk but a tiny, true and incredible beautiful smile. Harry had thought that his heart would give out at the sight and he had felt light-headed for a moment.

His cheeks had been burning.

Daryl’s blue eyes had shone with warmth and adoration, and a little mirth.

“’lright.” The man had sounded amused and proud. The husky tone had made Harry’s stomach flip and had him swallowing heavily.

Dazed the green eyed youth had nodded at the older man who had chuckled before he plopped back onto his mattress with a satisfied sigh – that wonderful, tiny smile still in place.

*

The night after Harry had forced an unbreakable vow on Jadis, he woke up screaming.

+++Nightmare+++ Greedy hands were holding Harry down. Len was hovering above him leering at his naked form.

“Always knew you were a fucking slut. Gaging for it, aren’t ya?” Joe’s voice hissed into his ear. “Ya have the hots for the bowman, haven’t ya?” The old man breathed leeringly his foul breath into the boy’s face.

Harry struggled in in frenzied panic as Len’s and the Joe’s faces morphed into Death Eater masks as his opening was breached without a warning or care. Mocking laughs and cruel jests had filled his ears as faceless men tore through his body.

Someone clasped their hands around his throat slowly squeezing… cutting off his air supply.

The world around him changed as he fought for each breath.

Harry was lying on a misty meadow and then the hands around his throat were gone… but pale, potion-stained and long fingered hands were holding him down.

A whistling sound filled the night.

A tall man in a leather jacket and a red scarf had stood before him… He was bald, hairless and had two slits were his nose was supposed to be.
The Dark Lord was twirling a baseball bat while a wide grin distorted his pale snake like face.

“Harry Potter. How nice of you to join us!” Voldemort hissed mockingly, stepping a bit to the side revealing two bodies lying on the ground next to his feet.

Blood was splattered on white wings that pranged on a leather vest. Its owner laid unmov ing on the slightly wet grass.

Harry tried to scream but no sound left his throat. Desperate the young man watched for a sign of life… finding none! Silent sobs rattled his thin body and bitter tears spilled over his face.

No… No… NO! Daryl!

This couldn’t be! It just couldn’t.

An overwhelming pain was starting to blossom in his chest. High, mocking laug her was the only answer to his despair. And the teen nearly didn’t dare to look at the second shorter person on the ground…

A glimpse of a tale-telling leather duster and a big messy puddle of blood… and other things made Harry want to wail in distress.

“Harry Potter!” Chuckling in icy amusement, the tall figure before him moved closer. Harry flinched as the smooth but bloody surface of a baseball bat caresses his face almost lovingly. The metallic stench of fresh blood filled his nose.

And then he saw it… long strand of dark blond hair that clung to the barbed wire wound around the bat – sticky with blood and brain matter…

His slender body was nearly trashing with the tantalising need to get away from the horrendous sight and a shrill screamed ripped itself from his throat but the hands wouldn’t let him get away.

Another pair of cold hands gripped his face and forced him to look at a snake like face… and into emerald green eyes.

“We’re the same Harry. You shared my soul.” The monster in front of him whispered tauntingly.

“No. No… I’m not… NO!” Harry choked and sobbed as bile rose in his throat.

“We’re more alike than you think.” A mad grin turned the face in front of him into horrible grimace.

“Show him his place.” The thing in front of him commanded and ice filled the teen’s veins.
Suddenly he felt smaller and younger than before. Then the last Death Eater, who had held him down the whole time, was on top of him.

The man had taken his mask off, letting Harry come face to face with fathomless black eyes and a big hooked nose.

Severus Snape stared impassively at him. His lips were moving but the green eyed teen couldn’t hear anything anymore… white noise was filling his ears.

Surroundings blurred again and changed to junkyard littered in gravestones covered by ivy and moos, over him towered a marble headstone. The most striking feature of the grave was the frighteningly familiar, large statue of the Angel of Death. In its right skeletal hand it was bearing a raised scythe. Under the sculptured hood a skull-like face starred down at Harry, while Snape’s deep voice whispered:

“Look into my eyes.” over and over again.

The British teen felt oddly numb in this moment everything seemed so far away – like being pushed under water – and Harry was drowning!

He wanted to panic, to be afraid but no real emotion came to him… he was trapped in numbness! And somehow that scared Harry even more.

Distantly he felt how his body convulsed and how a now well-known pain tore through his lower body.

“Look into my eyes.”

The tortured screams of child, steadily increasing in their volume, surrounded him.

“AAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!” Harry flinched at the raw, throat shredding scream, only distantly aware that he was the one that had yelled out…

+++Nightmare end++++

Cold sweat was running down his back. His head was a mess.

Harry had started dry heaving.

Fuck, he couldn't breathe. Panic was creating a thick fog in his head, muddling reality, flashback and fucked-up dream to an overwhelming delusion, making Harry unable to think or feel anything besides paralyzing horror and stomach turning nausea.

“Shit!” Daryl’s rough curse cut through his haze like knife.
Daryl was here! Desperately Harry latched onto this thought.

It was a dream! A dream!

A bloody nightmare! He was in Alexandria hidden in his pillow fort that Daryl had teased him about. Tangled into the blanket he had nicked from the hunter.

Daryl was here!

Daryl was here!

I’m safe!

Choking Harry forced the used up air out of his lungs and inhaled again with a hiss.

A small lamp got lit.

Blinking viciously he tried to clear his vision enough to see Daryl. There were no words to describe the relief Harry felt when he looked at the hunter. His hair was sleep-mussed and there was an imprint on his cheek from a pillow crease. But the hunters slated eyes were wide in alarm and apprehension.

No blood! No blood! There was no blood on the man!

Harry was shivering as he cooled down, choked sobs and hysterical laughter mixing together.

“Hey, Harry?!” Daryl mumbled lowly. Whatever he must have seen in Harry’s face, had made the man cautious… and embarrassed. It confused the dazed and rattled youth.

“Bad dream?” The hunter asked gently but his voice sounded strangely high and a breathless.

Harry could tell that Daryl made an effort to keep his body language as none-threatening as possible. And then he could feel it…

Bloody hell!

Harry could feel it like an extension of himself how it had enveloped the hunter like a second skin.
His magic hummed contentedly at the closeness and intimacy the contact to the other man provided.

If Harry concentrated he could feel his magic caressing Daryl muscular arms, a feather-light touch trailing over his broad shoulders, the biceps down the underarm over circular scars on his hand down to the man’s finger tips.

The green eyed teen watched with nearly feverish attention as it caused Daryl to shiver and swallow heavily. “Harry…” His voice had taken a husky quality.

The small wizard felt something in him snap.

*Daryl was alive! He was well!*

*Negan hadn’t killed him. Voldemort was dead!*

*Daryl was alive! He was in front of him!*

*Alive and warm! Not dead and cold!*

He knew all of this!

Bloody, fucking hell!

His magic could *feel* it! It could trace every heartbeat in the blue eyed man, but at the same time it wasn’t *enough*.

Without thinking, Harry threw himself into the hunter’s arms.

Daryl gave a startled grunt as the little Brit made contact with his chest, but strong warm arms caught the teen’s smaller frame easily, cradling him closely.

Encompassed by warmth and the comforting smell of Daryl the green eyed youth felt all his walls crumbling.

The panic and horror of the dream catching up with him, Harry started shaking like a leaf. Petite hands grabbed the back of the hunter’s shirt as sobs were torn from his throat and tears left wet trails on his face. He could feel Daryl breathing out forcefully, before he cradled the teen’s head in his bigger hand securely and manoeuvred them both into a lying position – just holding Harry close.

The wizard’s magic cocooning them both. Humming protectively.

“It’s alrigh’. I’ve got ya. Shhhsshhh. I’ve got ya.” The smooth, rumbling southern drawl of Daryl’s voice, combined with the way he ran his hand through Harry hair settled something in the young man.
“I dreamed about them. I dreamed about the captivity. I dreamed about…” Harry clutched the hunter a little tighter. The little Brit could feel the muscles under his fingers tensed at those words and for a moment the Daryl buried his head into the crook of Harry shoulder.

“But the worst was that I dreamed that he killed you…and Paul…” The green eyed teen whispered, causing Daryl to go still.

“I ain’t dying on ya.” He grumbled after a while. “But ya can’t die on me either, ya hear me?!” Daryl demanded softly, rubbing the wizard’s back.

“Oh!” Harry hiccupped wetly.

It was a stupid promise. They both knew this… It was an impossible promise.

They lived in a world where such vows were useless. They could be both dead tomorrow, but it calmed Harry nonetheless.

It was stupid and naive but still comforting.

Suddenly Harry tensed up as Daryl’s hand graced his hip accidentally.

“Is… is this ok?” His gruff redneck asked shyly, at one stilling his hands and the raven haired wizard got the impression that the older man had even stopped breathing.

“Yes… no… I don’t know.” Harry shivered, his heart was racing madly. Daryl tried to back off immediately.

“Sorry.” He mumbled sounding dejected and small, like a rejected kid. It tore Harry’s heart apart to hear his grumpy Hufflepuff like this.

He didn’t want Daryl this insecure! Not over something as wonderful as comforting someone and especially not because of Harry!

Taking a deep breath the teen grabbed the hunter’s arm. “Stop! Don’t… don’t go! Please…! Just wait… I need a moment.”

Counting from ten backwards Harry looked up in Daryl’s face, tracing every contour and line on it, from the slated blue eyes that shown with so much anxiousness, care and concern, to the sharp cheekbones and the straight nose, to small mole over those thin lips that looked unusually soft right now.

This was Daryl.

I’m was safe with Daryl.

Very slowly and with each controlled breath, Harry calmed a bit more, relaxing back into the
Yeah I can do this.

“Alright?” Daryl looked so unsure of himself, so shy. And Harry could relate to this so well that he wanted to reassure the other man that this was ok. That they were ok!

“Hmmmhm.” Harry hummed softly. “You, too?” The teen could feel how Daryl relaxed a little at his confirmation.

“Yeah. It’s good.” And very slowly Harry could feel how the hunter dared to breathe again. It was sweet and Harry had to fight back the tears that swam in his eyes. Daryl would have backed off, one indication that he was uncomfortable had been enough.

“Can… can we stay like this?” Harry whispered into the broad chest before him, inhaling the comforting scent that was all Daryl and listening to the steady thumps of his heartbeat.

“Yeah. Yeah, we can, darlin’” The blue eyed man hummed, burying his nose into the youth’s unruly hair.

“Thanks.” His only answer was a soothing rumble.

* 

Rick had called his family for a meeting in Alexandria’s church, combined with a conference call with the Hilltop and the Kingdom via the magic mirrors Harry had created.

The only ones missing where Daryl and Harry. When he had knocked on the door of the attic room his brothers deep rumbled had answered him. Some deeply curious part of him had dared then to peek into the room, choking a little when the picture of Harry curled on Daryl’s chest greeted him. The hunter peered at him out of one slated blue eye through the curtain of his messy fringe, calmly motioning to the sleeping teen and signalling Rick to let him sleep a little longer.

The last days had been pretty straining for the kid so he had just nodded and let the two be.

For the peace of his mind he had tried very hard not to think too much about Harry and Daryl curled together… snuggling…

Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, Rick forced himself to get back to the matter at hand they needed to talk about the latest developments…

Tara’s and Carl’s stunt at the Sanctuary and their potential new allies.
Rick was still a little rattled that Harry didn’t trust Jadis. The former Sheriff had really thought that they would make good allies but their green eyed wizard had never been wrong in his hunches.

It made Alexandria’s leader worry.

The usually friendly teen had been in a right state… agitated and angry. Rick had been able to sense how unsettled and aggressive the wizard’s magic had been when he had talked to Jadis. After they had been back he had talked to Michonne and she had agreed with him… whatever Harry had done to the red haired woman – it hadn’t been the usually benevolent kind of magic they had seen from the teen until now.

And a small part of Rick was terrified of that.

Once he had asked Harry to fight and kill for them… and while he had accepted the green eyed boy’s refusal and his explanation what kind of mind-set it would need, it had been somewhat grudgingly… But since yesterday he got the feeling that they had gotten a light taste of what might have happened if he had pushed the wizard in this direction.

Rick shivered.

He hoped that Harry hadn’t hurt himself with what he had done to ensure that Jadis wouldn’t fuck them over.

“So we have new allies but not enough weapons or ammo. Damn!” Maggie cursed colourfully, summarising their current situation quiet adequately.

“And Negan remembers Alexandria and the night in the meadow?” Even through the small mirror Carol looked very concerned about the news.

“Yeah.” Rick sighed, rubbing tiredly a hand over his face.

“Harry also had to use magic to get Tara and Carl out of the Sanctuary. So he knows about that too now.” Aaron pinched the bridge of his nose. Their usually very cleaned up scout looked exhausted and a little dishevel Rick decided. Having a baby in the house was pretty demanding.

Not that Beth hadn't helped yesterday but the couple had wanted to face the first night with their daughter alone.

Even Carl had been over a lot. But that was more of a punishment than volunteered assistance. With a sweet smile had could have belonged right on Carol’s face, Harry had all but dragged Rick’s teenaged son over to the new parents and had offer Carl up for babysitting and diaper duty.

Neither the couple nor the still guilty feeling boy had dared to protest, while Rick had tried very hard to keep up a stern and disappointed expression. Sadly laughing in his kid’s face about the whole thing would have missed the point of the punishment.

And Christ, had Carl messed up!

The boy knew it but hell...

“And he knows we're in contact with each other.” Ezekiel sighed through Carol’s mirror.
Carl’s and Tara’s small excursion had annihilated all their strategic advantages. This changed everything.

“We have lost the element of surprise and the time to plan more carefully. We'll need to be fast now.” Rick told them seriously.

Tara who had been very silent since they had come back from the Hilltop looked suddenly up. “I... I might know where to find more guns.” She told them hesitantly. It was strange to see the usually vibrant brunette so crestfallen.

And then she started to talk…

It showed that Tara had lied to him when Rick had asked her if she had found anything on her trip. Back when she had come back she had firmly told him that they hadn’t found anything out there!

Now it turned out that nothing was a whole self-sustaining community of women with a lot of weapons. Women, who had lost their men and sons to the Saviours. Who had fled and had built up the Oceanside community.

Shutting foreigners out, killing trespassers...

But they had helped Tara, saved her life and in return she had promised not to reveal their existence.

The brunette girl looked wretched for doing this now… And Rick could understand the reluctance to break your word to someone who had saved your hide. But Tara’s and Carl's stunt had costed them to luxury to honour such promises if the lives of three communities were now on the line.

And she knew it too. This wasn't about keeping your word or being ungrateful, this was about doing what was necessary to protect your family.

Huddled together in the Grimes kitchen they contemplated how to proceed in the light of Tara’s new information. Harry was sitting on the counter nursing a cup of tea, while Daryl leaned next to the teen seeking closeness.

The plan they worked out wasn't bad. Tara would try to convince the leader to join the alliance and if they refused they were going to take the weapons with as little violence as possible.

Glenn, Jesus and Sasha were going to come with them from the Hilltop, while the Alexandrian party would consist of Tara, Rick, Daryl, Michonne, Gabriel, Noah and Harry.

Behind the pink flower glasses green eyes had looked very uncomfortable with the idea to ambush
another community like that...

To rob them of their weapons if necessary...

Rick and Daryl had made it clear that he didn't need to go if he couldn't stomach it but Harry had just mutely shaken his head.

Since the encounter with the Scavengers from the junkyard the kid was tense as hell. Something had happened then.

Rick knew Harry had done some kind of magic and the former deputy wouldn’t lie it worried him that the wizard himself seemed so apprehensive about whatever he had done there to ensure his family’s safety.

Chapter End Notes

In case your wondering, now that Harry has his magic back, he's feeling a lot more anger than before.
Besides fear, anger and aggression are the strongest emotions in traumatised persons. And now that he has the means to protect himself and his loved ones, Harry's fear of losing anyone else is fueling his fight reflex.
It won't stay that way but i think working through those emotions are an important part of healing after everything he went through.

^^
Chapter 25

Harry starred at the women who were herded up before them. There were a lot of children, too… They all looked very scared.

The green eyed wizard felt his heart twist painfully.

Tara had sneaked into the Oceanside community to speak with their leader. While Michonne had taken a post in one of the trees, Daryl and Paul had laid out explosive outside the Oceanside walls to cause a distraction.

Next to the wizard Glenn shivered. “This is it, isn’t it? Those women hid themselves away, killing every stranger or trespasser, because they didn’t know how to fight the Saviours anymore but couldn’t serve them either…” The young Korean said solemnly.

Harry nodded. He shared Glenn’s morose mood. It… It didn’t feel right to force even more calamity on these people who had already lost so much.

“Maybe they agree with us…” Harry hoped they would as he watched how Daryl and Paul were marching up another two female guards to the other captives with Rick trailing behind them.

“We made a lot of noise. We wanna wrap this up quick.” Their blue eyed leader called out to their group before he addressed the Oceanside women.

This needed to work out or they would not only take their guns but also call the wolves on to these people when they were the most defenceless. Harry knew the person Rick could become and right
now he wouldn’t buck an inch on what he thought was necessary to do. The small wizard had every intention to keep this without any collateral damage. And he hoped that this wouldn’t end like it did with Jadis and her tribe.

“You can send people to redirect anything coming this way. Tara said your forests are relatively clear, but we won’t take any chances. No one needs to get hurt. This is just about what you have, what we need.” Rick radiated a cool calm as he spoke causing the women to huddle together in fright. They knew Rick meant business.

“Nobody’s taking anything!” A harsh shout interrupted the former Sheriff.

An elderly blond woman, accompanied by an exotic looking, dark-haired girl, was holding Tara at gunpoint.

Natania and Cindie, Tara had called them when she had briefed them about the Oceanside community.

“You need to let everyone go and leave right now. Just walk away or this one dies.” The older woman demanded firmly nudging Tara’s head with the gun.

Oh, Harry could already see this! Rick was in for a hell of a fight, this woman was the real thing. A leader that wouldn’t back down either.

The way she spoke and held herself reminded Harry very strongly of Professor McGonagall.

This didn’t bode well for their hopes of a new alliance.

“Yeah we’ll leave you alone. We’re taking your weapons with us, that’s not gonna change.” Rick told her tersely, a threat lingering in the air.

Harry wanted to groan.

*That!* That was *not* the way to convince a McGonagall to work with you.

They may look like elderly women but they were the kind to kick your ass for rude insolence alone.

Harry cleared softly his throat. “I am sorry, we barged in like that! But circumstances forced our hand. It has left us little room for politeness or failure.” Harry apologized cordially.

“Harry!?” Rick hissed exasperated for being interrupted.

“At least one of you is well-spoken enough, as expected from a British young man” One corner of Natania’s mouth quirked a little.

“It’s Natania right? Put the gun down, and let’s talk about what we can change.” Rick bulldozed
back into the negotiation.

Harry sighted in resignation, as the old woman’s face closed off again. “No. Leave right now.”

A movement in the trees altered them that Michonne was still there with her sniper rifle. “Michonne don’t! Don’t.” Tara called out, eyes wide in panic as she shook her head viciously.

“We just wanna be left alone.” Natania hissed at them all and under her tough composure the old woman seemed tired and exhausted to Harry.

“No. Leave right now.” Rick demanded harshly. Harry asked himself for a moment if the former deputy ever had negotiation training for hostage-recovery. “Or we’ll kill you. None of us wants that.”

Probably not… or he had forgotten all of it…

“They want us to fight the Saviours.” The young woman that had come with Tara and Natania said suddenly addressing The Oceanside residents, causing the captive women and children to stare at them with wide eyes. Their expression varied from horrified to astonishment and hope and stone cold assessment.

Natania also felt the shift in the atmosphere this new information had caused. “We tried that. We lost. Too much! We’re not gonna lose anymore. Not our guns. Not our safety. Not after everything we’ve done to get here!” She tried to intervene.

“We’re gonna win.” Tara tried to convince the gathered people. “With your guns, with or without your help.”

“We’ve build alliances with other communities. We’re not going alone against them. We have the numbers to pull this off! But we need some more guns.” Harry saw his chance to back Tara up. They were listening! He could see it in their eyes.

“Maybe we should try.” The short haired guard woman muttered. Apparently not all women agreed with their leader’s decision for caution and hiding. Hush chatter filled the crowd.

“Granma stop. Just talk to them. It’s over.” Cindie tried to reason with her grandmother, too.

But the Oceanside leader just pressed her gun more firmly against Tara’s temple.

“It’s not over! Have you all forgotten?! Some of you actually want to fight them? After everything? We can lose our guns, but us leaving this place to fight? After everything? I have to remind you! Yes. I’m gonna do this and then I’m gonna die. But it’s that important, This is your life, all of you. Remember what it’s looks like. Remember what they did to us. Open your eyes!” Natania shouted angrily at her community.
This was a woman that had already seen too much… that had lost too much…

Harry could see it now… her fear to lose anything else because it would destroy her…

She had been through too much not to play it safe.

“Rick! Walkers!!” Michonne suddenly yelled out in warning. And she was right they were coming… a lot of them!

Damn!

Harry turned back to disarm Natania magically if necessary – Only to see Cindie knocking her grandmother out and taking the gun from her.

Slack jawed he starred at the girl as she nodded to him but he got the message.

She would not turn against them not right when walkers were about to swarm the place.

Rick switched immediately.

“Everybody up! Get the children behind us! Their coming.” He instructed them all. Also calling the Oceanside guards to the front handing them knives.

“First shift, join them on the line.” Cindie called out to her fighters.

“Knives out. Dead only. Dead only.” The short haired guard’s woman instructed her fellow fighters firmly.

“Everyone, shots within ten feet of the line.” Rick commanded.

Harry stood between Paul and Daryl, the gun felt heavy in his hands.

The hunter looked down at him with a small grin. “Ya still crunch up ya nose very time ya about ta shoot a gun.”

“Yes, well, I still don’t like them very much.” Harry huffed back, mock-glaring at him.

“It makes you look like a very displeased kitten.” Paul chimed in from the other side, a teasing twinkle in his cyan eyes. “It’s quite adorable.”

To Harry’s surprise this made Daryl chuckle.

“Traitor.” Harry pouted, hitting two walkers perfectly between the eyes.

“At least I hit my mark on the first try!” Harry quipped at Paul, taking out another walker.

“Oh, are you making this a completion now.” The Hilltop scout grinned at him, aiming and shooting also two walkers even if he didn’t manage to hit them directly in the head on the first tries.

“I’m on five.” Harry smile innocently up at him.
“Well, I’m on four.” Paul smirked back teasingly. “That’s not so far off.”

“I’m on seven.” Daryl rumbled a little smug, causing Harry and Paul to groan.

“Ya both talk too much.” With enlightening piece of philosophy Daryl shot another arrow through a walker’s eye.

“’ight! That’s how it’s done!” The hunter bragged in an even deeper and smoother tone than usual, making Harry shiver in nervous delight at the exciting teasing between them.

“God, please!” Glenn groaned from Daryl’s other side. “Shut up you three! This is not the time I want to listen to you three pulling each other’s pigtails!” The young Korean begged.

It made all three of them to blush and suddenly there was a shy awkwardness about their teasing interaction. Harry felt like a kid caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

Doing something that felt deliciously right but not sure if he was allowed to do or feel this way.

A glance at the other two showed that they were in similar states of embracement. So maybe they really weren’t supposed to…

Harry wasn’t even sure what they had been doing…

To stop himself from freaking out further Harry tried to concentrate on the task at hand. Together with the Oceanside women, the organised a combined defence line against the approaching walkers allowed them to efficiently kill all the walkers.

Beatrice, the short-haired guard woman, shook hands with Rick afterwards, handing him back his knife.

Natania was slowly picking herself up, glaring at all of them. She was about to say something… but whatever it was it got swallowed by a startled scream when a lone walker grabbed her from behind.

Without think Harry threw his hand out, making his one of his daggers, piercing the corpse head through its eye.

The roamer sagged lifelessly behind the old woman, who starred in wide eyed shock at Harry.

“Granma!” Cindie and another small girl, both ran to Natania.

“Are you alright? Did it get to you?” Both questioned her in wild panic, already pulling at the woman’s clothes in search for bites or scratches. Natania didn’t even seem to take notice of her granddaughters’ fright. She didn’t acknowledge them in the slightest just starring at Harry out of unfathomable grey eyes.
The young Brit shiver a bit under her scrutiny… something about her started to feel … familiar… Something about her face, but he couldn’t lay a finger on it.

It was there just on the tip of his tongue, in the back of his brain…

“Thank god! It didn’t get you!” Cindie finally sighed in relief, shoulder sagging. But instead of answering her granddaughter Natania made a step forward towards Harry.

“You’re a wizard.” She whispered. Her voice sounded breathless with disbelieve. Her wide eyes were moving restlessly over slender form until they fixed themselves onto his forehead. Harry shivered because he had the uncomfortable feeling that he knew what she was staring at. His hand twitched with the impulse to cover swipe his fringe back over his scar.

“Circe! You’re Harry Potter!” She exclaimed more firmly.

The intensity in her expression made Harry take a step back from her. It caused Daryl and Paul to close shoulders with him.

He knew that look in her eyes… knew it since Hagrid had taken him to London and the tiny eleven year old had walked into the Leaky Cauldron for the first time. It was that glint of recognition and expectation that held intrigue and hunger for information and power, adults in the wizarding world had directed at him countless times.

He shivered under its familiar weight…

“How? How do you know that?” The small wizard hissed at her.

An irrational fear cursing through his body, blood was rushing in his ears.

He didn’t want this anymore! All that boy-who-lived shit! He was so done with all of that! It had never been good for him when people had recognized him.

He wanted to be Harry – just Harry! Nothing more…

He had been so careful, even here and now. He had very seldom given out his last name.

“The scar. And I used to see pictures of Fleamont in the Daily Prophet when I was a child. You have the Potter look.” Natania answered still coming closer, eyes still hungrily fixed on his forehead.

Harry wanted to squeeze his eyes shut… cursing his bad luck! Nobody should be recognizing him here in the nowhere of Virginia! Nobody!
He wanted to hide from her inquisitive eyes but she was still coming closer. People always seemed to lose all boundaries with him as soon as they knew who he was… It was like he suddenly stopped being a person but became public property.

With hitching breaths he stepped closer to Daryl and Paul seeking comfort in their solid presence. The thought alone that yet someone else could know about the boy-who-lived and… and claim him like the British wizards had, made his skin itch… Harry thought he could feel the letters etched into his skin burning.

“Stop!” The raven haired teen yelled out at the advancing woman. Now Harry’s dagger was hovering against Natania’s throat, stopping her in her tracks.

“Who are you?” He hissed, his glowing green eyes were dangerously narrowed. But she still starred at him in a daze, locked into her own thoughts.

“How did you get here? You should be in England!” She rambled uncomprehendingly.

“How are you?” Harry asked again, more sharply this time. He made sure that the knife was still in contact with her throat.

“How is Harry Potter working with a group of rag-tag muggles?” There was a hint of distain in Natania’s voice this time as she looked disparagingly at Daryl and Paul. Both men growled at the badly wielded insult against them and Harry sent a non-verbal Stinging Hex at the old woman.

It made her yelp a little in surprise.

“Who, in Merlin’s name, are you?” Harry growled at her threateningly, letting his magic push at her. The terrified grasp she gave, told him that she had gotten the message. She backed away a bit.

“I will ask for the last time. Who. Are. you?” Again Harry accented each word with small pushes of magic.

In another situation he would have felt bad about bullying an old woman but right now he was scarred as hell. This woman knew who he was. She had recognized him… and he needed to know how…!?

“I’m Natania Miller.” She yelped out, looking frightened herself.

“Cut the bullshit! You’re lying. Who are you? And how did you who I am?” Harry pushed more aggressively. He could tell once again that his magic was manipulating a weaker person into giving him what he wanted. A little unsettled and sick he thought about the vow he had pressed from Jadis, carefully reining his powers in.

But it had been enough already.
“I… I’m really Natania Miller… by marriage. I… was borne Natalie Dolohov.” She finally whispered, looking to the ground.

Harry felt his knees buckle, only Paul’s quick reflexes kept him upright.

“Harry?!” The scout held him close. But Harry could barely hear him over the white noise that whooshed in his ears.

Dolohov!

There was it! That was who she reminded him of… Dolohov.

Antonin Dolohov

One of Voldemort’s most faithful.

Bile was rising in his throat as pictures of his captivity were playing before his eyes.

“Oh, you’re just as sweet as my Nat was.” A rough male voice moaned into his ear.

“Let me hear your pretty voice, Nat.” A rough hand was pulling on his hair as invisible bonds held him down.

“Sing for me little bird! Sing!” A cruel laugh echoed in his head.

“Crucio!” The curse got moaned sinfully into his ear, as a big hand caressed his face all most lovingly.

And just like that hot white pain was dominating his every being.

Screaming… Harry was screaming…

His body was convulsing under the mind-shattering torture as his tormentor moaned unashamedly.
Spasms were wrecking through his entire being, making it feel like his hair and even his nails were burning...

Hid throat was being shredded into bloody pieces by desperate animalistic screams...

Screaming...

A little girl...

Screaming...

The disgusting groan of “NAT!”

“You’re Nat.” Harry whispered faintly to Natania.

“You’re Nat.” The green eyed boy repeated dazed, making the old woman rearing back as if he had struck her. White as a sheet she was swaying.

The British wizard was still blindly starring at her not really seeing anything. Memories were still hauntingly vivid in his head making his stomach churn.

All the things he had tried to forget of those terrible four weeks he had spent in the hands of Voldemort and his Death Eaters were resurfacing…


That little girl…

At the last moment Harry managed to turn away or he would have vomiting on Paul’s boots.

“Fuck!” Daryl exclaimed in concern.

Paul was crouching next to the teen carefully sweeping raven looks from Harry’s sweaty forehead.
“Hush, Sweetheart! Deep breaths!” The long hair man instructed softly as he gently rubbed the slender wizards back. Heaving Harry coughed out another on rush of sour bile, clenching his eyes shut and whimpering pitifully he huddled closer to Paul’s reassuring presence. He wanted to hide in that long leather duster while Daryl took a protective stance before them.

“Granma!” The desperate cry of two girls ripped Harry out of his own misery. Glancing up the green eyed wizard saw how Cindy and her sister hovered around their kneeling grandmother.

The old woman looked equally sick and haunted as Harry felt.

When green eyes met grey ones, they both knew the truth…

She was Nat…

They were the same. They both had suffered under the cruel hands of Antonin Dolohov.

“I… I think it would be good if we talked.” Harry’s voice sounded weak and hoarse to his own ears.

“Yeah… we probably should.” Natania sighed looking as hesitant and unwilling to talk about anything pertaining that man as Harry felt.

“I have some tea at my house. Let’s have a cuppa.” The slender teen laughed mirthlessly at her invitation.

“Okay.”

*

It was strange how comforting a cup of hot tea could be.

Now that they all sat huddled together in Natania’s house each nursing some kind of hot beverage. Rick and Michonne had taken post by the door while Paul and Daryl flanked Harry. Glenn and Tara were sitting next to Cindie and her sister.

“This name… It was his pet name for me, but at the same time it was an insult…” The old woman revealed slowly. Her eyes were glazed over in old bitter sorrow as she looked unseeing out of the window.

“I’m a hedge witch. I’ve got next to no magic… barely enough to make a passable potion – if even. It wouldn’t have been enough for Hogwarts.” Natania explained in an emotionless voice. Harry
guessed that she had had to come to terms with her unfair fate decades ago, but losing your family because you were deemed inferior… Such hurt could never truly leave you.

Harry knew this from experience and with a small glance to Daryl he could detect the same pain in the older man’s face.

“As you can guess, there was no room in the Dolohov family for Squibs and the likes.” Natania sighed bitterly.

Beside him Harry could feel Paul shaking, so he carefully gripped the other man’s hand in silent comfort.

“The long haired scout had to thinking about his own grandmother and the similar pain she must have gone through as her family abandoned her.”

“Antonin is eight years older than me and he… he has always been…” Natania faltered – her voice brittle with old emotions.

“… getting off on hurting those weaker than himself?!” Harry finished for her crudely.

This sharp hurt in his tone caused both Daryl and Paul to inch a bit closer to him. He could practically feel how they exchanged meaningful looks above his head. The dark haired youth exhaled shakily forcing himself to loosen his shoulders a bit, leaning against the two men by his sides.

“I’m sorry. That was…” Harry shook his head but Dolohov was a sadistic son of a bitch. Everything about this man just rubbed the green eyed wizard the wrong way.

Laughing darkly Natania shook her head.

“No. You’re right. He always found ways to torture the house elves. He loved it to trick the creatures into punishing themselves. And after I turned six…” Green eyes found her dark grey ones.

The Dolohov siblings shared the same eyes… It had to be hard to see part of your tormentor every time you looked into a mirror, Harry mused.

“You don’t need to…” The abused teen tried to stop the old woman but she just waved his concern away with a resolute gesture.

“Like hell I do!” Natania snapped at him, her face mocking him for his try to molly-codling her. “He always found ways to be alone with me… I was always a mess when he used to come home from Hogwarts. My father had never blinked an eye. He couldn’t have cared less what happened to me. Even then it had already been clear that I was too weak to stay in the family. And my mother… she… Today I think she tried… She was a harsh woman but I think she couldn’t bear what Antonin did to me. So one night when I was ten before the Yule holidays she portkeyed me out of the house to America so I was gone before he came back. She made it clear that I wasn’t allowed back home and that she was cutting all ties with me.” Natania sounded hollow as relayed her tale to them and Harry’s heart ached for the small abused girl that had been raped by her own brother and whose only chance of survival had been to be disowned and cast out by her own mother.
“Oh, Granna!” Cindie was crying for her grandmother but Natania was still sitting upright in silent dignity. Even after all those years her pureblood upbringing was still showing Harry thought.

“That’s a horrible story!” Paul mumbled in earnest compassion. He seemed to be deeply rattled by the woman’s account.

“You think you so, boy?” Natania barked out a wintery laugh her voice laced in cynicism, but the hilltop scout didn’t back down.

“Yes, I think so. My gran was Squib.” He told her calmly, his big soulful eyes soft with sympathy.

Cyan blue eyes met grey ones in a long stare before the old woman titled her head to the side conceding.

“A Monroe, perhaps?” Natania asked suddenly, causing Paul to blink taken-a-back.

“Uhmm… yes… her maiden name was Monroe… How did you guess?” The long haired man frowned in slight confusion.

“Your eyes. You have the Monroe eyes.” The Oceanside leader pointed out.

When Harry looked at Paul he found the man with a familiar expression on his face. He was pretty sure that he that same dazed and pained look on his face when the Mirror of Erised had shown him his family for the first time. This kind of startling, heart-wrenching and heart-breaking information that showed you that you belonged somewhere.

So bitter sweet that you reeling so much you nearly feel empty inside – torn between laughing, screaming and crying.

Squeezing Paul’s hand a little more firmly, getting the man to look at him, Harry smiled at him, trying to convey the message.

It’s alright!

I understand.

You’re not alone.

The smile Paul directed at him in return was shaky and wetness shone in the scout’s eyes, but warm in gratefulness. So Harry just tucked softly on a long lock of hair behind Paul’s ear, while Daryl just rumbled comfortingly from the other side.

Natania suddenly cleared her throat looked at the three of them with raised eyebrows.

“Interesting.” She mumbled. The dry amusement she projected made Harry choke in embarrassment.
They had done it again… This thing he still wasn’t sure about if he was allowed to have it…
Bloddy damn!

“You still haven’t told me how you came here or how you know... him.” Natania pointed out, her eyes sharp with interest.

And so Harry told her…

About the tourney, about the tasks and how he had walked into a trap that had brought Cedric Diggory death and himself four weeks in Voldemort’s captivity.

Here he paused for a moment…

Some memories for that time were very hazy thanks to Snape, while others were still so very vivid... Dolohov had made sure that he didn’t retreat into his head. That tormentor had liked his victims alert.

++++Flashback+++++

“Look at me.” Severus whispered urgently.

Harry obeyed starring into black eyes.

“Legimens.” The green eyed teen felt his head going hazy, his body felt suddenly numb, not quite like his own. He knew that he was terrified but he couldn’t feel that either anymore.

Everything was so far away.

He flinched when he felt his Potions Professor move above him…

Oh… So this was really happening… Oh… Dazed Harry blinked.

He was tired… maybe he should rest his eyes for a moment.

But that thought didn’t seem appropriate for the situation… He felt his body flinch under a harsh thrust.

His cheeks were wet… Harry thought had he might have started to cry.

He had problems to tell... Everything was so strange.
“Well, well, Snape look at the little Mudblood. Taking it all silent and complaint like a good little bitch.” Someone leered at them. Harry turned his head automatically to the man standing beside them. The tall man was completely dressed in black and longish dark brown curls framed a face that must have been handsome once… The man reminded his of Sirius shortly after Azkaban. It was in his haunted eyes.

But no… His godfather had never leered so coldly at him… or looked so frighteningly hungry…

“Leave Dolohov! The Dark Lord bestowed the honour of putting Potter into his place to me alone.” Snape sneered at his fellow Death Eater.

+++Flashback end++++

Harry shivered and he felt nauseous again. Forcing himself to concentrate on Paul’s hand in his own and Daryl’s broad chest that rested against his shoulders and back, he counted from ten backwards in his head.

Grounding himself, anchoring himself before he would drown in the onslaught of horrifying flashbacks.

“Breath and talk, Harry!” Denise’s voice from long ago instructed him.

“Voldemort wanted his men to break me but they weren’t allowed to kill me. He wasn’t the first to hurt me… He came as one of the last… He used to call me by your old pet name when he… He wouldn’t stop calling me that. It was as if he re-enacted something…” Harry looked solemnly at the elderly woman, letting their eyes meet.

Behind him he could feel Daryl vibrating in anger and grief. He didn’t need to look to know that the heart of his gruff, loyal Hufflepuff was probably breaking on his behalf. He had never told his family these things… only ever hinting at the horrors that he had endured even before the wold had ended and Len had claimed his every existence, stripping the young teen of the last of his humanity and will to live.

When Harry dared to look at his gathered family, he could tell that they all looked sickened – Glenn had his head buried in his hands, while Rick had closed his eyes as if in physical. But it was the expression of silent anguish on Paul’s face that had Harry tearing up.

Though his tears he saw Natania pale as a sheet.

“Circe! I… I’m so sorry!” Her head buried into her hand’s, the old woman sobbed.
It wasn’t her fault… They had both suffered under Antonin Dolohov.

“He was a sadistic bastard.” Harry told her shaking his head, resting he more firmly against Daryl and Paul, soaking up their body heat to fight his steady shivers of – trying and needing to reassure them all, that he was here and well.

“Dumbledore and some others got me out… And after that they sent me to America with my magic bound for my own protection. That’s when the dead started to walk and I was stuck here…”

Harry gave the Oceanside leader a short overview about how he met Daryl and Rick and became part of their family – “You refused to leave him behind three times?” The hedge witch had asked surprised. Before she laughed at Rick’s confused nod. “No wonder the kid’s attachment to your family is so strong. There is magic in numbers. You’re as good as adopted him. Something like this creates a bond.” – and how his explosive magic had forced him to leave Alexandria.

“Show me!” Natania demanded suddenly. There was it again that hungry stare that made the teen’s skin crawl with invisible bugs.

“Pardon me?” Harry squeaked.

“Show me, where you magic broke free.” The old woman motioned to his body. There was a calculating glint in her eyes.

“Bloody hell woman! Why?” He knew exactly what she wanted to see and he was highly uncomfortable to reveal this… This was another thing he hadn’t shown his family… yet…

Not that he had lied per se but he had just… not told them…

Fuck!

“It’ll help me gauge how strong your magic is… And if it’s safe to support your cause and to fight with you against the Saviours.” Natania offered in blatant innocence.

That old Slytherin hag! Damn her! Harry glared at her.

“You would be ready to do this?!” Rick asked in hopeful surprise.

“After the Saviours killed our men, we decided to protect ourselves, no matter what. No matter who we crossed, we would kill on sight. We left our old home with just the clothes on our backs. And then we found this place. We would stay hidden. And we would stay alive. But when the boy-who-lived asks you to fight with him you don’t just say no.” Natania replied dignified but Harry knew better than to trust that explanation.

Damn her! That old viper had played her cards well… she wanted to gauge his power and if he was
worth the risk of siding with them against the Saviours and now Harry hadn’t even the opportunity left to refuse to reveal himself… He would have to show himself and with it his body.

“What? Who?” Tara asked wide eyed, causing Natania to stare from Harry to his family.

“Don’t you know what this boy meant to the wizarding world? What an icon he is?” She sounded scandalized by the very idea that they were ignorant about Harry’s status in the magical community.

“Of course they don’t!” Harry couldn’t help but harshly snap at the old woman. “They’re non-magical and I had no interest in telling them all that bloody bullshit people made up about me for something that happened when I was still a baby.” The green eyed teen huffed irritated.

Ignoring the raised eyebrows all around him he stood abruptly up with exasperated huff, startling both Daryl and Paul.

“Harry?!” The long haired Hilltop scout exclaimed in confusion.

“What the…?!?” While the hunter choked as Harry started to unbutton his shirt. The slender wizard forced himself to stop overthinking the situation and his modesty was a small price for Oceanside’s support.

Slowly the green eyed teen revealed the scar in form of a shooting star that crossed his whole upper body where his magic had tried to rip him apart as it broke free.

Shocked silence filled the room. Harry could feel the horrified stares of his family on his skin. He had to keep his fists clenched at his side to keep himself from covering up immediately. Breathing steadily he forced himself to endure the weight of their combined gazes at the star-burst shape that ran diagonally down his torso from the left side of his chest trailing down to his right hipbone.

“By Circe!” Natania muttered appalled. She made a move as if to touch him but he quickly stepped back eluding her inquisitive hand.

That would have been too much.

“That should have killed you!” Wide grey eyes wouldn’t stop tracing his ruined flesh as the old woman whispered those words.

“I’m pretty sure that I did die for a minute.” Harry mumbled under his breath. All this attention on his half-dressed form made him deeply uncomfortable.

Unfortunately Paul heard him well enough and sucked a breath in.

“For real?” The long haired man asked shrilly and even Daryl looked at him in alarm.

“Uhm… yes.” Harry admitted softly. Both the scout and the hunter looked stupefied with horror.
"Fuck! Ya ‘aven’t say so when ya ‘xplained ‘bout magic.” The hunter cursed sounding dejected but it was the hint of betrayal in the Daryl’s voice that made Harry’s heart clench painfully and his stomach drop.

“I… didn’t want to frighten anyone. There was so much to take in already… I… didn’t want to scare you away.” Harry sighed.

With shaking fingers the green eyed youth tried to button his shirt back up.

He was feeling too exposed right no. But his trembling appendages proved very unsuccessful with the task he had bestowed them with.

He could feel his panic rising, his chest constricted and a strange choked sound escaped his throat.

They were all starring at him. He needed to close his shirt! Right now!

Daryl was disappointed in him.

Suddenly there was another hand in fingerless leather gloves helping him with the unmanageable knobs, while a second hand had settled in his neck.

“Come on, sweet heart breathe. I’ve got you.” Paul whispered as the man made fast work of the buttons. Bright cyan eyes met his gaze and the hand in his neck gave him a comforting squeeze.

"We’ve got you.” The long haired man assured Harry before he slowly stepped a bit back, letting the teen glance at Daryl.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to keep it from you.” He whispered shyly at the older man with the concerned, slated, blue eyes.

Harry yelped a little in surprise when he got impulsively pulled close to a broad chest.

“Ya ok now, right?” Daryl asked and the small wizard could feel how anxiously the hunter still was. So he buried his face for a moment into the flannel shirt above Daryl’s heart, blinking away the tears und inhaling the hunter’s familiar scent.

“Yes, my magic saved me. I’m alright now.” Harry tried to soothe them both.

“Good… Good!” Daryl sighed and the British youth could feel some of the tension drained out of his…

Harry was still not sure what exactly they were to each other…

“That is an impressive feat of magic. You’re have to be very powerful for you magic to rip your
open like a piñata and bring your back from death’s door nearly at the same time.” Natania interrupted his spinning thought. She sounded awed when she said this.

Harry pulled away from Daryl but the hunter kept one hand on protectively Harry’s shoulder and Paul came up on his other side.

“So you’ll help us.” Rick asked eagerly.

“Yes. But I demand magical protection. Wards!” The old woman demanded.

“So that’s what this was all about…”

“I’ll look into it but… You should know that too much magic attracts walkers, Natania. And most of the regular wards are designed to keep out living threats so they failed against the undead.” Harry told her carefully. “Relying on them wiped out most wizards and their communities.” He cautioned her.

The old woman plopped stunned into her chair. “What?!?”

“I was in New York. I saw the MACUSA… it… It’s a tom, Natania. London was the same.” Harry mirrored his own shock when he looked into her face.

Magic was so powerful that it made one often think its users should be unbreakable.

And yet they were gone now…

“Wait! I have a question, you said my gran’s brother ‘was’ a bastard… So he is gone, too?” Cindie asked. There was murder in the young woman’s dark eyes.

“Yes, he’s probably gone like the rest of the wizarding world. I talked to the goblins in New York and London, as well as to Snape and Dumbledore’s portrait at Hogwarts. They rounded up most of the Death Eaters. Most communities and manors got overrun in the early days of the apocalypse. Wizards are all but extinct now.” Harry explained.

“So you went to Hogwarts? There are still people?” Natania asked.

“Yes it’s so far in the Scottish Highlands. That only small herds of walkers got there until now. A few teachers and students are still there. A few old classmates want to build a safety zone there. But it’s not really a safe place… not in the long run.” The green eyed wizard could see the wheels in Natania’s head turning.

“Will they allow Muggles there?” She asked pointedly.

“My friend Hermione is a Muggleborn… so I hope that they will, but… I can’t say for sure until they’ll start taking people in.”
“Hmm… You would mind bringing us into contact when they reach that point.”

“I would be glad to be of assistance ma’am.” Harry smiled at her.

“Good! You’ve got yourselves a deal!”

Rick sagged in relief.

****
A prisoner awaited them when they arrived home.

It was the man with the scarred face – Dwight.

The man that had stolen Daryl’s bow and had accidentally killed Denise with it when he tried to shoot the hunter with his own weapon.

As it turned out the man wanted to turn coats.

It seemed like Negan had fucked his own men over, once too much. The way he force this peoples’ wives into his harem, how he pressured them into committing… Harry had told the man that it would blow up into his face sooner or later.

And now that the Saviours had seen Harry doing magic a lot of them weren’t so sure that they were
still the biggest sharks in the tank… There were whispers of defection. And apparently now some of them saw a chance to finally get away from Negan.

Dwight wanted Negan dead and he wanted the Saviours to fall.

And he had come to inform them that the enemy was getting ready to ambush them in \textit{three} days…

\textit{Well, shit!}

\textquote{“You believe him?”} Rick had asked them all later.

And surprisingly enough to their leader Harry, Paul and Daryl did.

Dwight’s wife was Sherry, the woman Harry and Paul had met on their first scouting trip to the Sanctuary. She had run away weeks ago and apparently that had been the kick in the balls her ex-husband had needed to decide that things with Negan had gone too far.

It sounded plausible. Even if the man might be too late to salvage his lost relationship.

But that meant they needed to move, fast!

They needed to organize their defences or the Saviours would run them over. A day later Rick, Michonne and Glenn had gone to the Scavengers to hand over the collected weapons, while Daryl had taken Paul out scouting and hunting.

They all wanted to go as prepared into the fight as possible.

Harry had decided that he didn’t want to be around Jadis anymore than necessary, so he had stayed back and had organized things in Alexandria.

He had even carved a few protective runes into different trees around the safety zone trying to create some kind of protective circle around their home that wouldn’t attract too much walkers, drawing mostly on natural magic.

Later that day the small wizard went over to check on Eric and Aaron, a shrunken bottle of Firewhiskey in his pocket, with a heavy sigh he knocked on the couple’s door.
Soon the door was pushed open by a tired looking Eric with a screaming baby in his arms and suspicious looking stains all over his shirt.

“Oh thank god!” The auburn haired man whispered brokenly. “Please, take her for a moment! I… I need a break…” Eric sobbed, all but trusting the wailing infant into Harry’s arms.

The slender teen immediately cradled her close to his body.

“Eric, who was at door? Oh thank heaven, Harry, it’s you!”

Aaron looked as bad as his partner, with dark circles under his eyes as if he hadn’t slept for days, this clothes equally soiled.

“Merlin! What happened to you?” Harry couldn’t help but ask at the sight of the two exhausted men.

“She’s been screaming none stop for two days!” Eric sagged against Aaron taller frame. “I think she hates us!”

Both men looked close to tears at that.

Harry rocked the little body in his arms carefully. “Carl and Beth were supposed to check in on you, didn’t they come?”

“No… when Dwight came here everything got so busy… We didn’t want to intrude. We thought we could manage this by ourselves.” Aaron had dropped down onto the couch his head resting in his hands. He looked absolutely defeated, ready to fall apart at the slightest poking.

Looking around at the chaos in the living room, the British teen settled Gracie more comfortably over his shoulder and came to a swift decision.

“Oh, this is what we’re going to do now.” Harry spoke up firmly. “You’re both going to shower. Now! Change your clothes and rest for a bit. I’ll look after Gracie for so long and I’ll make us something to eat. Ok?”

Both men nodded weakly at him. They looked dejected and wretched, apparently even lacking the energy to argue against the teen bossing them around in their own home.

“And for the record she doesn’t hate you, you two morons. She’s a baby. She’s in a new environment and she has probably colic.”

With soft smile he shooed them off to the showers.

**

Two hours later Aaron and Eric came down the stairs looking somewhat rested and refreshed, as Harry sung to Gracie rocking her softly in a belly hold.
“I gave my love a cherry
That had no stone
I gave my love a chicken
That had no bone
I told my love a story*
That had no end
I gave my love a baby
With no crying.

How can there be a cherry
That has no stone?
And how can there be a chicken
That has no bone?
And how can there be a story
That has no end?
And how can there be a baby
With no crying?

A cherry when it's blooming
It has no stone
A chicken when in the shell
It has no bone
The story of how I love you
It has no end
A baby when it's sleeping
It's no crying.”

“Here, grab some coffee and a sandwich.” He hummed softly, pointing to the table.
“It’s so quiet. My god, I had forgotten how silence sounds like.” Aaron whispered. Harry laughed quietly at them.

“You’re feeling better now?”

“Yeah somewhat. Thanks!” Eric sighed peering a little jealous at his now silent daughter in the teen’s arms.

“Here, take her.” Harry offered the calm baby to Aaron, who flinched back from her in panic.

“What if she cries again?”

“She’s a baby. Of course she’ll cry again. She has no other way to tell you that she’s uncomfortable with something. And her daddy’s stressed out of their mind makes her uncomfortable. So take a deep breath, calm down and hold your daughter.” The green eyed teen instructed kindly but firmly.

Swallowing nervously Aaron let Harry place his half-asleep baby into his arms.

“See, there all good. Bloody hell, Aaron, will you please exhale, for Merlin’s sake! You’re doing well.” Harry teased the man.

Transfixed they observed Gracie wiggling and snuggling deeper into Aaron clean shirt yawning and drooling on him, giving a small sigh of contentment.

“She’s looks so cute now.” Eric whispered in fascination peering down at the infant. “I thought I was going to lose it. She just cried so much…”

“You’re a live safer, Harry!” Aaron sighed, cooing down at their daughter.

“You would have managed without me. I’ve seen you two with her before. You’re great parents. You should ask Rick about being a first time parent. I think he might have some interesting story about Carl to tell.” Harry grinned at them. It was nice to see them a lot more relaxed now. Comfortably holding and adoring their child.

“You’re still mad at him?” Eric asked gently. The auburn haired man looked unsure when he addressed this.

Harry heaved a sigh. “Yes and no…” Frustrated he messed up his already unruly hair. “When I was still in school I did some pretty reckless things myself. Merlin, getting Gracie wasn’t exactly well planned or safe either… I saw how pissed and worried Daryl and Paul were. So being angry with Carl for risking his life… - it’s quite hypocritical, isn’t it?”

Eric and Aaron exchanged a loaded look, communicating silently. Apparently Aaron had drawn the short straw because he after a few seconds he huffed in resignation.

“You’re right. Eric and I talked about this. And don’t understand us wrong, because well, god, we love Gracie, but to see you just jumping right into that herd, alone without any possibility to get back-up… That was terrifying.” The tall, curly-hair man admitted, causing Harry to slump a little,
feeling chastised.

“But there is a difference to risk your life for a baby, knowing it’s their only chance to survive and running of into enemy’s land when there are plenty of other solutions.” Eric told him softly.

“To be honest I… I’m still miffed because they took my protection for granted. Carl and Tara made that plan together and they counted on me to get them out but never told me about it.”

Talking and think about that still hurt. “I’m being petty?” Harry asked in a small voice.

“No, they have been inconsiderate. But maybe you should make a decision when they’ll have made amends for that or how? Don’t let the bitterness eat you alive, ok?” Eric said kindly.

This sounded like a good thing. Neither ignoring his hurt feeling but at the same time giving his family members a chance to redeem themselves, setting himself a deadline for the bitterness and disappointment in his chest. Defining a point where it would be ok to forgive, so that he could move on.

“You’re so wise, I knew why I wanted to come here and talk to you two.” Feeling considerably lighter he grinned at them.

“Oh, so you came here to talk about something?” Aaron asked in surprise, catching on quite fast.

“Uhmm… yes… I did.” Harry stuttered a blush creeping over his face.

“But you’re tired… and exhausted and we totally don’t have to do this now…” The green eyed teen rushed to assure them. “I should be going… I check on you guys tomorrow…”

This had been a stupid idea.

_Of course they don’t have the time or the energy to talk about your dumb problems, Potter._ He berated himself

“Harry! Harry, stop! What’s wrong, honey?” Eric put a hand on his arm before the slender teen could flee from the couple’s kitchen.

Swallowing heavily Harry forced his breathing to stay steady. If he ran out now he would never again find the courage to ask those questions.

“I… you said once that… It was okay to… ask questions right?” As he mumbled those words unsurely, he held his eyes fixed on the kitchen counter but he could practically feel the look the pair shared over his head.

“It’s alright if you don’t… but… uhm… I… I even brought Firewhiskey…”

Eric was startled into a good-natured laugh, when the British wizard put the bottle of liquor before them. The kind sound had Harry glancing up with a shy smile on his face.

“I’ll put our fuzzy princess down for her nap. Don’t start without me.” Aaron smirked at them.
Harry had the distinct feeling that the tall man knew about Harry’s and Eric’s last very awkward conversation.

Harry nibbled nervously on his bottom lip, while Eric filled three glasses with whiskey, waiting until they all settled in the living room.

“So what’s on your mind, honey?” Eric asked completely calm this time around. Maybe the idea what this was probably about or the prospect of heavy alcohol had an serene effect on the auburn haired man.

“I liked it better when you were as freaked out by our conversation as I was.” Harry pouted. “I think Aaron is giving you an unfair advantage here.” Causing both men to laugh, leaning against each other. They looked so in love…

“And you’re stalling.” Aaron teased the teen gently.

Harry sighed.

“Does it have something to do with Daryl and you sharing the attic?” Eric gave him a knowing look. “Did something happen you’re uncomfortable with?”

At this Aaron sat a little more upright, a worried frown on his face.

“Do you need us to talk to him?” He asked firmly.

“What? No! No! Nothing like that…” Harry felt absolutely mortified at the idea that Aaron would talk to Daryl about something like that. “I had a bad dream a few nights ago and Daryl he held me afterwards… I lost it a bit when he accidentally brushed over my hip.” Harry sighed. “He backed off immediately… Daryl would never hurt me… Besides we haven’t really talked about… about what we are to each other?”

Aaron and Eric looked surprised by this.

“You haven’t?!”

“We thought… With the way you acted… We were certain that you were a couple now.”

“Well, a lot of it went unspoken?” Harry stated a little insecure.

“Oookaay! Harry, maybe that’s where you need to start, you two should talk to each other about such stuff. I mean with real words. Clear communication!” Eric shook his head in clear exasperation.

Harry groaned. “Bloody… I guess you’re right. Daryl isn’t not really forthcoming with words about his feelings and I guess neither I am.” Anxiously he dragged a hand over his face. Damn! The idea alone to ask Daryl if they were a couple made him want to curl up into a nervous ball. He
couldn’t think about this now. “But that wasn’t I wanted to talk a about…”

“No?” Eric asked in surprise.

“Uhmm… there’s Paul.” Harry hesitated as he watched both men raise their eyebrows in astonishment.

“Wait! You mean Jesus. The hot scout from the Hilltop?!” The auburn haired man tried to confirm.

“Eric?!” Aaron yelped sounding a bit scandalized.

“Oh, shut up love. I love you but I have eyes. You can’t deny he’s smoking hot.” Eric grinned teasingly at his gapping partner.

“I walked in on him getting a handjob from Alex, the nurse.” Harry blurted quite suddenly out.

“What?!” Both men sputtered.

“I nearly killed Alex because he had Paul’s hands pinned over his head… If I hadn’t seen Paul’s face in the last second… and that he liked it…” Harry rambled on, blushing madly.

“Okay, that sounds… kinky.” The flustered youth could tell that Aaron tried his best not to laugh.

“I… Paul and I talked about it… but I don’t understand how anyone could be comfortable with being restricted like that.” Harry’s ears were burning.

“Oh my, I need that whiskey!” Eric muttered and drowned his glass in one go, making both Aaron and Harry wince when smoke came out of the man’s ears.

“Jesus! Holy…” The slender auburn haired man cursed, sounding a little raspy.

“Giving someone full control of your body can be very arousing. It doesn't have to be bondage... Light restraining, something you could easily break if you wanted to... It can feel liberating, giving yourself over into someone’s care.” Aaron explained.

Harry shivered in discomfort the thought of anyone holding him down like that...

“Are you two doing stuff like that?” He asked desperately.

Aaron spluttered at the question, clearly avoided any eye contact, before drowning his own glass of alcohol, choking and coughing as the strong liquor burned down his throat.

Harry couldn't tell if the tall, curly haired man was so red in the face because of the beverage or embarrassment. But maybe that had been idea...

“Why do you want to know?” Eric patted his partners shoulder in an attempt to be comforting.

“Is this something you're supposed to do in a relationship? I mean should I... Should I want this,
too?’” Harry whispered dejectedly.

“Oh... “Aaron stared wide eyed at him. Harry could see how Eric squeezed the other man's arm.

“I thought so when I was younger.” Aaron told him with a small smile.

Harry felt his world crumble.

Freak! He was such a freak!

Broken goods.

“Aaron!” Eric hissed angrily.

“What? It's the truth. It took me quite a few borderline horrible encounters to understand that there is no ‘supposed to’ in sex. Only that what all participants enjoy and comfortable with! There is no right and wrong in a relationship, Harry! As long as everyone involved is happy with the situation and nobody is hurt. Physically or emotionally.” Aaron explained very plainly.

Frowning Harry picked at couch cushion. “Are you sure? What if I don't like anything anymore?”

“Then your partner is going to respect that or they'll have to answer to us.” Eric smiled threateningly. “No matter, who they are!”

“Is that the case then?” Aaron blushed furiously. “I mean you not liking anything?”

“Uhmm... I...” Harry stuttered as his mind wandered…

... Daryl lying lax on his bed, strong arms and gentle blue eyes, hooded with relaxed satisfaction....

...Paul, face flushed and lips swollen from heated kisses, long hair in disarray, head thrown back as a feverish moan escaped his mouth, eyes dazed by desire...

Harry cringed at the way his body reacted, heat pooling in his belly, the increasing rhythm of his rapid beating heart, the lightheaded feeling...

When he thought steam was about to burst out of his ears he drowned his own shot of Firewhiskey.

“So I assume there are things or someone that you might like?” Eric asked carefully.

Harry nodded jerkily.
Eric and Aaron exchanged another loaded look.

“Harry... Don't get me wrong but... Uhm do know what you like? You know it's... It's OK to... well, explore on your own, right?” Eric stuttered. The poor man was clearly at a loss by the turn of this conversation.

“You mean...?” Harry felt mortified.

“Yes, touching yourself.” Aaron replied calmly even if the tips of his ears were still an alarming shade of red that surely couldn’t be blamed on the whiskey. “Find out what you’re comfortable with. You can hardly expect from yourself to enjoy being touched if you can't stand your own hands on your body.”

Harry blinked in surprise... This was a sound logic.

“Just do what feels right and what you’re comfortable with.” Eric encouraged a nice shade of red still painting his cheekbones. “Don't pressure yourself too much. Set your own pace, ok?”

Frowning Harry nodded still a little unsure about the whole thing.

“Get to know your own boundaries. Rest comes with the right partner and trust.” Eric smiled

“And practice.” Aaron grinned cheekily at his partner with wiggling eyebrows, causing the smaller man to squeak in embarrassment.

Harry laughed at their interaction. He felt a bit lighter now even if the thought of touching himself made him a bit queasy.

But there was still one last thing on his mind.

“But if it has to do with trust... Why was Paul doing it Alex? He said Alex wasn't even his boyfriend anymore... that they had broken up because Paul had been afraid of the emotional commitment.” Harry asked frustration clear in his voice and face. He still felt a spark of something sharp and bitter in his chest whenever he thought about the tall blond nurse and how he had claimed Paul so easily.

Two equally stunned expressions stared at him.

“Harry, honey, are... are you jealous?” Eric asked in astonishment.

“What no...yes...maybe?! I don't know!” He huffed in frustration. “I like Paul... And didn't feel right to see him with Alex.” Harry admitted softly.

Aaron and Eric both blinked at him, mouths hanging a little open.
“Is that bad?” The green eyed teen couldn’t help but ask. He knew that the thing between him, Daryl and Paul was probably very strange.

As soon as Aaron started to open his mouth, Eric was very quick to stomp on his foot, making the taller man yelp.

The auburn haired man shook his head at his partner and smiled reassuringly at Harry. “No... No! Not bad at all! Just very surprising...”

Their shared disbelief made the teen feel somewhat self-conscious.

Suddenly Harry’s mirror vibrated.

“Bloody… Carol?! What’s wrong?” The green eyed boy gasped at the sight of her worried face.

Across from him Aaron and Eric looked up in alarm.

“Benjamin! He was shot by a Saviour when they came to collect the tribute… He’s bleeding too much I can’t… Harry! He’s going to die! Daryl said you healed his wound…” Harry could tell that the grey haired woman tried to keep it together but under her cool and tough façade she was desperate. Carol had left Alexandria because she couldn’t stand to see any more people die and now the Saviours had brought death to her exile.

“Of course, Carol! I’m on my way!” Trying to smile reassuring at her, Harry was already moving through Aaron’s and Eric’s living room towards the front door.

“Guys, can you tell Daryl and Paul where I am?” Harry asked, while simultaneously summoning his first aid potion kit and travel cloak.

“Yes! But…” Aaron starred perplexed at the young wizard.

“Daryl and Paul?!” Eric blinked. Harry thought his voice was a notch higher than before.

“Uhm, yes… Daryl went hunting and scouting.” The small Brit answered shrinking and storing his supplies into his cloak.

“And Jesus tagged along?” Aaron asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Hmmhmm, Daryl offered.” Harry hummed checking his pockets.

“What?! Daryl did what? He never offers… he barely tolerates Rick or me on a hunt… well anybody besides to you. But he offered to Jesus?” Aaron sounded a bit offended and betrayed at the new information.

“And this didn’t bother you, Harry?” Amused curiosity coloured Eric’s tone.
Confused Harry looked at the auburn haired man.

“No. It doesn’t. Should it?” Harry frowned at Eric who just looked at him in astonished wonder.

Shaking his head the slender teen decided to leave this for later.

“Listen guys, thank you! But I need to go! It sounded like an emergency. Ezekiel’s foster son was badly hurt. I’ll try to be back as soon as possible. Don’t let Daryl or Paul do something stupid!” Harry called out to them, already concentrating on his destination.

As he got ready to disapparate he heard Eric whisper to Aaron. “Did you see this coming?”

“No…” Aaron mumbled back, sounding completely dazed.

With that Harry was sucked into the transportation.

****

Focusing on Carol’s mirror Harry apparated right into the infirmary in Kingdom where he was greeted group all stained in blood.

Fuck!

Morgan and Ezekiel looked close to falling apart while Richard was staring blankly at the floor. Carol and Jerry were still busy pressing some kind of cloth against a heavily bleeding leg wound. The red liquid was very were and there was way too much of it soaking in the fabric.

“Thank god!” Carol whispered in relief when Harry swiftly moved further into the room.

“Move aside!” Harry instructed quickly, as he rushed to Benjamin’s side. The teen looked dreadful. His skin had taken a grey shade, shining in cold sweat.

This looked bad as hell. He might be already too far gone for your healing expertise. Cursing lowly under his Breath Harry tried to ignore the doubtful voice in his head. He wouldn’t give up now. Not before he even started to try.

Ezekiel and Carol deserved that he tried his best and that he believed in himself, as along as Benjamin breathed.

This was the kind young man that had given Harry his own clothes after he had killed Petunia. They had fought in the hay together!
Damn it, Potter! Get a grip and get to work!

Gritting his teeth and straigtening his posture the green eyed wizard called to his magic and started to cast.

“Vulnera sentura! Vulnera sentura! Harry mumbled watching nervously as the bleeding stopped and the flesh knitted itself back together. He could feel the magic seeping out of him quickly. The damage was a lot greater than the other injuries he had healed. Even Abe hadn’t been that far gone after Negan had hit him with the bat.

“Holly shit! Dude, this is so freaking cool!” Jerry gushed. Harry grinned tiredly up at the steward. He really liked the friendly and enthusiastic big man.

“He lost a lot of blood.” Harry worried and looking around there was blood very where… Casting a diagnostic charm, the results appeared as a parchment in front of him.

Looking it over the small wizard swore violently. A lot of the markers were in the reds…

Merlin, as he had feared this wasn’t enough…

Besides him Carol and Ezekiel looked alarmed by his reaction.

“Something wrong?” Jerry was apparently the only one who dared to ask.

“His blood levels aren’t good… He needs a lot of fluids so he can compensate for the blood he lost.” The British teen explained with a sad sigh. “He’s definitely not out of the woods.”

“Isn’t there anything else you can do?” Richard snapped at Harry, making the teen flinch violently at the harsh tone. Carol gave the man the stink eye.

Trying to calm his frayed nerves Harry started to pace trying to concentrate.

“I can try to give him a little of the Blood-Replenishing Potion but I think the dose needs to be diluted or it could do him more harm than good…” The wizard looked questionably at Ezekiel.

“You think? That doesn’t inspire much trust, boy.” Richard barked at Harry in agitation, making him jump away from the angry man.

“Stop harassing him, Richard!” Carol sneered at the knight. Back straight and eyes promising hell to pay if he dared to lay a single finger on Harry.

Damn, she would be a fabulous queen to these people. The sparkle in Ezekiel’s eyes revealed that the King thought so, too.
Harry inched pointedly away from Richard and focused on Benjamin’s foster father instead. “I’ll leave the choice to you.”

“It could harm him?” Ezekiel swallowed heavily. He looked pained and helpless by the situation, leaven nothing of the theatrical king he had met the first time in the theatre. This was the real Ezekiel – not the mask of a king – a good man and a father and Harry felt his heart going out to the man.

“Yes… these potions were developed for a magical clientele. A lot of potions rely on the magical core of a person to work like they should. In the worst case it can poison a muggle. I have little information how this specific potion would affect him. I’m sorry.” Harry apologized dejectedly.

“But you have a plan? Why else bring it up?” Carol asked with a light confused frown.

Biting his lip the small wizard fidgeted under their imploring gazes.

“Nothing that has been tested… It’s just a theory. If I push so of my own magic into his weakened body I could try to make the potion work for him in a very small dose. It could be enough to activate the necessary compounds.” The green eyed teen tried his best to explain the plan to them.

“He has a chance without it?” Ezekiel finally asked.

Harry worried his teeth over his thumb, out of the corner of his eyes he could see Carol’s mouth twitched in amusement at the sight.

“A small one… yes… but…” With a sigh he looked at the grey haired woman who was checking the young man’s pulse.

“His heart is beating, but it’s slow and a little erratic.” She confirmed. The implications that this didn't look too promising unspoken but clear in the air between them.

With heavy limbs Ezekiel dropped down on a chair, his head bowed, weighted down in fear and love for his foster child.

“Try it! Please!” He finally choked out. “Please, do whatever you think might save him.”

Nodding resolutely Harry jumped into action. He could do this. He would try his best.

“Do you have some water?” He asked Jerry.

“Yes, of course. Wait a moment.” The steward was quick to get him what he needed.

*  

Carefully Harry mixed a few drops of the potion with the water, before he spelled the mixture directly into Benjamin's stomach.

“Where did the water go?” Ezekiel asked in surprise.
“I spelled it directly into his stomach. It's easier than trying to get him to swallow it.” Taking a deep breath the small wizard guided some of his magic into the blond teen on the stretcher. Carefully he let small sparks wander through the weakened body hoping to activate the potion.

It was a meticulous work. Trying to guide just enough magic through Benjamin to spark the potion into working, without doing more damage than good.

A thin sheen of sweat had developed onto his forehead as held his magic in control with an iron will.

Damn. Just a little more.

Again he poked the potion…

And finally it started to work! The small sparks of his magic were setting off the chain reaction, activating the chemical compounds to get his patient’s blood levels up.

With a victorious grin Harry cast a last monitoring charm on the Benjamin and then slumped down in a chair. This looked already way better!

The ventilation and heart rate looked more stable than before. And maybe it was wishful thinking but the blond teen looked a little less pale now.

Thank Merlin!

With buckling knees Harry slumped to the floor. It worked. It had worked! It had really worked. Bloody, fucking hell!

He felt...

Exhausted and drained!

“Harry! Are you alright?” Carol asked him deep lines of worry and shock still etched into her face.

“Yeah. I am. This just took quite a lot out of me. Is all.” Harry sighed tiredly.

“Benjamin looks a bit better now, doesn’t he?!” Ezekiel looked unsurely at the wizard.

“I hope so... The potion should help with the blood loss. He's not completely out of the woods but he has a real chance to pull through now.” Harry explained looking up at the concerned father. The teen still didn’t trust his own legs so he let Jerry pull him to his feet and guide him to a plush chair.

“Thank God!” The King sobbed in relief.

Harry was fighting of the drowsiness of fatigue that pressed now down on him, when something
else occurred to him.

“I'm sorry for asking this… but how did this happen? You told us that the saviours respected you that they didn't hurt or threatened you as long as complied with their demands. What changed?”

“There was someone new with them today... Young. Arrogant. Mean. He stole Morgan’s staff and Benjamin was angry about it...” Ezekiel muttered forlorn. “He always was a courteous boy – eager to please, kind and loyal. He wanted to defend his master.” The wild looking man with his dreadlocks, with beads and feathers woven into them, looked tenderly down at his foster son. His face soft with love and worry for a child he had tried to raise as his own.

“I used to know someone like that, too.” Harry smiled sadly... Cedric had been like that.

“What set them off wasn't the staff, or Benjamin arguing about it. That was just tip of the iceberg,” Morgan said deeply troubled and the slender wizard saw how Richard paled at those words.

“We were a melon short for the tribute.” The King admitted with a disbelieving shake of his head.

“What? How is that possible?” Carol snapped incredulous. “We counted everything, together! Ezekiel, we made sure that the numbers were correct. I'm sure!”

“But there was one melon missing. I saw it then...” In spite of his words the man looked still so disbelieving.

“So you drove off with the right amount of tributes but when you got there one was missing?” Harry frowned it felt unrealistic that either Ezekiel or Carol had counted wrong not with so much on the line. “Did something unusual happen today?”

Now the men looked at each other.

“There was a road block with shopping carts on the way to the drop off.” Jerry revealed a little uneasy. “But when we searched the area there was only a freshly dug grave and a child's bag... It was strange. We were already a little late at the meeting point because of it.” The big man told Harry.

“The new guy hit Jerry on the head for it.” Richard hissed bitterly.

Worried Harry scanned the steward’s face. “Really? Show me.”

A little awkward the big guy leaned over so the much smaller teen could check on the head wound. With delicate fingers Harry gently probe the skin around the wound before he cast a light healing spell. “There, how is it now?” He asked softly.

Stunned Jerry patted around his head. “Damn, dude! This is awesome! My head stopped hurting! Thanks, man!” He beamed at the tiny wizard.

“No problem. Glad I could help.” Harry couldn't help but grin back at the friendly giant before he turned back to Morgan and Ezekiel with a frown. “But that sounds very strange... could you have lost the melon on the stop?”
“No, the drop was safe in the truck. It wasn’t overloaded… I can imagine a way how it could have fallen off.” The kind shook his head, completely puzzled.

“So someone must have taken it?” Harry asked carefully. He cringed at their shocked expressions. With an apologetic shrug he said. “Sherlock Homes: Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.”

Everyone paled at that. Ezekiel slumped down next to the wizard. “So that means someone from my own guard did this?”

“Could it have been someone else?” Harry asked in sympathy.

“No.”

“I’m sorry...”

The tension in the room seemed unbearable after that... The strain of realizing that there was a traitor among your most trusted friends.

“We can use what's happened.” Richard suddenly rambled into the suffocating atmosphere. His eyes were glassy and desperate.

Dumbfounded they all starred at the knight...

Dreadful silence stretched as Richard babbled on. “We can show the Saviours that we get it, we understand what we need to do. We know how to cooperate and they need to believe us. We have to do something to make them believe us. And then when we gain their trust back, we kill them, end them. We join with Alexandria and the Hilltop and we crush them in one fell swoop.”

Harry felt his stomach sink with each word that came out of the man's mouth.

“You did it, didn't you...” Morgan suddenly spoke up in a strangled voice. It was more of a statement than a question.

The dark skinned man seemed dazed and a little off kilter when he said this.

Concerned Harry looked between those present. His instincts told him that Morgan was right but he didn’t know Richard like the rest of them.

Ezekiel seemed frozen, his eyes fixed on the pale teen on the bed. The boy, who had bleed nearly to death today and was still in danger of dying.
His foster son.

Carol’s expression was ice cold as her blue eyes bored themselves into Richard. This woman had no patience for traitors.

While Jerry just stared incomprehensively at his fellow knight.

“What? Does it matter?!” Harry hissed back. “Benjamin could have died today! He’s your comrade! And a lot more people could have died because of the shit you pulled.”

“It was supposed to be me…” Richard whispered, finally showing something close to regret. “I thought they would shoot me…”

“But they did not. They shot him on purpose! Because these sadistic assholes aim to hurt everyone around you the most! They choose their victims specifically for that reason alone.” Harry stated coolly making the rough knight flinch.

“You should leave Richard.” Ezekiel whispered emotionless.

“My King…” The knight pleaded. The man had gone very pale. There was a crazed expression on his face.

“I am not your King, no more. You’re banished.” Ezekiel snarled sharply, vicious fury clouding his face. But the fire died out as quickly as it had flared up. “Richard... Just leave!” The King buried his head in his hands.

The picture of a tired and defeated man.

“You’re making a mistake, your majesty!” It was pathetic to see the formerly upright man beg now.

“Leave! Before I make you!” Carol said with murder in her eyes, causing the knight to take a step back.

With a last desperate look Richard left.

“What are you going to do now?” Harry asked gently.

Jerry paled as he hurried to look at his watch. “Your Majesty, we need to bring the saviours the last melon. Or they’ll come here.”

Ezekiel stiffened at the prospect of the Saviours coming to the Kingdom. Torn between duty and
the worry towards his child, he looked at Benjamin’s still form.

“Carol and I’ll keep an eye on Benjamin.” Harry kindly interrupted the man’s inner battle. “There’s nothing you can do for him right now. But you can do your job and be a leader, protect your Kingdom. Then you should probably leave now.” Harry promised earnestly.

*

Later that in the late afternoon Ezekiel came back to Benjamin’s sick bed with Shiva by his side. The tiger gave a satisfied purr when she spotted the small wizard checking the blond teen over. Immediately the overgrown cat left her master to greet Harry enthusiastically.

“I swear Shiva likes you more than.” The King chuckled a little surprised at this familiar’s behaviour.

“Aww! I like you too, Shiva.” Harry laughed and started to ruffle the cat’s fur behind the majestic animal’s ears. This earned him a very pleased rumble from the tiger as she closed her eyes in contentment.

Shaking his head with a warm smile Ezekiel took a seat on Benjamin’s other bedside.

“How is he?” The older man asked as he stroked blond hair out of a pale face with fondness and anxiety clear on his expression.

“A lot better. Earlier, he woke up for a few minutes. I’ll think he’ll make it.” Harry wanted to reassure the other, to smooth some of those deep lines of worry on his face.

“Thank god. And thank you my friend.” The King chuckled weakly, and as the British teen looked a little closer he could see tears streaming down Ezekiel’s cheeks.

Petting Shiva again Harry walked over to the crying man, before he laid carefully a hand on his shoulder. “I’m glad I could help him.” The wizard told him earnestly. Harry didn’t know with there could be any words of consolation in a situation like this so he just squeezed the kings shoulder more firmly.

Shiva seemed to sense their sombre mood as she grumbled at them and nudging them with her head until Harry started to rake his fingers through her fur again.

“My, my, you’re such a bossy lady today.” The green eyed boy laughed at her, scratching her more firmly behind her ear, making her purr loudly in agreement.

“A right queen in her own right, isn’t she?” Ezekiel chuckled at his pet’s behaviour. Then the King turned his dark eyes on Harry.

“I’m sorry. You warned me and I didn’t listen. You warned me that something like this would happen.” Raw desperation tore at the man’s usually powerful voice, making him sound smaller and more vulnerable. A man that had fought with very thing he had to protect his people, to keep the truth and with it the fight away from them.

And now it had come to him, nonetheless from his own inner circle.
“I didn’t. I warned you that Negan would one day force your hand but I didn’t dare to think that one of your own would do something like this to you. I’m truly sorry.” Harry shook his head. “No one could have anticipated such treachery.”

“Was I a fool to believe I could keep the peace for my people?” Ezekiel asked hollowly.

“Not a fool but an idealist?” Harry offered with a slightly crooked smile and an awkward teenage shrug, causing the King to burst out laughing.

“You my friend, have a nice way of words. But I fear that nowadays there’s little difference between the two. These times let us have only so little room for noble ideals.”

“Don’t I know it...” Harry sighed bitterly, remembering the way he had forced the unbreakable vow on Jadis. “If we want to keep our loved ones safe we need to be ready to get our hands dirty. And sometimes even stand back as our loves ones do the same for us.”

Silence settled between them as they watched over Benjamin’s still form. Only Shiva’s purring rumbles disturbing the strangely peaceful atmosphere.

Both of them knowing that the Kingdoms neutrality had ended today.

Ezekiel’s hopes to avoid open fighting lay shattered before his feet. Harry saw no reason to poke anymore at the man after that day filled with blood, treason, anger and fear.

The wizard could give the older man this evening to sort through his thoughts and emotions. Today would be the time for rest and healing. Tomorrow they would talk about war.

*

Harry hadn’t come back yet.

Rick was watching Jesus pacing by the gate, while Daryl grumpily glared down at his bow that he was cleaning. None of them had been amused to find the kid missing, especially when they heard that Carol had called because Ezekiel’s foster son had been badly injured by a Saviour...

Aaron had cringed at the twin glares he had received from the hunter and the scout when he had told them why Harry wasn’t in Alexandria anymore, while Eric had watched the interaction with an air of curious fascination.

Just when it looked like Daryl and Jesus getting ready to storm after Harry to the Kingdom, the slender auburn haired man spoke up.

“Harry said to tell you both not to do anything stupid and that he'll be back as fast as possible.”
Rick had cocked his head to the side at the strange tone Eric had used. It had reminded him of his mom when she had found out about the latest gossip and already knew more than his father.

And it sure had stopped both Daryl and Jesus in their tracks…

*Interesting!*

“While we’re waiting for Harry I’d like a little chat with you two.” The auburn haired man had stated in a strangely excited sing-song voice and a sharp smile. Damn, Eric had sounded out right scary like that. Aaron had just looked very flustered by the whole situation.

And Rick could have sworn that Daryl had started sweating next to him when the auburn haired man had smirked at him. Jesus had already started to slowly inch away, trying to avoid the conversation altogether, when the hunters hand had shot out and grabbed the long haired ninja by the scruff of his leather coat.

“Ain’t think so, ya prick. ‘e said both of us. If I get grilled, ya get, too!” Daryl had grouched at Jesus, who had blushed and paled in quick succession.

*Really interesting!*

Now the Scavengers were arriving and despite the impressive numbers Jadis was bringing with her Rick still a little worried that they might be not strong enough. But there was no time left to regret their choice to keep the Hilltop out of this fight. Most residents there were no fighters and although Dwight had only known about an attack towards Alexandria, there was still a chance that the Saviours would attack there, too.

Maggie and Abraham had agreed with him that it would be a mistake to leave that front unprotected, so Glenn and Jesus were the only fighter from the Hilltop here.

The same went for the Kingdom.

Rick had been very surprised when Ezekiel had called him this morning. The King had been visibly shaken by his knight’s betrayal and his son’s bad injury. Apparently only Harry’s intervention had saved Benjamin’s life. And while the boy was on the way to full recovery the small wizard had been forced to heal the blond teen again in the early hours of the morning. Rick remembered the feeling well when Carl had been critical injured through the two shot wound he had sustained since the world had ended.

The former Sheriff didn’t wish that kind of heart break on any one.

It was also the reason Harry wasn’t back yet. Ezekiel had told Rick that the teen had been quite drained after all that healing and Carol had been very set on making Harry rest before he travelled back to them. Rick also remembered that the wizard had once said something about the dangers of Apparation – something about splinching that had all of them shivering in dread… To hear that
Harry had exhausted himself so much, had also done nothing to calm Jesus or Daryl down.

But now the Kingdom had joined the alliance against Negan and the Saviours. But it had already been too late to send fighters out to assist Alexandria against the imminent attack. The risk of the Kingdom troops running into the Saviours on the way to Alexandria was too great...

And they also faced the same risk as the Hilltop... Negan knew now that the three communities had been in contact with each other. And all the leaders feared what that meant for their communities.

Now Rick watched as Jadis walked gracefully to the gate looking admiringly at Alexandria. “What you fight for?” She asked with an appreciative nod.

Rick shook his head. “Not the place. The people.”

He grinned boyishly at Michonne before he glanced back at Jadis. “Each other. You're a part of that now.”

“We take, we don't bother, our way. May be another way?” The red haired woman said, looking thoughtfully from Rick to Michonne, then she nodded her head towards the former Sheriff.

“You're?” The woman with the bob asked the dark skinned samurai.

“Well we're together.” Michonne answered a little startled.

“I lay with him after. You care?” Jadis leisure question had Rick choking. Anxiously he looked at his girlfriend, who seemed equally perplexed.

Behind them he heard Jesus snort.

Damn, Daryl was right the man was a prick.

A trickle of cold sweat was running down Rick’s neck as Jadis let her eyes wander over his figure. He fought against the feeling of dread that threatened to wash over him. He remembered Harry’s distaste for Jadis and his suspicions against her.

She looked hungry!

“We should get back to work.” Michonne finally answered stoically.

“Yeah.” Rick nodded, quickly backing away from the strange woman. Jadis just shrugged with an amused smirk.
Instructing everyone and getting all of them on the right positions took a while. Rick was busy running around the town.

And then they were suddenly there.

The tell-tale sound of a bat banging against their gate heralded the Saviour’s arrival.

“Welcome to a brand-new beginning, you sorry shits!” Rick heard Negan call out.

With swift moves the former Sheriff climbed up to the lookout where Carl and Daryl where stationed with Jadis and two other Scavengers.

A razor sharp grin greeted Rick as he looked down. There was a distinctive aggression in Negan’s expression as he looked up to Rick.

“You ever hear the one about the stupid little prick named Rick who thought he knew shit but didn’t know shit and got everyone he cared about killed?” The damn lunatic taunted.

“Because I’m a reasonable man I’m giving you this last chance, Rick. Open the fucking gate and then you’ll give me Harry and choose one other person for my sweet Lucille. Because… well I can’t just let all the shit you pulled go, can I?” There was something crazy in Negan’s eyes.

Rick could hear Daryl’s threatening growl when their little wizard was mentioned.

“Why should we?” Carl shouted at the Leader of the Saviour’s. Before the blue eyed man could intervene his son had taken aim and taken a shot at Negan’s head, missing him only by a hair.

“Son of a bitch, Carl! Was that just a play?! I thought we were havin’ a moment, you little asshole!” The man in the leather jacket bellowed frustrated but that infuriating grin was already tucking at the corners of his mouth again.

“That took guts boy. Too bad I’ll have to kill you now.” He promised. And Rick feared that Negan meant what he said.

“As to why you should?” Smirking Negan motioned a group of his man forward. Rick gulped when he spotted three rocket launchers.

_Fucking hell!

“Yeah, Ricky boy! That’s the reaction I wanted to see. Now you start to understand, we’re going to come in one way or another.”_ Rick could hear his own teeth grinding.

Panicked he looked at the others. As he met stormy slated blue eyes he started to calm down. Daryl had some times this effect on him. He tended to be unfazed and steadfast where Rick would be wavering. The hunter would remain cool when Rick would turn into a beast, lead on by rage and the need to protect his family.
And right now the stubborn glare in his brother’s eyes told him clearly:

“Fuck it all! Let them try!”

Daryl wouldn’t back down now, not when Negan had just so clearly threatened Harry’s life. And Rick knew that if they gave up now this wouldn’t be the end of Negan’s terror but the start of it.

“We’re ready to fight for our freedom!” Rick stated as calmly as he could, back straight and voice even. He could feel Daryl’s broad and reassuring presence at his left shoulder and out of the corner of his eye he could see Carl imitating his own posture.

*Click*
*Click*
*Click*

With that Jadis and the two other Scavengers behind Carl and Daryl had them all at gun point.

Everything seemed to slow down…

Fuck!

“We take. We don't bother.”
“Rick, I don't think we can trust those people. That woman just fucking threw you under the fucking bus.”

“We need them Harry! They just need weapons and then we can take on the Saviours.”

Jesus fucking Christ!

Harry had been right. The Scavengers had betrayed them… Fuck! Rick had impulsively struck a deal with Jadis and now the woman had served them to Negan on a silver plate.

Fuck!

Paralyzed with horror Rick watched helplessly on as Jadis right hand, Brion, started to open the gate.

“AAAHHHHHAAAAA!!!” The shrill scream of a woman ripped through the tense silence. It had come from the other watchtower… where Jadis had sent Tamiel to support…

Michonne?!

That had been Michonne’s scream!

“Oh Rick! Was that someone important to you? Have you just lost someone you loved?” Negan cooed in false sympathy, that fucking messed up grin still on his face.

“Michonne? Michonne…” Carl was whispering her name beside him like a mantra. It sounded disbelieving and hollow.

Daryl just regarded him with deep regret and honest concern. His brother knew the heart wrenching and soul numbing pain of losing the person that made you feel whole just all too well.

Fear had buried her ice cold fingers into Rick’s chest… if Michonne had died what was the sense in fighting on…

NO!
He couldn’t start thinking like that!

Not with his son still standing beside him. Not with Judith hidden in one of the houses.

Not with the rest of his family still alive.

This fight wasn’t over yet.

Not until he or Negan were dead.

The gate was open.

And with balled fists Rick watched on as Negan got ready to leisurely stroll into their home, only to stop at five feet before the gate.

Frozen in mid-move.

It was easy to see that the man in the leather jacket hadn’t stopped moving on his own accord… No this was a familiar picture. Negan was straining against invisible forces to move his limbs – without avail!

“What is this fucking shit!?” In a fit of rage Negan slammed Lucille against the ground behind him. He was heaving heavy breaths that betrayed the extent of struggle he had put up against the invisible barrier.

Stunned Rick looked at Carl and Daryl who both wore matching expressions of grim satisfaction.

“Harry.” Daryl mouthed silently.

Rick wanted to throw his head back and laugh out loud in relief. God, he had totally forgotten about Harry’s safety-measures to Alexandria. While they all had been busy preparing for a fight, Harry had run around the community carving little protective runes into tree’s and apparently the fucking gate, too.

And Negan had caught onto that too.

“Harry!” He yelled out. “That’s one of your little petty tricks, isn’t it? You unfair fucker!” He raged, beating his wired bat against the ground viciously, again and again.

“Come on you fucker, show at least your face! You little asshole!” Grinning like a lunatic Negan had stopped hitting the ground and had rested his bat on his right shoulder instead, using his left hand to sweep his hair back in a disturbing graceful move.

Only silence answered him.
And then suddenly Rick could hear a familiar sound in some distance… easily mistaken for a gunshot…

Even if Rick would have doubted his own hearing, he could see it in the way Daryl simultaneously sacked in relief and tensed in worried apprehension.

Harry had come back!

“Now come on Rick, tell me! Where is Harry? I’d love to see his pretty green eyes before I bash his head in with my Lucille.” Negan tried to temp Rick, who was grinding his teeth in frustration.

Faster than anyone could react two red lights hit Brion and the Scavenger that had held Jesus close by the gate at gunpoint, causing both men to size up, before falling over stiff as boards – one of them right on his nose.

“I’m here!” Harry announced calmly as he seemed to pop back into existence suddenly.

Rick practically felt Daryl tremble beside him at the sight of the wizard’s slender form.

“Thank god!” The former Sheriff could hear Jesus exhale breathily. “I know that this might be the wrong time to ask but are they…?” The ninja shrugged at the two fallen men.

The pretty green eyed teen raised an eyebrow and there was a nearly undetectable quirk around his mouth. “Don’t worry, the phasers were set to stun.”

“Oh my god, did you just quote Star Trek…?!?” Rick could barely refrain from rolling his eyes. Really!? Now?!

The former Sheriff could see the hearts in Jesus’ eyes from here.

But the flirty atmosphere was promptly cut short by the British youth’s next words.

“They aren’t dead… yet!”

The ice in Harry’s voice made Alexandria’s leader shiver. Rick could see how Jesus bright cyan eyes were now wide in worry.

The petit wizard climbed carefully up to the platform where Rick, Carl and Daryl stood with Jadis and her men. All of them eying the approaching boy with suspicion but not daring to shoot.

“Oho, there you are my fucking green eyed fairy!” Negan boomed in exaggerated happiness. But Harry paid him no mind. Instead he was looking unwavering at Jadis, who still holding Rick at gun point.
The former deputy shivered at sight of the kid’s face.

Stone cold. He had never seen these eyes looking so hard, gleaming with barely restrained power. And it seemed he wasn’t the only one… he could feel the gun in Jadis’ hand shaking.

“By Merlin! What have you done, Jadis?!” The small teen sounded conversional but the shark like smile he sported, screamed threat loud and clear.

“Better deal.” Jadis tried to answer just as calm but her composure was failing. Her voice had started quivering.

“You’re breaking your word.” Harry reminded her coolly. His head titled to the side in a curious fashion.

“We take. We don’t bother.” Jadis stated her motto again.

“You swore!” Harry snapped now, making her flinch back in the light of his anger. “You bloody swore on your people’s lives!”

“Just words.” She smirked but Rick thought that Harry’s strange reaction had her thrown of balance. The green eyed boy had pressed his lips into a thin line, ice and fire dancing dangerously in his irises.

In an abrupt movement Harry turned finally to Negan.

“Call your deal with her off.” There was now an new urgency under Harry’s stone cold tone.

Even Negan seemed thrown by the demand because instead of his usual bout of prophanities the man only asked with raised eyebrows: “Why should I?”

“People are resources. Right? You could prove this now. Call the deal off!” Rick could see one of Harry’s balled fists trembling. “If you don’t, all of her people will die right now!”

Rick got the feeling that this wasn’t an empty threat….

Fuck?! What was going on?

Negan didn’t react. He just starred disbelieving up to them.

“Jadis, we could make a new deal. A better deal!” Looking at Harry’s frozen expression and the devastation that was starting to stir in his eyes, Rick had to try.

But before the tall, red haired woman could refuse the slender wizard was just shaking his head.

“It’s too late now… She made her decision.” Harry sounded detached.
Something was changing… it was as if the air pressure had dropped suddenly…

That couldn’t be a good sign…

Without any forewarning a heavy wind rose, blowing through the safety zone. Harry’s cloak billowed impressively around his slender body.

“I tried to warn you. I really did. There no stopping it any more. You made your decision and you broke your part of the vow.” It seemed as if the wizard’s solemn voice was the only thing that could be heard above the gale.

Nobody was moving a muscle only Harry turned his head back to Jadis seeking eye contact as he whispered. “I’m sorry.”

“No need sorry. Over soon!” Rick didn’t know where the woman found the energy to answer, when he himself couldn’t find the strength to move an eyelid under the heavy pressure of magic.

“Yes. It will be.” Harry’s words were nothing more than a whisper now, nearly swallowed by the raging storm.

And then like it never had happened in the first place the wind stopped…

Vanishing into thin air.

And then it happened.

Horrified they all – Alexandrians, Scavengers and Saviours – watched as the Scavengers around them dropped to the ground… one by one.

Like dolls cut from their strings. They crumbled to the ground.

All of them, unmoving!

*Lifeless.*

“What are you ready to swear on that you’re going to honour your word?” The green eyed wizard pressed on.

“My people’s lives.”

Jadis was the only one left standing.

Immediately she dropped her gun to reach for her closest fallen comrade, hectically checking for a
The screamed that tore itself from the throat was that of a mortally wounded animal.

A sound that went right through the mark and bone of the former deputy.

Rick couldn’t wrap his head around this…

The Scavengers had come to them with 30 fighters and they had all just… dropped dead. No warning but a bust of wind. Because of a broken vow, Harry had forced one the leader of the junkyard people.

“Let’s say I made sure that she’s going to lose as much as we do if she decides to double cross us.”

The little wizard hadn’t trusted Jadis and he had feared for their family. So he had tried to make sure that the consequences of a betrayal wouldn’t bite them in the ass but would punish Jadis instead.

Fuck!

“Fuck! Green eyes, that was heavy shit. They are all dead?” Negan was rubbing his beard. The man looked as stunned as Rick felt and there was fear in his eyes. His men were already retreating.

“Yes. They’re all dead because she broke her word to us. It was the price she so recklessly and frivolously agreed on.” Harry replied monotonously.

“Damn, you’re a stone cold son of a bitch, aren’t ya? You’re ready to go so far?” Negan asked. Rick thought that the man started to sound uneasy.

“Yes!” The fire in those green eyes threatened death and destruction on anyone trying to harm the boy’s family in any way.

BOOM
Three small explosions had destroyed the rocket launchers. Saviours were screaming in fright.

In quick moves and with more strength than anyone would have expected from the skinny teen, Harry grabbed Jadis by the neck and dragged her to the edge of the parapet of the platform.

“Yes, I am ready to go this far.” There lay an icy unspoken threat in those calm words.

Negan watched his fidgeting men, none of them looked ready to fight anymore.

Gritting his teeth he squared his shoulders.

“I care about my people. I don’t want to just march them into the line of fire because I want to play ‘my dick is bigger than yours.’ It is. We both know it. This isn’t over! I’ll be back!”

Unable to intervene Rick watched in shock was the small tinny wizard pushed the much taller woman over the balustrade down the wall. Apparently enforced by magic she flew right into the arms of the Saviours.

“Take her with you. She has nothing else left.” Without so much as looking at Negan or Jadis again Harry was turning his back on the enemy, already leaving the platform.

***

It was getting dark but Harry couldn’t stop.

A while ago it had started to rain but he couldn’t stop.

Harry’s hands were bleeding but he couldn’t stop…

It felt like he had been at it for hours.

Digging and digging and digging.

A grave big enough for 30 bodies.

He relished in the pain and in the blood. In the strain in his arms.
The tear drops were hiding the tears he had no right to shed.

“Harry that’s enough! Take a break.” That was Paul’s kind voice.

“Go away!” Harry snapped at him. But instead from backing off, the long haired man laid a calming hand over his own. Gentle fingers brushed wet raven locks out of his face before they tenderly caressed his face.

“You don’t need to do this on your own. Let us help.” Paul urged gently.

Glenn, Rick, Rosita and Daryl had come with him.

Harry was surprised to see Rick here. The teen had thought that the man would stay by Michonne’s side tonight since she had been badly hurt in the fight with Tamiel.

Broken sob escaped Harry, the only thing holding him up right any more was the shovel he leaned on.

“I killed them!”

“But how? I don’t understand how you did this?” Rosita asked. She was shaking her head in wonder.

“The vow. When I made her swear to keep her word.” The slender wizard whispered. He had started shivering – partly due to the cold creeping up on him, partly in disgust and grief.

“Ya asked her what she was goin’ ta swear on… because we were settin’ ‘ur lives on ta line ta fight Negan and trustin’ ‘er. And she swore on…” Daryl frowned in confusion

“…on her people’s lives. But that wasn’t… She didn’t want to put in that wager.” Harry finished for him

“What are you talking about? You’re making little sense.” Rick asked.

“I cast an unbreakable vow on her. And the magic… I felt it… It compelled her to offer something of equal exchange. She didn’t choose to lay their lives on the line. I saw that. I felt that!” The British wizard explained. Guilt and shame weighting heavily on the conscious.

“Wow, damn! I’m always amazed what magic can do?!?” Rosita shook her head in incredulous wonder.

“That’s the reason wizards are not supposed to cast on Muggles. She had no means to resist the compulsion. A witch would have been able to offer me something else for the vow. She wouldn’t have been forced to give up her all of her family!” Harry sighed defeated. He felt close to hysterics.

“I messed with magic I didn’t know enough about. Hermione would never have made such a mistake! She would have known… I was just so angry.”

Gentle hands were making him focus on beautiful cyan eyes, framed by long dark blond lashes.

“Breathe! What were you angry about?” Paul instructed softly.

Inhaling deeply before exhaling very slowly, Harry tried to calm down a little.
“I was angry at Rick for trusting her, for being so desperate in his search for allies that he took this risk, when it was so obvious that Jadis was playing us. I was angry… because my parents had trusted the wrong man and it got them killed and my godfather was framed for it and went to jail without trial.” He forced the words out.

“Harry…” Rick sounded upset.

“I couldn’t stand the thought of losing you, too… Not when I just got you back. I was so set on protecting you no matter what that I… I practically tricked her into killing her own family!” He couldn’t breathe anymore… He just couldn’t….

A rough and callused gripped the back of his neck comfortingly.

“Breathe!” Daryl rumbled at him.

It was all Harry could do to keep himself from hyperventilating.

“But if she had kept her word nothin’ would ‘ave happened, right?!” The hunter mumbled.

“Yeah…” The green eyed teen nodded.

“She had a choice, Harry. She decided to break her word on us! And you warned her. I heard you say it to her!” Rick spoke calmly, but the slender teen just shook his head.

“Jadis didn’t know the extent of what had gone on! And she didn’t believe me! I saw that in her face and I did nothing. I should have said more. Made her understand the consequences of doubles crossing us.” The young wizard rambled on.

“Harry, whatever you think you have done, you saved us today. If you didn't do what you did the saviours would have taken Alexandria today with the help of the scavengers. You protected our home. You had your reasons.” Rick tried to get through to the teen.

Sobs shook Harry's small frame.

“I'm no different than Negan or Voldemort. They had their reasons too... Negan thinks he's protecting... Saving his people, too...” Harry laughed hysterical. “We'll always find something to tell ourselves that what we did what was necessary that there was a reason... But how could any reason make this right? 30 corpses! And probably more of them in that junkyard. How could I ever make this right again?” Shaken by disgust he had started clawing at his skin. “Snape was right I'm an arrogant fool for thinking I could handle anything. People always die because me.”

“Fuck! Harry breathe damn it. You're working yourself in a state!” Daryl growled pulling the struggling teen close to his chest.

“You should send me away I'm bad luck... I'll bring only failure and death...” Harry sobbed into the hunters chest.
“Stop it!” Daryl growled. “Nobody’s sendin’ ya anywhere!”

“Shhh, hush sweetheart! You're not bad luck!” Paul whispered soothingly. “Look at me. Harry, please look at me! You're not like Negan! You hear me. You're not!”

“How do you know?” The small teen asked between hiccups.

Somehow the combined warmth and closeness to Daryl and Paul settled the deep hurt in his chest a bit.

“Because of this. Negan enjoys hurting other. He likes to kill. And he certainly wouldn't have felt guilty over killing traitors either, not like this. He wouldn’t grief for them like you do now Harry. He wouldn’t work his own hands bloody to bury them either.” Paul continued to caress his face and hair, his touch a soothing as his words.”

“I messed up.” Harry whispered forlornly.

“Yeah, ya might have. We all did an’ probably will in future. This is a fucked up world an’ sometimes ya do fucked up shit to protect your family.” Daryl agreed smoothly, accepting everything in stride.

They all had today.

“Harry…” Glenn, who had been silent until now, suddenly spoke up. “We stormed that satellite station in the middle of the night, killing all those people in their sleep. They never saw us coming because they didn't even know we existed.” The young Korean whispered. Obviously the incident still weighted on the kind man. “That least the Scavengers were awake and held us at gun point. They made the decision to fight against us. After we gave them the opportunity work together. We had a deal and their word. They chose to break both.” Glenn said firmly.

“They had a choice, Harry. Jadis had a choice. She played a dangerous game dealing with the Saviours like that. We don't know how that would have played out for her and her tribe.” Rosita agreed.

It was only a small consolation.

Glenn’s sudden yelp cut through the morose atmosphere.

A little worried the young Korean retrieved his communication mirror from his pocket.

“Glenn!?” They could hear Maggie’s worried voice.

“Maggie! Oh my god, did something happen? Are you alright?” Her husband fretted.

“Yes... Yes, I’m alright. Shaken up but alright. Simon led a group of saviours to the Hilltop. We were right. They thought all of our fighters would be in Alexandria... That the Hilltop would be
unprotected.” She told, exhaustion clear in her voice for everyone to hear.

Paul had jumped to his feet at the information.

“They were surprised that there were still so many of us here. The fight was short and nobody got killed. There were only a few injuries...” Maggie gave them a short report.

“But Rick that... That wasn't all... They used tainted weapons! The bullets and blades had been infected. We had to kill the injured.”

Paul hissed in shock.

The Saviours had picked up their game.

And that they had survived today's attack had been dumb luck and thanks to an impulsive mistake Harry had made... and regretted.

The slender wizard dropped his head into his hands. He felt sick and exhausted.

And worst of all he didn't know what to do now.

He needed to find a way to protect the people he loved without creating a carnage like today...again.

Chapter End Notes

Hi! I hope you liked the chapter.
It was a hard chapter for Harry. For me it was like my version of the 6. year bathroom incident for this Harry. i wanted him to a such a moment now, too. He needed to learn about the bitter consequences of dealing with certain kinds of magic.
It was a hard lesson!

But I have a question to you... I'm starting the chapters with a little more romance soon. So how much smut are you willing to read? XD Let me know ;)}
Chapter 27

Daryl was in the kitchen eating breakfast with Rick and Carl when his mirror vibrated, grumbling he pulled the device from his pocket.

“Good morning, sunshine!” Paul’s grinning face greeted him.

“Mornin’” he mumbled back lowly trying to work his face into a convincing scowl but, apparently he hadn’t been able to keep his pleasant surprise at the call hidden if the way Paul’s smile broadened was an indication.

He hadn’t certainly managed to fool his family. Rick was just smirking into his coffee while Carl, the little shit, wiggled his eyebrows suggestively.

“It was too early for this shit,” Daryl decided. He settled for showing Grimes junior and senior gracefully his middle finger and ignored those childish fuckers.

“Yes, I’m OK. We burned the last corpses yesterday. Ten in total.” The Hilltop scout told them with a tired sigh. Bright cyan eyes searched for slated blue ones. “We’re still on for the emergency meeting in Alexandria with all the communities ambassadors?”

“Yes, I talked to Carol yesterday. They’re coming. Natania as well.” Rick interrupted them.
“Good. We finally convinced Maggie to take it a little easier. I'll come with Sasha.” Paul replied smirking a little. Daryl grunted in amusement Maggie was a fucking force of nature.

“That's good.” The hunter agreed. It would be good for the young woman to rest a bit. She and the little one would need it.

“You’re coming with Sasha? I thought Glenn would come here?” Rick asked in surprise, causing Paul to laugh mirthfully.

“Oh, he tried! But Maggie said if she had to sit back than he didn’t get to run around and do all the fun stuff. Well, that’s the child-friendly version of the argument that took place.” The hippie ninja smirked.

Carl and Daryl shared an amused glance.

*Yep, Maggie was tough as nails.*

“How’s Harry?” Paul changed to topic.

They all exchanged weighted looks, while Daryl heaved a sigh.


Paul looked troubled by the news. “That sounds…”

“…Unhealthy? Mad? Obsessed? He doesn't sleep or eat enough... If he ain’t pouring over dusty, stone old tomes and freakin’ parchments or discussin’ stuff with Eugene.” Daryl groused unhappily. This was going on for days now… since Paul had left the day after the Saviours had attacked Alexandria. And Daryl had yet to get through that thick British skull that they all were concerned about the kid’s health.

“I wanted to say worrying.” Paul winced.

“Dude, he’s completely out of it.” Carl snorted. “Yesterday he nearly ate a napkin because he was so exhausted that he couldn't keep his eyes open.”

Paul’s eyes widened in alarm. “Why isn't he sleeping?”

“’Cause if he's not readin’, researchin’, writin’ or blowin’ up stuff, he’s either talkin’ with the mullet or he’s chattin’ half the night with that witch girl on the mirror all night.” Daryl replied surly.

The night after they had come back from burying the Scavengers Harry had gotten a call. Daryl had just gotten a glimpse of wild bushy brown hair in the pocket mirror over the teens shoulder before a high very British voice had nearly immediately called out in obvious concern.

“Oh, Harry! What happened?”
And the kid had crumbled like an old cookie. Daryl had wanted to rip that mirror out of the teen hands. He and Paul just calmed the teen down and then the girl from the other side of the world had ripped at those fresh wounds with disapproving and worried questions.

Since then he had found Harry most nights sitting in the living room talking to the British girl in hushed tones. A few nights even Eugene had been there, too.

Looking at Paul right now Daryl saw a familiar look of consternation in the scouts face. Yeah, he wasn't happy with that either... Especially since Harry wasn't telling them what the hell was going on with him.

“Her name is Hermione. She's nice, you know!” Carl piped up.

“Ya talked ta her?” Daryl scowled suspiciously at the younger grimes.

“Yep! I mean she's incredibly smart! At least as intelligent as Eugene, but her social skills are a bit better. And she is pretty, you know... Really great skin and beautiful eyes...“ Carl gushed.

**Clang!**

_Damn!_ Everyone was staring at him.

Daryl might have put his coffee mug down with a little too much force. The hunter glared at them all hoping to distract them from his burning cheeks.

Carl tilted his head in confusion.

“You know that they're just friends right?” The kid asked a little confused. “Thinking that they're more than that is like suggesting that you and dad have something going on.”

Daryl and Rick simultaneously crunch up their noses making Carl snicker.

_Uhh... Gross!

“Sorry man, but that feels little too incestuous for my liking.” Rick shuddered wincing.

“See!” The kid grinned broadly at them. “So don't worry. If it were different wouldn't he have stayed with her instead of coming back to us?”

Daryl sighed...

Yeah that sounded logic. But it couldn't curb his last doubts that Harry could one day realize that
that fancy school of his was a better place to be and that he was sick of old redneck trash Daryl and
the strange thing they were developing with a long haired hippie ninja Jesus.

*Fuck, it was too fucking early for this shit.*

Paul looked as wary as he felt.

“Maybe yer able ta talk some sense inta his stubborn British head when ya come tamorrow?”

Daryl mumbled lowly.

Peeking at the small face in the mirror the hunter felt a bout of giddiness. He had missed the cocky
ninja in the last few days and he prospect of seeing the man tomorrow lifted his mood
considerably.

And Daryl thought that Harry would feel similar.

Maybe he was mistaken and his head was playing games with him but to Daryl it seemed like Paul
looked also relieved to be back in Alexandria with them.

*Looking at Alexandria’s gates felt strange to Carol.

It was a bit like coming home to your parents after you moved out. A place you love with the
people you cherish but at the same time you know you’ll never become the person you want or
should to be if you stayed.

And a part of her feared that once she stepped back into her old life she would become her old self,
that she would lose herself in here again, unable to leave again.

Ezekiel put a calming hand onto her shoulder and Shiva rumbled soothingly at his side.

And then the gate opened, revealing Alexandria’s familiar streets and its big white houses. She
smiled a little at Ezekiel’s stunned awe at the sight but the grey haired woman couldn’t help but
miss the Kingdom’s friendlier and cosier feeling.

*What a relief!*

“You brought a tiger.” He observed. “Panthera tigris is the largest species among the Felidae and
classified in the genus Panthera.”

Carol had to bit her lip to keep herself from sniggering as a very pale Eugene inched away from Shiva, while reciting what sounded like a Wikipedia article.

“It is an apex predator, primarily preying on ungulates such as deer and wild boar. It is territorial and generally a solitary but social predator, requiring large contiguous areas of habitat, which support its requirements for prey and rearing of its offspring.”

“Her name is Shiva.” Carol interrupted mirthfully, causing the man with the mullet to give her an indecipherable look.

“... of course it is...” He deadpanned.

“Are the other already here?” The grey haired woman asked good-naturedly.

“Yes. The other ambassadors have already taken their seats on the counsel table.” Eugene replied formally.

“And where my good friend might that be?” Ezekiel inquired theatrical, every inch the well trained role of a king.

The genius cocked his head to the side studying the flamboyant king.

“In the Grime’s kitchen. Beth made cookies yesterday.” He replied with a blank face.

Ezekiel looked confused at a now laughing Carol.

Sure where else should they discuss a war if not in the kitchen of Rick Grimes and with some sweet pastries to ease the conversation?

God! How she loved those people.

With a grin she took Ezekiel’s hand and steered the confused man with quick steps to heart of her family.

On the porch of the Grimes residence a smoking Daryl greeted them.

With narrowed eyes he took in the congregation before his gaze fell on Carol’s and Ezekiel’s joined hands. It earned her a raised eyebrow and a barely-there, teasing smirk. Relaxed he moved to the steps but stopped there suddenly looking shy, as if he was unsure how to proceed with all the people round.

So Carol took that decision from him and with crossed the distance between them with quick steps, pulling her best friend into a bone crushing hug.
“Oh Pookie! I missed you.” In a few seconds time she could feel him melting into the embrace.

His only answer was a rumbling sound of comfort.

“Daryl? Any sign of…?” Suddenly someone asked from the door. Peeking around the hunter’s broad shoulder Carol spotted Jesus. The young man’s hair was open and he was dressed in some loose shirt and comfortable brown pants... And he was barefoot.

*Someone was feeling very at home here… Interesting!*

“Friend Jesus, good to see you!” Ezekiel greeted with a lot enthusiasm.

“King Ezekiel! Lady Carol!” The Hilltop scout grinned teasingly down at them. “Come in! Everyone's waiting. There's coffee and cookies.”

The kitchen looked a lot like Carol remembered but someone had set up a bigger table in the middle of the room.

It already contained Rick and Michonne, as well as Sasha and Jesus who had taken the place next to her. Carl was lounging on the counter and Daryl had chosen to lean against the door frame.

The only two persons that Carol hadn’t recognized were an elderly woman with grey hair and a very stern expression and a young beautiful girl with caramel skin and long raven locks.

“Carol, King Ezekiel! It’s good to see you!” Rick’s smile looked a little strained. The man seemed exhausted and there was some of that old wildness back in his face, they all had developed in those months on the road.

“These are Natania and her granddaughter, Cindie, from the Oceanside community. Cindie, Natania these are our friends from the Kingdom.” Michonne introduced them.

The pretty girl smiled shyly at them but the old woman frowned suspiciously.

“As nice as this is, we’re not here to do small talk and eat cookies, Richard.” She reprimanded the former Sheriff.

Oh hell, that woman sounded like Carol’s grandma did, all stern and disapproving… and even Rick looked a little bashful.

“Right!” The blue eyed man coughed. “We called you all here because Negan attacked both Alexandria and the Hilltop. The Saviours have picked up their game. They came with poisoned weapons to the Hilltop, tainted with walker blood so that the injured turned at night. They’re coming for us now. We all have been threatened and hurt by these people… We need to fight now or they’re going to destroy us. The only chance to win is when we fight together.”
“And you trust these people?” Natania asked sceptically.

“Yes! Their allies… and family!” Michonne replied firmly.

Natania let her harsh grey eyes wander over the war counsel a heavy frown pulling at her lip

“Harry trusts all of us.” Jesus threw the old woman a meaningful look.

“He does?”

“Yes, he does.” The long haired man confirmed. His tone light but sure.

Suddenly the coffeemaker sprung to life without a warning or anyone touching it. The poor machine made noises as if it was dying…

“Nah… fuck!” Daryl cursed under his breath behind Carol, while Michonne dropped her head into her hands.

“No! I hate it when he does that! The coffeemaker gets all weird when he messes with it.” The usually pretty relaxed samurai groaned in misery.

It was very obvious who he was.

And speaking of the devil…

Harry walked suddenly into the kitchen and with walked Carol meant stumbling – half-asleep and half-blind. The kid was a mess of rumbled clothing and a disarray of raven locks. His glasses were pushed up his head and the deep, nearly purple bags residing under his eyes, were setting a stark contrast to his frightening pale skin.

Carol hadn’t seen Harry looking this bad since before he had started therapy with Denise.

And apparently he was so out of it that he didn’t even took notice of them. Carl moved hurriedly out of Harry’s way as the older teen fumbled blindly and dazedly with a mug.

Then Harry slumped unceremoniously into the chair next to Jesus… well, the chair the long haired man had hurriedly shoved under Harry’s behind before the kid had landed on his ass.

**Thumb.**

Carol winced as the wizard’s head plummeted on the table top with a thud. Sasha had moved the kid’s coffee cup away just in time to avoid any injuries. They all starred at the British youth in different states of worry and complete bewilderment.

“What yer doin’ up? It’s been only two hours.” Daryl scowled at the teen.

“I had an alarm set.” Harry mumbled into the table top.
“How the hell is that still possible!” Jesus threw his arms up in exasperation. “I collected three
clocks! Three! Damn it! You promised to sleep!”

“You missed the one I hid under my pillow. And I did sle….eep.” It might have been a little more
convincing without that big yawn interrupting the last sentence.

“Yeah, two hours ain’t enoug’!” Daryl barked at the teen, who instead of answering had started
snoring softly into his arms.

Silence filled the kitchen.

“You know this would be incredibly cute, if it hadn’t taken both of us nearly an hour to wrestle
him into resting for a while.” Jesus remarked wirily after a while, staring at the exhausted youth.

Daryl just sighed and dragged a hand over his face. “At least he got those two hours down. Might
be more than the night before.”

“Why isn’t he sleeping?” Cindie asked in confusion.

Just when Rick opened his mouth to answer, the coffeemaker beeped, causing Harry’s hand to snap
up and with the flick of his wrist the coffee decanter was floating through the kitchen.

They all observed in fascination how the coffee poured itself into the mug.

“Wicked!” Carl grinned from the counter, watching amused how Harry blindly grabbed the
steaming hot beverage and started to inhale the caffeine with small sighs of relief.

“That was an impressive show of silent and wandless magic, Potter.” Natania commented. There
was a strangely satisfied look in her grey eyes that made Carol shiver.

Suddenly brilliant green eyes shot wide open.

“I need a cock!” Harry called out.

“WH… THE FUCK?!” Everyone was staring open-mouthed at the British wizard.

Carol thought that he still looked quite out of it…

She had heard once that sleep deprivation could mess with the brain… Maybe that was the case
now? There was a slightly feverish look to the teen when he fixed gleaming eyes on Jesus and
Daryl.

“Paul, Daryl, do you were I might find one?” Harry asked enthusiastically.

Daryl made a sound as if he was dying. Her best friend had turned an unattractive shade of reddish
purple.
And Carol thought that the Hilltop scout was about to disappear under the table. The usually very easy-going man had gone very pale under the scrutiny of Rick’s very sharp blue eyes and the dangerous look on Michonne’s face.

All the while Harry seemed completely obvious. God, the kid looked a little high…

Daryl and Jesus had been right. The slender wizard needed sleep.

“Harry, hun! You want to tell me why you’ll need that?” Carol asked, keeping her voice gentle and carefully controlled.

Unfazed the green eyed youth rambled on. “Thought about using Frederick but that would make me sad…”

The grey haired woman thought that she saw Rick flinch a bit and in her own stomach something clenched in fear…

_Had they failed again?_

“Who the hell is Frederick?!” Daryl had finally found his voice. The hunter sounded raw and choked. He and Jesus were looking equally alarmed from each other to Harry.

“I need to tell Eugene. Maybe he can assist…” The British teen mumbled lost in his own sleep deprived thoughts.

“WHAT?!” Daryl yelped.

This was making even less sense… Wide eyed Ezekiel and Sasha coughed, while Natania looked very displeased.

_Just what the hell was going on with the boy?!_

Suddenly clear, loud and inhibited laugher filled the kitchen from the counter.

The noise had made all of them startle quite badly. Carl was doubling over in a full belly laugher.

Even Harry, who blinked drowsily and was looking a little more alert than before.

“Carl?!” Rick frowned at his son his whole face a prime example of parental disapproval.

“Oh… you… Hahaaahhhhaaa!” The blue eyed teen snorted mirthfully. “You and your dirty, dirty minds!” The younger Grimes grinned widely at the confused and bewildered adults in the room.
“He needs a cock.” Carl wiggled with his eyebrows. “And you automatically jumped to the conclusion, that he was talking about…” Besides Carol Ezekiel was squirming in uneasiness.

“Frederick isn’t a guy.” The one eyed teen smirked at them. The boy clearly enjoyed their cluelessness.

“Quit dilly dallying, boy. Some of us aren’t getting younger.” Natania dryly berated the gloating teen, who in turn just shrugged but complied with a smirk.

“Frederick isn’t a man. And he hasn’t a cock but he is one! The kids named the our rooster Frederick.” Carl laughed at their stunned expressions.

“Merlin’s balls!” Harry squeaked blushing from head to toe.

Aha, so the frail wizard was finally awake enough to realize just what he had said… and to be deeply embarrassed about it.

“As entertaining as this is, I must say I find it all the more interesting that you’re in need of a… cockerel.” The old woman raised a daring eyebrow at the flustered green eyed wizard, a small smirk playing around her mouth. “So what do you need it for?”

“Oh, well I… uhm… maybe I should show you… I don’t know if I could explain it so well. And maybe someone should get Eugene. I need him to check something any way.” Harry rambled. Cradling his hot coffee like a precious jewel the British wizard jumped up from his chair and staggered out of the kitchen.

They followed Harry to his work room.

And Carol had never seen anything like this. There were books and paper everywhere and even a little laboratory on the left side of the room. One whole wall had been turned into a chalk board. It was covered in equations, strange letters, numbers and difficult looking diagrams. Maps of Virginia had been pinned there and someone had drawn different coloured lines all over it.

It was an overwhelming mess of scientific and magical research. And considering the equally floored expressions of the others, they didn’t have a clue what all of this was.

“So this is what you’ve been working on the last few days?” Michonne asked wide eyed.

“No offense, but what is this?” Sasha exhaled, looking somewhat overwhelmed.

“This is a ward construction.” Natania breathed in awe. Carol watched as the elderly woman inspected some of the charts and maps. “You’re trying to create a protective ward for all four communities, aren’t you?” There was pure astonishment on her face when she looked back at Harry.

“Uhm… yes, but it has proven quite difficult…” Harry sighed tiredly. “Eugene and a friend of mine from Hogwarts have been trying to help me.”

The teen slumped into a plush chair, looking still utterly exhausted. With a flick of his wand he
summoned a phial containing a transparent blue liquid that he drowned with a grimace.

Ezekiel jumped in surprise as smoke puffed out of the teen’s ears. But at least Harry regained a little colour to his cheeks and seemed a bit more rested and fitter than before.

“How many Pepper-Ups have you had since yesterday?” Eugene’s nasal voice suddenly droned. The genius was standing next to the wizard’s potion kit staring at it with a frown. “Hermione said not to take more than two per day. But I count three less then yesterday, additional to the one in your hand.”

“How many Pepper-Ups have you had since yesterday?” Eugene’s nasal voice suddenly droned. The genius was standing next to the wizard’s potion kit staring at it with a frown. “Hermione said not to take more than two per day. But I count three less then yesterday, additional to the one in your hand.”

“Eugene…” Harry groaned

“You promised me and her to take care of yourself when we started to work on this.” The chubby man accused.

“I am!” Harry defended himself, ignoring Pauls and Daryl’s incredulous scoffs behind him

“Well… I try!” The boy pouted adorably.

“But never mind I think I have found the solution for the energy problem. Here!” With a deterrent hand movement he waved Eugene’s concern away, instead he handed the genius a stack of parchment. “Could you check the equations? Making sure I haven’t missed or messed the math part up again.”

“Why a ward?” Rick finally questioned. “You said they don’t keep the walkers out but attract more them…?! You said even Hogwarts wasn’t entirely save. So why all of this?”

“Yes, but right now we need more protection against the living, don’t we?” Harry huffed. There was haunted despair etched in every line of Harry’s young face. “Negan has the numbers and… and… I can’t… not again, Rick!”

Something had happened…

“What happened, Richard?” Natania interrupted sternly, causing the blue eyed man to wince.

“We thought that we had found new allies… They promised to fight with us against the Saviours in exchange for weapons…”

“The weapons you’ve gotten from us, I assume?” Natania asked sharply, causing the former Sheriff to flush bright red.

“Uhmmm… yes. Harry didn’t trust them. But... I... I thought we needed them to fight, I chose not to listen… even if Harry has always been right with his hunches. He trusted you, but not Jadis... I didn’t listen and Harry…”

By God! It had been ages since Carol had seen Rick squirm like that.
“… I panicked and I was angry.” Harry sighed. He seemed heavily burdened by whatever had happened. “I bound them to their promise.”

Beside Carol, Natania barked out a harsh laugh.

“An unbreakable vow?” The old woman guessed. “You know how to cast that?” A while she seemed impressed, Harry winced.

“Not as well as I should have. In hindsight it was a harsh and impulsive decision…” The young teen admitted, guilt openly displayed on his face. “You’re not supposed to cast these kinds of spells on Muggle…”

“Oh? What happened?” Natania wanted to know.

“My anger and fear compelled the magic of the spell to force Jadis into an equal exchange of wagers. And I told her that trusting her was like putting all our people’s lives on the line…”

“So it forced her to do the same?” Natania asked in polite interest but Carol felt her own stomach sink at Harry’s words. In an attempt to steady herself she searched for Ezekiel’s hand.

“What happened, Harry?” The King inquired softly, his dark eyes kind and full of sympathy for Harry’s obvious pain.

They all could guess what happened but they needed the clarity.

“One of Negan’s men had warned us that the Saviours would come to attack Alexandria and we called the Scavengers as back up… You called me to the Kingdom the day before, because of Benjamin… and when I came back…” Here the young wizard broke.

“They betrayed us.” Rick replied his mouth tight in bitterness. “And when the Saviours knocked on our door they turned on us. Held us on gunpoint…”

“They broke the vow.” Natania breathed wide eyed.

“Yes… I had tried to warn Jadis… that there would be consequences but she didn’t believe me”. Haunted green eyes stared into nothingness. “Sometimes I forget, how dangerous magic can be, how literal. It took them. All of them. Except the leader. Jadis, who made the vow with me.”

“Good for you!” Natania replied with a cool smile, making Harry stare at her in shock.

“What?!”

“We are fighting a war, my child! This isn’t a time for the squeamish. She made a deal with your leader and she broke it. Not only that but she handed you and your community over to the enemy. If you hadn’t forced the vow on her, everything we’re trying to do here would have been over and people still would have died. It just wouldn’t have been her people…” Carol shivered at the old woman’s words.

And the part of her that had killed and killed and killed in cold blood to protect her family agreed with Natania but the part of herself that Carol had wanted to nurture… the woman that she had tried to save by leaving Alexandria was crying with the broken and torn looking boy in front of her.

The burden of having caused the deaths of so many people, of laying a trap like that… even if it
had saved your own…

The choice between what was right and what is easy.

Looking around the room again and considering the things Daryl and Jesus had hinted at… all of this spoke of a desperate frenzy to… make amends… to be better… to punish himself and maybe to keep himself from thinking about what had happened…

“So what’s the purpose of these wards you want to build?” Rick asked again starring confused at the research and the way Eugene seemed to breeze through the stack of papers Harry had given him.

“I found some old wards that went obsolete after ‘Notice me not’ and ‘Anti Muggle’ wards were created which are a lot more complex than the wards I found.” Harry showed Natania a book.

Skipping through the pages the old woman raised a grey eyebrow.

“Those are really complex wards, subtle in their workings, emotion and intention based… You know that went out of fashion because they take a lot out of the caster, right? That’s the main reason wizards stopped to use them. And the territory between our communities is too big! It’s impossible to ward such a big area all on your own, Harry!”

“Yeah, we know!” Eugene replied firmly, an unusual stern look fixed at a pouting Harry. This seemed to be an old argument between them.

“I still think we should have gone with option number three.” Harry said stubbornly glaring back at the tall man with the mullet.

“And Hermione and I both told you, that option would have drained you too much.” Eugene threw his hands up in aggravation.

“It would have been worth a try.” Crossing his arms over his chest Harry had never looked more than a teenager to Carol.

“There would have been no such thing as a try! Hermione told you that!” Daryl and Jesus looked deeply unsettled by Eugene’s words.

“Harry…” The long haired man started to talk, his pretty features crunched in concern and disapproval.

“I’ve let them convince me to search for another option, didn’t I?” Harry sighed petulant.

“Yes, after Hermione threatened you to call Daryl!” Eugene groused. Carol had to bite back a little snicker at the way Daryl puffed his chest up at that tiny bit of information.

“She was being unreasonable about it.” The wizard with the green eyes sniffed.
“She was unreasonable?! Three percent success rate isn’t a reliable outcome prospect! We told you that! I did the calculations and Hermione agreed with me that option number three would have most likely killed you. You refused to listen. And you made her cry!” Carol had never seen Eugene so lively, even if he seemed to be very vexed by Harry’s stubborn attitude.

“I didn't!” Harry glared at the genius.

“Twice! And she told you to sleep and stop living off those potions.” The genius accused the small teen.

“I did! Paul and Daryl made me.”

“And we told you two hours aren't enough.” Paul groused unhappily.

“I'm nearly done now.” Harry tried to placate the long haired scout. “I think I found the perfect solution for the energy problem. What do you think?”

Eugene scowled before he huffed. “This sounds even more insane than option number two and four but you’re right it solves the energy problem... Hermione needs to agree. That woman is a genius! If she says this goes than it goes.”

That was a high praise from a man that had once very clear announced that very one in their group couldn’t compare to his intelligence.

“What have you planned?” Carol asked.

“Since Natania is right and the wards are freakishly complex and take a lot of magic and energy to create and maintain... I decided to dig deeper further back in the books. The topic of wards is as old as magic folk. And the first ones where not forced on the land by magic users. Instead the natural magic of the land was used to power them.” Harry explained with a crooked smile.

“Oh Circe! You're not talking about wards but a blessing of the land.” Natania threw her head back laughing in delight.

“Yes. Since it’s natural magic, it tends to be subtle. And the land itself provides protection and well... Prosperity.”

“Ok...? What does this mean?” Sasha asked in confusion.


“… Strangers with ill intentions losing their way in the woods. Cars breaking down at our borders. Roots appearing out of nowhere making enemies stumble and hurt themselves. They'll find neither food nor water nor shelter. The land itself will protect and provide for us, while it will starve and punish those who want to harm us.” Natania smirked viciously.
“Oh my... Sorry, but you know that sounds really, really creepy.” Sasha shuddered.

“Why did people stop using that?” Jesus asked interestedly.

“Because, while subtle over time it drew too much attention... Local folk started to talk, fairy tales about haunted forests... Witch hunts have been a real threat back then.” Harry mumbled evasively and Carol had the notion that this wasn't the complete truth.

Natania snorted.

“Yes. And it’s not that easy to get the land’s blessing. You don't just go around and carve some runes and say some spells, like you do it for a ward. A blessing needs to be willingly given. It needs a promise from the wizard to honour the land and the living things in return. Humanity lost that.”

Everyone wince a little.

Yes, humanity had mostly lost its reverence for the earth over the centuries. Pollution, exploitation and destruction for their own gain were the things they had offered nature instead.

“Before we became too full of ourselves. Every culture magical or not lived with humble respect and dignified deference for Mother Nature.” The old woman pointed out.

“So it means back to the old ways. That fits all of our methods now. It sounds like a good plan.” Ezekiel nodded.

Harry beamed at Eugene. “See, they think it can work.”

“They won't have to work out a way to perform a flawless execution of a very complex ritual.” Paul frowned worriedly at all the charts, maps and equations.

In the background Eugene had started talking into his mirror and a female voice with a crisp British accent was asking questions in rapid speed about values, parameters and combinations of runes. The chubby man with the mullet answered her in an equally fast and monotonous way, rattling through all the sheets of paper Harry had handed him.

Finally Carol could hear the young witch on the other side of the world take a breath and a sigh.

“This might really work.” She heard her huff, but you could still hear her concentrated frown.

“What was the baseline again?”

“75 Algiz (Protection), 38 Eihwaz (Strength, Dependability), 92 Mannaz (Family), 75 Dagaz (Happiness, success), 676 Uruz (Courage), -77, Gebo (Love), Inguz (Fertility), 635 Sowulo (Health), 33 Tiwaz (Warrior)” Eugene replied looking through Harry's work.
Hermione hummed again. “Add Perb (Rebirth, fertility, magic) in the last place and drop Eihwaz and Tiwaz completely you don’t need them there and they would open another layer. Exchange the Inguz. It tends to behave badly with Sowulo. Fehu (Prosperity) would be better… And make it 72 Algiz… It allows the magic to follow better with the 75 Dagaz. All in all that really good work, Harry.”

Carol couldn’t even comprehend half of the stuff the young woman had just rattled down… The girl hadn’t even breathed once.

But apparently Harry and Eugene had understood her, because the chubby man looked a little less nervous now and the green eyed boy positively beamed at the praise. “Thanks.”

“But! The baseline is much too high!” The British witch interrupted. “For a baseline that high…”

“… I need to tap right into the leyline.” Harry told her calmly crossing his arms over his chest. “I know.”

“Harry! You can't just tap anywhere into...!” The witch in the mirror screeched in exasperated annoyance.

“Of course not, Mione.” He snapped back, dragging a hand over his tired face. “And I'm not going to. I planned on scouting for an old access point.”

“An old access point?” Natania raised her eyebrows.

“Yes. There should be a few old ritualistic sites the old native tribes and shamans used back in the days before the colonist came to America. I planned on feeling one out. I’m quite sure that there might be one in the woods between the communities. I found some old maps.” Harry explained pointing out a dozen old parchments that were littered in with lines. On one, someone – most likely Harry – had circled an area where four of those lines met.

“Quite deep in them woods.” Daryl grumbled roughly. He scowled at the piece of paper over Carol’s shoulder as if it offended him personally.

“Yes… and it will take a lot of concentration to track the access point… When I said I have to feel it out, I meant that literally. Since it most likely isn’t visible anymore…” The green eyed wizard sighed.

“Harry, that’s an incredible difficult thing to do! Do know how hard it is for a witch or a wizard to sense current magical signatures not speaking of century old traces? The books all say…” Hermione sounded very agitated.

“I know what the books say, Hermione! And I am telling you that I can do it! My sensitivity to magic has changed since Dumbledore decided to bind it for over two years… something that isn’t in the books, right?!” The green eyed teen snapped angrily back at the girl.

“Harry…” The girl sounded so weak… Had Carol ever sounded like that?

But Harry was on a roll: “So could you just once trust my bloody word over those damn books?!” He bit at her.
“You making her cry again.” Eugene sounded awkward, holding the pocket mirror so that Harry and Carol could see a teary eyed girl surrounded by a mass of hair.

“Merlin!” Harry immediately deflated and sighed tiredly. “Will you please stop that? I’m not trying to be mean here. I just want you to trust me. I am sure I can find an old access point, so that I can safely ask for a blessing for our communities. I am sure! And I worked myself to the ground to get the necessary research done as fast as I could so that I could protect…” Here the young man stopped abruptly.

Carol thought that he looked immensely frustrated by the situation. Maybe they had put too much pressure on his frail shoulders, if he thought that he needed to find solutions for all of them so badly. And considering the stricken face in the little pocket mirror the British witch on the other side of the pond might have thought so too.

“Harry, of course I trust you…” She whispered dejectedly.

“A small cleansing should be enough to help his senses along.” Natania interrupted briskly. “But he needs an escort, at least two people. He’ll be too distracted, tracking down the magical signatures to pay any attention to his surroundings.”

“I’ll go.” Michonne, Rick and Sasha offered simultaneously.

“Uhm…” Harry starred wide eyed at them and then to Daryl who already stood very close to the green eyed teen. The hunter glared at his family daring them to forget that he would go with the small wizard.

“I’m goin’ ta come with ya!” The hunter growled at the teen. The gruff declaration caused a sweet and warm smile to spread over Harry’s exhausted face.

“And the second?” Jesus asked carefully. The long haired man was staring at the maps. “I know the area quite well. I know at least one small hut out there.”

Carol could tell that he tried very hard to be casual about this but he was doing a bad job at hiding the longing and yearning look in those big expressive eyes he directed at Harry… and Daryl…?!

Besides Carol Rick was frowning. “Listen Jesus, I think…”

“It’s a good idea.” Harry interrupted putting a hand on the former Sheriff’s arm.

“Really?” The blue eyed man asked.

“Yeah, I trust them both to have my back.” Harry replied simply, making Daryl puff his chest out a bit and causing Jesus to grin boyishly.

OHO!

So this was how it was!
Awww! Well, looks like Pookie’s life had gotten immensely interesting!

Carol could see her best friend twitching and fidgeting under her amused stare, while trying to get her to stop by glaring at her. All it achieved was to make Carol grin more wickedly, as she watched a sweet blush creeping over Daryl’s face.

The moment was broken by rustling of paper and by Eugene’s monotonous, clipped voice.

“Harry, you know that you’re going to need a rooster for the blessing ritual right?”

**

Paul’s breath was caught in his throat. He could hear that Daryl had a similar problem controlling his lung function…

God damn it!

When Harry had told them about his plan two days ago he hadn’t imagined something like this…

But now he stood in the middle of nowhere and watched as the small wizard peeled himself out of his clothes.

His. Clothes!

Paul would have laughed at the small squeaky sound Daryl had made when Harry had pulled his shirt off after he had already taken his shoes off, if he hadn’t been rendered speechless himself by the sight of pale flesh and a beautiful body. The big starburst scar on the British youth’s chest was on full display now and Paul shuddered on the inside. He felt sick when he thought about the implication of that wound… a normal person without magic wouldn’t have survived an injury like that.

That scar was a reminder how close Harry had already come to dying … torn to literal shreds by his every own powers. Even before Paul had any chance to meet the small wizard with the beautiful green eyes…

And now he watched as slender hands started to working on the buttons of his trousers.
“The hell ya doin’?!” Daryl sounded adorably alarmed by the whole situation, causing Paul to snicker lightly, which earned him a very sour look from the hunter.

Startled Harry looked up at them stopping his undressing for the moment, which left Paul a tiny little bit disappointed…

Because, well… Harry was fucking beautiful!

“Uhm… Sorry! Maybe I should have warned you… Uhm… the more body contact I have with the environment the better I can sense potential magical signatures. The clothing would disrupt the … so it’s easier like this.”

“Ya’ll get cold.” Daryl grumbled blushing deeply, keeping his gaze averted to grant Harry some privacy.

“I’ll manage but I really need you two to keep an eye out for me. I won’t be able to focus on much else than tracking down the access point.” With a resolute nod Harry dropped his pants and Paul felt his mouth go dry and the familiar feel of heat pooling in his belly.

_Fuck, this was going to be a long, long trip._

And then the kid turned around and any sexy thought in Paul’s head evaporated just like that…

_Harry’s back!_

It was a battlefield of _scars_, criss-crossing over pale skin but what killed him on the inside were the bold letters someone had to have fucking carved into the skinny teen’s back:

_C L A I M E D_

*Thud*

Something hit his beany clad head.

Stunned he wheeled around only to be caught in Daryl’s slated, blue-eyed stare. The usually stoic man looked full of sorrow in the face of those scars, his lips were pressed into a thin line and with a
barely recognizable shake of his head he motioned for Paul to keep silent.

The long haired material arts fighter noticed that the hunter looked grief-stricken but he wasn’t surprised. The older man had known about this – he had probably even seen the gruesome scars before.

And in a way Daryl had already told him… back when he had panicked about Harry being shot. The older man had told him that he thought that Harry might never be ready for any form of physically intimacy because he had been hurt so much in his life.

But Paul hadn’t been ready to understand the full implications of what Daryl had been telling him back then…

And now… now he was getting a glimpse of it, a first horrible teasing taste of what Harry might have endured in his young life so far.

But Daryl was right. This wasn’t the time to talk about things like this… to tear at Harry’s scars. They had come here so that their brave, little wizard could work on the task of keeping their communities safe and Daryl and Paul were supposed to keep an eye on him – to protect him!

“I trust them to have my back.”

The memory of Harry’s soft smile when he had this to Rick… The double meaning of those words hit Paul like a truck.

The boy had known that he would do this… that he would expose himself like this, that he would lay himself bare like this…

And he had chosen Daryl and Paul despite that… or even specifically because of that?!

It… it was a humbling thought. Harry was trusting him enough to reveal so much of himself. And he was trusting Paul to bear the gruesome proof of the hardships this kind young man had already endured in his short life…

“I trust them to have my back.”

Harry was trusting him to see this and to get his task done.

So Paul forced his troubled feelings down. He took a few calming breaths.
Yes, he could do this! He would concentrate on protecting Harry for now. Freaking out wouldn’t help anyone right now.

Schooling his features, he looked at Daryl who was busy starring at Harry again. The hunter’s face mirrored his own struggles and heart-ache. When the hunter looked at Paul again both men shared a determined nod.

They could do this! They would protect their little wizard out here.

And there would be no new scars on the green eyed youth’s body after this!

“Are you both ready to go?” Harry asked his British accent softening his voice. And despite his inner turmoil Paul felt the right corner of his mouth twitching into a light smirk at the sight of a half-naked Harry. The teen had taken all his clothes off with the exception of a pair of black boxer shorts that were riding very low on thin hips.

Warm green eyes peered at them over a delicate shoulder and the hippie ninja could spot an adorable light flush spreading over his cheeks.

Paul couldn’t resist on sending Harry a teasing wink and a thumbs up. “Ready when you are.”

Daryl just grunted in affirmation.

*

They followed Harry for hours.

Daryl watched in fascination how the slender and skinny body before then moved gracefully through the woods. The wizard had eyes closed navigating only on his sense for magic traces in his surroundings. To be honest the hunter had been prepared that Harry would run into a few trees like that… but surprisingly that hadn’t happened.

What had proven to be a problem was the fact that Harry was walking around fucking _barefoot_... in a fucking forest.

Worried Paul and he watched as the teen’s feet looked increasingly bruised, scratched and bloodied the longer they walked.

But when they had tried to get the green eyed teen to wear his shoes again, he just had shaken his head with that strange faraway expression on his face.
It had been like this since the old hag from the Oceanside community had walked Harry through the cleansing ritual…

Which had consisted on fasting and a shit ton of herbal tea that had smelt so vile that it had them all gagging.

Carl and Paul had been the only ones brave or curious enough to taste test the swill. Daryl himself had lived long enough in a rat’s assed cabin surrounded by redneck trash to know if something smelled like shit you shouldn’t eat it… whatever it was, it wasn’t worth shitting and puking your guts out in the end.

And judging by the disturbing greenish-grey colour Carl and Paul had taken around the gills…

Carl had spit the liquid immediately out into the kitchen sink, while Paul had swallowed it down. But to be fair the Hilltop scout had looked like he had wanted to brush down his tongue afterwards.

The awkward shudders and the way the little ninja prick had danced around in disgust had looked pretty adorable.

“Oh my God! I have never in all my life…! How can anything be so… Urg!” Paul had cursed loudly. Harry and Natania had laughed out rightly at him and Carl.

“It will help Harry to open up his senses. It will strengthen his inner eye.” The old woman had smirked at them.

“Some good dope could have done the same. I’m sure I could get some of the good stuff.” The hippie had grinned with wiggling eyebrows.

“Excuse me!” Rick had barked at Paul, making the younger man jump a little. “Are you talking about getting my foster son high?!”

“A little bit of weed wouldn’t be the worst thing any of us did. And it would certainly smell better than that swill over there.” Daryl had grumbled lightly at his brother. Rick had kept silent after that but with the way he had continued to glare at Paul, the long haired man had won no brownie points with the potential in-laws.

“And for your information. Weed would useless for our purposes now.” Natania had quipped at them, before the British teen had grabbed a big steaming cup of the vile tea and had drowned the whole thing in one go in front of their combined horrified eyes.

But instead the dramatic reactions that Paul and Carl had shown, Harry had only crunched his nose up looking incredibly cute in his discomfort.

Poking his tongue out at Natania he had even smirked at bit. “Sadly, this isn’t even the worst tasting remedy I have ever had in magical world.”
Natania’s response had been a hearty laugh.

The rest of them had been caught in various degrees of disgust and horror…

The cleanse had been very physical…

After Harry had puked for two hours that afternoon the old hag had pushed the teen for an hour long under the ice cold shower that had left Harry shivering and pale afterwards. Daryl and Paul had been ready to call it to an end then and there but the green eyed wizard had just levelled them with a stubborn and determined glare. The look the old woman had given the hunter and Paul for their overprotectiveness had clearly questioned the existence of their balls.

Then Natania had proceeded to send a shivering and shaking Harry meditating with even more of that stinking tea.

With each step in the procedure Harry had seemed a little more… off. Strangely calm and his eyes faraway, seeing things that neither Daryl nor Paul could detect.

This new distance – it was uncanny… and it made Daryl heart clench in irrational fear of losing track of their little wizard. He could barely resist the impulse to grab the kid and hold him close if only to reassure himself that this precious person wasn’t going to vanish into thin air…

Paul’s presence eased the tight knot in his chest a little bit. And the younger scout seemed as anxious about this as Daryl. Considering of the man’s past… the prick had to be as afraid as Daryl to lose any of those few meaningful relationships they had been able to forge in all this mess.

Every now and then slated, blue eyes and bright, cyan ones would meet and to Daryl it felt like they were grounding each other, reassuring themselves that they weren’t alone.

That Harry was still there and that they would keep him safe.

They would have Harry’s back. But they would have each other’s backs, too.

With their resolves strengthened, they fixed their eyes firmly back on the slender and vulnerable body in front of them, killing approaching Walkers and other threats, like snakes lingering in the grass. For hours they followed Harry as the teen unwaveringly followed a trace only he could sense.

Deeper and deeper into the woods.
Daryl was pretty sure that not many people had come this far into the dense forest, not before the apocalypse and not after. Signs of human influence became less and less pronounced… The hunter could see that this part of the forest hadn’t been used or maintained in decades.

Completely untouched.

Almost primal.

Twice Daryl had shivered and had felt the compelling need to turn around. Paul had even stopped walking all together. In both instances Harry had opened his eyes to look back at them out of eerie green irises that glowed and glittered more that they had the right to, under the dark shadows of those big trees.

Without speaking the half-naked boy had come back to them holding frail and pale hands out to them carefully coxing them further on the path they needed to follow.

They saw no more walkers after that…

But there were… other things… lurking… watching them…

Not exactly malicious - but curious and taunting.

Daryl couldn’t completely fight the feeling off that their roles were now reversed and that Harry had become Paul’s and his protector. Whatever was out here with them was keeping its distance. But with the way the hunter’s hair stood on end… it wasn’t him or Paul that ensured that.

The long haired hippie had chosen to close shoulders with Daryl and they had both shortened the distance between them and Harry considerably.

After hours of walking through uncharted territory and the decreasing daylight, Harry suddenly stopped on a small meadow. They watched as the green eyed wizard heaved a deep sigh before he finally opened his eyes.

“We’re there?” Daryl asked hopefully, feeling his own exhaustion after the long foot mash.

Looking at Paul he snorted as noticed the way the long haired prick was starring transfix at Harry, still half-naked, but now blinking lazily at them… and thankfully losing some of that faraway look. It was like watching some waking up after a very long dream…

The beautiful warm smile that stretched over Harry delicate features made Daryl’s heart miss a beat. When bright and clear green eyes searched him out the hunter felt the tight knot in his chest loosening, so he could breathe finally easier.
“We’re not there… But close enough for the moment. I think we should rest for the night.” Harry finally answered. Only now Daryl noticed that the teen had started shivering, badly. Paul seemed to have noticed this too, because scout immediately slipped out of his long leather coat and wrapped the green eyed wizard’s half-naked form into the stupid-looking piece of clothing.

“Shit! Sorry.” Paul apologized for their oversight, as he took hold of the wizard’s hand.

“Damn, you’re freezing! The beginning of autumn is definitely too cold to run around so sparsely dressed, not that I’m complaining about the view.”

Daryl envied the easy going flirting Paul was sprouting, with a good-natured wink and warm smile that caused an adorable blush to rise on Harry’s pale cheeks.

The man managed appear totally at ease, showing nothing of his earlier shock and hurt over the state of Harry’s back, nipping every potential freak-out or bout of insecurities from the teen in the bud.

The hunter tried to pointedly ignore the strangle tingling feeling at the sight of Harry being enveloped so securely in Paul’s mantle, both of them standing so close to each other.

They looked beautiful together…

Slated blue eyed observed in nervous fascination how the ninja prick tugged an unruly raven lock behind a delicate ear. His mouth felt suddenly very dry.

And then two pairs of big bright eyes looked at him, glowing with warm and welcoming, beckoning him to come closer and to join them.

His feet moved without any conscious effort.

As soon as Daryl was close enough Harry all but buried himself against his taller and broader body with an heavy sigh of relief.

“Merlin, you’re so warm.” The kid groaned and Daryl had to agree with Paul, Harry was fucking cold.

The hunter could feel it, it was as if the cold was seeping through the leather of that stupid coat. With a huff he snatched that fucking hipster beany from the scout’s long, straight hair and pulled it on that unruly dark mop, causing Paul to laugh and the green eyed teen to yelp a little.

“Will take a while to make a fire.” Daryl grumbled, already scanning the area for fire wood.

“Oh, uhmm… that won’t be necessary! Can you hand me my wand and my cloak?” Harry stuttered.

“Huh? Oh, sure.” Paul hurried to comply.

Curious they watched as Harry pulled a miniature backpack out of his pocket that he enlarged with
a spell. Letting his hand disappear unnaturally far into the bag the wizard suddenly made a triumphant noise and produced… a tent.

“Stand back a little.” In seconds the tent had erected itself. Daryl thought that it didn’t look like much.

A fucking normal tent for maybe two to three persons but better than letting Harry sleep outside.

“Might be a tight fit for all three of us. I’m goin’ ta take the first shift.” Daryl mumbled but Harry laid a fucking cold hand on his arm.

“No need for that. I don’t think that a walker will come here but just in case… here I brought this.” It was a wire with empty cans.

“Well prepared.” Paul sounded impressed.

“Thank you” The youths green eyes were sparkling.

“But won’t we still need a guard for the fire?”

Shaking his head, Harry smiled. “That why I brought the tent. The less we disturb the forest around us the better for the ritual tomorrow. The blessing is all about respect, don’t forget that.” Harry told them seriously but he grinned at them mischievously. “Take a look inside the tent. You’ll understand better then.”

And understood he did…!

The tent was huge inside. A sarcastic part of Daryl’s brain noticed that it might be bigger than the cabin his family had lived in… and it was definitive better stocked – the fucking thing had a damn sitting room, complete with comfy armchairs and a fucking fireplace. He could see a kitchen and a bedroom… and was there a bathroom?! Staring stunned around he ignored Paul, who was jumping around like a kid on Boxing Day. The damn hipster certainly loved the decoration, with its warm hippie vibe.

“It’s warm in here.” Paul observed suddenly.

“Hmmhmm.” Harry hummed getting the fireplace to work, shooting a spell at the tea pot in the kitchen to boil some water.

Daryl watched as yet another shiver wrecked the teen thin body. “Still cold?”

“Y…yes, I…” Harry’s teeth were noticeably clattering. “I’m pretty exhausted, physically and magically. That’s probably the reason.” The little wizard admitted. When he noticed their combined worried gazes he hurried to assure them. “Nothing a hot tea, a fire and rest won’t fix.”

“Oh… I know something even more effective.” Paul suddenly plopped himself down on the countless colourful pillows and blankets on the floor, moaning in delight.

“Oh my God, I can’t remember when I have ever lain on something so comfy.”
With the coat and his hat already gone the young man chucked his boots off and quickly got rid of his shirt and his long combat pants. Daryl followed the example dressing down to his boxers and a thin tank top.

Transfixed Harry and Daryl watched as an excited Paul snuggled down with a moan of satisfaction. “You need a cuddle.” Declared the long haired man confidently. “And let me tell you I’m an excellent cuddler.” Mischievous bright cyan eyes twinkled up at them from under a mountain of blankets and pillows, causing Harry to laugh with an adorable flush on his face and Daryl to smirk.

Only hesitating for a second the British teen sat down next to the Hilltop scout, never letting go of Daryl’s hand he pulled the hunter down with him. Daryl’s heart was beating incredibly fast. He was extremely aware of Harry’s small and still cold hand in his own and Paul’s warm, slightly teasing expression inviting them both in.

He liked Paul… he really did but without Harry there, he would have never bridged the distance to the other man. Years of abusive conditioning through his father and verbally harassment and slurs through Merle would have never allowed the self-conscious man to even consider getting close to someone so dangerously enticing as Paul.

But Harry made all the difference in the world…

It had been like that from the very first moment Daryl had seen the small boy, abused and nearly broken. They had understood each other on a deeper level, not unlike the connection he had shared with Carol… but still somehow… more! When he had thought that Harry had died… when he had been unable to find the kid. It had nearly killed him as well.

Harry was everything to him. And the small wizard had laid his heart on the line when he had come back to them. Neither had said it out loud yet but… but their world rested on each other… and slowly Paul had come to into that picture, too.

And to Daryl’s complete surprise the pretty Hilltop scout didn’t just show an interest in Harry but in the both of them. The younger man had become someone Daryl would trust with his life and more importantly someone he would trust with Harry’s life and safety.

A light squeeze with cool fingers pulled him out of his musings. Big green eyes peered inquiring at him.

*A silent question if he was ok?*

Huffing a softly he pushed gently some wayward strands of unruly black hair out Harry’s eyes. He nodded.

*Yeah, he was ok.* Maybe for the first time in his life.

The slender wizard looked relieved.
“Everyone alright?” Paul asked carefully despite the excitement and teasing the scout was very careful with them.

This might have something to do with the awkward talk Eric and Aaron had forced on them…

+++ Flashback+++ 

“We need to talk to you about Harry.” Aaron stated firmly as Daryl sat down on the couch. While Eric had pulled Paul away in the kitchen, the long haired man had sported an amusing look of panic and had mouthed the words ‘Help me!’ at Daryl.

But right now the hunter paled himself in the light of Aaron’s stern expression.

Was this how it felt when you had to talk to the parents!? Almost instinctively Daryl started to glower at his friend, a small part of him hoped that a bad attitude would stop this awkward conversation right here and now!

But to his utter dismay Aaron just smirked at him…

Shit, his former scouting partner just knew him to well…

_Fuck! That’s what you got from making friends… more people to call you out on your own bullshit… Great!_

“He came here to talk about some of his worries.” Aaron revealed, his expression softening a little.

What?!

Surprised and a little hurt that Harry hadn’t come to him Daryl starred at his taller friend.

“Don’t look at me like that.” Aaron raised his hands in surrender. “Apparently being the only gays in the village makes us the Dr. Phil’s for all questions of normal homosexuality. Believe me this conversation had all three of us drowning shots of that burning fuel Harry’s calls Whiskey.” The curly haired man huffed in a deadpan voice that betrayed his exasperation with the situation.

Slightly intrigued Daryl grumbled in sympathy.

_Yep… no wonder kid hadn’t asked him._
Nervous he hoped Aaron would get to the point. He wanted to smoke, badly! Even better! To grab Paul and run back to the forest where nobody asked question or…

Aaron knew him to well, because the man suddenly sighed heavily.

“I’ll make it short. Harry knows nothing. Literally. He never experienced any normal urges, he never had the time to discover what he likes and what he preferences are… not until after. And now… it confuses him, Daryl. He’s afraid and rattled by the things he feels. Always afraid that they mean that he’s too broken for any kind of relationship.”

Daryl’s heart ached for the British youth and suddenly he was very glad that Aaron and Eric had been there to listen and talk to Harry.

And then cold dread settled over the hunter.

*How are ya fuck up suppoused ta help with that, Darlina?*

*What do ya know about relationships or being a fag, huh?* Merles voice snarled into his head, vicious but even worse he could detect a hint of *pity* in his brother voice.

“What… What I’mam supposed ta do ‘bout that?” He forced himself to say out loud, hiding his face behind his hair.

“Nothing much.” Aaron said gently, causing Daryl head to snap up.

“Wha…” He wanted to grouse angrily at his friend. What kind of fucked up game was this?

“You’re doing well with him. But maybe you two should talk a little more with each other?! Tell him how you feel.”

“He knows that!” Daryl grumbled. He could feel his ears burning.

“Maybe but I think he needs to hear you say it, too. As I said he’s not sure if he’s allowed to want what he wants… or already has?” The way Aaron wiggled his eyebrows made Daryl flush in embarrassment

“Ain’t like that! I would never… He ain’t ready… I would never hurt him…”

“I know he said that too.” Aaron grinned broadly. “I’m just messing with you. Call it pay back for making us have this discussions.”

Daryl scowled darkly at his friend’s teasing, but he was relieved to hear that Harry had told Aaron the same.
Maybe… Fuck, maybe they did need to talk about… their feelings and shit! Groaning he let his head drop back against the couch cushion.

“So now that we talked about Harry. What the fuck is going on between you two and Jesus?”

Fuck, it all! He was so done talking to Aaron. He needed a smoke.

++++ Flashback end ++++

In the end Daryl had just jumped up, ignoring Aaron’s teasing sniggering and had just quickly grabbed a flustered Paul by the scruff of his neck and had all but dragged the other man out of the kitchen.

They both had been flustered afterwards but Paul had been a lot more relaxed since then…

There had barely been anymore moments when the prick had hidden behind his Jesus persona. Daryl had enjoyed Paul’s more genuine attitude.

“Yes, but I can’t get comfortable in the leather coat.” Harry huffed at the hippies cuddle invitation.

“Then take it off.” Daryl told him lightly, closing his eyes. This was really comfortable.

“Uhmm… I…” Harry stuttered.

“What’s wrong, sweet heart?” Paul asked gently.

“Is it alright if I wear a shirt?” Harry whispered, causing Daryl and Paul look up to immediately. The teen was beet red and badly flustered.

Aaron’s words played through Daryl’s head.

Yeah, the kid doesn’t know anything.

“‘Course ya can, darlin’.” Daryl grumbled his voice rough with emotion.

“I told you before you can always tell us to back off and if you like a shirt to be comfortable then you should wear one.” Paul responded calmly. Hearing their confirmation Harry jumped up and shed the coat, to cover himself quickly into a long sleeved, oversized shirt. As soon as he was covered Harry sighed in relief, tension bleeding out of him.

Sheepishly he paddled bare feet back to them. But Paul just lifted the covers between himself and Daryl, opening a spot for the slender teen.

Still quivering a little with exhaustion and cold, Harry hurried to his place between them.
“Ya good now?” Daryl couldn’t help but ask still a little worried that this would be too much for the wizard.

“Yes” Harry sighed as he wriggled under the blankets under Paul’s amused gazes. Making sure that Harry was seeing what he did, the scout grabbed the teen and settled him closer to his chest, while motioning Daryl to come closer. When the teen was finally safely sandwiched between them Harrys sighed in contentment.

“You’re both so warm. It’s nice”

“Glad to be of service.” Paul teased, using shamelessly the opportunity to bury his nose into Harry’s raven hair, causing the teen to giggle as stray hairs tickled his neck.

“You’re sure talk a lot.” Daryl grumbled good-naturedly at them.

“Does this bother you?” The long haired scout asked carefully. “I’ve been told that I tend to come on too strong sometimes.” Daryl could tell that the man tried to keep a neutral tone but the nervous glimmering in his eyes betrayed his worries.

“Nah. Since ya stopped with the Jesus attitude bullshit, it’s alright.” Daryl hummed, hoping to soothe some of Paul’s unease.

“I like it when you tell us things, Paul.” Harry whispered, expression gentle and warm, causing the man to flush prettily.

“You and Daryl are the only ones calling me Paul, why?”

“Can’t speak for the kid, but I ain’t calling anyone that stupid nick name of yours. Ya ain’t Jesus. Yer Paul, so I’m calling ya Paul.” Daryl glanced up to the younger man, trying to gauge his reaction. “I can keep callin’ ya prick throu’, with ya more happy with that?” He deadpanned.

His answer was a wet chuckle. “Did you, Daryl Dixon, just make a joke?” Bright cyan eyes glowed in happiness.

Daryl felt the small vibrations of Harrys laugh against his chest.

The hunter couldn’t hold the tiny satisfied smile back that stretched over his lips.

This was good. And it felt so right.

“Yeah it does.” Paul whispered back.

*Fuck!* Blushing to the tips of his hair Daryl cursed under his breath. He had said this out loud. Tentative small hands settled on his chest and apprehensive green eyes starred at him.

“I think so, too.” Harry spoke softly. The admission was a barely audible gasp. “Is this alright for us to feel like this?” The insecurity in those big eyes made Daryl’s heart throb painfully.
He wanted to say yes… that this was alright, because it felt so good. Because they all felt the same… but the words didn’t come.

He saw his own hesitation reflected in Harry’s bright eyes… could see the kid fall into himself.

“Of course, it is alright.” Paul spoke up from Harry’s other side. His words felt overwhelmingly sincere.

The Hilltop scout laid a protective hand on the blanket covering Harry’s stomach, not possessive but reassuringly holding the British youth close, while his other hand searched for Daryl’s hand over Harry’s head.

And somehow it felt like Paul’s small gesture was holding them together right now.

In this moment Daryl understood that Paul was offering them his all.

Right here and now.

It was in his big eyes, in his warm smile and in his gentle touches. Paul had seen how life had messed with them, how it had marked them inside and out and yet he was here.

Offering.

Because it felt right. It felt whole.

“I don’t want to lose this. Please!” Harry whispered almost pleadingly.

Swallowing against the tightness in his throat Daryl rearranged his arms so that he could encompass both Paul and Harry more securely.

“Shh. You won’t. It’s alright, darlin’. We’ve got ya.” The hunter soothed, pressing a small kiss against the green eyed youth’s temple, allowing his right hand to run over Paul’s side. The answering smile of the long hair ninja was beautifully breath taking.

Teary cyan eyes glowed with overwhelming emotions.
I promised more fluff and here it starts!!! ^^

Please don't be too upset with Harry about his arguments with Hermione but he was really desperate and exhausted... ^^'
I apologize beforehand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 28

“I can’t remember when I last went camping. You know with a real tent and without undead corpses threatening to eat you at any moment.” Paul mused after a while. “I think the last time I was nine. Tom had wanted to go on a trip. We guys loved it. Sleeping outside, exploring, playing around. But mum hated it. She didn’t want to ruin it for us so she suffered quietly. She was great like that.” Paul chuckled softly drawing small patterns on Harry’s clothed arm. The long haired scout seemed very content.

It felt like something had settled in all of them after their breathless confession that this—this closeness between them—was something they all wanted and craved.

Harry felt a lot calmer now.

*It was ok to want this.*

*He wasn’t broken.*

And neither Daryl nor Paul pushed for anything more than they did right now.

*Cuddling.*

“That sounds nice.” Paul offered carefully, nimble fingers caressed the hunter’s dark hair.

“They used ta camp all the time.” The older hunter mumbled. “Merle used ta take me out inta them woods. Told ma all these wild stories making it an adventure.” Daryl grumbled, his voice wavering a bit under the assault of fond memories with his brother and an old bitterness.

“That sounds nice." Paul offered carefully, nimble fingers caressed the hunter’s dark hair.

“That sounds nice.” Paul offered carefully, nimble fingers caressed the hunter’s dark hair.

“Hmmm... Showed me all kinds of stuff. Finding shelter, building snares, hunting, surviving…”
Daryl hummed. “It was ‘fore he left for them army.”

“Merle was a good older brother then?” Harry could hear how badly Paul wanted to know more about the usually silent man, but he was also still unsure how much he was allowed to ask.

“He was an’ he wasn’t. Did what he could… think he really tried but he was also an ass. He was away a lot. Army, prison, his gang, always doin’ shit, talkin’ shit…” Daryl revealed with a huff. “But he was ma brother despite all the dumb stuff he said and did. Despite that his words hurt me. He was the only one…” Here he stopped talking for a moment, clearing awkwardly his throat.

“It wasn’t good but at least it was something?” Harry asked softly, voice full of understanding.

For a moment it was very still.

“Yeah.” Daryl croaked, his voice raw with emotions. “At least it was sumethin’.”

“Being alone and being ignored hurts so much more than the hits and slurs.” Harry agreed. “No matter how bad it was at the Dursleys… I don’t think I could have left them… because there was nowhere else to go. And the thought of being all alone in the world…” Harry shuddered. “At least it was something.”

“After Merle was gon’ I realized that he didn’t take me out for fun but ta keep me away from the old man drinkin’ and ragin’.”

“So when he left…?” Paul’s face showed that he had already guessed what the answer was.

“The old man had a new punchin’ ball then. No more of my ma or Merle takin’ the brunt of the anger for me.” Daryl revealed sombrely.

“Your dad was a mean bastard.” Harry groused against his chest, felling indignant and angry for Daryl’s sake. He could feel Paul trembling on his other side and knew that the long haired man shared the sentiment wholeheartedly.

“Thanks, darlin’.” The hunter rumbled, his eyes hidden behind his fringe. Placing a tiny kiss on tip of Daryl’s nose Harry didn’t commented on the slight tightness in the man’s throat or the wetness in his eyes. “What about yerself? Ever been camping?”

“I went camping with the Weasleys once. The family of my best friend Ron. But it ended in an attack so it wasn’t much…” Harry sighed when he thought back to the Quidditch world cup and how it had ended.

“An attack?” Paul asked alarmed.

“Yes… it was at the Quidditch world cup Death Eaters had been torturing muggles. It was awful. I remember how terrified they were. Everyone was in panic. Hermione, Ron and I got separated from the adults. Spells were flying and we were so helpless. But in retrospect it was hardly the worst I’ve seen… what has been done to me.” Harry laughed a little bitterly.

“You’re talking about the captivity aren’t you?” Paul stroked a hand over his unruly hair.
“Hmmmhmm.” Harry hummed. He could feel the weight of their gazes on him.

After a heavy pause, Daryl exhaled loudly.

“Ya never said much about it… but I remember how ya said once that Len and the claimers haven’t been the first ta hurt ya like that.”

It wasn’t a question… and Harry knew that the hunter was too considerate and too set on giving Harry his privacy to ask him outright. That was one of things he loved the most about Daryl!

His sweet loyal Hufflepuff.

Harry had said it to Aaron and Eric – he was sure that Daryl would respect very line he drew. Daryl would never willingly hurt him.

“He wasn’t.” The small wizard confirmed after a moment. His tone carefully light and open.

Giving both men the silent permission to ask about the topic.

“That Dolohov guy ya talked to Natania about… was… was he… ya know?” Daryl asked in a pained voice, taking the hint. Harry decided in that moment that he would stop running away from those memories. If he wanted a future with these two men then he needed to talk about what had happened in his time with Voldemort.

“He hurt me. Tortured me with glee. He did that too… but he wasn’t the first.” Harry whispered.

“Oh sweetheart… He wasn’t?” Paul asked sadly. The man sounded dejected.

“No. The man… that did it was a spy. A double agent for the headmaster. He didn’t want to… not really I think. I just hated him at the time.” The small wizard tried to explain.

Instinctively he fell back into the breathing exercises Denise had taught him so long ago.

Forcing himself to keep his eyes open and to take notice of all the tiny details that differentiate the present from the basement he had been tortured.

“You knew him? About him?” Even without looking Harry could tell that Paul was frowning in concern. If asked he probably he could have drawn every deep line that had etched itself in the man beautiful face.

“Not about him being a spy. But yes I knew him. He was one of my professors at school.” Harry sighed. He hated thinking about Snape… his feelings for the man were just too complex. But the man would probably always be a red flag for him.

“What?” Daryl barked out while Paul stared at the youngest in shock.

“One of your teachers?!”

“Hmmmhmm, and we had already bad history with each other.” The small wizard battled the impulse to drift with the undertow of his memories of fathomless black eyes, that were threatening
“How so?” The way Paul’s finger raked through his hair felt really nice, sighing deeply Harry tried to explain who Snape had been for him.

“He was an absolute jackass to me and other students. A teacher, who lived more by principle of tough love than actual teaching. Strict, snidey comments, playing favourites. I lost count of the detentions I had to serve because I talked back or because he was punishing me for small mistakes that he ignored in others.”

“Sounds like an absolute dick. Reminds me of ma old chemistry teacher.” Daryl shuddered.

“Hmm… Now I think that it wasn’t even about me. He went to school with my parents. I found my mums journal when I went back to London last summer. My dad and his friends bullied him – badly I think. He used to be friends with my mom… but they lost contact to each other in school. He had gotten deeper in the dark arts, started to run in the wrong circles. She was sad to lose him. And I think he was in love with her.” That part of the story had made him always sad. Sad for his mum, because the boy she had written about, had sounded nice… and a bit like Harry. But also sad for Snape himself who had lost his first true friend and who hadn’t been able to overcome his own drive for power and acknowledgement, that had stirred him right away from the girl he had probably loved.

“Wow… Shoudn’t a grown man be able to put this behind him, if he decides to teach children?” Bright cyan eyes were angrily. Harry knew that the man had taught children himself material arts, so he guessed Paul knew the challenges of interacting with students a bit.

“You would think so.” Harry laughed bitterly. “He’s a bastard. But I think he had no intention to even be there that day. Dumbledore always had his ways to manipulate people… He… my teacher… came to Voldemort a week after I was captured. And I don’t think it was purely of his own violation. Voldemort was sure as hell suspicious about where his allegiance lay so he used me as test of loyalty. He demanded that Severus showed his devotion to him and the cause… by raping me.” He had to take very deep and deliberate breaths now. Both of his fists were ball tightly into Paul’s and Daryl’s blanket searching desperately for something to ground him.

“Shit. That’s fucked up!” The Hilltop cursed violently and despite everything something close to a hysterical giggle escaped the small wizard.

“Yes it was… In his own way he tried to soften the blow. He made me dissociate with a spell… but I can’t say that it made anything better. It felt horrible. To know and not able to feel. It was like helplessly drowning. I was so angry at him.” Harry whispered, with a strange hollow feeling growing in his chest.

“You were? Not anymore?” Paul asked softly.

“Yes... No... I know rationally that he saved my life. If he had refused to rape me Voldemort would have killed him on the spot, no hesitation. He was the only one who could have told the headmaster and my friends where I was held and how to free me. He had had to do what he did… He saved my life. But I can neither forget nor forgive what he did to achieve that.” Harry hiccupped. This was the first time he had said this out loud. The first time he openly acknowledged his contradicting feeling about Severus Snape.
“Oh sweetheart, no one can expect that of you!” Paul stroked his cheek. “It was horrible what he had to do to you. “

“Fucking bastards. I ain’t give a shit ‘bout their shitty reasons! Nothing makes this ok!” Daryl suddenly barked out, making both Paul and Harry jump a little. But instead of feeling startled by the outburst, the small wizard felt a little more awake, pulled back to back into their safe heaven.

His throat felt still too tight to speak so the green eyed boy just grabbed wordlessly the hands of the two men beside him and smiled at them, hoping to convey the message this way.

*Thank you!*

Paul placed a very light kiss on his temple “Thank you for telling us. This can’t have been easy.” The long haired man praised the British youth warmly. Daryl grumbled in agreement, his blue eyes swimming with so many emotions, that Harry blushed bashfully in response.

“I want you to know that you can always talk to us. We’ll always listen, okay?” Paul added after a while. Daryl just grunted in agreement but Harry had seldom needed words with the hunter.

“Thanks.” Harry whispered shyly. It occurred to him then that he had once offered Paul something similar, after he had walked in on him and Alex. He remembered how Paul had spoken of his problems connecting with other people and how he had always problems to get close to others.

“Are you ok, too?” Harry couldn’t help himself to ask the long haired man in worry.

His response was the softest and warmest smile he had ever seen on Paul face. And Harry nearly choked in the light of all things he found in those big cyan eyes.

“Yeah. I’m ok. More than ok, actually.” The ninja confirmed happily. “Aaron and Eric pulled us away for a very, very uncomfortable talk you know?” He added teasingly in an afterthought.

“Circe! They did?!” Harry squeaked alarmed, starring wildly from Paul to Daryl.

“Yup.” The younger man replied with a popping ‘p’, while the hunter just blinked bashfully a the tent’s ceiling.

“Oh my… Merlin’s saggy balls.” Harry groaned, causing Daryl to snort loudly at the odd phrase.

“Why?” Harry whined deeply embarrassed.

“Because they were worried about you… and us, I think. I don’t know for sure what Daryl and Aaron talked about but Eric… he was concerned about my intentions towards you two. Apparently Mr. tall, dark and grumpy here, taking me hunting had gave them nearly an aneurism. And when you think that Eric is a nice harmless guy, you’re badly mistaken! He grilled me endlessly about what I wanted from you two, threatening my balls and everything holly to me if I messed with any of you.” Paul relayed lightly.

“Fuck, Eric can put ya quite through ta wringer if he wants ta…” Daryl winced in sympathy.

“Yeah, he made it very clear to me that I should back off unless I was in it for the long run.”
Smiling the bearded man looked at them and Harry’s breath caught in his throat at how pretty the man looked right now.

“Paul I’m so sorry. I talk to him.” The small wizard replied anxiously, hoping desperately that Eric hadn’t pushed too much. He could feel how tense Daryl had become at the new information. “I know you said that you had problems in past relationships with…”

“Hush, don’t fret.” Paul interrupted his rambling kindly. “I seated more in that talk, than I like to admit. And yes, Eric pushed skilfully all my weak points. And yes, I thought about backing off…” Harry thought that his hear was about to shatter. He didn’t know how much more it could stand. Forcing to concentrate himself on those earnest cyan eyes he kept listening. “But all those questions made me realize that I had already started to open up to you two – more than I have in a long time. Backing off wasn’t an option. Not anymore. And probably never again.”

The young wizard swallowed with great difficulty “So this.” Harry motioned between the three of them. “Doesn’t make you want to run away screaming?” With Hopeful green eyes he starred at Paul, who just smiled a little brighter at him.

“No. Honestly it makes me want to get closer still. No flight-risk what so ever. I promise.”

Paul had just promised to stay. That he was in this for the long run.

In their own way these beautiful men had declared themselves to him. Harry’s heart was beating painfully fast. It felt like it was expanding, filling out his whole chest.

Harry wanted to sob in relief and happiness.

He loved them.

And they loved him back.

**

The rest of the night had been spent cuddled together, sharing warmth and comfort between the three of them. Sometimes they would talk about small anecdotes from the past – some funny, some sad and some just everyday facts of their lives – learning more about each other.

They heard about the hard life Daryl had lead with his father and brother. Paul and Harry had snickered when the tall hunter had told him about the poison ivy incident but at the same time both of them had made sure to cradle the man securely against them, because they also hurt for the small boy that had nobody looking out for him.

Daryl and Paul laughed about Harry’s stories about Hogwarts, Ron and Hermione. They supported him when shivers of grief for a life, long gone and lost, wrecked his slender frame, interrupting
moments of happy reminiscences.

Daryl and the British wizard listened intendent as Paul spoke of his lost twin brother, how they had played pranks together, how they had fought with each other and how they had made up again.

Wide eyed Harry listened how both men used to party before the world had ended, sharing stories about drunken benders. Some of those had Harry blistering in anger when Daryl revealed how Merle had used to throw drunken women at his brother ‘to get his dick wet’. Or when Paul told them about nights filled with booze, weed and anonymous men that had threated the beautiful ninja like a used tissue.

The stories had been told in amusement and neutral tones by the Hilltop scout but they had Harry rolling on top of a startled long haired man. The green eyed youth had grabbed Paul’s face in both of his hands and had stated very firmly:

“Never again! You hear me! Promise me! Promise me that you’ll never again let anyone treat you like that. You’re worth more than that!”

Bright cyan eyes had become impossibly wide at that. Harry had been able to see how heavily Paul had swallowed; so many different emotions had been running through the scouts eyes.

“I promise, sweetheart.” Paul had sounded breathless when he finally answered. He looked a little dazed but the warmth in his expression had Harry’s heart welling up in love and adoration. Following his spontaneous impulse he lowered his head to give the man under him an Eskimo kiss.

“Thanks.” He whispered against Paul’s lips not quite daring to close the last distance there.

He could feel Paul shakily exhaling against his skin.

This was nice and at the same time Harry started to feel the familiar sensation of ants crawling over his skin. Forcing himself to keep his eyes open the green eyed wizard tried to keep his breathing steady as he began to pull every slowly back from the older man.

“You alright, kid?” Daryl rumbled soothingly.

It must have shown on his face that something was wrong, because now both men were watching him with cautious concern.

“Ah… his magic.”

It had wrapped itself again around the hunter, covering the man intimately like a second skin. Harry could see that Daryl was flushed to the tips of his ears, embarrassedly clearing his throat.

“Yeah… sorry.” Harry muttered breathlessly. Before he peered a little dazed down at Paul, who looked to be in a very similar state as Daryl…
Blinking to clear his vision a bit more Harry realized that his magic wasn’t only wrapped around the hunter but also around Paul… caressing with humming tunes and little sparking sensations all over the cyan eyed man’s body. Even though he had increased the physical distance to Paul and Daryl, with his magic acting as an extension of himself he could practically taste both men.

He could feel what his magic playing in curious ripples over their toned bodies – exploring every inch, every scar, every dimple… –did to them…

Blue and cyan eyes were half lidded, shaky exhales puffed from enticingly flushed faces… Paul had started to squirm… a tell-tale hardness was forming under the blankets…

“Merlin, I’m so sorry! Bloody hell!” Harry stammered, trying to regain his composure. His heart was beating so fast and there was an underlying excitement cursing through his blood.

What he had felt then… to touch them both like that…

Harry swallowed heavily.

“Wow…! That was… intense” Paul finally choked out, voice raw. Daryl grunted in agreement.

“I’m so sorry!” The wizard repeated meekly.

“Oh sweetheart, don’t worry. That was far from unpleasant, quite the contrary.” Paul winked reassuring. “But I think that went a little further than you’re ready to go yet, right?” He asked kindly as he very slowly moved to touch Harry’s face, giving the younger one time to pull away. Harry closed his eyes as Paul’s warm hand stroked soothingly over his face and nodded mutely.

Yes, this had gone way too far for him. Excitement and dread were still churning in his guts.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to imply… I’m not ready. So sorry!” He whimpered.

“Ya have nothing to be sorry for. ‘kay? We know, darlin’.” Daryl rumbled smoothly. Harry could feel the hunter’s strong presence behind his back, as rough and calloused hands were stroking over his neck and tense shoulders. “We know. It’s alright.”

“Yes. We wait for as long as you need.” Paul agreed easily.

“What… what if I’m never ready?” Harry whispered anxiously.
“Then nothing happens, sweetheart. As easy as that.” Paul’s thumb stroked lovingly over Harry’s cheekbone.

“Come on, let’s get some sleep.” Harry could feel the tension draining away from him and he sank slowly against Daryl’s broad chest. The hunter settled the green eyed wizard back between them.

“Alright, ya two?” The gruff man grumbled at them.

Harry had only enough strength left in him to hum in agreement, while Paul gave a quirky ‘yep’.

All three of them made sure to cuddle close to each other, providing comfort and stability.

Their gentle hands, the steady beats of their hearts and even breaths slowly lulled the British teen into a deep sleep.

***

The next morning came with fresh air and the last hint of morning dew.

The sun had come up yet because Harry had said that the ritual needed the first rays of sunshine.

As they got ready for the day the changed status of their relationship could be felt and seen in little touches and gentle gestures between all three of them.

Daryl was surprised how much Paul seemed to like touching both him and Harry. Touches between him and Harry had always been very careful, hesitant even… sometimes the most they had managed had been those little almost-touches. Like two hurt hedgehogs that were afraid to hurt each other or themselves if they got too close, too fast.

The long haired hippie was somehow a lot more carefree in his approach. He still made sure not to startle them too badly but whenever he closed the physical distance between them, he did it with bright eyes and a warm smile that made Daryl’s heart beat a little faster.

They hadn’t said the words last night… but they were together now.

And he was pretty sure that they were falling in love with each other.

Had been for a while now.

It should have been strange… with the three of them, but somehow it seemed easier like this to Daryl. Like Paul had brought a new lightness into their interactions. And it made the hunter a little bolder, too.

So when Paul came out of the shower – because, of fucking course there was a shower in a magical
tent – clad only in his boxers and a long shirt, smelling fresh and clean, the hunter had pulled the long haired Hilltop scout against his chest. Smirking a little when Paul had made a sweet “eeping” sound but had relaxed against his taller frame, laughing happily at the contact.

“What a nice view.” Harry had commented teasingly from the tent’s entrance. “Are you ready? The sunrise is in about 30 minutes”

“Yeah. I’m ready.” Daryl had hummed smoothly. To the hunters surprise Paul had groaned in response. The Hilltop hippie had then the gall to laugh at his confusion.

“I really, really liked the sound of your voice just now.” Paul had admitted with a sheepish smile and a sweet blush on his face when he had noticed Daryl’s bashful scowl.

* 

Harry had forgone his shoes like the day before, but at least he wore his cloak over his boxer shorts today. The teen had been right the night before their destination wasn’t far from the camping site. On a small meadow they stopped.

The trees seemed to have avoided growing in a 30 feet radius forming a perfect circle around something that looked like the remains of an old stone circle.

Time and weather had eroded a lot of its structure but Daryl could still make out the three circles, the stones that were still standing, were mostly overgrown by moss and ivy. The blue and red tones of the twilight gave their surroundings an uncanny atmosphere… old, mystical.

And the blued archer wasn’t sure if they were welcome here. It was awfully quiet around them… There should be a lot more noise in a normal forest…

The lack of sounds made the hunter in Daryl shudder in unease.

Without words Harry showed him and Paul were they should stay for now. And both men noticed that they were still in some distance to the first circle. Harry wanted them obviously out of the way for the ritual.

They watched on as Harry glided to the primary stones and summoned one of his Goblin daggers with a graceful flick of his wrist. Daryl hissed lowly through his teeth as the slender youth slashed both of his palms, not even flinching. Unconsciously the hunter had even taken a step forward only Paul grabbing his wrist held him in place.

Warily he looked back at the younger man. Paul’s pretty face was a grimace of determination, with furrowed brows and teeth worrying on a plumb button lip. He was forcing himself and Daryl to let their small wizard do what he came for, to trust him. But what hit the hunter like a truck was the terrified angst and concern in those big cyan eyes.

Yeah… Paul was just as afraid for Harry in this unknown, foreign place, where they held no
Cursing under his breath he interlaced his fingers with his long, haired hippie boyfriend.

Fuck it all!

He could do this! He could trust Harry to do this and be fine afterwards. And he could be strong together with Paul, without losing his shit and ending up doing impulsive and reckless shit.

They could do this!

And then they would go home.

Together.

They watched on as Harry kneeled before the stones and pressed his bloody hands on them, softly mumbling so low that they couldn’t make out the words he said. But Daryl was pretty sure that it wasn’t any form of English. The tones were too smooth, too interwoven and had a strange rhythmic to them.

It sounded a bit like a song…

As old and as mystic as this place.

And then something answered the wizard’s call.

A guttural purr filled the silence around them.

This was nothing like the bee-like humming of Harry’s magic… This was so much deeper.

So much more powerful.

They had hoped that this would happen… but now that it did… That something – big and powerful – was really answering to the British teen’s call…

Instinctively Daryl pulled Paul closer to him, wishing desperately that he could do the same with Harry. But their fearless wizard was raising his hands and head in greeting to the old powers he had woken up after centuries of slumber. With bloody fingers Harry traced two small symbols on the moss covered stones before he rose gracefully to his feet.

Harry’s cloak whispered as he stretched both of his arms out, his bloody palms turned up to the sky in a humble gesture, his face raised a little to the east where the sun was about to emerge.
The deep purring softened into a low humming that resonated deeply in all living beings around the area.

*A Greeting. A curious invitation.*

Harry stepped over the first line of stones. He joined the humming in the air again with another soft chanting, moving with sure steps along the first circle. The slender teen stopped every now and then to draw further symbols with his blood onto stones or the places where one used to be, all the while the power around them gained steadily in pressure. When he had completed the first circle Harry kneeled again, repeating the process of slashing his palms again to offer more of his blood to the stones.

The red liquid dabbled the moss…

Daryl heard Paul hiss in concern and he had to grind his teeth to keep himself from rushing to Harry, who continued unwaveringly with the ritual of walking through the second stone circle. Every once in a while he would stop and scribble runes on stones until he kneeled again, before he finally stood before the headstone of the third circle.

Daryl could hear Harry’s soft muttering as the teen drew quickly six big runes on the stony surface before him.

A bout of wind that ruffled through unruly dark hair seemed to answer the small wizard.

With a look of deep concentration Daryl felt the familiar sensation of Harry’s magic rising around them. And then the young wizard stepped inside the third stone circle. Without waiting any longer the green eyed youth pulled a stunned rooster out of one of his cloak pockets. Daryl and Paul had searched for the stupid thing with a lot of trouble. Finding a living rooster these days was no easy task.

Just when the first teasing ray of sunshine breached the tree crowns Harry enervated the big bird... startling it into a high and surprising loud bout of crows.

“Poor Eggbert.” Paul sighed solemnly and Daryl shivered a little as warm breath tickled his neck.

“Ya gave the stupid thing a name?” The hunter groaned.

“Of course. He was one hell of a dumb chicken... God, it was ridiculous how easy we caught him once we found him. He at least deserved a name.” Paul mumbled and after a small but weighted pause he added: “Later he's going to be sad that he had to kill Eggbert, you know?”
The hunter pulled the shorter male a little closer against his chest. “Yeah…”

Harry would be sad... The kid still got upset about such stupid shit... Squeezing Paul's shoulder in comfort he hoped that their little wizard would be OK after all of this.

Light started pouring into the meadow... And it seemed to gather in the third stone circle where Harry stood...

_Damn._

Before the wizard’s slender and only half-dressed form – splattered with stray drops of blood and bleeding hands – a tall figure formed.

The thing seemed to consist only out of pure blinding light and its shape resembled roughly a human’s...

Daryl thought that he could make out a head and two slightly too long arms. The hunter could feel the straining tension of Paul muscles under his fingers. Neither of them dared to breathe nor to take their eyes of Harry's frail silhouette before the towering ancient entity.

The humming rumbling had gained in intensity. A sound that was equally greeting as it was inquiring. With all hairs on his body standing Daryl shuddered... 

This being was powerful... Very powerful...

It could _help_ them or _destroy_ them... Easily.

Stupefied in horror he watched as the being touched Harry's chest right above his heart. And then as easily as if the British teen was made out of butter… its appendage disappeared inside wizard’s body until it had pierced him completely, reappearing through the boy's back.

There was still a look of soft, startled surprise on his face as the small teen slumped forward into the entity's arms.

_Blank_...

_There was nothing in Daryl…_
Until…

“NOOOOOO!”

The wounded sound that had ripped itself from Paul's mouth let Daryl’s heart stutter to a painful halt and his head into the excruciating process of working again.

Fuck... What?!

This... couldn't be!?

He's OK... Harry had to be alright! He had to be. They had just... Last night! They had just started...!!!

This couldn't be how it ended!

He couldn't think. He couldn't speak. He couldn't move... Literally as he had to realize...

Fuck!!

Squeezing his eyes shut in overwhelming pain Daryl couldn't do anything but holding Paul's quivering body as tightly as possible.

*

Paul felt like he was dying.

He couldn't tear his eyes away from the terrible sight of Harry's prone body pierced on arm of that creature. Daryl’s strong arms were the only thing holding him still upright but even his tough hunter was shaking in uncontrollable trembles.

The slack body... Like Tom.

No... No... NO!? NO!! NO!!!!!!!!!!!

Oh God! Please!

This couldn't... They had just...

Please! Please! Please! Please!!!!

And as if it had heard his mute pleas the luminous figure holding Harry turned to them. The way it titled its head seemed like curiosity. A new inquiring rumble filled the air as the pressure of magic increased.

Fear

Paul couldn't remember when he had been this...

A trickle of cold sweat ran down his back and his whole body trembled. No walker had ever made him this... afraid. He wanted to take Daryl and run...

Run as far as possible from this terrible place.

But even if he had been able to move... How could they ever leave Harry behind...?

A choked sob escaped him.

God...Harry...!?

What were they supposed to do now?!

Desperate tears burned in his eyes and he felt how Daryl pulled still him a little closer.

Please! He begged. Whatever this is, do not to take Harry from us!

A strange crooning sound accompanied by the excited buzzing of hundreds of hornets filled the air around them and Paul's eardrums gave away with a soft pop under the increasing pressure around them.

The shining figure had turned its attention on him and Daryl now.
Suddenly Harry’s hand moved and their little wizard grabbed the creature and managed to raise his head enough to look up at being face.

“Wait!” The British teen sounded alarmed. He seemed to be in a lot of pain, his voice was rough and barely audible over the buzzing magic around them. “They’re... They’re not like me... Y... You can’t touch them...like this... Please! Don’t... Don’t hurt them... Please!”

He was begging for them. Pieced through the chest and in pain Harry was still begging first and for most for their safety.

Paul felt the distressed howl about their helplessness that vibrated through Daryl’s body into his own more than he heard it.

With great effort Harry raised a badly shaking hand to touch the shining light. Paul could see how pale their little wizard had become. A sheen of cold sweat had started to appear on his face. They watched on as a look of deep concentration made Harry furrow his brows and suddenly it seemed like he was glowing too.

Amused crooning sounds added to the excited buzzing noise.

Blinding light was filling the meadow.

Suddenly Paul saw a beautiful red haired woman.

She was sitting in front of big window, a small baby boy with raven hair sat on her lap. Yawning widely the child looked drowsy and content just listening to her sweet singing, playing sleepily with a long lock of flaming hair. A tall and lanky young man with glasses stepped carefully into the room. He placed a small kiss on his wife's head and caressed his son's chubby cheek with a gentle finger, causing two pairs of green eyes to peer up at him.

“I love you both so much.” Paul heard him mumble. And the bearded man thought that the young father sounded adorably star struck with his little family.

The scene was gone as fast as it had come.

“Please tell me you've seen that too?!” Paul rasped with great effort to Daryl. At the hunters stiff nod he sagged in relief.

*Good,* that meant he wasn't going crazy.

“The littl’ on’. ’t was Harry.” Daryl rumbled with great difficulty. But before Paul could grasp the whole implications of those words they saw another scene.

A cottage at night... A post card picture of cosiness and vintage beauty. Until a tall, hooded person disrupted the peaceful place. The young father from before tried to intercept the predator that had come into his home, trying to give his wife and son a chance to escape. He died so quickly in a
A rush of green light… Paul could hardly grasp it.

A life gone just like that… no struggle… no wound… just a light and a life was gone. The beautiful red haired woman was next. She tried to plead for her child’s life, begging for mercy… but without avail. Paul felt a tear trickle down his cheek when her lifeless body dropped to the floor.

And then the monster turned to take the small infant that starred uncomprehending at him with impossible big, green eyes filled with innocence. The child hadn’t understood yet that his whole world had just changed and that his loving parents were already gone now. Daryl cursed violently and his grip on Paul’s arm grew uncomfortably tight as they heard the same incantation that ended the young couple’s life and then green light filled the room…

But something was different. The curse didn’t kill the child instead the whole first story of the cottage exploded, taking the attacker out… leaving only a hysterical crying child behind.

There was no pause now.

In quick succession scenes and pictures appeared around them.

They saw a tiny and skinny child huddled in a cupboard under the stairs, playing with a shabby little knight that was missing a leg. A tall, thin woman was snarling at the boy who stood on a step to reach the stove and a fat man barked at a quivering child, rough hands shaking it, only to throw it unceremoniously into the cupboard, locking it in.

Slaps, a frying pan swung at the child’s head, angry words and hisses.

No food, no gentle touches, never a nice word… no care.

The rush of pictures increased… too fast a grasp everything but general emotions and impression.

Letters.

A castle. A school.

A bushy haired girl with too big books and a lanky red haired boy with a big family.


Praise. A place to belong.

Family.

A shabby and tried looking man, with scars. Werewolf. Remus.


And then darkness… unthinkable pain… hurting… failing… loss!
No friends.
No school.
No family.
No magic.

Dead everywhere… alone… again pain… hurting… falling apart… dying.

And then like a ray of light in a world filled of darkness Paul spotted a pair of familiar sky blue eyes, filled with pain and sympathy. Gone too soon to really make a difference but a reminder of light, a breeze of fresh air when he had been suffocating.

**Rick.**

But instead of being swallowed in darkness a new light refused to leave Harry’s side. Rough looking, but with slated blue eyes gentle and patient.

“Please, stop trying to look out for me…”

“Can’t. Just can’t bring maself ta look away.”

“You asked me to hold on and… I haven’t given up yet. I’m still trying, more than I did in a long time…But I promise to keep trying, alright?”

**Daryl.**

There was still pain and hurt in these memories but also so much hope and happiness that Paul forgot how to breathe for a moment.

Befriending **Carl.**

**Michonne** taking care of the lost and hurt teen.

“I want to be stronger. I refuse to fall prey to anyone else again, be it walker or men.”

Tough **Carol** pushing him to become stronger.
Bob and Tyreese. Grieving with Sasha.

Singing with Beth. Joking around with Noah and Tara.

Judith reaching out for him. Singing her to sleep

But the hunter’s broad shoulders were the one thing those big green eyes had focused on to move forward.

“Now you’re our sick kid!”

Rick offering him a place and protection.

“You’re family. And family will always come first! We look out for each other. None of us is going to leave you behind. I did it once… I left you on the carpet of that bedroom and we’ve both knew since Terminus that I wouldn’t be able to do that again. I can’t sacrifice one of us for the greater good, because we all are the greater good. You’re part of the reason we’re still here.”

Helping Glenn and Maggie. The kind Korean and the young woman looking out for him.

“At this point we make it together or not at all!”

Abraham refusing to leave him behind, carrying him. Eugene and Rosita.

“I was dead the moment I was captured by Voldemort. And I died every day after. I wasn’t alive for a long time… It was them that woke me up again.”

Harry’s voice filled Paul’s head.

Warm and soothing. And so full of love.

Aaron and Eric.

Kind words and understanding. Accepting his questions. Smiling with adoration at their new daughter.
“They’re good people! They deserve to live. They deserve to be safe!” The soft spoken British teen pleaded to the shining figure, showing it scenes of Negan’s terror.

The Kingdom.

The Hilltop.

The Ocean side.

Alexandria.

“These are good people! Please, they survived so much already! They just want a chance.” Harry tried to bargain further. “Humanity needs help or what is left of it will perish into total destruction and cruelty. I beg of you. You’re magical children are already all but gone form the face of earth.”

The response was that of a grieving mother. The nature around them wailed in despair over the loss of so many lives.

“They accepted me. They protected me. These people are my friends and family.” Harry told the ancient being firmly. “Please! I want to protect them, too. I can protect them if you help me. Please, help me to keep them safe.”

The small wizard shared all the adoration and warmth he felt for his family, pouring it out with the light around them filling the meadow.

“Doesn’t matter if ya don’t belong with these assholes. ‘Cause ya belong with us now!”

Daryl!

Daryl was the one that had pulled Harry out of that deep dark abyss. Harry was alive because of Daryl.

“He led me to a family. Since we’ve met, he has given me the hope and the courage to hold on. He gave me a family.”

Then there was Paul, himself.

It was strange to see himself through another’s eyes.
How his bright cyan eyes sparkled in the sun as he and Harry moved in a mock fight. To see the small dimples on his cheeks when he smiled. The way he buried his head into soft raven locks as he held Harry close. His own voice reading ‘the Hobbit’. Fighting in the hay with Harry and Daryl.

Paul smiling at Daryl encouragingly. Him and Daryl hunting together.

The three of them cuddled together in their tent.

“They’re my soul and my heart.” Paul could only feel wonder as Harry whispered those words.

_Fondness, devotion and love_ resonated deeply through the pictures Harry revealed to the luminescent being, showing much of the moments the three of them had shared.

Their small touches and gentle gestures.

The spoken and silent promises they had given each other last night.

“I beg of you. Please give us your blessing. We need you!”

“And _I shall answer your plight._” The voice that answered was neither distinctively male nor female, it was neither loud nor quiet, but it was all around them, smooth, warm and benevolent.

*

Harry hadn’t thought that it was possible but this hurt worse than the Cruciatus, every inch of his skin was burning. When he had prepared for the ritual he had thought that _he_ would tap into the leyline… not that the powers of the _leyline_ would tap into him.

_Bloody... Fucking... Merlin's tits..._

That they had made that mistake showed how much wizards had neglected this old powerful being.

The ancient being had pierced him through the chest very close to the heart. And Harry could feel its presence everywhere in his body flowing through all his magical chancels. It was curious in his search in a disquieting neutral way. Having woken up after spending centuries forgotten and ignored it held no real interest in humanity.

Harry could very well feel its pain… Its children had forsaken the old entity for easier ways and in a search for more power they had turned elsewhere…

Neither muggle nor magical humans had cared for the being – that most texts called Mother Nature – in a very, very long time.
And now it showed them the same neutral disregard…

His heart had nearly stopped when it had turned its attention on Daryl and Paul. Harry had been able to see them through the eyes of the being – huddled together frozen in shock and terror. He had just instinctively known that should Mother touch them, they would burn out! Their bodies wouldn’t just hurt like his did, it would destroy them.

So Harry had gathered all his strength and had pushed back over the connection. Memories, thoughts, emotions… It didn’t matter!

It just didn’t.

Anything to satisfy the ancient being’s curiosity and maybe… hopefully… to convince it to offer them its blessing. And to keep its attention away from Daryl and Paul.

He projected years of memories…wildly throwing them out…

And it seemed to work.

Harry felt the magic around and inside him changing. He had caught the Mothers attention.

_Thank, Merlin!_

And like any good mother, it was devastated over the things her children had to suffer. The small wizard felt the shiver of disgust and pain when he showed Mother the thousands of dead that feasted on the living and that now walked the earth. But he also revealed that not everything was lost. Harry showed it everything.

His family. His friends. His _heart_ and his _soul_.

And finally he got the response he had hoped for…

He had gained Mother’s approval and its blessing.

He could feel the pain ebbing away, leaving only warmth and encouragement. Bright glowing magic enveloped him whole and incredible rushes of power filled him.

Harry was overflowing like a too small cup. If he didn’t start directing all the energy soon he would simply burst. And this time there would be no chance of his body recovering… like it had happened the last time.
Taking a deep breath Harry pictured the map he had made with their four communities in his head. He started with the territories in the east surrounding the Hilltop, imagining clear borders. In his mind he drew a line north encompassing the Kingdom until he continued the process to the west to the Oceanside and then down south to Alexandria.

When he had finished the protective circle Harry crouched down on the ground and drew the last runes in the sand before him.

\begin{itemize}
\item\textbf{Mannaz} (Family)
\item\textbf{Algiz} (Protection)
\item\textbf{Fehu} (Prosperity)
\item\textbf{Uruz} (Strength)
\item\textbf{Gebo} (Love)
\item\textbf{Sowulo} (Health)
\item\textbf{Dagaz} (Happiness, success)
\end{itemize}

Harry arranged the runes into a stable circle before he drew and eighth rune into its centre \textit{Perb} (Rebirth, fertility, magic) and with that he pushed all the magic that had started to gather in him into the runes and the earth that would carry the Mother’s blessing.

\textit{It had worked!}

He had managed to work the power of the leylines. The stones around him were glowing and fey lights were dancing all around the meadow. The tall luminescent figure in front of him withdrew her arm form his chest, leaving no trace behind that it had ever been there in the first place.

“You did well my child. The blessing needs to be renewed once every twelve full moons.” Mother pressed a last kiss on his forehead before it vanished.

Leaving behind a meadow filled with fairy lights and sunshine.

\textit{It was done! They had done it!}

Harry was brimming with power and excitement as he turned to look back at Daryl and Paul. The two men looked still frozen, shock and astonishment clear on their faces. And then very slowly the terror and worry that had paralyzed them melted away like snow in the sun.
It gave away to knee buckling relief and gratitude, the small young man could see how both of them sagged against each other, but they didn’t look away from him. The green eyed wizard bathed in the warm and love Paul’s and Daryl’s eyes held.

And with that all three of them started to move at the same time.

Spurred on by a blazing heat he had never felt before Harry ran to them and all but threw himself into their waiting arms.

These two men were his _heart_ and his _soul_!

There was no overthinking or planning this anymore.

_They just were._

Driven by this new insight he gave Daryl one long and hard look, before he pulled the taller man down. There was no finesse in the way their lips moulded themselves against each other but to Harry it felt _perfect_. He could feel how surprised Daryl was, but after a moment of shock the hunter responded – it was slow and hesitant. The other man even sighed into the kiss as if all the tension was bleeding off him.

And Harry loved every second of it. This was who Daryl was.

His lovely, grumpy Hufflepuff.

But this wasn’t all. With small peck he drew back from Daryl’s mouth, pulling a sweet grumbling protest from the flushed looking man.

Still held securely in hunter’s strong arms the small wizard turned his head to Paul who was staring at them with wide cyan eyes full of want and adoration, his pretty face flushed.

The Hilltop scout didn’t need any prompting and there was certainly no hesitation in him. The long haired man practically flew into their shared embrace and as he laid his left hand on Harry’s cheek the young wizard found his own need met with the same urgency.

The kiss was different but no less wonderful.

Where Daryl had been shy and careful, taking his time to explore the new territory, kissing Paul was like jumping into a whirlwind. His full lips were soft as they skilfully and surely moved against Harry’s own. Paul was where everywhere at once, changing direction and speed constantly. His beard tickled.

And just when Harry had decided that suffocating by kissing sounded like a perfectly acceptable death, the Hilltop scout pulled back, allowing them both to draw a much needed breath.

The pure happiness that sparkled in those big cyan eyes had Harry laughing in light-hearted
contentment.

“Finally.” The green eyed teen whispered. He couldn’t remember when he had ever felt this jubilant as in this moment between these two beautiful men. Paul grinned broadly at the small wizard before he looked up at Daryl, who looked a little dazed. But there was also that barely noticeable and absolutely wonderful little smile tugging at the corners of his mouth that made the hunter look ten years younger.

Harry watched how Paul couldn’t resist any longer and pulled Daryl into another kiss.

And wow… just…wow…

They looked **magnificent** together.

Daryl’s rough and handsome features against Paul’s pretty fine sculpture face framed by his long hair and the nicely groomed beard.

The hunter looked so sweet as he flushed a little deeper under Paul’s skilled ministrations. The hunter had his eyes closed and his hand around Harry’s waist flexed repeatedly as if he was unsure what to do with it.

As Paul pulled back he laid his left hand on Harry’s neck, both shorter men leaning against Daryl’s broader frame.

“Yes, finally.” Paul whispered a little dreamily, while Daryl hummed in breathless agreement.

Right now Harry’s heart felt too big for his chest.

This was perfect.

Chapter End Notes

I can’t agree more with the boys!! XD the working title for this chapter was actually ‘Finally!’.

Getting them together and to kiss now was something I really anticipated and I think some of you did so too ;)

I really hope you liked it!! ^^ And that I didn’t mess this up too badly :)

The next update will take a little, because my vacation is over now and life has me back now ^^’ And since it’s now my colleagues turn for a vacation… it’s very likely that I’ll be back to working overtime next week.

Next chapter will be fluff, fluff…, some time to rest and settle for our boys and some smut (light) before we were back on track with the last planned arc of the story. ^^
Rick squirmed in his seat like a school boy which earned him a nudge between the ribs from Michonne and a snigger from Carol, while Natania just raised an unimpressed eyebrow at him.

Damn it, but that tough old lady was giving him creeps. When they had stormed her community to rob their guns he had been... well, kind of in the... zone. Harry had once called it his fight-mode. Rick had had no problem to face her then... Fuck, he had threatened to kill her even...

But now...

Sitting here on his porch, delicately sipping tea… Natania with her stiff and resolute attitude, she terrified him.

It was like sitting in the school library with Shane all over again, with old Mrs. Nickels hawking down at them. That woman had always known if you had given back one of her books dog-ears just by looking at you. Shane had once guessed that she could smell the guilt on them.

‘Richard.’

Every time Nataina called him that in that crisp and short tone of hers he jumped a little.

God in heaven!

Only his grandmother on his mum’s side had ever called him ‘Richard’ and only if he had been up to something... It made him feel like he had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. And to
make matters more he had gotten the distinctive impression that the old shrew knew all too well what she was doing to him... Rick glared half-heartedly at her as she smirked into her tea cup.

Suddenly Natania raised her head to gaze to the east. A look of pure wonder transformed her hardened features into something softer.

“Natania?” Carol asked in confusion.

“Oh hush, child. Can't you feel it?” Rick barely held the childish impulse back to snigger and stick his tongue out at Carol when the grey haired woman looked a little petulant at being called a child.

But then he felt it too...

Something warm that had nothing to do with the late summer sun filled the air. It wasn't even a real temperature reception... More like the feeling of getting tugged in at night, of soft hands caressing your face... A warmth that came from the inside rather than from an external heat source.

This was family, friendship, loyalty.

This was safety and stability.

This was the promise of protection and prosperity.

“Wow.” Michonne sighed, a broad smile illuminating her beautiful face. And now that he looked at her, Rick realized that he was smiling just the same way. A breathless chuckle escaped him and he had to lower his head as a traitorous wetness gathered in his eyes.

“What... What is this wonderous feeling my friends?” Ezekiel asked.

And Rick noted that the other man held his head unashamedly high as he too cried.

“Harry.” Natania stated simply, laughing happily.

*  

A call form a teary eyed Glenn and a beaming Maggie a few hours later confirmed that the effect of the blessing had been felt in all the communities.

Harry had done it. He had gained the blessing and with it the old protection for all their communities.

And now they waited.

They waited for Harry, Daryl and Jesus to come back home.

In the late afternoon Aaron and Eric had come over for a drink while Beth, Noah and Carl were on
babysitting duty for Judith and Gracie. Rick’s daughter had proven to be very curious about the younger baby and as long as Harry wasn’t there she behave very well with Gracie. The blue eyed man was a bit miffed that his daughter had no problem sharing all everyone’s else attention with the baby but raised hell when Harry dared to play with Gracie in her presence.

When the car finally returned Rick’s heart nearly stopped for a second as they drove right up to the Grimes’ house. Normal they parked the cars at the entrance…

And then only Daryl and Paul got out of the car.

With fear and dread were rising in his chest Rick hurried down the porch followed by Aaron and Eric. When they reached them, Paul was holding the rear door open and Daryl was very carefully gathering Harry’s limp body into his arms. Seeing his foster son so unmoving and pale… it brought old concerns to light, when the boy’s health had been so very fragile that they all had feared he would die any day. Only the calm way Daryl was handling Harry reassured Rick that the wizard was still alive. Worried they watched anxiously as his brother settled the small teen securely against his chest.


Daryl only grunted non-committing, completely focused on getting his precious cargo inside the house. But Jesus put a calming hand on arm of the auburn haired man.

“Nothing too bad. It worked out in the end but there were some…” A dark look clouded the usually bright eyes of the Hilltop scout, before he shook his head and dragged a hand over his tired looking face. “… some unexpected developments.” He finished unhelpfully.

Rick scowled at the younger man for his evasive answer.

“Look, Harry’s alright but he’s exhausted himself quite a bit with the ritual.” Jesus sighed finally. “He fell asleep as soon as we reached the car and his feet are still quite sore from walking around barefoot, so even he had been awake Daryl would have carried him.” As he spoke some tension drained out of the young man and Rick could detect a small, fond smile playing around his lips as he peered at Daryl’s broad back.

But something was odd… There was a strange, nervous hesitation in Jesus that hadn’t been there before the trip.

“Sorry, my friend but that explained nothing.” Aaron frowned at Jesus, who watched distractedly as Daryl was about to bring Harry inside the house. Just when the long haired man opened his mouth to answer Aaron, Rick’s brother looked over his shoulder.

“Yer coming or what?” The hunter grumbled at Jesus. It could have sounded harsh but there was a surprising softness in Daryl’s blue eyed gaze.

Rick blinked a little bewildered. This was an invitation… He was sure of it.

And somehow this seemed to be the thing Jesus had been waiting for, because just like that his strange mood evaporated and the hippie ninja hurriedly followed Daryl with a beaming smile and a
little skip in his steps.

“H…Hey!?” Rick manged to yell after him, causing both him and Daryl to stop again. And while his brother just glared at him impatiently, Jesus looked busted.

“Huh? Ummm…” Well, nice to know that Rick had the same effect on someone as Natania had on him.

“Give the interrogation a rest, Officer Friendly.” Daryl rebuked him gruffly. “Our report can wait till tomorrow, after we all had something to eat and slept.”

Rick frowned a little unhappy but relented. He trusted Daryl and if he said that it could wait… then it probably could.

“Oh… I’ll tell Olivia that Jesus is staying. She’ll get one of the guest rooms ready for him…” He stocked when Jesus now looked like a deer caught in the headlights, swinging his head from Daryl to back to Rick, mouth opening and closing without a real sound. To the former Sheriff’s utter astonishment his brother cleared his throat awkwardly.

“That ain’t necessary. Paul’s staying with Harry and me in the attic.” Daryl mumbled with his shoulders defensively drawn up and his slated blue eyes glaring defiantly at them, daring them to disagree. All the while Jesus slumped in relief and quickly skipped over to Daryl with a very pleased expression on his face, causing his brother to flush bet red and to duck his head.

And before Rick’s brain could process with had just transpired there, both men had hurried inside with Harry.

“O…Okay… What has just happened?” Gabbing like a fish he turned to Aaron and Eric. And while Aaron looked like he had a small stroke, his partner was grinning like a loon in excitement, slapping his boyfriend’s shoulder repeatedly.

“I told you so. I told you so.” The slender auburn haired man sung, laughing when Aaron cringed a little.

“Well, congratulation. You’ve won the right to do the talking in the next three awkward conversations with Harry.” The tall curly haired scout deadpanned.

“Oh come on! It makes sense, don’t you think?” Eric teased his partner, before he winked at a very confused Rick. “Not to mention hot.”

“My God, Eric! I didn’t need that picture in my head.” Aaron squeaked miserably.

“Lalalalalalalalalala! I’m getting our baby now!” He announced with as much dignity a grown man, pressing his hands against his ears and the skin colour of a tomato, could muster.

And as a sniggering Eric followed Aaron, who stomped off with a happily babbling Gracie, Rick stayed behind on his porch feeling more confused than ever…

The wheels in his head turning…
The pieces of the puzzle falling slowly into place…

“Hey, dad?” Carl asked casually from behind him. “Are Daryl and Harry now in a threesome with Jesus?”

**HUH?!**

With budging blue eyes and his jaw hanging open Rick gapped at his 16-year old son, who leaned demonstrative relaxed against the door frame.

“What!?” He choked out.

“Jesus just went up to the attic and Daryl said that he would stay there with them.” Carl offered as an explanation.

“I… I… What!?” The former Sheriff stuttered.

“Oh come on, you must have noticed that Jesus has been interested in them for ages.” Carl snorted.

“What!?” Rick’s brain refused to work. “I mean, yes, I noticed his interest in Harry for some time… and he and Daryl were friendly… They have grown close, sure. But… that doesn’t mean that… I don’t think even Harry and Daryl are… that… so… uhm.”

“It’s Daryl and Harry, we’re talking about.” His son shrugged. “Daryl doesn’t let people this close, dad. And Harry… we all know it’s difficult for him, probably always will be. But they’re both relaxed when Jesus’s here and they let him close. Harry chose him *and* Daryl to accompany him into the woods.”

“When you say it like that…” Rick sighed.

His head was reeling. Daryl was a lot older than Harry and the green eyed teen had been hurt beyond imagination… Under normal circumstances the situation would have been hardly acceptable but months ago he had come to the decision that as long as his brother and Harry were happy that he could live with everything that developed between them… did it really matter if Jesus joined the picture now?

To his own surprise Rick came to the conclusion that it *didn’t*…

He wanted Harry and Daryl to be happy… and if someone deserved to be happy than those two.

And if Paul Rovia made them happy who was Rick to say or think otherwise…

Exhaling heavily he looked at Carl again. “I don’t know what’s going on between them, to be honest. Would it bother you if they were?”

Carl crunched his nose up, deep in thoughts.
“Not bothered per se… but worried?” His son offered carefully after a while. “I mean Jesus is a good guy but I don’t want to see Harry hurt… I know that Daryl can look after himself. But how can we be sure that he’ll take good care of Harry? Will Harry and Daryl move to the Hilltop, now? What if we don’t see him and Daryl anymore now?” Carl looked at him. His one blue eye filled with concern for his friend. Rick couldn’t say when he had been that proud of his son.

“I guess we can’t really know …” He finally sighed. “But we can just try to support whatever makes them happy, huh? And if one of them looks unhappy, we’ll help as well as we can. How does that sound?” Rick bumped his shoulder against Carl’s, causing the teen to smile at him.

“You’re so lame, dad.” The boy mock groaned before he hugged his father tightly. “It sounds good. Thanks, dad!”

Rick ruffled Carl’s long brown hair lovingly in response.

*

The next morning found the extended Grimes family and all the ambassadors in Rick’s kitchen as Paul and Daryl came down for breakfast. The Hilltop scout stopped for a moment in the light of so many people but the broader hunter shoved his boyfriend just into the room and pushed him unceremoniously into the next free stool.

“Uhm… Hi… uhm, good morning?!” Paul chuckled nervously.

“Yes, good morning, young man. It’s nice to see that you’re finally rested enough to give us a report.” Natania laconically greeted back them.

“Uhm… yes, sorry.” Paul cringed a little at her tone. Daryl handed him a cup of coffee and settled against the counter behind the long haired ninja.

Sipping carefully on his hot drink Paul tried to collect his thoughts. The tense silence in the kitchen grated on his already strained nerves. He had no idea how to behave now… There hadn’t been time with Harry to discuss what they were going to tell the other about the ritual let alone about the new relationship status…

And the fact that Daryl was probably the world’s master in sitting out socially awkward situations in stoical brooding silence, meant that he had dawn the short straw right now.

Just when Paul thought that Rick would implode in impatience, his saving grace entered the kitchen in form of a small, slightly skinny and absolutely beautiful British wizard.

Paul could feel his intestines unwind a little at the sight of Harry, partly in relief that he didn’t have to explain what happened at the ritual and partly because just the presence of the green eyed youth made his heart flutter with happiness.

He still couldn’t belief that he was now included in the wonderful thing between Harry and Daryl.
That he belonged now.

After blinking a little owlishly at the assembled people, Harry waved a little sheepishly, quipping a cheerful ‘Good morning’ at them. Before he ducked his head and made a beeline for Daryl, who held another cup of coffee out to the teen.

With an appreciative hum and green eyes gleaming with mirth Harry stood on his tiptoes he placed a quick peck on the hunter’s lips. “Thank you, Daryl.” He mumbled at the now furiously blushing man.

Paul already knew then that he wouldn’t be left out… but it was like watching a car crash. So he just looked on dumbly as their little minx took his mug out of the hunter’s hand and sauntered leisurely over to himself. The wicked gleam in Harry’s eyes promised mischief. Paul exhaled a little shakily as the slender teen plopped down in his lap and greeting him also with a small kiss.

And damn, if that small peck didn’t made him want more.

“You didn’t want to break the news a little more subtle, hmm?” Paul laughed breathlessly into Harry’s shoulder as he felt the heavy and shocked gazes of the teen’s family and their allies on them.

“Nah…” The British teen drawled out in a perfect imitation of Daryl. “I refuse to waste any more time or energy to worry and second guess this any longer.” Earnest green eyes searched for his gaze, before he also looked reassuringly at the hunter behind them.

Settling comfortably against Paul’s chest the teen turned around to face the music.

“You wanted to know about the ritual?”

“Yes please, Potter! As happy as I am for you I have no inclination to be up to date with your relationship status.” Natania sated drily, making Ezekiel next to her choke on his tea.

So Harry relayed the events during the ritual, informing everyone that their plan had worked for now but that the ritual needed to be repeated once a year.

“Ya need ta do this again?” Daryl scowled unhappily.

“Uhm… yes.”

“Will it hurt you like that again? Can’t someone else do it the next time?” Paul asked concerned.

“It hurt you this time?” Sasha asked in alarm. “Jesus, you told Rick yesterday that Harry was fine.” The beautiful woman glared at Paul accusingly.

“Because I am alright now. It caused no lasting damage.” Harry tried to placate the upset woman. “But we… I misinterpreted something in the old texts. I thought the ritual would allow me to tap into the powers of the leylines… As it turned out it was the other way around and the powers tapped into me. It didn’t injurie me per say but it was far from comfortable.” The small wizard winced a little, rubbing his chest in a bout of phantom pain.

“I would say so.” Natania snapped, but despite her rash tone there was worry in her expression.
“And it means that none else can do the ritual. Harry, I don’t know if you realize this but even most wizard would simply combust or burn to ashes if something so powerful would ‘tap’ into their bodies.”

This new information let Paul’s stomach sink in belated dread and fear.

They could have lost Harry yesterday… while they had just stood there unable to do anything but watch. Instinctively he pulled Harry closer against him, reassuring himself that their little wizard was still there with them, that he had survived the ritual. Behind them Daryl was growling like a caged tiger and a thickly muscled arm curled itself protectively around Harry and Paul.

“Calm down, please!” Harry patted the hunter’s arm soothingly. “It’s alright. Everything went fine.”

But the Hilltop scout had the feeling that the Brit was burying his smaller frame more firmly against him, resting all his weight securely against his boyfriends. So Paul just sighed and let his head drop into the crook between Harry’s neck and Daryl’s arm.

“So you’ll be repeating the ritual next year.”

“Looks like it.” Harry confirmed lightly like he had already accepted that he would be hurt again for their sake.

But what rattled Paul the most was Natania’s obvious concern.

“No wonder you were so exhausted yesterday… How are you feeling now, Harry? No sugar coating it.” The old woman inquired her face set in deep worry lines as her grey eyes scanned every inch of the slender wizard.

“I’m still tired and my body feels a little strange… Not quite hurting but aching?” Harry shrugged and Paul thought that he could hear Daryl’s teeth grinding at the careless gesture.

“Anything else?” Carol asked, eyeing the raven haired teen suspiciously.

“My head hurts…a little?” Harry revealed somewhat hesitant under the sharp eyes of these two formidable women.

“How much?” Carol asked with narrowed eyes.

“Uhmm… It’s alright… maybe 6 or 7 out of 10? Nothing too bad, I swear. But my… vision gets a little blurry from time to time?” Harry offered haltingly and Paul could see Carol’s and Natania’s jaws working in tension.

Damn it!

“You should have told us that right away.” Carol berated the teen sharply. Alexandria’s former den mother made sure to check Harry’s temperature and the reactions in his pupils. When she found nothing out of the ordinary she sat down next to Ezekiel with a huff.

“Sounds like a serve case of magical exhaustion, at least. Have you taken a pepper-up or a magic-replenisher?” Oceanside’s leader sighed unhappily when Harry shook his head. “Where is your potion kit then, you reckless brat?”
“Uhm… in my workroom, but you don’t have to… I can go myself.” She waved him off.

“No! Do all of us a favour and stay in your boyfriend’s lap. If possible I would like to avoid having you collapse on us.” She snapped in exasperate irritation.

Blushing a little Harry nodded, looking bashful but Paul sighed in relief apparently the old woman knew what to do even Daryl seemed somewhat less tense.

As Natania left the kitchen Paul had the feeling that everyone was watching them with hawk eyes. The atmosphere in the room was filled with amused astonishment and curious awkwardness that made Paul sweat with nervousness… even if it held no anger, no outright disapproval or contempt.

He could only imagining what a picture the three of them made. Daryl hovering protectively around them with his tall and muscled frame, every inch rough and dangerous looking. Paul with his smaller and leaner stature, neatly trimmed beard that hid his baby face, his long, straight hair flowing down his back and Harry, so much younger than them, skinny and frail looking and so breathtakingly beautiful, with his pale skin, his dark raven hair and those impossible green eyes, curled into his lap and their shared embrace.

Carl had observed their interactions until now with a light frown that seemed to stem more from worry than anything else but now as Harry closed his eyes tiredly and Daryl raked his fingers through the raven locks, offering comfort to the exhausted teen, Paul thought that he could see that Rick’s son was quirking a tiny smile.

“What’s going to happen now, Jesus? Are you going to continue to live at the Hilltop?” Carl asked anxiously, his lips pressed into a thin line. “Will you take Harry and Daryl with you?”

“Carl…” Rick groaned at his son, but the blue eyed teen ignored his father and looked apprehensive from Daryl and Harry to Paul.

“I mean Maggie and Glenn already live there with Sasha and Abraham…so they wouldn’t be alone…”

Oh… but he would be…The kid was afraid of losing even more of his family.

Paul’s heart constricted in sympathy for the young teen. There weren’t many children or teenagers around Carl’s age left, making friends had become incredibly hard now.

“But… we haven’t talked about that yet to be honest… But you should know that neither Daryl nor Harry are things that I can just take with me. We’ll come to a decision to together.” He tried to calm the down upset boy. Looking up at Daryl, he searched for the hunter’s blue eyes that gazed at him warmly and satisfied smile was playing around the older man’s lips. Against his collarbone he could feel Harry hum softly in agreement.

Paul felt a little bad in the light of Carl’s obvious relief that his family wouldn’t leave Alexandria so soon.
And that was it… wasn’t it!?!  

Daryl and Harry had family here in Alexandria – people they loved and who loved them in return, while Paul had just drifted in and out of the Hilltop. He had been like a ghost never staying long enough to carve a solid place for himself there. He liked the people there, had enjoyed the possibility of a community but… he had never taken the leap to settle there. Things had changed a little since Maggie and the others had come to live at the Hilltop but even those new friendships hadn’t been enough to ease the ever-present unrest in his chest that made his skin itch and crawl with the need to be on the move before he could get too close.  

The anxiety that came with loving and being loved in return.  

The overwhelming fear to lose that little that made his heart beat.  

Those feelings that had been his constant companions since the car accident that killed his family…  

Those feelings that only ever calmed when he was with Daryl or Harry. Harry, whom he had promised to stay…  

Oh…  

So maybe it was that easy…  

With a new lightness in his chest he eased back into the chair.  

Yes, in the end it probably was that easy.  

Chapter End Notes  

There will be two small timeskips in the next chapter so I thought that it made sense split it here ^^  

I hope you enjoy it :)
I apologize beforehand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

So here is chapter 29 part 2 ^^ more fluff XD and some light smut, that I marked as such so you can skip it if you don't like it ;)

++ Time skip++ Winter++ J

“Oh the weather outside is frightful
But the fire is so delightful
And since we've no place to go
Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!

Shows signs of stopping
And I've bought some corn for popping
The lights are turned way down low
Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!

When we finally kiss goodnight
How I'll hate going out in the storm!
But if you'll really hold me tight
All the way home I'll be warm...”
Happy giggling could be heard from the living room, followed by a few happy hums as small kisses were probably sneaked in between the song’s lines.

Daryl sighed as he watched the silently falling snow from the kitchen window. The last months had been eventful and calming at the same time. Maggie was now six months pregnant and glowing as she ruled the Hilltop with the efficacy of a general. Deana and Rick had been right. The young woman was perfect for the job. Glenn had taken to following his tough wife around, worrying nearly constantly that she wasn’t resting enough.

But they were all nervous for the new little one to arrive. Especially since Harlan Carson had lost an arm because of a walker bite just a few weeks ago on a run. They had been able to save the man’s life but he had been badly handicapped since then. Enid had started to train as his apprentice, but…

Nobody was sure if it would be enough… if the good Doc would be able to work through the delivery now. So it had been decided that Daryl, Paul and Harry would move to the Hilltop when Maggie would reach her eighth month. The small wizard would be there in case of emergency. They were going to live in the scout’s old trailer until the baby was born.

But that was still a little over two months away.

Right now Paul and Harry were joking and fooling around as the small wizard decorated their living room for Christmas. Daryl had never much cared for that particular holiday because even when his ma had been alive there had never been money to spare on presents or special food…

Maybe when he had been really little but not when he had been older. And there had been nothing festive about his old man getting pissed drunk, while Daryl had hidden himself in the wardrobe quivering in fear for the beating that would surely follow. He had lost count of the years he had spent either shivering, out in the cold woods, waiting for the holls to be over or being dragged away by Merle to get sloshed and high in some dirty biker bar.

He could still remember how he used to look into the windows of happy families. Houses with warm lights, laughter and songs, with big Christmas trees. Families where all wore nice clothes, mothers were smiling fondly at their children and fathers were ruffling lovingly over their son’s heads.

It had been a faraway dream then…

And now he had two boyfriends who had set their minds on creating a winter-wonderland in their home, while singing the sweetest version of ‘Let it snow’ Daryl had ever heard.

The part of him that had grown up with Will and Merle Dixon wanted to grumble about how useless that was and that they were adults that didn’t need such nonsense. But then there was still that small boy who had looked into other people’s windows, dreaming about having a home like that… And that little boy was embarrassingly giddy right now at the prospect of a proper Christmas.

With a tree, real food, maybe presents, his family!
And most importantly with Paul and Harry.

He had never thought that it would be possible to be this happy, but Carol had been right

“Take that leap when you’re both ready. You deserve it, both of you.”

And as it turned out, the leap they had taken when they had been ready, had led them not only together but also in Paul’s arms. Daryl was still reeling how easily his family had accepted their relationship, even if there had been a fair bit of teasing and worry in the beginning.

++++ Flashback++++

After having convinced Harry to lay down for a nap, Daryl came just down the attic to find a very pale Paul in the clutches of a sharply smiling Carol.

Oh… for the love of…!!

“Carol?!?” He scowled at the meddlesome woman.

“Oh Pookie, so nice of you to join us! I was just having a very friendly talk with your new boyfriend.” His best friend beamed at him. And this wasn’t an act. He could see the earnest happiness in her expression but at the same time there was also something hard in her eyes.

“It was quite a surprise to see the three of you together. And I just expressed my hopes that all of you have the same goal to make this… unique… arrangement work in the long run.” Carol turned her bright blue eyes at him. “And you certainly haven’t told me anything to prepare me for this.” The reproach was clear despite her sweet tone.

_Fucking hell, Carol was terrifying even him now._

“So you didn’t know this would happen… And you haven’t planned this… So you just jumped into a relationship with two other men, without talking any of this out?!” The grey haired woman glared at him. “Daryl, this… this is reckless. How do you plan to make this work? Carl was right in the kitchen, you know? What are your plans together? Where will you live, for God’s sake?!”
She was right, wasn’t she? Caught up in our feelings and high on the revelation that we all felt the same, we ain’t spoke none about any of this, at all. Daryl felt himself shrink into himself.

He had been an idiot! To think they could make this work. Maybe Paul and Harry would soon lose interest in him…

Maybe they already had… so they hadn’t bothered to make plans with him…

His thoughts were reeling with anxiousness.

“Stop!” Paul snapped suddenly, squeezing himself between Daryl and Carol. The rough hunter jumped a little in surprise when he felt Paul’s hand on his chest, placed reassuring over his heart with light pressure.

“Is it so hard for you to believe that I like them both the same? Or that I want to stay with them? Harry and Daryl are wonderful and beautiful persons and they let me in. Let me be a part of what they are to each other. I want to make this work! And that we haven’t spoken about it when Harry is still clearly unwell after the ritual doesn’t mean that we won’t or that we won’t find those answers.”

Daryl thought that his chest felt too small for his fast beating heart. He forced his brain to register each and every word their hippie ninja had just said…

Paul wanted them… Paul wanted them… **both of them!**

‘course we haven’t spoken about the details yet. Harry still wasn’t well. They would talk when all of them were rested. They would find solutions together.

“There will be time for that when Harry feels better. And it will be Daryl and him that I talk to first. They are the ones to demand answers from me! Not you Carol, not here in Rick’s hallway and certainly not now!” Paul continued. His voice firm and carefully controlled as he stood up to one of the most dangerous women Daryl had ever met.

The young man had manged something Daryl hadn’t seen in a long time he had rendered Carol speechless. And after a few tense moments she gave Paul a grudging, wry smile, cocking her head to the side in acknowledgement.

A sign of approval if Daryl had ever seen one from her.

The hunter felt torn between the need to kiss his boyfriend senseless and to hide himself behind Paul’s smaller stature, pulling comfort from his lionhearted little ninja defending their relationship.

In the end he did neither and settled for putting his hand on Paul’s hip, squeezing it wordlessly. To his surprise the younger man let himself rest against his chest… That small gesture was something Harry had been doing so often when he wanted to calm Daryl down. With a huff rested his head on Paul’s clean, straight hair making sure to place an inconspicuous kiss there.
He was a lost man. Should either Harry or Paul ever leave him he would just beak apart.

++++ Flashback end +++++

And they had talked, after Harry had been better.

Both Daryl and the small wizard had been thrown when Paul had announced that he would move to Alexandria for them. Daryl himself had been prepared to move between the communities splitting their time between the Hilltop and Alexandria.

Hell… who was he kidding, if Paul would have asked for it, they would have moved to the Hilltop altogether. He was sure of it. With Harry’s teleportation thing it would have been alright, too. But it had further proofed Paul’s commitment to them that he had not wanted to estrange them from their family.

Especially considering that moving in with them, had meant moving into the attic of the Grimes’ house and with that had come Rick’s sterns glares and Carl’s curiosity.

Really, there had been moments in those first weeks of living all together Daryl had been close to shooting all Grimes in the house with the exception of Littl’ Asskicker.

****

Paul laughed as Harry danced around their Christmas tree, humming yet another song. The slender young man looked breathtakingly beautiful with his cheeks adorably flushed and his big green eyes gleaming in bight happiness.

Unable to resist, the former Hilltop scout caught Harry carefully around the waist, twirling him around the living room. Paul couldn’t remember ever feeling so light as right now with Harry’s ringing laughers filling the winter evening and cheesy Christmas decorations all around them.

Pulling his wonderful wizard flushed against him, Paul dipped Harry deep, making him whoop in excitement. His heart was beating missed a beat when those wicked eyes sparkled so prettily.

Fuck, how could he ever resist that!?

So he followed the impulse and kissed his lover, enjoying the way Harry responded eagerly to him. Nimble finger burying themselves into his hair as the British youth sighed sweetly against his lips. Paul felt his blood rushing in his veins, nibbling playfully on Harry’s lips and offering small teasing licks begging for entrance. He could feel his small boyfriend giggling softly, before he opened his mouth to deepen the kiss. As their tongues met, they both groaned in appreciation.

Damn, he just loved kissing Harry.
Pulling his lover back into an upright position he let his thumbs stroke over the smaller male’s cheekbones as he leisurely explored Harry’s mouth. A sudden quivering that ran through the wizard’s body, had Paul carefully pulling back, peppering smaller pecks lightly over his boyfriend’s face.

The tiny needy whine that left Harry’s throat went straight to his dick that was already twitching in interest in his pants. The British youth had his eyes still closed behind his slightly askew glasses, his expression looked enticingly blissed out as he dropped his head against Paul’s collar bone.

“Alright? Still with me.” The long haired man asked lightly as he swayed them both.

“Hmmmhmmm. I’m good. It felt really nice. I like kissing.” Harry hummed happily.

Sighing in relief Paul kissed his forehead. For a moment he had feared that he had pushed too much.

It had happened a few times in the last months that he or Daryl had triggered Harry but the slender wizard had gotten a lot better about it. He was now able to tolerate a lot more physical contact with either of them and panicked decisively less now.

Paul still winced whenever he thought about the one incident that had pushed all three of them to move out of the cosy attic in Rick’s house.

+++++Flashback+++++

(Light smut)

Harry’s groan was swallowed as Paul explored his mouth. Daryl was looking at them with smouldering eyes, dark with lust and want.

Paul hadn’t been that excited over making out with someone since he had been a hormonal teenager. He settled Harry’s smaller frame into his lap so they faced each other but was careful to leave the wizard enough room to move if he wanted.

Harry was breathing heavily. His oversized shirt revealed a fragile shoulder and a detectable flush that had worked its way from his heaving chest up to his cheeks and the tip of his ears.

Paul was giddy to notice that the young green eyed man was just as aroused as he and Daryl. Peeking at the Daryl out of hooded cyan eyes the former Hilltop scout pulled their shy hunter into a deep kiss. His tongue and teeth managed to coax a noise out of Daryl that was half strangled moan and half needy growl. The broader male was pressing his body more closely to Paul’s, hips twitching nervously forward. The long hair ninja uttered a low groan when he felt through their boxers how hard Daryl was for them.

Small and soft fingers started to daw patterns in feather light touches on his and Daryl’s skin as an eager mouth had taken to alternatingly placing sucking kisses along their jaws, necks and collarbones.

“Uhmm… F... Fuck… Harry… P…Paul” Daryl rasped throaty. His pelvis was thrusting blindly,
seeking friction, causing Paul to shudder in delicious arousal as their clothed erections rubbed against each other. Harry’s darkened emerald eyes peered at them in unashamed want and desire as their owner nibbled on Daryl’s skin and adding small teasing licks every now and then. The archer had closed his eyes in under the sweet torture his body taunt and flushed in lust.

Paul changed his position so that he could place open mouthed kisses on Harry’s delicate shoulder and collarbones, worshipping their little lover. And without thinking too much about it one of his hands sneaked under the teen’s shirt drawing little circles on a flat stomach.

“Mhhmm...” Harry meowed weakly against Daryl’s skin. Paul could feel the taunt muscle under his fingers quivering.

“Alright?” Cyan eyes stared into hooded green ones. The British youth had rested his head on Daryl’s chest and was biting his lips indecisively. Paul watched patiently as the small wizard contemplated his next step and sighed in relief when Harry finally nodded. But to his and Daryl’s utter surprise Harry also started pulling his shirt off.

The expression their little lover made, was almost tearing Paul’s heart apart.

*Insecurity, shame, want, love...* But most importantly *trust.*

Harry wanted to trust them with this.

“You are so beautiful, sweetheart.” Paul whispered earnestly, observing carefully how those green eyes flickered close at the praise.

“He is right, ya know. Never seen anythin’ so pretty, darlin’.” Daryl rasped huskily, as he let his fingers trail over Harry’s arm, hesitant and tender as if he was afraid that too much pressure would break the younger man. Their slender boyfriend sighed deeply at those words, settling comfortably against Daryl’s broad frame letting the hunter place kisses on his exposed skin.

“Our brave, wonderful sweetheart.” Paul couldn’t help but praise again, before he sealed his lips over Harry’s for a deep kiss.

“Ahh... Mhhmm...” Harry moaned under their combined ministrations, as Paul swiped his thumb over one pert, rosy nipple. Harry was even pulling the long haired man a little closer to him and Daryl. Heat pooled in Paul’s belly when he felt Harry’s hard arousal pressing against his crotch... and there was no doubt that Harry could feel their stiff dicks, too.

(light smut ends)

Spurred on by their lover’s responsiveness Paul and Daryl let their hands and mouths wander further on Harry’s body, exploring swells and hollows, enjoying all the small noises they managed to draw from him. The humming ‘Mhhmm’s, the husky ‘Ooohhh’s and the breathless ‘Aahhh’s.

And then with a sudden tension snapping into Harry’s slender body, an “Ahhh, w… wait... too much…” just barely audible was hissed in the space between them.
And before he could realize what was going on… Paul felt a tugging sensation around his navel, accompanied with a gust of wind and then he and Daryl suddenly stood in front the attic’s entrance.

**Thud!**

With a loud banging noise, the door was slammed close by an invisible hand… right before their noses. Gapping both Daryl and Paul starred speechless at the closed door. Their hair tussled, hickeys littering their necks and only wearing boxer shorts tented by raging hard-ons.

Great! Frustrate Paul dropped his head against the wood of the door, while Daryl looked still completely shell shocked.

“What the fuck is going on here?!” A male voice snapped from behind them, causing them to nearly jump out of their skin. Daryl swore lowly under his breath beside him. Paul cursed all possible deities for their rotten luck.

A wide eyed Rick Grimes was standing at the bottom of the stairs – arms crossed over his chest both eyebrows raised as he took in their states of… well, undress and flagging arousal.

A slightly hysteric part of Paul couldn’t deny the shitty irony of this moment. He had to admit that he had enjoyed it a lot more when he had been the dressed one startling a but-naked Rick out of his bed.

And right now Alexandria’s frowning leader was the perfect picture of a very scary father finding his son’s older boyfriends half-naked in his hallway. He looked terrifying.

“Oh my God, dad! How can you be so embarrassing?!” Right on cue Carl had also poked his head out of his room at the noise. “I mean, it’s fucking obvious what going on here…” The teen shrugged, grinning mischievously up at Daryl and Paul.

God, fucking damn!

“Carl!” Rick squeaked a little high pitched. But now there were three curious blue eyes peering up at them. And Paul just knew that they were cataloguing their rumbled appearances with every little love bite and their kiss swollen lips. Paul was thankful that at least they weren’t hard anymore…

**Small mercies…**

“What are all of you doing here in the hallway?” Michionné’s confused voice asked suddenly.
Paul feared that Daryl would evaporate if he got any redder in the face…

Before anyone could answer Michonne, the attic door got ripped open by Harry, who had wrapped himself in the bedsheets and looked adorably shy and flustered. The teen’s already big green eyes got impossibly wider at the sight of the gathered family in the hallway. Flushing a bright red, Harry let out a high pitched yelp, before he pulled both Paul and Daryl lighting fast back into the attic and then proceeded to slam the door unceremoniously shut behind them, leaving the rest of the Grimes family gabbing in the hallway.

Paul watched in slight worry how Harry, let his body flop against the closed door, breathing heavily like he had just run a marathon. He looked every pale as he slid down the door, until he sat on the floor hiding his face into his hands and knees.

“Are you alright, sweetheart?” Paul squatted before the green eyed teen, while Daryl chose to sit down next to their little boyfriend.

Nodding mutely Harry sagged into the hunter’s familiar warmth, soaking up the comfort offered by calloused hands working through his unruly hair.

“Merlin, I’m so, so sorry!” He finally whispered dejectedly.

“Yes… it was…a little bit… sudden.” Paul agreed, but now that the tension was bleeding out of his body… He felt small laughs bubbling inside him.

“But you should have seen Rick’s face… When he starred at us. I thought he was about to have a stroke.” Paul snickered.

“Oh… bloody hell! That’s awful!” The small teen groaned in mortification. “Is it possible to die of embarrassment, because I’m pretty sure I’m dying right now?!” Harry whined dramatically, causing Daryl to chuckle, too.

Plopping down on Harry’s other side Paul enjoyed the physical closeness between them.

“God, even Carl saw us standing there and he was all: ‘Don’t be embarrassing, dad!’” The long haired man giggled, mimicking Carl tone when he had mouthed of Rick.

“Hmpf!” Harry snorted.

It started with small giggling sounds and sniggering between the three of them, before it developed into booming laughter over the hilarious situation they had found themselves in.

“See, sweetheart! That’s better.” As they calmed down a little, Paul shared a warm look with Daryl over Harry’s head.

Gently Paul pushed an unruly black lock out of Harry’s flushed face. Carefully he took notice how the younger one’s eyes peered at his mouth and how his eye lids dropped a little bit at the gesture.
Deliberately slowly Paul bent down, giving Harry the opportunity to pull back before he closed the distance between them fully.

Paul still marvelled at the incredible feeling of kissing Harry’s soft lips, who tasted always a bit like lightning and thunder. He used thumbs to caress the younger male’s smooth cheekbones as the green eyed teen sighed into the kiss. Deciding that they had all enough excitement for the day Paul pulled slowly back ending the kiss with a small peck on the tip of Harry’s nose. He was rewarded by an unbelievable beautiful smile that made his heart dance and his stomach twist in all the best ways. Intertwining their fingers Harry turned to Daryl. This time the green eyed wizard was the one to initiate the kiss.

Paul smiled as he watched their lips moved against each other. Slowly, calmly, reassuringly.

His heart always ached a little when one of them kissed Daryl… Although the hunter was the oldest in their relationship he always looked so surprised when any of them initiated any form of physical intimacy, as if he couldn’t believe anyone wanted him like that. The rough hunter was still mostly too diffident to start anything on his own or if he did it happened with great hesitation. Paul sometimes thought that the man still feared that he would be refused or that he wanted too much. But between Harry and Paul, they had found a lot of calm patience to show Daryl otherwise. That they wanted to touch him and to be touched by him in return.

As Harry rested his forehead against Daryl’s both of them looked adorably flushed and deeply in love.

With a satisfied but tired sigh Harry snuggled deeper into them.

“I think it’s time to move into our own place.”

****

The next morning wasn’t as fun, when Paul had entered the kitchen only to find Rick there shopping apples for breakfast with an entirely too big knife. And as Alexandria’s leader leaned back against his kitchen counter, arms crossed over his chest, the knife gripped loosely in his right hand but hard steel in his eyes, Paul felt instantly reminded of the man that had very seriously threatened to shoot him over a truck of supplies.

For a tiny moment the long haired man feared for his dangly bits, swallowing with light difficulty Paul raised his hands in surrender. But the hard-assed cowboy moved right in for the kill.

“What was that last night? Why did Harry felt the need to throw you both out of the room?” Rick asked with an angry glare, jaw set stubbornly.

“Rick…” Paul started, his brain trying to come up with an explanation.

“It wasn’t his or Daryl’s fault.” Harry’s British voice stated sharply from the doorway.

“How wasn’t it their fault?” The former Sheriff asked in fake lightness, there was that burning look in his eyes that promised some kind of fight.
“Because I was the one who freaked out over nothing! They were just touching.” Harry hissed at his foster father.

“Maybe then they shouldn’t have touched you in the first place?! They should respect your boundaries!” Rick growled in agitation.

“Well, my boundaries are bloody shit!” Harry snapped back loudly, surprising the blue eyed man with his vehemence. “They touched me because I wanted them to! Is it so hard to believe that I want to function like a normal human being in my own bloody relationship?” Paul watched as Rick reeled back at the sight of desperate tears swimming in Harry’s eyes.

“God, Harry… I… I’m sorry.” As all fight drained out of the tough cowboy, it leaved only a worried father behind.

“We’re moving out.” Shaking his head, Harry plopped down on a chair.

“What?!” Rick starred shocked at the small wizard. “Harry… There’s no need… Really… I’ll…”

“Rick! What happened last night… It won’t be the last time and to be frank I think we need a little more privacy. I don’t know about you, Rick… but my sanity can’t take a repeat of yesterday.” The former Sheriff winced at the reminder and so did Paul.

Yeah, they had laughed about it but truth to be told none of them wanted to repeat of that hallway scene. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw Carl peeking around Daryl, who leaned against the doorway looking equally uneasy as Harry continued.

“I… I can’t move forward if I live in the constant fear that if I freak out again I might accidently teleport my half-naked lovers into the hallway… to be judged and gawked at by my family. Daryl doesn’t deserve that and neither does Paul.” The frail wizard huffed tiredly and Rick slumped in defeat.

“So you’re moving to the Hilltop?” Carl asked from behind Daryl. The teen looked pale and was giving his father an impressive one-eyed glare.

“Huh?” Harry blinked owlishly at his friend, scratching his head sheepishly. “Uhm… I thought more along the lines of the empty house down the street? The one diagonally across from Eric and Aaron?”

Rick looked blankly from Harry to Daryl to Paul before he nodded, before he sighed in relief. “Yeah that sounds… acceptable… good!”

“Glad, ya think so, man.” Daryl snarked in sarcasm.

++++Flashback ends+++++

They had move into their own house the same day and Paul had to admit that it had done them a world of good. With more privacy the three of them had been a lot calmer with each other. Things had been easier.

And yes, Daryl and he that been banished a few more times form their new bedroom but it had definitively been lees awkward for all of them. And most importantly it had rattled Harry less. The
little wizard had gotten a lot better about it… they all had.

He and Daryl had become really good at reading the signs if things got too far. Stroking his thumb over Harry’s bottom lip Paul pressed a loving kiss against the young man’s forehead.

“What ya’ doin’ over here?” Daryl smooth southern drawl interrupted them. The hunter looked very good standing in their living room, freshly showered, scruffy beard trimmed and dressed in a soft plaited shirt. He looked rested. That and the wonder in his eyes as he inspected the decorations Harry had put up, took years of his face. It gave Paul an idea what a younger, more innocent Daryl Dixon might have looked like.

“We can play with you, too.” Harry suggested with a bright laugh.

“Ya wanna play with me, darlin’?” A predatory had entered Daryl’s eyes as a lazy grin pulled at his lips and with a few smooth strides he had bridged the distance between them.

The strong hunter picked Harry easily up, making the slender youth whoop in surprised joy. Paul couldn’t help but smile at their light-hearted banter. He could practically feel the heat radiating from Daryl as their little lover wrapped his legs around the broader man’s waist. Delicate fingers buried themselves in long dark hair as Harry brought their mouths together in a sweet kiss that grew more heated as it continued.

“Mhmmm.” The green-eyed teen hummed and Paul could see that there were now tongues involved.

Fuck, his lovers very seriously hot together.

“Bloody hell, you smell so good.” Harry rasped between kisses and Paul could see how Daryl’s chest swelled a little in satisfied pride.

The gruff hunter usually hadn’t minded being dirty or sweaty but as the physical part of their relationship grew, they had both noticed that Harry was the most relaxed when they were freshly showered and smelled clean. Spending months on the road being raped by various men that never bothered to really wash up… it had to leave some marks.

And now Harry was quite obviously burying his nose in Daryl’s hair, inhaling deeply before he was pulled back into another deep kiss.

“Ahhh…” Harry’s soft pants and Daryl’s low growls made Paul painfully aware of how tight his pants had become behind his fly. Licking his lips he stepped closer to his lovers putting one hand to Daryl’s neck and letting the other slip under Harry’s shirt caressing over smooth skin interrupted by raised scars.

Their sweet hunter grunted when he turned his head to press his lips against Paul’s. The cyan eye man could feel his lover shiver in arousal as Harry nibbled on his jaw and neck. This was turning much too heated for an afternoon make-out session.
“Uhmm…” As Daryl thrust his hips forward against Harry, an impatient keening sound got ripped from the small Brit’s throat. Paul felt the small tingling sensations of Harry’s magic on his skin…

And then just like that all of their clothes were gone…

“Woah…” Daryl rasped. His voice sounded a little strangled, probably for the same reason as Paul had let his head drop forward on his lovers’ shoulders in a low moan. The sudden feeling of naked skin against naked skin, not speaking about the way their cocks were abruptly laid bare now.

“Ups…” Harry half sighed, half panted against Daryl’s collar bone, his face was flushed and his teeth worried over his bottom lips.

“Mhh… ups, alright.” Paul sniggered. “But I have to say I like this trick much better, than the one beaming me out of the bedroom.” Paul mumbled teasingly, dragging his hands suggestively over Daryl’s and Harry’s scared backs.

“Yeah, but I liked that shirt.” The broad hunter grumbled hoarsely against Harry’s mouth.

“I’ll try to get it back…” The teen replied a little breathless, as Daryl proceed to lay him on the plush rug, trailing kisses along Harry’s upper body.

“…Oh…Ooohh… maybe… later.” Harry’s voice sounded a little high pitched as Paul settled next to the green eyed wizard’s face letting his fingers flick over perky nipples, teasing further moaning exhales from their lover. Daryl started to suck slowly on the inside of Harry’s tights, working closer to his straining erection.

“Mhhh mah…. F…fuck, Daryl…” The British youth whined. His back was arching of the ground in pleasure as the older man blew a hot breath over his heated flesh.

“Ya good? Want me ta go on?” Sharp blue eyes took in every small twitch, looking for a sign that this was crossing a line.

“Merlin, yes! Yes, please… Uhg!” The green eyed youth groaned. As Daryl then swiped his tongue experimentally over the velvet skin of Harry’s shaft, he threw his head back in response and buried his head against Paul’s hip. Overwhelmed with the sensation of Daryl’s mouth on his cock Harry held a searching hand out to the long haired man, who grasped it and intertwined their fingers.

“Shhh… sweetheart, we’ve got you.” He drew Harry into another kiss that was all tongue and need. To Paul’s utter surprise their little wizard freed his hand from his hold and let it trail down to Paul’s hard and neglected cock. Harry had been mostly hesitant to really touch them down there, without a last protective layer of clothing.
Their brilliant wizard was proving to be very bold today. And denying all he wanted the thought alone that Harry felt ready to take that step with shaking fingers and lust clouding those brilliant green eyes, left Paul’s heart beating impossibly fast and his dick weeping more than it reasonably should. When Harry wrapped him up in his small hand Paul moaned against sweet lips.

This was torture and relief at the same wonderful time

Very slowly Harry developed a rhyme, gaining more security with every stroke, up and down Paul’s dick. As Daryl started to suck in earnest on Harry’s cock, the little Brit keened into their kiss and it felt like Harry’s finger send tiny electric sparks right into Paul’s rock hard erection.

“Jesus! Uhg… Holly fucking…” The cyan eyed man moaned in pleasure at the intense sensation. Having his dick touched had never felt like this.

They were all speeding up.

Harry’s breath was getting more and more laboured as Daryl deep throated him, humming softly around the stiff length in his mouth. And as Harry rapidly approached his orgasm, those sparks gained in intensity, driving Paul embarrassingly fast forward to his own sweet release.

“Ah… ahh… Daryl… I’m… I’m gonna…” Harry yelled out head thrown back, Daryl pulled off the wizards cock, taking them both into his big, rough hand and started to jerk them of simultaneously. Daryl’s low groaning moans soon joined Harry’s lighter once… heat was pooling in Paul’s belly.

And then several things happened almost at once. Accompanied with a hoarse shout Harry’s body bent in a high arch and pearly white cum splattered on his stomach, while a last powerful zap went through Paul, together with a thumb sweeping over the head of his wet dick, triggering one of the most intense orgasm he ever had.

He felt himself quivering and his hips jerking as his dick shot spurt after spurt over Harry’s hand.

“Oh… my… Harr… Yes!” Daryl mouth swallowed most of Paul’s shout as the hunter furiously worked over his own heavy cock.

“Uhmm… Shit… Gonna… Uhhhhh!” Daryl’s whole body tense as his dick spewed his load over Harry’s and Paul’s stomachs.

(Slight smut end)

“Damn!” Daryl cursed out of breath plopping on his back on Harry’s other side. “That was…”

“…bloody brilliant?” Harry offered a dazed little grin stretching over his lips

“…intense?” Paul added smugly.

“Yeah, fuck!” Daryl just snorted. As they caught their breaths, basking in their post-orgasmic bliss, cuddled together on the plush rug, cleaned up and warmed by Harry’s magic, they watched as the magical Christmas decoration around them blink and glitter.

“Looks like that toy store from Home Alone 2 in here.” Daryl grumbled after a while.
“So you like it?” Harry asked his voice and eyes brimming with hope.

“Hmm… it’s alright.” The stoic hunter groused, a lazy grin twitching in the corner of his mouth.

“You bloody love it.” Harry smirked victorious at Daryl snuggling up against the man’s side as Paul laughed happily.

This felt good. Like home.

* 

As Boxing Day came around everyone was meeting at the ‘Dixon-Potter-Rovia’ house for a Christmas celebration with the family. Harry had banished his lovers from their kitchen, spending hours cooking, baking and setting up some last decorations.

The green eyed youth had been hyped up for this evening. He had never celebrated Christmas with his family before. And even with they had tried to play it cool both Paul and Daryl had been excited for it.

As it turned out they weren’t the only ones. Carl, Tara, Beth and Noah were all grinning widely at the opulent set up, from the tall Christmas tree illuminated by hundreds of little lights and Christmas glitter balls, to the spelled ceiling that had small sparkling snowflakes falling on the tree.

“Oh my god this is so sweet!” Tara squealed, poking a plump little Santa dancing to the sounds of ‘Jingle Bells’ on the mantelpiece. “I love it!”

Judith toddled through the living room pulling her daddy along for the exploration of all the magical Christmas wonder Harry had created, cooing and babbling at a teary eyed but amused Rick. When Harry caught his blue gaze, the man mouthed a moved ‘Thank you’ at the small wizard.

“This… is a lot, Harry. It’s like a store of Christmas decorations exploded here.” Eric greeted him, looking around a little overwhelmed. Aaron seemed to be equally stunned by all of it and could barely keep his hold on their squirming daughter, who looked around with wide innocent eyes.

“Well, I think it’s wonderful. My mom used to go all out on Christmas, too” Beth beamed at them, nibbling on a cookie.

“Yep, when I was little my family visited the Rockefeller Centre, kind of reminds me of that a bit.” Noah laughed happily, putting an arm around the blond girl’s waist.

“Harry… this picture is… moving…” Tara asked suddenly starring at the wall with the pictures he had brought back with him from Private Drive and had just added today.
“Yes, magical photos do that.” He laughed at her incredulous expression. “Believe me magical portraits are much worse… They talk and their inhabitants tend to wander between frames. They spy on anything and are terrible gossips.”

“Say Harry, are these your parents?” Beth had stopped in front of a photo that showed James Potter twirling his wife around under falling snow flakes. The blond girl was staring in awe at the laughing couple.

“Yeah…” The young Brit smiled mournfully.

“Damn, your mom was real looker.” Tara gushed. Paul was leaning over the young woman’s shoulder, peering too at the picture.

“I know you said that you looked a lot like your dad but most about your facial structure comes from your mom and obviously the eyes.” Harry relished in the complement, he liked it when people pointed out his similarities to his mom. Maybe because he always felt like he had so little of her left, while everybody brought his father up.

“You think so?” He leaned against Paul.

“Yep and just as pretty.” With twinkling cyan eyes his boyfriend dropped a tender kiss on his head.

“Tara’s right your mother was beautiful. And they look…” Noah squinted at the picture, looking a little surprised.

“…happy, right?” Harry grinned. “I don’t remember them well and this is one of the few photos I have left of them. I like to think that that were happy.”

“…that, too!” The gangly young man laughed, scratching the back of his head. “But I wanted to say they look really young. How old were they when this picture was taken?”

Harry cocked his head back in thought, trying to remember what he knew about his parents birthdays… he had read the dates on their gravestones.

“Let me think… I only visited their grave once… the dates were engraved there.” He ignored the stricken looks they send him at this. “Oh yes, Sirius told me that because of the war a lot of couples moved a little faster than usual… I think mom and dad were about 19 when they married, only a year after they had finished school.” A little proud that he had managed to remember, he smiled at his family. “This photo was taken when they learned that mum was pregnant, so I think they’re around 20 in the picture.” Paul held him a little closer at that, his eyes looking troubled.

“That’s sound very young. They were around our age then.” Beth sighed.

“They were only 21 when Voldemort killed them.” Harry smiled sadly at the picture of his ever twirling parents. It wouldn’t be long now before he would be older than they ever had the chance to get.

“Uhm… sorry to interrupt but I couldn’t help but over hear this conversation. If your parents were 20 when you were born to them… and by my estimation you are now… 19?” Eugene rambled on with an awkwardly blank expression.

“18…” Harry corrected him, cocking his head to the side. He was confused was this was about but he could feel Paul stiffening next to him.

“Oh my… that means your parents would be only 38 by now?!” Tara gasped loudly, drawing every
ones else attention on them. He thought he had heard Rick and Gabriel choke in the background when the information hit the room.

“That’s a lot younger than dad is, now.” Carl blinked in astonishment, giving Rick a critical once-over.

“Hey! I’m 42. That’s only four years older.” Rick protested, sounding somewhat hurt.

“That sounds pretty old to me, dad!” Carl shrugged, causing Rick to hang his head in resignation, before his head snapped back up. “What does that make Daryl? He’s older than me!”

Carl squinted at the hunter who looked like a deer caught in the headlights.

“Probably a chicken hawk.”

Tara snorted loudly, while Paul had paled a little.

“What?! Where did you hear that term?” Rick asked aghast.

“Dad, I’m nearly 16 and I didn’t live under a rock before the world went down.” Carl rolled his eye at his father.

Daryl bent down to Harry and Paul whispering in absolute confusion “Why the hell does that make me a hawk?”

“How old are you by the way, Jesus?” Carl asked in fake innocence, closing in for the kill. Harry watched as Paul dragged his hand over his face.

“Uhm… 32…” He admitted, looking somewhat troubled by his own answer. And even Daryl looked uncomfortable with the situation. They had never really talked about the indeed large age gap between them but to be honest Harry had never cared about that.

“Aww… so you’re also missing the half your age plus seven line of appropriate age gaps, by quite a few years, huh?!” Tara teased, nudging Paul with her elbow.

“Does that make them my sugar daddies?” Harry blinked neutrally at the young woman, hoping to defuse some of the focus on Daryl and Paul and to lighten the mood again.

The strangled sounds his lovers and his foster father made had him and Tara laughing loudly.

Taking Paul’s hand in his, Harry tucked lightly on his boyfriend’s beard. He sent him a bright smile that got returned with a grateful softness. Grinning brightly Harry then stood on his tiptoes pressing soft kisses on the crow-feet’s around Daryl’s eyes before he pecked his lips. He could feel the hunter relaxing a little and the insecurity in his blue eyes diminishing when he got the unspoken
message.

I love you.

All of you.

Everything else is not important.

This was the best Christmas ever.

****

+++++ Time skip ++++ Maggie gives birth+++++

Glenn twitched nervously as he heard Maggie scream again.

He couldn’t get the picture of her crying and cradling a bloody baby to her chest out of his head, while a pale Carl stood beside her with haunted blue eyes. He could still hear Rick despaired yelling and screaming echoing through the prison’s yard…

The young Korean had never felt the weight of Lori’s ghost so heavy on them like right now.

Harry had joined Siddiq, Enid and Carson in Maggie’s room. But his lovely wife had resolutely banned everyone else from the scene. So he was stuck sitting before their bedroom with Daryl, Jesus, Abraham and Sasha listening to Maggie fighting through the pain of giving birth to their child.

And while Abe looked a little uncomfortable, Sasha was probably the only one, keeping her cool. Daryl was sitting on the floor across from Glenn, biting nervously on his thumb nail, flinching every now and then, when an especially loud yell could be heard. And Jesus was a jittering mess of bouncing legs, jumping at every pain filled sound. The stoic hunter finally pulled his lover against his side, pushing the smaller man’s head against his shoulder. Fascinated Glenn and Abraham watched on as the quirky ninja calmed down considerably after that.

Those three had really a special kind of relationship.

Glenn still winced when he thought about the shriek Maggie had uttered when Jesus had come back to the Hilltop with Sasha, Daryl and Harry in tow, five days after the blessing to inform her that he would move to Alexandria, permanently.

Only to explain the sudden decision to move was because he was now in a committed relationship with Daryl and Harry. Glenn had thought his ears would never be the same again...
“That was not what I meant when I told you to get closer to people, ya hear me!” Maggie glared angrily at Jesus.

“Maggie...” The long haired scout had raised his hands in a placating gesture. And while he looked friendly there was a vulnerability in his eyes Glenn had never seen before in the smooth talking man. In the months they had spent at the Hilltop they had gotten to know the scout quite well. Glenn would even call them friends now. Jesus had protected them and had helped to carve a place for them all here.

“Don’t you ‘Maggie’ me! I trusted you to look out for my family and not to...to... Harry isn’t ready for such a relationship.” Maggie hissed and Glenn winced at the low blow.

“What…? You obviously had no problem with him and Daryl starting something.” Jesus gabbled at her.

“Because Daryl is Daryl” The young, pregnant woman snapped. She was so upset that she didn’t even noticed how the air suddenly got thinner in the room.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Jesus asked in cool calm… a little too calm.

“Yeah, I like ta know that, too?” Daryl scowled from the window, while Harry followed the conversation with narrowed eyes.

“Daryl's... Well...” Maggie hesitated a little. Throwing the hunter an apagobical glance she straightened her back. “Daryl's practically asexual... He has no game!”

“Hey... That's...” The archer growled, looking very embarrassed and a little hurt by her words. Glenn took a step forward to interfere, but Maggie ruthlessly kept going.

“... but you, Jesus,... I heard people talk about you at the Hilltop and the Kingdom. You told me so yourself... you have problems to stick with people. You can’t have a flimsy relationship with Harry, not like the one you had with Alex. Do you even know what Harry's been through?” Her brown-green eyes were sharp and her mouth thin with worry.

“Maggie!” Harry interrupted her harshly. “Paul knows! I told him. Please, stop talking before you say something you might regret later. I know you're worried but I thought Paul was your friend. You're hurting him.”

One look at the tight lines around the usually smiling mouth and soft eyes of the long haired ninja revealed that Harry was right. Glenn saw how Maggie reeled back at the hurt in Jesus’ expression.

“Damn.” She cursed lowly sinking back into her chair. “I'm sorry. That was out of line. But...”

“No, but! Yes, it was.” Harry snapped. “Paul is a good person. I trust him as much as I trust Daryl. He would never intentionally do anything to hurt me. And just for the record Daryl has game!” With an angry huff the green eyed teen crossed his arms over his chest, causing Abe to laugh loudly at the cute picture the small wizard made, while Paul smiled adoringly at him.
“That you trust me as much as Daryl that's the highest praise.” Jesus pressed a small kiss on the top of Harry's hair. “And I have to agree. Daryl totally has game”.

The embarrassed groan the hunter uttered in response had them all snickering. Daryl blushed a little deeper.

“God, can ya please stop saying such bullshit?” The hunter pouted, glaring at the ceiling.

Abrahams reaction had surprised Glenn the most to be honest.

After a few crude and sceptical remarks about who was sticking into whom and Alabama-three-ways that had Harry and Daryl blushing like nuns in a brothel and Sasha slapping the bid man’s arm in exasperation, he had then proceeded to crouch down before the small wizard.

“I know it’s not our place to question this… Hell, I sure as hell didn’t care what anyone thought when I made my decision… But ya’re sure about this? Relationships are kind of hard with just two people in it... Three sounds like quite a crowd.” Abraham asked with more compassion than Glenn had ever witnessed from the burly ex-soldier. But like the rest of them Abraham had a soft spot for the small teen.

It had been sweet how Harry's eyes had widened in astonishment before they had softened.

“You know, you're the first one to ask me that. The others just made their minds up one way or another.” The green eyed youth smiled kindly. “And yes, for the record I'm sure. Never been so sure of anything in my life. I know it won't be easy but I think no relationship would have been after what I've been through.” Harry admitted softly.

“It would have been simple just to... avoid...everything. To close myself off from anything like this at all. It would have been lonely but I would have been safe from being hurt. I could have survived like that. I could have lived like this. But the thing is I'm not want to live like this. Of course I'm risking a lot... All three of us are risking a lot. But I think we have all more to gain from this than to lose. And these two are the only ones that make me want to try, for them and for me.” Beautiful green eyes were gazing sincerely at Daryl and Jesus.

They all had been stunned to silence for a moment. With Daryl lowering his head so that his fringe hid his eyes, but not his red burning ears and a wetness in Jesus’ bright eyes that had Glenn looking away in awkwardness.

“That was a damn good answer.” Abe had barked out laughing, pulling Sasha closer to him. “Ya’re one of the bravest son of a bitches I ever had the honour to meet, yes sir!”

++++Flashback end++++

Maybe the admission about their relationship should have surprised Glenn more...but really...

It just hadn’t.
He had talked with Carol about it once and she had cut right to the chase of the matter.

“They need each other.” She had summarized. “It doesn't work with only the two of them, not in the long run. Daryl and Harry would have never dared to move forward like that on their own, each of them too afraid to be hurt again and too afraid to hurt the other. Daryl would have swept the kid into the woods to live like hermits before starting anything… And where Daryl wouldn’t have done enough Jesus would have probably done too much. But together they mellow each other out, forming something more stable. I wasn’t sure in the beginning but the more I see them together… They’re good. They're happy.”

In a strange way those three fitted together... It made sense somehow.

And they sure as hell stood up for each other.

+++Flashback++++

Abe and Glenn had gone to the dining hall, leaving Maggie and Sasha behind with Jesus, Daryl and Harry. Their women had become close friends with the former scout and the Maggie’s outburst had been hard to stomach for the young couple. There was still some air that needed clearing and they had wanted to give them some privacy for that.

To their surprise they found Alex, Wes and Kal in the communal hall, all of them quite obviously deep in their cups already.

“…said he couldn’t com…commit to a real relationship… That he wasn’t the type for that kind of relationship. That he was just looking for some fun between friends…, friends with ben… benefits…” Alex bitter voice carried through the room.

“Come on, man….” Kal crunched up his nose in unease. “TMI, Alex!”

“You know it could be a chance. Let it go. Good point to move on, ya know….” Wes said with a hopeful under tone that went completely unnoticed by the tall nurse, as he raged on.

“Haahhhhaa… Yeah… yeah… Like Jesus moved on! Turned out just one man wasn’t enough for him.” Glenn winced at Alex mean laugher. “But to think that he would settle for some old, white trash redneck…” The tall blond man spat, setting his cup down with too much force.

“At least the kid’s pr…pretty, even if he looks like jail bait.” Dante shrugged, a roguish grin pulling at his lips. “Never batted for the home team, you know… But damn, I wouldn’t mind feeling that ass out.” He winked at Wes, causing the other man to flush as he threw a longing glance at the seething nurse.

While Alex glared venomously at Dante, Glenn felt his own hackles rise and Abe growled lowly beside him. They all were protective of Harry in that regard, to hear someone speak so lightly of ‘feeling out’ the boy, didn’t sit right with either of them.
“Y… Yeah… He’s pretty.” Alex sneered, before smirking at his companions. “But I heard that the boy is pretty used up already… claimed that it was rape. But what rape victim hooks up with two other guys. Doesn’t it sound a little slutty to you?” He slurred cruelly. Wes and Kal looked a little unsure at that and even Dante wasn’t smiling any longer. “But maybe that’s, what’s Jesus wants, huh? Who knows what the three of them get up to?! Two sluts and Dixon.” Alex continued to run his mouth.

That jealous fucker!

Glenn had balled his fists in anger and he could hear Abe swearing furiously. This damn trash talk was going way too far.

“Only a matter of time before they get tired of him. He’s not even that good.” They heard the nurse hiccups into his cup.

And suddenly Daryl was suddenly there, looming over the four tipsy men with a frightening scowl. Growling like an angry bear and quick like a snake he grabbed Alex unceremoniously by the collar, pulling the tall, drunk man from the bank.

“What’s yer problem, asshole?!” He hissed furiously. “Has Paul ever promised ya something, he didn’t keep?” The gruff hunter snarled as he shook Alex, making the other man’s teeth rattle.

“N…No…” The nurse had gone very pale, visibly frightened by Daryl. And Glenn couldn’t fault him… he knew that expression. It promised pain.

“Nah, he ain’t!” The archer growled in confirmation. “So there’s no other reason for ya talkin’ shit… than yer bein’ a jealous bitch!” Glenn could see how Alex flushed and paled in rapid succession at those words.

“Argg! Shit…” Alex whimpered in pain, holding his bleeding nose. Before could even gather his senses, Daryl had grabbed him by the throat lifting him easily off the floor.

“Listen, ya damn bastard. The only reason I ain’t beatin’ the shit outta you right here and now, is that Paul wouldn’t want that. ‘Cause that man ya talked shit about, he’s a damn good one.” Daryl hissed lowly.

“But I ain’t that good and if I hear ya sproutin’ any of this bullshit ‘bout him or Harry again, I’ll fuckin’ kill ya.” Looking at the feral snarl on his friend’s face Glenn didn’t doubt for a second that Daryl would go through with his threat.

“Do ya understand?” The hunter barked at the quivering nurse for good measure.

“Ye… yeah…” Alex stuttered out nodding frantically.
With a disgusted grunt Daryl dropped Jesus’ jealous ex. As soon as he hit the floor, the nurse scrambled away from the hunter’s looming form, only to vomit quite explosively all over the floor.

“Mother of dick!” Abraham barked in disgust. “Get a grip, man! Someone get him a bucket, you useless dicks.”

Wes immediately jumped to his feet to help Alex but Glenn noticed that he was careful to keep as much distance between him and Daryl as possible, as Alexandria’s archer glowered at the other present men.

“Jesus, Paul, provided fer ya! For years! Riskin’ his neck out there. Lookin’ fer people. Lookin’ fer supplies! Keepin’ contact to other communities! And that’s how ya repay him? Listenin’ ta shit like that, ‘hind his back? Well, go fuck yerselves!” Daryl spit before their feet.

A strange coughing sound altered Glenn and Abraham to something behind them. When they looked around they saw that the others had also come down from Maggie’s office. Sasha was holding Harry back, whose eyes were gleaming dangerously, while Maggie had put a comforting hand on Jesus’ shoulder.

The silence that followed was awkward with guilt.

But Glenn noticed that Jesus wasn’t looking at any of them, he gaze rested on Daryl’s broad back, his bright eyes warm and the calm smile on his lips soft with affection.

When the hunter turned around and spotted his lovers, Glenn had to bite a back an incredulous laugh, as the tough man that had just roughed up someone blushed lightly, but instead of hiding his face like he used to do, he stubbornly pushed his chin forward.

“Stop smilin’ like that, ya prick. I ain’t takin’ that back. They don’t deserve ya if they talk shit like that.” He groused gruffly.

Jesus’ smile had just widened in answer.

+++Flashback end++++

After that Maggie had never again questioned their relationship. And Alex had never mentioned Jesus again.
Paul flinched when Maggie screamed again. God, he had never been more grateful that now that he was gay.

He didn’t envy Glenn right now. The young Korean was tense and pale as hell. With his lips pressed into a thin line he sat there listening helpless how Maggie fought to bring their child into the world. Paul didn’t think he could stomach that if he were in the young Korean’s shoes…

The worry not only for your wife but the unborn baby, hearing her pain without any chance to help. The paralyzing fear not only to lose one but both of them.

Luckily neither Daryl nor Harry were ever in danger of getting pregnant. Paul was sure he would go crazy with worry even before the kid would be borne.

Paul couldn’t imagine a life without Harry and Daryl. He loved them with everything he was. Feeling the comforting weight of Daryl’s hand on his shoulder he remembered the day they had said the words ‘L-word’ for the first time.

They had been here at the Hilltop for that, too.

++++Flashback++++

“Jesus! Carl! Thank God, you’re back.” Glenn exclaimed, looking equally relieved and exasperated with them.

Paul and Carl had come to Hilltop three weeks ago without Harry and Daryl to help out with the repairs on the trailers. Both men were supposed to come in a few days and Paul felt giddy at the prospect of seeing his lovers again. On their way here Carl had spotted a lone man, desperately in need of help but they had lost sight of him.

So as the repairs had moved along so swiftly, a bout of bad weather had hit the area and had confined Hilltop’s inhabitants mostly to their houses.

And while Carl had been more and more worried about the lone man out there, Paul had nearly gone out of his mind because he couldn’t stand the feeling of being scooped in and being without his lovers. He had not thought it possible to miss them that much in such a short time.

So when Rick’s reckless son had suggested sneaking out to look for the young man they had seen and who had obviously needed help, Paul had been just all too ready to escape these walls.

The plan had been easy: Take a car to the place they had last seen the stranger, find him and offer him a chance to live at the Hilltop.

Early out and back in a day… No problem, right?

He should have known better than to plan with a Grimes…
That had been five days ago.

They had found the young man quite easy… but their car had broken down… They had just managed to reach a small cabin before a damn snow storm had hit them, making it impossible to walk back until now.

“Who’s that?” Abraham looked critically at the new guy.

“That’s Siddiq. We’ve seen him on the way when we first came here but didn’t manage to contact him back then. We thought we could collect him before the storm hit.” Carl explained awkwardly.

“We were so worried! This could have waited! Or at least you should have told us.” Sasha rebuked him, punching Paul’s shoulder.

“Ouch! Sorry!” The long haired man scratched the back of his head in embarrassment.

“HAAAHAAAA! That took real balls, you reckless monkeys.” Abraham barked a laugh, hitting Siddiq mirthfully on the back so hard that the poor guy nearly fell to his knees.

“Yeah, let’s hope Jesus still has his at the end of the day.” Glenn remarked drily.

Gulping Paul looked at young Korean with big eyes. “Is Maggie very mad? We were really worried that Siddiq was in danger, if the car hadn’t broken down…”

“Ohoh!” Glenn laughed amused. “You really think you have to worry about my wife?!”

Paul nodded but to his confusion his three friends just smirked at him gleefully.

“Ah, don’t worry. My sweet wife has decided that she’ll let it slide – this one time!” Sniggering the young Korean slapped his shoulder repeatedly. And if Paul had been just a little more aware he would have noticed sooner that his ‘friends’ were very careful to walk at least two steps behind him… But right now he just felt relieved that Maggie wasn’t to upset with them and bone deep exhaustion.

“That’s really nice of her. I’m totally beat. I just want to shower, eat and sleep.” Paul sighed, eager to get some rest.

“I wouldn’t count on that…” Sasha muttered sardonically.

With a loud bang the heavy doors of the Barrington house suddenly flew open.

And without a warning a white light hit the cyan eyed man square in the chest with the force of a well-placed punch, immediately winding him and dropping him to his knees.

_Holly shit!_
This could only mean one thing…

He was fucked!

“They’re already here?!” Paul found himself asking in an unusually high pitched voice, cold sweat was forming on his forehead.

“Yes, they came three days ago. And you both left your mirrors behind. The kid’s madder than a bull caught by the nuts.” Abraham grinned wickedly.

Shit! He had hope to be back before… and the mirror…

Oh…

Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

Slightly panicked he watched as Harry leisurely strolled down the steps twirling his wand between his delicate fingers, his eyes burning with green fire. Very thing about this slender boyfriend radiated barely controlled anger.

This was probably not the time to notice such things…

But fucking damn… the British lover looked smoking hot, right now.

Some of his thoughts must have shown on Paul’s face, because an enraged gleam was his only warning before a stinging hex was fired at him.

“Ouch! Hey is that a way to greet your…” He tried to make light of the situation quickly jumping to his feet.

“Don’t you dare to start joking now, you giant jackass!” Harry barked at him, a thin finger poking Paul in the chest.

“You two left without a word to Maggie or us! Carl just told Enid that you were going out to look for some guy. Something could have waited at least a few more days or that would have needed some kind of back-up. But no! No…! You had to leave right away. And you bloody, fucking hell went alone! Alone! Out there! With a potential snow storm approaching! And you left the mirrors behind!” Harry was breathing fire and brimstone down on him. And even through the wizard was a few inches shorter than him… Paul could have sworn that his boyfriend was now towering over him.

“Have you any idea how worried everyone was, when Enid told them that you just went out alone! Maggie is highly pregnant, you wankers! She doesn’t need that idiotic kind of stress.”
Aww… shit, no he hadn’t thought about that… Fuck!

Apological he looked at Glenn, who had kept a respectful distance from them – or most likely the very angry and yelling wizard in front of Paul – and was now wincing in sympathy as yet another stinging hex hit him.

“Eyes on me! Does it seem like I’m done?” Harry snarled at him. “Did you even think about what leaving like that would do to us?! What it felt like when Daryl and I arrived here. To an empty trailer!? Your mirror forgotten on the kitchen counter?! No note!! No word what so ever?! Only to hear from Enid that you’ve been gone for three days already!! And that you were supposed to be back after one?!?” Those lovely green eyes were now dangerously narrowed.

Paul swallowed heavily. “I’m sorry…?!”

“You better be! We were sick with worry, you ass! You can’t just disappear on us like that. We bloody love you, you stupid prick. I started to think you were dead, for fucks sake!” Paul’s heart stuttered at the pain and fear in Harry’s voice. “Without the mirror and with the storm Daryl and I couldn’t even search for you! We couldn’t… we couldn’t find you! If you had died out there…” Harry’s voice broke as he wiped furiously the tears away that threatened to roll over his cheeks.

God, he was really a prick.

In the door way he spotted Maggie and Daryl, starring down at them with matching expressions of fond exasperation.

“Daryl?” Paul asked in a small voice.

“I’ve nathing ta add. Harry said it all. Yer a fuckin’ idjit! We were mad with worry, ‘cause we love ya. Don’t pull that shit again. Or next time I’m goin’ ta be the one beatin’ ya ass.” Daryl shrugged casually, as he smoothly moved the steps down, behind the hunter a very pregnant Maggie was laughing at her friend’s stunned expression.

What had they just said?

“We were mad with worry, ‘cause we love ya.”

“We bloody love you, you stupid prick.”

God, I’m really a prick.

Paul thought a little giddy, because despite Harry’s very obvious anger and the tears swimming in those incredible green eyes, he couldn’t stop grinning now.

“You love me?” Paul whispered, smiling impossible wide.
“Oh, shut up! That’s all you’ve heard?! Of course we love you!” Harry seethed at him.

“No, I’ve heard the rest, too. And I’m very, very sorry for everything I put you through. I thought I was going to suffocate here without you two. I needed to get out for a while and I just jumped at the first chance I got. I’m sorry. And I’m sorry for forgetting to take the mirror with me. It’ll never happen again, I promise.” He apologized sincerely. Very slowly he pulled his obviously still angry boyfriend in his arms.

“But right now I’m just so incredibly happy to hear you say those words. To know you both care so much.” To hide the stupid grin that was starting to hurt his cheeks and those damn happy tears that were causing his sight to blur, Paul buried his face into Harry’s soft hair.

Finally the slender young man in his arms lost some of the tension brimming in his body and returned the embrace.

“Of course we care.” Harry whispered into Paul’s neck, as Daryl came to their side.

“Don’t doubt that.” Daryl mumbled placing a soft kiss on the crown of Paul’s head. “I’m glad yer safe.” The hunter sighed in relief.

“I’m glad to be home.” Paul breathed, his voice breaking with too much emotions to count. Because ‘Home’ didn’t meant the Hilltop or even their house in Alexandria but Harry and Daryl. He would always be home as long as he was with them.

“And I love you, too. Both of you.”

His whispered confession caused Harry to hug him tighter and Daryl to hum in contentment.

++++Flashback++++

They loved each other.

They were each other’s home.

And right now, sitting there, listening to Maggie’s screams the impact of that knowledge hit Paul like a brick. All he could do not to fall into pieces in that moment was to grab Daryl’s hand, letting the other man’s presence tether him to here and now.

And suddenly the screaming stopped… Paul hadn’t thought that the silence could be worse than the screams…

They all were frozen for a moment not even daring to breathe…

And then the loud and strong wails of a new-born broke through void, shattering the silence. They
all looked at Glenn then who, starred open mouthed at the door.

There was a look of nervous astonishment on the Korean’s face as he mumbled:

“Oh sit! I’m a dad now.”

“That you are, man.” Daryl snorted loudly, a small smile tugging at his lips. “That you are.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked the chapter ^^
And I hope that i didn't mess the smutty parts up too much... I know they're quite tame in comparison to some other stuff but I wanted to keep things consitent with Harry's trauma. Anything more just seemed too much for now. So sorry if you were rooting for more action in that regard ^^'

Chapter 30 will take at least a week before it's ready, maybe a little longer :)}
chapter 30

Chapter Notes

Oh my gosh!!! I’m really sorry this took soo long! This was the first time since I started this story that I wasn’t ahead of the game anymore. And it took me ages to get me the things I had in my head written down. And then life added to it and I got delayed even more @.@ But now i finished Chapter 30 and have more than half of chapter 31 ^^

I apologize beforehand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.
I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.
This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 30

Hershel Green was a squishy little thing. A 20 inch long and 7.6 pounds heavy, squirming bundle of joy with rosy cheeks, a tuff of black hair on his head and a pair of black button eyes. And with his first little yawn he had his parents wrapped around his tiny, tiny little finger.

Harry just knew that this boy would be a prankster one day and that those innocent eyes would soon enough start to regard the world and people around him with curiosity and mischief. This child would be a wild one and he would make sure that the world would hear him. Hershel already proved that he had a healthy pair of lungs to pull that off.

Glenn and Maggie had both groaned when Harry told them so with wiggling eyebrows and mischievous smirk.

“God, please! Don’t jinx it, Harry! He’s still so sweet and small!” Glenn whined. The newly minted father peered at his son, poking his son’s chubby cheek. “Hershy, don’t listen to Uncle Harry! I’m sure you’ll stay all cute and cuddly for daddy and mommy, right?” He cooed at the baby, who just crunched his nose up and grunted in hard work. Harry, Paul and Maggie laughed loudly at the way Glenn recoiled at the heavy stink that came suddenly from the babe.

“Seems that’s ya answer, man.” Daryl sniggered in obvious glee, from his place on the windowsill.

Harry’s heart melted when he saw the fierce love in Maggie’s face as she watched Glenn handle their precious child. Had his mum looked the same? Had her face been full of same unconditional love?

“The three of you will be alright, Maggie.” Harry’s voice sounded somewhat strangled to his own ears and it made his lovers and Maggie looking at him with startled concern.
“Sweetheart…?” Paul asked hesitant. But Harry just inhaled deeply and shook his head.

“It’s nothing. Just me being weird for a moment… thinking about my mum… Sorry.” To his own embarrassment he sniffed a little. “I’m alright. Really, I swear!” He quickly wiped his eyes, smiling earnestly at his worried family.

“Oh, hun!” Maggie softly sighed in sympathy before she looked firmly at Paul and Daryl. “There was something Glenn and I wanted to ask the three of you. We want you three to be Hershel’s godfathers…” Stunned they all stared at her and Glenn, who was settling the tiny baby in the crook of his arm.

“Should anything happen to us…” Maggie said hesitantly. “We just couldn’t imagine that there would any people who would love him more or protect him more fiercely than you three. Would you do that for us?” The young Korean smiled at them. Harry shared a look with his lovers.

Both looked a little overwhelmed at the prospect, but not entirely opposed to the idea.

“Maggie… Glenn…” Paul swallowed heavily as he looked at his boyfriends for confirmation. Daryl cocked his head to the side, while Harry beamed at the cyan eyed man. “Of course, we would be honoured.”

* 

Harry sighed a little mournfully. He watched the landscape pass them by as they drove back to Alexandria with Siddiq and Carl. The former emergency resident and Rick’s son had stuck a deep friendship in a very short time and were chatting next to him.

“What’s wrong, sweetheart?” Paul suddenly asked from the passenger’s seat. His cyan eyes peered in concern at him and Harry could see that Daryl was watching him thoughtfully through the rear mirror.

“Nothing…” Harry mumbled evasively.

“Nah… ain’t nothing. Try again.” Daryl grumbled back and Harry knew that now that the hunter smelled trouble he would not just back off.

“Just… It’s stupid…” Harry pouted at his lovers, causing Paul to raise an eyebrow in amusement and Daryl to patiently stare him down.

With a huffed sigh the small wizard gave up… “I guess, I miss Hershel, already?” He admitted softly.

And it was true. Since Maggie and Glenn had asked them to be Godfathers to their little boy the three of them had spent as much time with Hershel as possible. And Harry knew that it was stupid but he had fallen a little more in love with Daryl and Paul just by watching them cuddle and play with the little boy. It wasn’t as if he wanted a baby right now…

They were not ready! None of them… but his heart ached somewhat with longing.

Maybe when things had settled a little more? Did Paul and Daryl even want kids of their own?
Shaking his head at his own silly thoughts he smiled a little wryly at his lovers. “Don’t worry. It’s alright. Nothing a good cuddle with Judith and Gracie won’t cure.”

Paul and Daryl seemed unsure what to make of his strange mood but neither pressed for further elaboration. But Harry knew that they wouldn’t let his go in the long run but for now they would take his word for it.

Instead Daryl turned his blue eyes on Siddiq. “Hey doc, yer spend a long time out there. Found anything interesting while yer were out there?”

The young man looked very intimidated by the hunter’s grumbling demeanour and harsh attitude. “Uhm… no, well… There were a lot of walkers… you know fresh ones? Strange looking ones?”

“How did they look strange?” Hilltop’s former scout asked curiously.

“Some… Some looked like they… were speared… perforated by roots… I have never seen anything like that…” Siddiq shivered slightly.

Harry’s stomach churned at the description. He had no doubt that those walkers had been Saviours. The blessing was working in their favour.

And it meant also something else…

If so many Saviours had crossed into their territory then Negan had been sending more of his men after them. Maybe to scout… Maybe for an attack… It didn’t matter.

Because the land was obliterating their trespassing enemies!

And when they returned to Alexandria it turned out that Negan hadn’t just sent his men… He had come as well.

Oh Lucille, give me strength!
Negan’s cheeks started to hurt from the too big shit-eating grin that pulled at his lips as he watched an agitated Rick pace in front of his cell.

This wasn’t what they had planned but it wouldn’t hurt either. He had been warned that Alexandria or its allies might catch him but it had been worth the chance. Taking the risk of sneaking behind these uncanny boarders had been crucial to their plan. It had been the only way to gather information about the nature of those freaky borders. His men had claimed that they had started to feel unwell when they came close to certain parts… they had claimed that they had felt unable to cross into the territories surrounding the Hilltop, the Kingdom or Alexandria and those the Sanctuary had lost its resources…

Negan and his executives had understood long ago that their community couldn’t survive on its own. There wasn’t enough around to sustain their people… So Negan had been forced to search for a solution and to find a way to get his turf back. He had tried to send out scouts but either they had balked and pussied out at passing the borders or they hadn’t come back… at all…

The… wards… that had been erected by a sneaky little bastard wizard… had more than likely injured or killed a shit load of his men! They had known that there was a chance that the fucking wards might also get him killed… But that hadn’t happened!

Oh no!

Once they had an idea what they were dealing with… They had prepared and they had found something that had helped Negan and a good amount of his men to cross into his old territory!

And if Negan hadn’t wanted to kill Harry, that eerie eyed bitch, before, he sure as hell would smash that beautiful face in now, for forcing him to sneak into his own turf like a god damn thief!

With the new help that had managed the border, Negan couldn’t deny that stepping back into his territory he felt like a cat brushed the wrong way, but he had laughed and whistled in delight when he and his men had managed to sneak. Though sneaking in turned out not to be the most taxing task...

Because as soon as they had dared to move deeper into the land, they had had some \textit{fucking} bad luck.

Their cars had broken down on them, one after another while their food supplies had either disappeared or had rotten away in record time. They had lost their ways in the woods more times than Negan could have counted, leaving them disoriented.

His men had dropped like flies. Falling prey to walkers and stray dogs, getting sick or injured very quickly.

They hadn’t found shelter or supplies.

After a week only Negan had been left. His men had slowly but surely died or balked. A lot of them had run away like headless chickens… and probably died any way. A small herd of creepers
had chased him into an abandoned building. But he hadn’t become the Saviour’s leader for nothing.

He had prevailed against the odds, trusting that Simon and his new partner were working on something. Negan had just known that they would get him out.

And then Rick had stumbled on his weakened ass.

The fight that had resounded between them had been hard and bloody. Flying fists and cursing had come as soon as they had run out of bullets to shoot at each other. Hell, that hard-assed cowboy had even tried to chop of his hand when Negan had fallen off the landing of the stairs and had dangled from its ledge by his fingers. And he had been lucky that Rick had missed but Negan had plummeted into the basement instead.

But Rick wouldn’t be Rick if he hadn’t hunted him down there. The gunslinger had been surprised to find him still breathing, though.

“You’re still alive?” The curly haired bastard had asked in cold-hearted fury that had made Negan want to tease and annoy the shit outta him.

“I’m a goddamn cat.” He had answered, trying to overplay his fast beating heart and the dread in his stomach. The man in the leather jacket had known then that he was in a tight spot then.

“So, where’s your people? They should be here by now. We’re not that far from our border.” Rick had stoical ignored his taunts, but Negan had noticed how a muscle in the man’s tense jaw had started ticking. So Negan had decided to count this still as a win.

“Oh, they're coming.” He had bluffed easily but Alexandria’s leader hadn’t bought it.

“This is where you die... in the dark, all alone.” Rick had assured him in steely calm, rage and furious conviction burning in his cold blue eyes.

“What the hell is your problem, Rick? Huh? You want me to pay for what I tried in that meadow… did that big redhead die? Did that sick-looking girl, the wife, did she kneel over? I offered you and your people a place in the new world order, Rick! All you had to do to was fall in line! But you spat in my face time and time again! You and that green eyed bitch…” Negan had scoffed at Rick with narrowed eyes.

_The stuff Rick Grimes and his trice damned wizard had forced him to do! The lives that had been wasted on both sides.... It was a shame!_

He had been able to see Rick grinding his teeth as he had listened to Negan, so he had taken his cue to continue.

“I know I come across as an asshole- but if you aren't the most stubborn know-it-all prick I've ever crossed dicks with..."
What Negan hadn’t expected was the sharp punch to the nose and another to the neck that had rendered him unconscious.

And to be perfectly honest Negan had been more than surprised that he had woken up at all…

… and even more so when he had come back to his senses in a small cell.

Who the hell knew…? Rick-the-prick hadn’t killed him.

Instead the curly haired man was looking at him like he had swallowed a big lemon as he walked up and down before the cell, his right hand twitching nervously to his Colt Python every now and then. Negan had barked out a laugh at the ridiculous sight!

For whatever reason Rick had battled the impulse to take him out right away.

Well, well… so the game was still on.

Not that Rick was alone here. No… Negan recognized a few of the people standing before his cell. The dark skinned samurai woman and the tall curly haired man had also been in the meadow that fateful night. The priest with the creepy ass smile was new to him, though.

Interesting folks…

Suddenly the woman jumped up and pulled a small vibrating thing out of her pocket.
“Honey, you really shouldn’t waste batteries on ya toys. If ya need it that badly I’m sure one of the gentlemen in this town might be willing to help ya out!” Negan mockingly grinned at her suggestively. “Or are you are all dickless or sworn to celibacy?”

Oho, that got him a sweet reaction from Rick. And what a nice reaction that was!

Blue eyes blazing the cowboy had drawn his colt.
“Shut your mouth! Don’t talk to her!” He snapped at Negan, while the woman just coolly raised an unimpressed eyebrow.

So the cowboy was sticking it to the samurai… Interesting!

Negan saw then that the thing in her hand was a pocket mirror. And it vibrated…

And as she switched it open a voice called out to her.
“What the heck??!!

“Michonne!? Is it true? Is it over? Rick captured Negan?” Negan had heard that voice before…

It was the wife! The sick young woman from the meadow. So she was alive.

“Yes, he did. We have him in the cell. We found some of his men… dead, walking around in the forest.” Michonne confirmed in a calm voice. “We called all of you. The King and Natania still have to call us back. So we can decide together how to end it…”

Negan shivered at those words and what they implied…

*The King*… that meant that fool, Ezekiel.

And the *Wife*… didn’t sounded like she was here. Could it be that she was at the Hilltop? Had Gregory lost the Hilltop?

*Natania*… wasn’t that the old hag that had run the Hollowbranch community? Simon had told them that they had just disappeared one day. Negan had all but forgotten about them… So these fuckers had been out for his blood the whole time.

*Shit!* How hadn’t he known about that…? His uneasy surprise must have shown on his face.

“Sucks, when you realize that you don’t know shit, right?” The tall dark blond haired man remarked drily, throwing Negan’s own words from the meadow back at him…

Yes, Alexandria thought they had the upper hand now. These poor motherfuckers! They were in for a nasty wake-up call as soon as his partner made his move. And considering how long Negan had been gone by now, he was sure that the plan had already begun.

Leaning back comfortably against the wall he crossed his arms over his chest.

“You should have taken the deal, Rick.” Negan taunted instead of reacting to the bait. “I would have saved you. I still could save you all.”

“You can't save anyone, because you don't *care* about anyone. You use people, to bring you food, to sleep with you, to protect you!” Alexandria’s leader growled in distain. And then Negan’s heart nearly stopped as Rick-the-prick held something up.

*Lucille No.2*
“The only thing you care about is this bat! And you can't even save that! I'll make you a deal: I'll let you kiss her goodbye.” In horror he watched as Rick drenched her in gasoline.

“DON'T YOU TOUCH HER!” Negan screamed in panic. The picture of Lucille No.1 bursting into sawdust replaying in his mind… the icy coldness in luminescent green eyes as the last piece that held his world still together crumbled under his fingertips. Like the real Lucille, like his sweet wife… just gone…

And looking now in Rick’s bright blue eyes he found no mercy. “Come and get her!” The man taunted his voice as hard as his gaze. Michonne and the other two guys were just starring.

Suddenly the door to the prison flew open, revealing Daryl, the rough looking redneck from the meadow, and Jesus, one of Gregory’s Hilltop men. So he had been right the Hilltop had stood with Alexandria now…

The Saviours had already suspected it and had certainly tried to intimidate Gregory and his farmers into complying… but it seemed like Gregory was no longer in charge and his successor was made out of tougher stuff. Their intimidation had failed if Negan looked into the bright eyes of that Jesus guy.

*What a shame…*

“Merlin, Rick! Do I smell gasoline in here?” Negan could hear Harry’s crisp British voice reprimanded from behind Daryl’s broad back even before he could see the tiny young man.

“Uhm…” Negan mockingly raised an eyebrow at Rick suddenly flustered response. A messy shock of raven hair poked into the room and then Harry advanced onto Alexandria’s leader with a wagging finger.

“This is an enclose room without a bloody window… Do you want to poison us all? Don’t you dare to light that up, you hear me!” The exasperation in the wizard’s voice made Negan chuckle in delight.

“My, my… there you are Green Eyes!” He gushed, causing said uncanny eyes to focus on him. “I dreamed about your pretty face, you know?” Negan hummed happily. “I dreamed about bashing you beautiful head in. Hmmhmm.” He made some mock swings with an imaginary bat. “Bang! Bang! Bang! Until nothing was left but mush on the ground.” He shouted Oh yeah, Lucille would be so dirty.” He gloated with a sardonic grin.

The reaction was instant… but it wasn’t Harry that reacted…

No… it were the others that growled threateningly at the prisoner.
“You, shut your mouth!” Rick barked. But it were Daryl and Jesus that had murder written all over their faces.

“Got yourself an admire or two, Green Eyes? How nice! And here I was thinking that the future serial killer had a thing for you.” Negan continued trying to rile the wizard up.

It was fun. And angry people made mistakes! But Harry just regarded him with an easy calm before he turned to look at Rick, choosing to ignore Negan.

*That wouldn’t do… No, sir!*

“We’re holding him until all communities will come to a decision what to do with him and the Saviours?” The young man guessed.

“That’s the plan.” Rick nodded to which the kid sighed. For some reason the green eyed wizard seemed troubled by the situation. The look Harry gave Negan was full of suspicion.

“Was he alone out there? Did someone follow you here?” The small wizard questioned Rick and Michonne, worry evident in his expression.

“No.” The tough samurai shook her head. “The men he had with him were all dead. We found their corpses. You think there’s reason to be concerned?”

Harry had pressed his lips into a thin line and rotated his tense shoulders and while he didn’t answer out loud he gave Rick a weighted look that had the older man immediately on alert.

“Gabriel, go to Tobin tell him to double guards and the patrols as well.” Rick instructed.

*Shit!* No wonder the Saviours had such trouble against Rick Grimes and his people if that was the way Harry could smell the stink of trouble brewing 20 miles against the wind.

Not, that they would be able to do much against the shit storm his partner would let rain down on them… No, they would go down, all of them.

After this there would be no more resistance.

And he was sure that it had already started!

Only now, those freaky green eyes were back on Negan.

“Why did you come here? What made you cross the border?” Harry walked closer to the cell. “With the magic I used you must have felt that you were no longer welcome… It would have taken a lot of determination to come here despite that. And you must have noticed that your men were getting lost… didn’t make it back. So why? Why take the risk?”

“Ah Harry, not only breathtakingly pretty but smart.” Negan grinned broadly at the slender Brit.
“Together we could have ruled the world. It’s such a shame that you’ll have to die, really. That’s going to be one of my biggest regrets when all of this is over.”

“Like hell, ya ain’t laying a finger on him!” Daryl barked in anger teethes bared like an angry dog.

“Daryl is right! We’ll make sure you won’t get even the chance to breathe wrong in his direction.” Jesus coldly informed him.

Surprised by their vehemence Negan smirked. Yes, riling up people was fun and so informative.

Ah, jackpot!

“So which one of you is sticking it in the pretty boy, huh? The pretty hairy one or the bulky old one?” Negan laughed when the two men reared back with deep scowls on their faces. “Oh, did I say something that was a secret?” He asked innocently.

To his astonishment Michonne and the tall curly haired men snorted while Rick grimaced a little in discomfort. Harry just grinned wickedly back at Negan, sauntering over to Daryl to press a kiss on the older man’s lips.

“So it’s the old grumpy one? Man, whatever floats your boat.” Negan whistled only to choke a little when Harry turned to Jesus pulling him also into a kiss.

“Oh, come on, kiddo! Now you’re just fucking with me!” Negan groaned. That boy was really good at messing with his head.

“Maybe I am… maybe I am not…” Harry told him calmly but the mischievous gleam in those green eyes mocked him, before they turned serious again.

“You’re done for. And even if Rick stopped now… you’re new Lucille is going to be destroyed just like the one before. She will be gone like your wife. And if you’re lucky you’re going to see her again.” Harry told him solemnly. The fact that the wizard was so calm… it scared Negan more than any of Rick’s threats ever could.

He growled in agitation and impulsively banged his fists against the bars.

“You’re making a mistake, you fucking assholes! You’re failing your people, Rick! Kinda makes me sick just thinking about it. All that wasted potential… But see, there is still hope for you!” Negan grasped out. As much as he trusted his partner, maybe this was wroth another shot.

“A one-time deal: you get Hilltop, Kingdom, Alexandria and Natania to fall in line and our arrangement is back in place, and you are forgiven, Rick! I will lower my take from 50 to 25% - a lousy 25%! But you, you gotta come work for me, Harry. Not bad at all. Your people, they get to live like 75% KINGS! Now that is an epic freaking Christmas-Hannukah-Kwanzza gift all rolled up into one considering what a THORN in my ass-cheek you've all been!”

“Now why would I trust any deal offered to me after what your people did to Natania and her people?” Rick’s answering smile was all sharp edges.
Those words left Negan reeling.

“What the hell are you talking about? The old hag just took her people, packed her backs and left. They were offered the same deal everyone else got.” Under his confusion Negan felt the uncomfortable suspicion that he was missing an important piece of the puzzle right now…

“Your men killed every male over the age of ten! Fathers, brothers, sons! ALL of them! Half of the community just wiped out as punishment for resisting!” Michonne hissed at him. Her eyes condemning him a millions times over for the atrocious deed.

Negan felt like all air got sucked out of his lungs…

But Rick was relentless. “Is that how you ‘save’ people?” He asked cynically.

Simon had told him that he had delivered the message to Hollowbranch community when Natania and her daughter had started to fight against them. The same message they always sent!

One person, two at max! Pressure them back in line! Waste no resources!

Those were the rules Negan had sworn his men into! Those were the rules he had beat into them as he grabbed leadership of the Sanctuary.

Negan had thought that Simon had learned his lesson. That was why he had made the other man his right hand. Negan had thought that he could trust him and now it turned the Simon had lied to him!

“Sonuva bitch!” Negan whispered to himself.

This brought another uncomfortable question… what else had his right hand man lied about. Negan had given him a lot of leeway… And more importantly could he still trust Simon with their partner… Were they still on the plan? Were still doing everything they had agreed on?

 Fucking shit!

“You didn’t know!” Harry exclaimed suddenly with a breathless chuckle as he stared wide eyed at Negan. “Merlin! You really didn’t know… I’ve already guessed that you didn’t control what your men did with the communities as long as you thought the results were good enough. But to think that you had so little control over them to miss something so big…”

Negan was grinding his teeth when Harry shook his head. “Every deal you’re offering us here and now, is worthless now that we know that… You lost all credibility.”

Rage and despair were starting to cloud Negan’s vision, he felt like this prison walls were closing in on him.

*He was stuck! He was stuck!*
Rick was peering at him, his cold blue eyes cataloguing every sweat drop on Negan’s forehead, as he casually twirled Lucille between his fingers.

He couldn’t trust Simon anymore. Harry was right… Negan hadn’t controlled his executives enough. Who could he trust if Simon had already betrayed him?

Negan could feel the weight of their silent, judging stares.

These bastards! These fucking bastards.

His breath was coming in short puffs and his chest felt uncomfortable tight. He had built something big out there, something larger than life! He had saved people! And now these fuckers thought that they could destroy him, that they could dismiss him!

No! Oh no! He would show them! An injured bear was always the most dangerous! This cage wouldn’t hold him forever!

His new partner had vowed to help him! He was bound to the deal!

They both were!

“You might think that you have won, Rick… That the nifty trick your little wizard pulled out of his sleeve was enough. Yeah? Well, fuck you guys! You’re already dead!” Negan seethed behind the bars through clenched teeth. He could tell that Rick was ignoring him but Harry was suddenly very alert.

“Yeah Green Eyes, that little ward might have made problems for me and my men but will it also keep someone like you out? Someone, who knows this shit?” Negan taunted and finally he got the reaction he had been waiting for.

The British menace was paling drastically.

“What are you saying?” Harry whispered, dread obvious in his soft voice. The young man’s unease triggered a domino reaction in the other inhabitants of this room. They all seemed more alert now.

“Well, Rick’s not the only who can ask a wizard for some extra help, you know.” Negan smirked at them like a cat that got the canary. “Has the same delightful accent as you, you know?”

Harry had gone very still and the Saviour’s leader wondered if the teen had stopped breathing all together.

“Came a long way here. Said that around a year ago something strange happened in the area around here. Lit up the world like a beacon in the night, made him curious enough to start investigating… We stumbled into each other by chance.”
Suddenly it felt like all air got sucked out of the room, making Negan and everyone else visibly shiver.

“Who?” Harry’s voice was toneless. He wasn’t looking at anyone, his fringe was hiding his eyes from view.

“You know, when I mentioned you, Harry… Described you pretty face with those fucking green eyes and that particular scar on your forehead… He got really, really… excited!” Negan kept on taunting, ignoring the strange sensation of increasing pressure in the room or the way the lights had started to flicker or the buzzing sound of angry bee’s filled the room.

“Harry?” Jesus took a step forward. But before he could touch the small kid, the cell’s door blew out of it angles with a loud bang, just narrowly missing Negan.

“Wow kid, did I hit a ner…?” Negan didn’t get to finish the sentence as he was suddenly slammed against the brick wall with so much force that it drove all air out of the lungs.

“Oh fuck…!” Negan wheezed winded. His head was ringing from the collision.

The pressure on his chest wasn’t easing up one bit. It felt like an elephant had sat down on him. And as he noticed just now he couldn’t move a fucking muscle even if had wanted to…

Fuck…?!

Stinging sensations had started prickling all over his body as the buzzing sounds got louder, echoing through the small room. And then Harry was in front of him with an expression he had never seen before on this soft and beautiful face.

“Who?” The young wizard demanded again, green eyes stone cold and harsh.

“Come on, Harry… You don’t expect me to spoil the surprise do you?” Negan wheezed with a nasty smile. He flinched at a particular painful sting. The little Brit loomed before him and for a moment Negan thought that he could see the vicious predator the boy could be if he wanted to…

“This is the last time I’m going to ask.” Harry hissed at him icily, so low that Negan could barely hear him under the angry buzzing noise. “After that I’ll get the answers from you in my own way… So tell me, what you’ve done, Negan? Last chance.” Negan couldn’t suppress the shudder that ran through his body as those luminescent green eyes bore into him. “Who?”

But the Saviour’s leader wouldn’t have lived to this day if he cowed so easily. So despite the dread in his stomach Negan straightened his shoulders and put on his cockiest smile for the show. “Such a curious little thing, you are Green Eyes. No!” He gloated.

Green eyes flashed dangerously in response and although Harry wasn’t touching him there was suddenly sensation of hands pressing around his throat, causing him to cough and choke.
“Harry…?!” Someone else, maybe Rick tried to intervene… But Negan couldn’t look away from those gleaming emeralds.

Was that what the last thing he would see? Would he die to the sound of angry bee’s?

He thought he could see Harry’s pinkish lips moving… but… the words…

“Ok… I warned you.” Negan more felt them resonating in his head than he had really heard them…

Harry was staring into his eyes and Negan couldn’t have broken the eye contact even if he would have wanted to… Green eyes bore into his own dark ones.

Perring deep into his soul.

“Legilimens!”

Sharp pain followed immediately. Negan’s head felt like it had been split open.

Distantly Negan could hear his own pained screams as he felt the green eyed wizard invading through his mind, ripping viciously through memories and thoughts.

Reading it, controlling it, unhinging it.

Harry was a relentless beast. He took everything…

_Lucille, give me strength…_

_This was agony!_

_*_

They all stared wide eyed at Harry and Negan, unable to move under the heavy pressure of the small wizard’s magic. Rick’s ears were ringing with the angry buzzing noise that filled the room and Negan’s tortured screams.

Whatever was going on right now…?

Whatever Harry was doing right now…?

It was causing the cocky man in the leather jacket pure agony.
For god’s sake there was blood coming out of Negan’s nose…

And Harry wasn’t even touching the man…

It all stopped abruptly.

They all stumbled a little as the pressure of magic eased up so suddenly.

Rick’s ears popped as the buzzing and screams came to an end and heavy silence settled over them. The blue eyed man felt oddly numb like this. And they all watched how Harry stepped back from Negan who was still pinned to the wall, heavily panting and glassy eyed. A trail of blood running down from his nose.

Rick saw how Daryl and Jesus flinched as Harry jerkily turned his back on all of them, just starring at the cell’s wall. The British youth looked tense as hell, his fists clenched and shaking.

Rick shivered again… It felt like the temperature in the room had taken a free fall. The former Sheriff could see his breath forming small puffy clouds in the air.

What the fuck…?!

He shared a nervous look with Daryl and Jesus, who were anxiously looking at their small lover.

“Harry?” Jesus asked softly, taking a cautious step forward.

No reaction.

Rick thought that the shaking might have increased… It wasn’t only the hands anymore…

BANG!!

The harsh sound of a lightbulb exploding over their heads had them all jumping in startled fright. Goosebumps were creeping all over Rick’s arms when small chuckling sounds filled the cell…

Harry had started laughing.

A cold and mirthlessly, tranquil laugh that had all of them shivering in unease. Rick hadn’t heard that kind of laugh from Harry since the kid had stood up to Gareth at Terminus. And he had hoped that he would never have to hear that hollow and broken sound ever again from his foster son. Just looking at the pain in Daryl’s face Rick could tell that his brother felt equally shaken
about this.

“Harry…?” Jesus whispered very softly as if he feared to spook a nervous horse. “Sweetheart… will… can you talk to us? Please?” And his quiet plea seemed to finally pierce through the strange mood surrounding the British youth, as Harry laughter decreased to faint chuckling.

“You know… this is really disappointing.” Harry mumbled coldly as he peered at Negan’s fallen form. Rick could see that the usually cocky man shivered when those otherworldly eyes and a bitter, humourless smile were directed at him. Something churned in Rick’s belly and he felt Daryl rear back a little at Harry’s strange tone when the young man continued.

“I knew you were a bloody asshole the first time I saw you on that meadow threatening my family.” The small wizard’s voice sounded strangely soft now… almost gentle and soothing. “Merlin, I was sure that you’re a sociopath when we met in the Sanctuary and you were harassing Carl.” The light tone posed a stark contrast to the kid’s twisted smile and the harsh look in his eyes. Fear creeped through the former Sheriff as the teen slowly and deliberately advanced on Negan. Like a predator.

“But I would never have guessed that you were… stupid!” Rick flinched together with Negan at the sharp hiss with that Harry had uttered that last word. The whole room seemed to be freezing by now.

“So yeah, this is disappointing!” The slender Brit breathed down on Negan, who had paled drastically.

None of his usual cocky swagger in place. The taunting grin gone for once.

“What are you talking about?” Negan choked out.

Harry glared at the fallen man with a furiousness in his eyes that had Rick taking a step back. He saw Negan clenching his eyes shut as another bout of strong magic slammed against the wall right next to his head. The former Sheriff felt a sweat drop run down his face as he observed how Negan swallowed with great difficulty when he saw that the bricks had cracked at the strength of the impact.

“You’ve become greedy and you’ve become desperate. So you made a deal with the devil.” Harry stated clearly with a calm voice and gleaming emerald green eyes. “You made a deal. Took a vow, even! And you didn’t ask the right questions.” Harry hissed. True terrifying anger written all over his fine sculptured features.

“What… What the fuck are you rambling about?” Negan stuttered, seemingly cowed by the young wizard’s cold fury.

“You haven’t asked him what he wants in return!” Harry snapped harshly, causing the Saviour’s leader to frown in confusion.

“I did…! We agreed on a payment in resources.”

The mocking and hollow snorting laugh he received from Harry as an answer did nothing to defuse the tension in the cell.
“Oh, you see that’s where you went wrong. I know that man… I know him better than I want to... I saw the vow. You have failed to specify what he would consider resources. He won’t be satisfied with food or weapons, you know? He won’t!”

Dread was spreading through Rick at those words. This sounded bad even if he didn’t quite understood yet what Harry was on about.

Negan seemed just as rattled. “Green Eyes, shoot straight with me.” He groused back with a deep scowl.

“Oh now, you want to know? Now! When it’s too bloody late to change anything? That’s rich. You swore the oath, a binding unbreakable vow! Although you knew how that turned out for Jadis?! You did it without knowing what’s exactly on the stake!” While Harry’s voice got increasingly louder, the bricks on the other side of Negan’s face cracked dangerously. Rick watched in concern as his foster son balled his shaking fists and took a few deep breaths before he looked back at their prisoner. “That man and you… you two have something in common. You both consider people resources.” Harry revealed tonelessly to the Saviour’s leader.

Negan looked nervous now. “So you think he’ll ask for some men? I swore to open resources from all the communities to him… how many could he take…?”

Another mirthless laugh mocked the Negan’s question as Harry bend down to the man on the ground.

“He will not ask for men… he has no use for them! He likes them a lot younger. And he’ll take them all because he’s in the bad habit of breaking his playthings. But I already see that you don’t get it.” Harry turned abruptly away from Negan, switching to pacing agitatedly through the small room. Every now and then his eyes would land on Daryl and Jesus causing his slender hands to shake again before he clenched his fists and starred back at Negan in determination.

“So, let me show you then what you signed away. Let me show you the devil you invited into all of our houses’…”

Legilimens!

Negan’s head snapped back again, as Harry forced his magic on him for a second time that day. This time their prisoner wasn’t screaming but the silent horror on his face wasn’t any easier to stomach.

Much sooner than before the small wizard pulled back. The frail teen was deathly pale and shaking all over. His expression as closed off as Rick had ever seen it.

This time when Harry stepped back the Saviour’s leader crumbled to the floor like a puppet cut loose from all of its string. Negan was left a heaving and quivering mess on the floor. Pitiful wheezing and sobbing sounds escaped the slumped lump on the floor that was normally a cocky asshole with a big taunting grin.

None of that seemed left when Negan whimpered, vomiting all over the floor in heavy gaging heaves.

The man they had all learned to fear… whose shadow had haunted Rick for months… that had cost
him so much sleep…

That man appeared to be broken.

Not on a physical level like Rick had imagined doing it… No mentally.

Whatever Harry had done there… Whatever he had shown Negan just yet… It had ripped his mind to shreds.

Stunned and a little scared Rick starred at the scene before him. He had known that Harry was powerful… They all had. But this…

Nothing could have prepared Rick for this…

“I'm a half trained school drop-out. It might take years to compensate for all the education I missed and to achieve the practical knowledge for the more complex spellcraft.”

Harry had said this to him all this months ago… if that was the damage he could inflict… then what did they have to except from the fully trained wizard that had sided with Negan?

Watched on as Harry crouched down in front of Negan, Rick shivered at how hollow the kid sounded and how… dead… his eyes looked. He remembered this expression on Harry’s face from the early days – when they had just started to travel together…

His foster son had been haunted by his past and his memories back then and it seemed that Negan had now called one of those old demons back into Harry’s life and in turn he had viciously shared his terrible and horrifying trauma with the Saviour’s leader.

The green eyed wizard gripped Negan by the chin and almost gently lifted the man face away from his own filth.

“You see… This is the man you stuck a vow with.” Harry said in an icy calm voice. “This is what will happen to everyone under the age of seventeen if you win. This is what you get for agreeing to work with a man, like Antonin Dolohov!”

Oh fucking shit!

*

They all stared in shock at Harry and Negan. Paul had closed his eyes in dread and was cursing under his breath beside Daryl.

“Harry...?” Daryl asked his little lover again. “Dolohov?” The hunter didn’t know what he had expected… or who… but that revelation was a punch to the gut. Harry had only given him and Paul bits and pieces about the time Voldemort had held him captive… but the little things he had told them…
“Natania’s brother? The one that?” Rick asked in confusion.

“Yes.” Harry replied curtly but Daryl was somewhat relieved that he was finally reacting and answering to them at all.

“Didn’t you say that he was dead?” Rick frowned in confusion. Daryl watched as Harry cringed at the question. He remembered that the green-eyed teen had indeed told that to Nataina.

“I thought so... The way my old headmaster and Snape made it sound...” Harry mumbled deep in thought. Beside Paul growled lowly as their lover utter the name of his former Potion’s Professor.

“Snape? The guy that...” Daryl hissed. “Ya trusted him?” The thought about what that man had done to Harry made Daryl stomach churn in outrage.

“In that regard... Yes.. I did.” The young Brit sighed distractedly.

“Maybe ya shouldn't have.” Daryl couldn’t help but snap... That Harry trusted that piece of shit send an overwhelming rush of burning jealousy through his body. Daryl cringed when he saw how Harry flinched under his harsh tone and Paul was looking at him with those big eyes full disapproving disappointment.

Fuck!

Detached green eyes peered at his from under dark lashes. “If I had known, Daryl... Merlin, if I had even suspected that Dolohov was still alive I would have never come back here. I would have never dared to reach out to you.” The hunter felt his heart freeze as Harry uttered those words almost tonelessly. Daryl could see Paul trembling beside him as the small wizard looked somberly at his two lovers.

Why did it feel like Harry was miles away from them, when he was just a few steps before them?

Why did Daryl feel the need to grab the slender from in front of him?

To hold him close...

Why did he have the feeling that Harry was already out of their reach.

And why did this feel like an end...? Like a goodbye...?

Daryl tried to swallow against the lump in his throat and to breathe despite the tightness in his chest. He wanted to say something... Anything!

Paul did not seem to fare any better. His mouth opening and closing without making a sound. Daryl was almost glad when Aaron cleared awkwardly his throat.

“I’m sorry... But who the hell is this Dolohov guy? And what does it mean that he's here?”
“He’s Natania’s older brother. When he was still a teen himself he was responsible for abusing and violating his little sister to the point that their mother thought that the only way of keeping her daughter alive was to send her away… and to banish her from the family. He also belonged to Voldemort’s inner circle. One of his most trusted. The go-to-man when his lord wanted to break someone. That's how I met him...” Harry revealed still sounding terribly closed off.

The implications of what had just been uttered in monotonous voice hung heavy in the small cellar. Of course the little wizard had talked with Daryl and Paul about small bits and pieces from the time he had suffered in the hands of Antonin Dolohov... But he had never shared all of it with them... And Negan’s heavy reaction made the hunter dread what else might have happened to his little lover in those four weeks of captivity.

Aaron’s brown eyes were wide in shock as his head twitched from Rick to Harry to Daryl and Paul. The slender wizard just gave Alexandria’s scout a heavy glance in return, his expression giving away nothing.

“And it means that you should gather everyone here.” Harry told them firmly.

“What?” Michonne asked, sounding as overwhelmed and aghast as the rest of them all felt. Harry chose to ignore her and Daryl had never seen his lover disregard Michonne or anyone in their family like that.

Instead he turned his glowing emerald eyes on Rick.

“Rick, get them all here! Now!” The command vibrated through Daryl like an electric shock.

His feet were already moving him to the door before he really realized what was going on... Rick, Michonne and Aaron were in fact already out of the door. Only Paul was still next to him. There was a strangely empty look on his face, but his eyes were flickering with deep unease. Like Daryl, he probably felt compelled to comply with Harry's demand and a part of the hunter's heart was breaking with the knowledge that Harry was controlling...forcing them to do as he ordered.

This wasn’t... Daryl had never thought Harry would do this kind of thing to them…

When they came back with all of Alexandria’s residents, he could see the same harsh realization in all of their expressions. Daryl had no words much that betrayal of trust hurt. The only thing soothing the blow was that the hunter was certain that Harry wouldn’t do this if he didn’t thought it was 100 percent necessary.

And Daryl could admit that they were out of their league right now… they never had to go against another wizard before…

A man that dangerous…

A man that had nearly destroyed Harry once…

Harry was the only one who had even the faintest idea what they were up against or what to do now.
The room with the cell had been changed drastically. Harry had expanded it to the point where it could easily harbour all of Alexandria’s people. Bunkbeds and hammocks had been erected and there were two new doors that apparently lead to bathrooms!? Food supplies and even a kitchen had been installed...

Their little wizard had built this into a bunker.

“Harry?! What the fuck?” Rick breathed at the sight, making the green eyed teen look at them. His usually expressive face giving nothing away, shutting them all effectively out. Daryl could feel Paul trembling beside him. This had to be Paul’s worst nightmare and it was turning rapidly into Daryl’s, too…

“You're going to stay here!” Harry told them in a no-none-sense tone. It felt like a punch in the gut… like someone had pulled the carpet away from under his feet. Paul made a choked noise.

“What? No! We're not!” Their long haired lover hoarsely disagreed.

“He’s right. Whatever is going on… we’re in this together, Harry. I am not letting you go out there alone.” Rick argued hotly.

Daryl wanted to support his brother’s point but he couldn’t look away from Harry’s blank face and the haunting hardness in his eyes.

“That wasn't a recommendation, Rick.” Harry replied in tersely. “You're going into lock-down. Keep everyone together. The higher floors will give you the best opportunity to defend the house and I did my best to make this place as secure as possible. I really hope that… That it holds.” Only now Daryl could detect a flickering of uncertainty and fear behind the impermeable wall of cold reticence Harry had erected around himself since the moment he had seen Dolohov in Negan’s memories.

“Damn it, Harry! Will you please talk to us?!” Paul all but begged causing the green eyed youth to flinch a little at the desperation and unsettling pain in Paul’s expression. Daryl got the feeling that their young lover was avoiding looking at either of them on purpose. Instead he turned away from them and starred directly at Rick.

“This isn't Terminus. This isn't Gareth. This isn't attacking a satellite station in the middle of the night.” There was finally some emotion back in Harry but the blubbing rage that now simmered clearly dangerously close under the surface did nothing to reassure Daryl. “Antonin Dolohov is a combat trained wizard! With decades of experience in the dark arts at his hands.” The British youth hissed at Rick. “He knows how to inflict pain and torture. He enjoys...relishes in it! He's a blood purist. He doesn't care for Muggle lives... You'll be dead before you even realise that he has found you. Because to him your lives are completely worthless. And you will count yourself lucky if that happens before you have to see what he will do to the children!” The mixture of despair, fear and rage that battled in those green eyes was hard to stand.

And it was then that Daryl understood that Harry wasn’t trying to be cold or to shut them out… His small boyfriend was terrified for all of them, barely keeping it together.
Harry didn’t believe if they could make it this time…

*Fuck…! That…*

Daryl put a heavy hand on Paul’s shoulder to offer himself and the shorter man some sort of stability. Swallowing with difficulty the archer shook his head at his ninja lover trying to convey the message, causing big cyan eyes to be filled with anguish and fear when they looked at Daryl. He gave his lover’s shoulder a comforting squeeze, closing his own eyes in an attempt to escape the harsh reality and the blooming hurt in his chest.

“So we’re hiding?” Rick asked hollowly. So his brother had noticed it, too.

“Yes, you’re hiding. Keep the children close. Shoot at everything that moves on the streets. Don’t hesitate!” Harry stated firmly. There was an underlying, hard determination in his voice that caused Daryl’s stomach to sink.

*Amplifying the feeling of goodbye…*

*Harry didn’t believe that he was going to make it this time…*

“You’re saying you as if…” Paul forlornly whispered and Daryl could feel how their hippie ninja choked in fear, unable to say it out loud. The hunter already suspected it but both he and Paul needed and deserved to hear it.

“What are ya going ta do?” He rasped at Harry, his voice raw with emotions.

*Harry didn’t believe that he was going to make it this time…*

*But he’s going to try none the less…*

Lips pressed stubbornly together Harry glared at the doorframe. With a sharp twisting movement he summoned one of his daggers and cut swiftly into his palm.

Ignoring Paul's and Daryl’s protesting outcries he used his blood to boldly draw a few big runes on the wall.

Without making eye contact with any of them Harry flicked his wand and summoned what looked to be a heavy black cloak as well as two black leather holsters, holding two additional knifes and a gun. Daryl throat was clocked as he watched Harry gear up. With each black item he added to his slender frame more and more of their bright and lively lover seemed to disappear behind a new
terrifying darkness.

“I’ll need to warn the other communities. Natania… She deserves to know…” Harry mumbled, as he secured his wand in his holster. “After that I keep moving… or he’ll be able to track me too easily. I can’t stay… I can’t hide from him. Not for long.” Harry chuckled mirthlessly. “I never thought the day might come I’d miss the bonds on my magic.”

They all flinched at that.

Those seals had nearly killed Harry but they had hidden him from his enemies. And now…

“We could help you!” Aaron grabbed Harry’s shoulder shaking the small wizard trying to convince him to accept their help. “You don’t need to do this alone.”

“Yes, I do.” With narrowed eyes Harry slapped Aaron’s hand away but Rick had sensed an opening there.

“Harry please…?!” He tried to plead with the kid that he had come to love like a son.

“STOP IT!” Harry snapped angrily at them. “You don’t get it, do you Rick?! You can’t help me out there! If it comes to a confrontation, Dolohov will annihilate you. You have nothing to hold yourself against him. Nothing!” Green eyes were blazing now.

“Merlin, I love you guys! I really do. You’re my family! But you are probably the most infuriating, reckless and inconsiderate bunch of assholes that I’ve ever met. And most of the time I deal with it because I know what you’re all capable of and because I trust you… But this…!? If you go out there… you won’t help me. You’ll just die! I… I have to go alone because I won’t be able to look after your back and my own. You’ll drag me down.”

Those harsh words had all of them paling.

They were family. They had stood by each other through any conflict. They had made it this far because they had stuck together. They had survived so much and Harry had always relied and trusted them…

To hear him say now that their mere presence would burden him against Dolohov…

*Fuck…* being kicked in the balls would have been easier to bear.

Numbly Daryl watched as the slender wizard walked over to Carl, who was holding Judith, his long cloak billowed around him, giving his appearance a dramatic flair. Harry exchanged a loaded look with the blue eyed teen.

“Don’t trust anyone who comes here. Appearances can be changed and stolen, do you understand what that means? No matter, what or who you thing you see… You’ll shot first and ask questions later. If I make it back I’ll let you know.” Harry told Carl firmly.
“If…” Rick’s son whispered as Harry bend down to press a small kiss on Lil’ Asskicker’s forehead.

“Mote you be safe from harm.” He heard the green eyed youth mutter.

Daryl wanted to say something… anything to make Harry stay. But no words came to him, his throat constricted painfully as he thought about uttering any form of goodbye. Paul was just as silent.

Together they watched mutely as Harry steeled himself and in the end neither found the words to say anything, as their young lover simply closed the distance between them to press two last desperate kisses against their speechless mouths. Actions conveying what words couldn’t.

I love you!

I love you!

I love you!

My heart and soul!

And then it was over.

With a heavy sigh the small wizard stepped away from them and proceeded to pull his bandanna over his pale face, hiding his face from their longing eyes. After that Harry pulled the hood of his cloak up… making him look like that night in the meadow.

A mystical, foreign figure, shrouded in blacks and shadows with gleaming green eyes.

Daryl thoughts wandered back to the morning they had spent in Hilltop’s library listening to Harry explaining about magic and himself.

“But you could have done it? You could have slaughtered them all?” Rick had once been fascinated by the idea that Harry could kill easily with his powers.

“I will fight with you. Merlin, I trained to fight with you. I will do my best to protect you all, but I draw a line at becoming your magical assassin.” Harry had once been adamant not become their hitman.

“Killing with magic is different. It's not just a tool, like a gun. You can't just pull the trigger and let the bullet do the work. Magic needs intention. … You have to feel it!...You have to envision it or it won't work!...To kill someone with magic... You have to focus on that. Righteous anger isn't enough. You'll have to picture it in your head. It’s not enough to pull the trigger! You’ll have to become the bullet, piercing the flesh, willing it to drill its way through the body. You’ll have to want to extinguish that life. To snuff it out. To destroy. To annihilate. That kind of mind-set...”
Daryl had thought he had understood it then… but seeing Harry encased in darkness, sealing himself off from them – seeing that icy coldness in his eyes and to feel that heavy, looming weight of his magic pressing down on them… void of its usual excited or even anxious humming.

He had understood less than nothing back then…

He hadn’t really understood what it would cost Harry…

What it would take from his brave, big-hearted and vibrant lover…

The hunter missed the gentle and intimate caresses Harry’s magic normally left all over his body. Suddenly all too aware of this lack of contact Daryl shivered in dread and pain. The only thing keeping him remotely sane was the feeling of Paul’s taunt muscles under his fingers.

Paul was still here.

Rick, Carl, Michonne and Littl’ Asskicker were still here.

And even if their chances were low, they wouldn’t go done without a fight. Harry was ready to fight for them… was steeling himself to kill.

For his own revenge and for their safety.

Daryl tried to remind himself that it wouldn’t be over until it was over.

“I’ll be going on a hunt.” Harry’s voice sounded firm but muffled behind the fabric of the bandanna.

Looking deeply into those glowing emerald eyes Daryl forced his anxiety into the back of his head. Harry would be going, they couldn’t change that. The fight that was coming for their love was hard enough without burdening him with their anxiety on top of it.

“We’ll be waiting here for you.” Daryl rasped roughly.

“We’ll find each other.” Paul agreed.

Maybe it was wishful thinking but Daryl thought that he saw those expressive green eyes widening a bit and a tiny nod before Harry turned abruptly and vanished with a loud pop.

Chapter End Notes

Danger is closing in on them! Harry has to gear up if he wants to protect his family.
Please don't be to angry with Harry for being so stand offish, but he is desperate and
terrified... ^^'
I hope you liked the new chapter.
The next one will explain what Harry showed Negan. ;)

Chapter 31

I apologize beforehand for any spelling mistakes and my probably terrible punctuation. English isn’t my first language.

I do not own Harry Potter or the Walking Dead.

This story will show and mention sexual violence to a minor as well as homosexuality as the story progresses. Don't like, don't read.

I have decided not to write a flashback for the scene that Harry has shown Negan but let him describe it instead... I really didn't think that it would be necessary for the story to put all the gory details in words and pictures. But the scene mentions heavy violence against a very small child so if even the idea of that feels too much for you, please skip that part.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 31

Paul felt his knees buckle as soon as the small wizard was gone…

*Harry had left them…*

*Harry had left them…*

To hunt for Antonin Dolohov.

Natania’s elder brother. A known sadistic paedophile that had tortured and raped his own sister, Harry before as well as probably countless others…

A combat trained wizard with decades of experience in a kind of magic Harry knew next to nothing about…

Harry had left them little doubt about his chances to fight against that opponent. And their little lover had been very blunt about their ineptitude to help him… Forcing them to stay behind.

Paul’s skin was itching like mad. He was going out of his mind. He wanted to scream at Daryl for staying silent, for not fighting hard enough against Harry, when Paul himself had been just as unable to speak up.
A small traitorous voice in his head speculated that their wizard had done something to keep them from fighting back more… Paul immediately hated himself for even suspecting Harry of a betrayal like that.

He just felt so helpless… so utterly useless…

So impotent and insufficient…

What if…

What if…

What if…

Flashes of dead cyan eyes that mirrored his own appeared before Paul’s eyes. They were starring back at him out of a slack childish face and he was barely able to hold back pained whimpers at the onslaught of emotions that came with those pictures nor the sensations... The imprinted memory of the metallic stench of blood fill his nostrils and he could swear that his skin itched under the impression of that red and sticky liquid cooling on him.

He couldn’t take this…

He couldn’t lose someone else this close to him ever again…

He just couldn’t be alone again…

Mindless fear and panic had Paul shivering uncontrollable…

… until a pair of chapped lips pressed firmly against his own, demanding a part of his attention, as well as the calloused fingers that stroked over his cheek, beard and hair.

Daryl.

“Da…Daryl…” His lover’s name escaped him in hysterical sob, mixed with a longing sigh.

“Shh… I know.” Daryl mumbled against his lips. “I know…” The raw pain and palpable fear in the hunter’s voice had Paul pulling the taller and gruffer man back into a desperate kiss that was little too much on the rough side. But they both needed this… They needed the small bouts of pain to ground themselves. They needed to feel the other to reassure themselves that they were still here. That not everything was lost.
And if Daryl pushed him a little too harshly against the wall then it had Paul only burying his hand more firmly into the taller man’s hair, yanking on it.

Giving back as good as he got.

And if Daryl harshly gripped his hips to rub their clothed erections against each other so hard that it was borderline on painful, it had Paul just arching more relentlessly into the friction. All sane thoughts seemed to have escaped them as their high strung bodies sought desperately for release and some kind of comfort. With clenched teeth and lowly growled curses and stuttering hips they reached their mutual highs, holding each other impossibly close.

Burying his face into Daryl’s chest Paul allowed himself to catch his breath, surrounding himself with the other man’s earthy smell – he could feel Daryl doing the same as his lover dropped his head onto his shoulder.

“I love ya.” Daryl mumbled, almost too low to hear. But he did and it brought tears to Paul’s eyes.

“I love you, too.” He whispered, clasping the back for Daryl’s shirt a little more tightly than before.

Slowly his jumbled thoughts came to a rest... leaving enough room for a new one...

In a rush of embarrassed panic and with a small curse, he pushed Daryl away and looked around in a hurry... expecting to see...

Huh?

They weren’t in the cellar anymore... Paul recognized this as one of the smaller rooms in on the first floor. “Huh?!?”

Daryl’s soft chuckles pulled him back.

“Calm down, Paul. Ya were quite out of it... looked ready ta faint. I brought ya here ta unwind a little...” Smirking Paul quirked an eyebrow at Daryl, causing the gruff southern man to blush furiously. “Not like that... I hadn’t planned... I wouldn’t...”

It was adorable how this rough-looking man could start to ramble like a school boy over a heated make-out session. Paul decided to have mercy on him and pressed an almost chaste kiss to the hunter’s lips. He winced a little when he felt the drying wetness in his pants, though. But his sweet, loyal and very observant partner would never let an expression of discomfort slip.

“Yer alright? Was pretty rough... Did I hurt ya?” Daryl asked with deep frowning lines marring his face.

“No, Dare. Hush, don’t worry.” The hippie ninja soothed. “This was exactly what I needed. I just... I just really need to clean myself up.” Paul laughed a little when Daryl grimaced... probably
only yet noticing the same predicament.

After pulling the taller man in another loving kiss, Paul rested their foreheads together.

“I felt better now. Still worried out of my mind… but less unhinged?” He offered with a wry smile.
“I’m here now. Thank you, for taking care of me, my love.”

“Always.” Daryl vowed roughly.

This close Paul could see the will to hold on burning in Daryl’s beautiful eyes. It hit him then like a tonne of bricks that despite all that dramatic angst. He wasn’t alone. Even with Harry setting out to fight, Paul wasn’t alone.

Daryl hadn’t given up and he sure as hell hadn’t left him. This wasn’t like Tom!

The hunter still had trust in Harry, Paul, in his family and himself. The hunter would fight till the bitter end for them all, spurred on by his courage, loyalty and his unconditional love for them.

“We’re going to trust in Harry and we’re going to fight.” Paul voiced what he could see in his lover’s eyes.

“Hell, yeah.” Daryl smirked down at him.

* 

After cleaning themselves up, they made their way down to the others with their minds still reeling and worried but a lot more collected than before. They had decided to trust Harry. And even with the small wizard gone, they had to prepare for a fight. They had a job to do and people to protect that counted on them.

The small wizard had forced them into lock-down because he had thought it was their only chance to fight back… With all their numbers collected and their ranks close they could use the upper floors to protect the house.

This was not the time to lose their shit!

Shoot at anything that moves… Harry had said.

Well, fuck!

On their way down Daryl’s pocket mirror suddenly vibrated. Sharing a nervous glance with Paul the hunter opened the device… and honestly Paul had never seen the archer looking this disappointed at the sight of his best friend.
“Hey.” The older man greeted Carol with a huff, causing her to raise her eyebrows in concern at him.

“You look troubled, Pookie.” She observed keenly before her features softened. “You wanna tell me what’s going on? Harry just swept through the Kingdom like a damn hurricane… Put us on *house arrest*, pressed a kiss on Henry’s forehead and was gone again without really explaining anything…” The irritation in her voice was overshadowed by her worried frown. Closing her eyes, she hesitated for a moment before she continued, giving rooming to a vulnerable side of her.

“Daryl…?! Harry… He looked… I’ve never thought I could be afraid of him. So tell me, what the hell is going on?!“ Carol admitted in a soft whisper, obvious pained by her own feelings. But both Daryl and Paul could relate to that just all too well… it had been unsettling to see Harry like that… to feel that suffocating darkness around him.

“Negan managed to gain an ally…” Paul sighed heavily. “A dark wizard. He belonged to the people that held Harry captive and tortured him before he came to America.” He revealed instead of Daryl, who glowered heavily at the floor, just grunting in agreement.

“Shit!” Carol cursed, scowling darkly at them.

“Yeah… and apparently he has a taste for hurting… and assaulting children…” Paul added in a bleak voice. “Harry… he… he kinda flipped when he got it out of Negan, who he had sided with…”

“He’s going to confront him alone.” This wasn’t a question. Carol stated it coolly, like a fact. Her light blue eyes regarded them sharply, demanding a further explanation.

“Yes… he made it clear that…” Paul stumbled. The words catching in his throat… he couldn’t really bring himself to say them.

“We ain’t no help ta ‘im out there… a burden…” Daryl mumbled resignedly, nibbling nervously on his thumb.

“Can he hold his own against that man?” Carol asked with a stony face, cutting right to the point that hurt the most, just when they came up to Rick and the others.

Both, the blue eyed Sheriff and Michonne, were also talking into their mirrors. And apparently Paul and Daryl had been close enough that they all had heard Carol’s question.

“I fear that Harry is way out of his depth with this one.” Natania’s voice answered Carol from the mirror in Rick’s hand.

The resignation in her voice made them all shiver with dread. Paul felt his stomach sinking.

“Antonin… he’s always been a powerful and cruel. He used to torment the house elves before he switched his attention to larger… more human targets…” The old woman’s voice shook with bitterness and painful memories. “It was one of the reasons the Dark Lord took so much interest in him. Riddle took my brother under his wing and I can only imagine the things he learned from that monster. Antonin fought front and centre for his master in the wizarding war that finally consumed Potter’s family. And while Harry is powerful… He certainly lacks experience in real magical fighting… to the death.” Natania sounded scared… truly scared and hopeless.
For the first time since they had met the tough, old woman, she seemed lost…

“Isn’t there anything we can do?” Michonne asked desperately and Paul felt his heart speed up in hope that anyone could and would think of anything that they could do to help Harry – that would make them less useless.

But only silence answered her.

“No… not that I can think of.” Natania answered finally. She sounded defeated. “Potter did well in putting us in lock-downs. A united front is a lot harder to break. If Antonin comes for one of the communities only a surprise attack or an all-out onslaught might be our only chance to defend ourselves. If we allow him to sneak into our midst…” Here she shuddered. “One on one… we would be dead before we’ll know what’s going on. The boy might be at a disadvantage but out of all of us he has the best chances to fight against my brother.” She breathed out deeply. Regret and fear clinging to her every word.

“She’s right, you know…” Another voice croaked bleakly.

Negan.

The man was staring blankly at the wall of his prison cell, no longer a crumbled heap on the floor but leaning slumped against the bricks, looking utterly defeated.

“You’re the last person that should be talking right now! You’re the one that got us into this mess. You have absolutely no right!” Michonne hissed aggressively at their prisoner.

“You haven’t seen, what I have seen!” Negan hissed back, the look in his eyes wild and feral like a mortally wounded animal.

Again Paul’s insides churned with dread.

“What has Harry shown you?” Aaron whispered.

That was the question, wasn’t it? The one they all wanted to ask but hadn’t dared until now… to afraid of the answer. And so it seemed was Negan… afraid to answer or to even think about the thing he has seen. The man pressed the palms of his hands against the sockets of his eyes, shaking his head as if to block out the memories.

“What has Harry shown you?” Rick asked again more firmly.

After what felt like ages Negan inhaled loudly before rasping out a frail and broken sounding: “Hell…”

Exchanging troubled glances between them Paul took a few steps forward to the cell crouching down in front of the bars.

“Negan, what memories did Harry show you?” Paul voiced the question calmly almost gently now, trying to coax the man into answering.
The answers he got, was a mirthless chuckle.

“He hasn’t just showed me the shit… That little motherfucker wasn’t satisfied in giving me a front row seat. No, he had to pull me onto the stage and into the play.” Cyan eyes widened in shocked surprise as Negan let out a desperate laugh. “He made me feel it. He let me experience it… all of it!”

The Fuck…?!

No wonder, Negan looked so pale, so terrified… so broken.

The look in his eyes was very much like Harry’s back when he had been still in the hands of the Claimers.

Empty dread and nausea… the look of someone that had been violated.

Yeah, Harry had gone all-out on the Saviour’s leader.

And for a moment Paul felt sick… That had been a vindictive move… harsh and cruel…

More than anything else it betrayed Harry’s desperation, his fear and rage, that he gone this far!

Whatever the little Brit had shared with Negan must have been horrible… and sharing a heavy look with Daryl, Paul didn’t know if what he was feeling for The Saviour’s leader right now was vicious pity or spitefulness.

Negan was now rocking back and forth, still shaking every now and then. His hands were nervously rubbing over his arms as if he needed to reassure himself of who he was.

“What did you see? Was there anything that we can use against Dolohov?” Aaron pressed on. The wretched choked up sound that Negan made then had Daryl pressing his lips into a thin line and Paul searching for his lover’s hand…

It sounded just too much like Harry after a flashback or a nightmare.

“Pain.” Negan muttered. “Everything hurt. I never felt something like this before. My very nerve was on fire, burning. My body was trashing… convulsing… while he was inside… me… Harry… I don’t know…” He rambled in strained, broken whispers. “He laughed the whole time… wanted information ‘bout something I… Harry… didn’t know… He didn’t care, because it was more fun that way.”

Daryl felt ice in his veins and dread in his stomach. This was seriously messed up. And it reminded him how much of a wonder it was that Harry had allowed the physical part of their relationship bloom to this point at all. That he was able to trust him and Paul this much…
“And when the kid didn’t break… Dolohov found another method to… torture him...” Negan’s shoulders slumped in defeat. Daryl thought that he started sounding a little more detached the longer he spoke, like talking about the things he had seen seemed to help him straightening out his thoughts…

At least he had stopped confusing Harry and himself.

Daryl watched as Negan lifted his head looking over at them and then his gaze came to a halt… on Carl who was still holding Lil’ Asskicker. Something strange flickered over Negan’s face as he stared at the children.

“That’s your little girl, Rick?” He asked. Usually such a question would have made Rick and Daryl, himself, bristle in anger… but that strangled tone Negan used…

It had them all frowning in concern.

“Yeah, she is. What of it?” Rick asked, blue eyes narrowed in suspicion.

“When the kid said that Dolohov liked them young… he wasn’t kidding. I just hadn’t thought…” Negan looked green. “I hadn’t realized how young…”

Daryl wanted to puke. He didn’t want to know more, he could guess what…

“He brought a small girl in… blond, just a bit older than your little one… made the Harry watch… as he… destroyed her… ripped her apart.”

That son of a bitch! No wonder Harry had been like that…

That guy was a monster and if they didn’t make it… If they didn’t win…

*  

If they lost…

If that was would happen to the kids… to Judith and Gracie…

If this was what was at stake…

Yeah, Daryl could understand how that would make Harry snap… How it could draw the determinate intention to kill out of their sweet-hearted lover.

Hell, Aaron looked green in disgust and horror at the corner where Eric played with Gracie. Rick looked shaken and pale but with a fire in his eyes that reminded Daryl about the night, back when he had ripped Joe’s throat out with his teeth.
Harry felt antsy.

Even through in the back of his mind he could feel the first signs of exhaustion as he closed his mirror. The young wizard had just finished his call with Hermione. He had informed her very shortly about Negan’s new ally. While Harry had confided in her about the Claimers he had never told her what he had really suffered at the hands of Voldemort and his Death Eaters. And he didn’t waste precious time on it now but something in his expression or tone or both must set her off because his friend had looked deeply worried… and most importantly she had refrained from asking too many questions just listening, which was a rare exception in itself. Driven by tension and urgency alike Harry had implored to her to take the bad news to McGonagall, Dumbledore’s portrait and as much as it left a bitter taste in his mouth… to Snape. If everything Harry tried to do right now would fail… Harry clenched his fists…

Hogwarts needed to be prepared. Snape needed to know. No matter the history they shared, Harry knew that the dungeon bat would do what was necessary to protect the school and what was left of Britain’s wizarding world. He needed to know that Dolohov was still alive. That he was still a danger…

Snape needed to be ready and alert.

This left no room for failure.

Absolutely none.

Either he would hunt down Dolohov soon and kill him, or his family would be dead… or worse. Harry couldn't let this happen.

He just couldn't let a monster like that live.

He couldn't.

Not with shit, Dolohov had done to him. Not when he could still hear the desperate cries of that small girl, ringing in his ears. Not when he could still smell the blood on her broken body, whimpering and sobbing in pain in Harry’s arms.

Rage, hot like burning metal ran through his veins.

*That man deserved to die!*
Harry would see this through.

There wasn't any other way.

There just wasn't.

* 

So he had started to track the fucker down. Harry knew Dolohov’s magical signature well enough… This bleak, dark oily presence that brought darkness everywhere that man went.

In the end Harry wasn't really surprised when he found Dolohov. The former Death Eater had managed to locate the source of the blessed wards the younger wizard had created with Mother's help. Hidden under his invisibly cloak Harry had crepted through the woods closer and closer to the stone circle, a strange clam settling over him. He was determined to end this. He wouldn't stop until he had killed that man.

On the meadow close to the stone circle he spotted his prey, dressed in a long dark grey battle cloak. Dolohov was still an intimating figure. Still tall and broad, but his hair and beard were now streaked with more white than at their last encounter. Dolohov’s sharp features seemed a little more lined but his grey eyes – eyes that he shared with his sister - still held that chilling virulence.

The eyes of a true monster.

The only times Harry had seen something else than cold detachment in them, had been when he had been screaming his throat raw under his tormentor... Only then those shark-like eyes had gleamed in terrifying excitement.

This fight wouldn’t be refined… There would be no grand gestures. No bowing or even acknowledging each other before spells would be cast. This wouldn’t be a duel between honourable gentlemen…

If Harry wanted any chance to win he had to fight fast and dirty… he had to catch Dolohov of guard… duelling etiquette be damned. This was probably his only chance to kill the man. To sneak up on him like an assassin and cast the killing curse.

Harry gripped his wand a little tighter at that thought.

A trickle of cold sweat was running down his face. Maybe it would be better to slit Dolohov’s throat on top of that.

Just in case… just in case he messed the Avada Kedavra up…


Merlin, he had to calm down or he would fall into hysteria. Taking deep breaths Harry tried to calm his mind, before he moved on.

Silent as a ghost he closed the distance between him and his prey with all the stealth Daryl had taught him. Thinking about his strong, loyal Hufflepuff had Harry gripping his wand a little more tightly. He could do this!

For Daryl!
For Paul!
For himself!
For the future they wanted to build together.

He could do this! He had done this before…

He had killed those two Saviours. He had killed Petunia. Fuck, he bore at least part of the responsibility for the deaths of Jadis people…

Dolohov deserved to die! He did! Harry didn’t doubt that for one minute…!

So why…?
Why was his hand shaking? Why did his chest feel so tight?

In his head he heard that little girl screaming again…

He could barely remember what she had looked like... her features had been a grotesque mask of blood, bruises and snot at the end. But before his inner eye Judith’s sweet baby-like face had begun to fuse with that poor nameless girl.

What he still remembered vividly was his own horror, his helplessness and the overwhelming rage when he had cradled her broken little form close to his chest humming to her and rocking her softly in attempt to offer her some kind of comfort.

Harry was almost thankful for the memory and the blazing fury it ignited in him, because it finally drove the hesitation and unease into the back of his mind.

He needed to focus! He couldn’t waver… and most certainly he couldn’t chicken out of killing Dolohov.

Too much depended on it!
Dolohov needed to die!

Harry would kill him.

He had to…

Kill…

Kill.

**Kill!**

*Use that rage, Potter. Come on, lad!* A voice that sounded a lot like Moody instructed him.

*That ice-cold hatred, use that. Imagine him dead.* Snape sneered at Harry.

*Feel how the magic is going to suck the live out of him. How you’re going to snuff it out. Like a light. It is so easy, Harry.* Voldemort’s high and brittle voice whispered into his ear.

Harry forced himself not to think. He felt his magic answering his call. It was cold and laced with intention. It felt like hornets were crawling under his skin.

Aggressive. Angry. Waiting to be used. Ready to strike.

**Kill him!**

**Kill him!**

**Kill him! Now!**

There was so much pressure. And yeah, Harry knew then that it would be indeed be sickeningly easy just to cast the curse.

**Do it!**

**DO IT, NOW!!**

And so he did it.

“Avada Kedavra!” Harry hissed under his breath. Transfixed he observed the familiar green light and the hauntingly buzzing sound that came with it. He watched how the spell was about to strike true to his aim…
Before suddenly a wall made of earth rose in front of Dolohov, swallowing the killing curse. Harry heard the bastard laughing.

*Shit!*

“Well, Potter! The killing curse?! Who would have thought that you had it in you…” Dolohov’s crisp English accent mocked him. “You attacked me even from behind, very Slytherin. Very Slytherin, indeed.”

Harry crouched low under his invisibility cloak. It was the only thing granting him a minimum of protection right now.

“But that will not be enough, boy! You lack the power and experience to stand up to me!” Dolohov hissed as he threw himself around the wall and send a bout of cutting curses over the meadow. Only a hastily casted ‘Protego’ prevented Harry from being cut open. But it had also given away his position.

In under a minute Dolohov had backed the younger wizard into the metaphorical corner… by forcing him into exactly the sort of open battle Harry had desperately hoped to avoid.

*Merlin’s bloody balls! Just why did his plans always fail like that…?*

Dolohov certainly left Harry no time to contemplate his bad look or even the time to breathe as the man continued to advance on him with rapid curse fire.

The older wizard made a sudden slashing movement with his wand from which flew a streak of what looked like purple flame, only quick reflexes and some last second shields saved the green eyed youth from losing a limb or two. The impact of the purple flame was dulled by Harry’s shield charm but he still felt a streak across his face like a blunt knife. Blood was running freely from cuts of varying degrees all over his body. And Harry was pretty sure that one of the curses Dolohov had sent at him would have burned his body to crisps immediately on impact hadn’t he dodged it in time.

This was so bad… so very bad.

And while the invisibility cloak hid him to some degree it also slowed him down and restrained his movements. Clinging to it right now, kept Harry in purely defensive position, leaving him next to no opportunities to counter attack the former Death Eater.

So when the next spells flew at him Harry gritted his teeth and rolled out from under his cloak simultaneously throwing both of his knives at Dolohov. Forcing his attacker for a moment out of his momentum as he stumbled back to avoid getting his throat slit or his eye pierced. It gave Harry the chance to send another ‘Avada Kedavra’ at the older wizard which the bloody bastard managed to evade yet again with a summoned piece of wood. As the green light hit the decoy, the wood splinters were flying everywhere. Harry cursed bitterly. This had been another chance blown in the
But he had no time to dwell on that. He had finally been able to get a shot in. He needed to keep this up or Dolohov would kill him and Harry didn’t want to think what would happen to his lovers and his family if he failed…

Sending a powerful ‘Incendio’ at the elder man Harry called onto his daggers at the same time. As he launched the double attack he hoped that he might be able to push Dolohov back into the defence. But instead the man seemed to catch the fire with his wand using it like a burning whip to fend off both knives of with a surprising agility for a man his age. The plan back fired even further when the burning string slashed Harry’s left arm and side, leaving badly blistering skin behind in its wake.

Grasping in pain and with watering eyes the young wizard failed to dodge the familiar red light Dolohov sent at him.

The hurt in his arm and side were immediately overshadowed by the overwhelming agony of the Crucius curse. Harry felt like his nerve ends were exploding. His muscles tried the impossible endeavour of cramping together and arching him of the ground simultaneously. His jaws clenched shut making him choke on the screams that wanted to bubble out of his mouth. The only sound he was able to make was a breathless hiss of anguish.

“So you’re back to wriggling in the dirt like the worthless mudblood you are, huh Potter?! But I must admit that I have always enjoyed it much more when you struggled and squirmed under me. You used to make the most delightful noises.” Dolohov taunted as cancelled the curse but put his boot on Harry’s throat for good measure, putting just enough pressure on it to make breathing even harder for the green eyed youth. Dolohov was gloating and he was obviously enjoying having Harry at his mercy.

“Fuck… you!” The younger wizard managed to wheeze out. The lack of oxygen was starting to get to him as black spots started to dance before his eyes.

Trying to ignore the way his body protested against any movement with sharp crippling pain the green eye youth tried to focus on his daggers. It was hard to keep his concentration up. Sweat was pouring down Harry’s face. He could feel the knives slipping through his magic’s grip several times before he could finally get a hold on them.

In a last desperate attempt he threw them at Dolohov’s smug visage. And this time one of his daggers hit true. The former Death Eater stumbled backwards, Harry’s goblin knife embed in the right side of his chest.

“Merlin trice damned bitch!”

“Expelliarmus!” Harry almost reflexively grounded out in between wheezes, causing Dolohov’s wand to nearly hit him square in the face when it flew out of the man’s hand.

If there had been enough air in his lungs Harry would have whooped in triumph. Instead he shot a quick ‘Stupor’ at the older man causing him to drop like a sack of potatoes. When the young wizard finally heaved himself of the ground he was shaking all over. His left hand wouldn’t stop twitching making it nearly impossible to hold onto Dolohov’s wand.
With gritted teeth Harry staggered over to his enemy’s fallen form.

“You’re done, Dolohov.” He hissed coldly and with an icy sort of pleasure Harry observed the fear mounting in those pale eyes.

They both knew Harry would do it.

And Harry wanted to do it.

Raising his wand Harry called on all of his anger, his rage and the need to annihilate that terrible excuse of a human being. The meadow was filled with the suffocating intent to kill. Harry forced himself not to dwell on the oily feel of dark magic as he focused on the spell.

“Avada Ke…”

**BAM! BAM!**

The impacts brought Harry to his knees. In unbelieving astonishment the green eye wizard watched on as two scarlet flowers blossomed on his cloak. They grew bigger and bigger in rapid speed…

Red… there was so much red… With shaking fingers he carefully touched the red. They came back wet and sticky… red… the smell of stale metal filled his nose.

*Oh…?! Blood…?! Someone… had shot him…?!*

His vision was fogging up and then a sudden coughing fit had him doubling over in massive pain. It felt like his chest was being ripped apart as specs of blood sprinkled all over the grass in front of him.

*Fuck… this… this was bad!*

Whoever had shot him had aimed true… Harry was struggling to breathe as another cough wrecked through his chest and more blood dripped from his mouth.

“Ah… Potter how the mighty fall, huh?” Dolohov mocked as the green eyed youth stared unseeing at the man’s boots. The stunning spell must have failed when Harry had collapsed.

The small Brit had trouble listening to the older man as his ears were filled with rushing sounds, as well as the wheezing and gurgling that sputtered from his throat.
“You didn’t think I would come here without a back-up, did you Potter?” The former Death Eater laughed cruelly.

“How…” Harry coughed out, struggling to draw another breath. He could barely see anything anymore.

“Me” A familiar voice revealed monotonously. A tall, blurry figure with distinctive red hair stepped in Harry’s line of vision. Despite his pain-muddled mental state he recognized her.

Jadis.

Jadis had teamed up with Negan and Dolohov…

Harry had let her go…

He had spared her life…

And now she had shot him before he could kill Dolohov…

Harry should have known better… he thought he had learned this lesson with Wormtail…

Apparently he hadn’t… and now he was dying for it.

There was no doubt. Harry could feel it life was running out of him… fast…

Icy realization washed over him. *It was over.*

But maybe he could land at least one last blow…

With dimming conscious and shaking limbs he threw his daggers with the last of his energy. Black dots were already dancing before his eyes, as colours dulled more and more together, distorting everything before him to greying shapes. Harry still saw how Dolohov easily evaded the knife aimed his way but the second figure dropped in a splash of red.

“You’re a real pain in the ass, boy.” The older wizard sighed dispassionately at the death of Jadis. “You can’t even imagine the satisfaction I feel right now seeing you bleeding out in the dirt, like the mudblood you are. You’re dead, Potter.”

Harry barely heard the sound of Apparation that followed Dolohov’s dismissive little speech over the deafening sound of blood rushing in his ears.
But that droning sound… like a million angry hornets… that wasn’t the blood rushing in his ears…

His thoughts were already drifting off… fragmented and jumbled…

_Cyan eyes and slatted blues eyes_

_Big calloused hands… Smaller softer hands…_

_Gentle mouths…_

_Loving words…_

_Daryl… Paul…_

_I’m so sorry, my loves…_

_I tried…_

_I lost…_

It had become unbearable hard to keep his eyes open and for the first time in years Harry’s mind did not feel organized enough to embark on the next great adventure. There had been times when he has nearly begged for death.

But now? Now, that he was dying, he wasn’t ready to leave them yet…

And wasn’t that ironic?!

_My heart, my soul, I’ll have to wait for you on the other side…_

Heavy eyelids closed over green eyes, clouded with pain and exhaustion.

*

Paul watched the streets of Alexandria with bleary cyan eyes from the second story window. He had calmed down in the last few hours but he was worried out of his mind and tense as hell.

Harry was somewhere out there… and he was in grave danger, while Paul and Daryl were stuck here waiting and hoping. Feeling utterly useless.
With a heavy sigh the former Hilltop scout glanced at his other lover who had taken position on
the window sill beside him. Daryl was biting absentmindedly on his thumb nail, a nervous habit
Paul hadn’t witnessed in many weeks. In the whirlwind that day had been Daryl had been his
steady rock. Without the older man Paul might have broken but Daryl had held him together, had
kept him from crashing… There had been a time when a loved person leaving would have crushed
him completely.

Hell, braking up with Alex back then had rattled him despite the initially casual start of their affair.
Establishing bonds was always hard for Paul because he was afraid to lose them again like he had
lost his family.

Harry and Daryl completed him in ways Paul hadn’t thought possible after everything he had lived
through. And in some mornings when he had rolled out of their big bed and strolled into their
kitchen just observing how Harry made breakfast and how Daryl still half-asleep grumbled into his
coffee mug, then he thought that maybe the fucking apocalypse was somehow the best thing that
ever happened to him. Because Paul wasn’t sure he would have dared to let himself fall so deeply
in love with anyone in the old world. But in this new world where everything old had crumbled
away under their fingers, those two amazing men had made him want to take the leap and he had…
knowing that the in this new world bonds and life were more precious than ever but also a hundred
times more fragile.

Suddenly a soft popping sound on the far end of the street had them all tensing up.

Someone had just apparated into Alexandria…

Rick and Carl seemed to have noticed it too, as they were glancing at him and Daryl with
concerned blue eyes.

Paul couldn’t decipher if that feeling churning in his belly was hope or despair. He watched in
nervous anticipation how Daryl scanned the streets with a looking glass. Paul could pinpoint the
exact moment his lover spotted something. He saw it in the way Daryl neck just tensed up. He
heard it in the sharp intake of breath. Paul’s heart was beating against his ribcage like a drum in a
rock song.

And after a few more seconds he saw it too…

That small and slender figure enveloped in a big dark cloak.

*Harry*!

This had to be *Harry*! It *had* to be! Paul was feeling dizzy with relief.

Lips pressed into a thin line the hippie ninja exchanged a nervous look with the others. Daryl
looked equally rattled, as slatted blue eyes sharply traced every move of the slender figure down
on the streets. With an uncomfortable tightness around his chest that made it difficult to breathe,
Paul watched the small figure stumble along the streets. He and Daryl both hissed when they saw
figure fall to his knees making the loose grey cloak slip off his slender shoulders, revealing a
familiar mop of unruly dark hair and a very pale, fine-featured face that was laced with cuts and bruises.

Harry!

Harry!

Harry!

He was alive!

Paul heart was singing and dancing in bitter-sweet joy at the sight of his lover. Even if Harry was obviously hurt he had come back to them! He was alive!

Driven by impatience Paul was already on his feet, wanting nothing more than to run out to his small wizard… to shake him, to kiss him, to hold him close and never letting him go again...

But then Rick's and Daryl's startled gasps made him stop dead in his tracks. Paul all but flew back to the window to see what was going on.

With the black cloak slipping of Harry's frail form, torn and bloody clothes that barely covered the heavy injuries on his right side had been revealed. Paul sucked in a breath when he saw the steady flow of blood that had started to form a track on the street, tracing the wizard’s way.

The vast amount of the daunting red fluid marring the pavement was the final cue to spurn both Paul and Daryl into action. Together they raced down the stairs in their haste to get to their lover. Rick was close behind them.

Down by the door Aaron and Michonne were waiting for them. They had held the first floor together with Rosita and Father Gabriel.

“That’s Harry out there, isn’t it?” Aaron asked them wide eyed when they nearly crashed into the door in their hurry to get out.

“Yes! Now move aside!” Daryl barked impatiently.

“He’s hurt!” Paul added a little friendlier but no less pressing, all but shoving Alexandria’s former scout out of his way to rip the god damn door open that was keeping them apart from their injured boyfriend.

As soon as they stormed outside Paul scanned the area for Harry. He spotted him only a few feet away from the house staggering into their direction before he dropped again on his knees in obvious exhaustion. Dull green eyes clouded with pain looked at them in a silent cry for help causing Paul’s heart to constrict painfully.

But just when he and Daryl stepped out to the street…
… a shot was ringing loud and clear through Alexandria’s streets, hitting Harry’s left shoulder.

“NO!” Paul screamed in panic as he watched how his lover’s slender body curled up in agony.

“God damn it, Carl! That’s Harry!” Daryl shouted in panic, his blue eyes wild and wide in shock. But instead of backing down, Carl aimed another shot on the curled up Harry.

“Carl! Stop shooting!” Rick barked at his son.

“No!” Carl’s shouted back at them. Paul’s blood was rushing in his ears at the calm sureness in the teen’s voice. “Harry said, not to trust anybody and to shoot anything that moves! He warned me that looks could be deceiving… He said that he would call us if he came back! We can’t be sure that this is Harry!” And with that Carl aimed and shot again, before the gaping and panicked adults could even really process what the blue eyed teen had just implied.

Bang!

But this time the bullet didn’t hit its target…

Harry had moved with a fluid grace that shouldn’t have been possible with the extent of his injuries and created a shield to repel the shot, making the bullet freeze in mid-air.

Paul’s breath caught in his throat when a strange expression flittered over his lover’s face. Those usually expressive green eyes regarded the bullet before him with detached calm before a sardonic smile twisted Harry’s features into something ugly and foreign.

“That mudblood slut instructed you better than I thought he would.” He cocked his head to the side rolling his shoulders carelessly and chuckled in malicious mirth. “Not that it matters much… But it would have been a little less of a hassle to access your little hide out and all the more entertaining to obliterate all of you insignificant vermin with you thinking it was him. Well, I guess one can’t have very thing.”

Paul heard Rick cursing behind him and he felt Daryl tensing up beside him… but his head refused to follow the things that had just come out of Harry’s mouth… but not with Harry’s voice…

Blood was rushing in his ears and the world was swimming before his eyes…
Harry stood before them… Paul could see him… For god’s sake!

But nothing fit…

Not that terrible smile on his loves face that mocked them all…
Not that scornful voice, taunting threatening to kill them all…

In uncomprehending horror he watched how Harry’s familiar form and features slowly transformed and changed.

Stretching, broadening… aging…

It seemed to happen in slow motion as Harry’s fine feature morphed into something sharper. An aquiline nose and high cheekbones formed over a hard and cruel looking mouth surrounded by a light and well-groomed salt and pepper beard while pale grey eyes starred at them with disdain.

With a noise that was half angry growl and half anguished howl Daryl pulled Paul backwards into the house, while Carl, Aaron, Michonne and Rick opened fire on the impersonator that could only be one man…

Antonin Dolohov had come to Alexandria.

And he had come wearing Harry’s face…

“Fuck!” Aaron cursed loudly after they had slammed the door behind them. “That’s the guy?”

“Yeah…” Rick growled lowly. Beads of sweat had formed on his forehead and tension radiated of from that man in waves.

“But if he’s here…” Michonne started but stopped herself suddenly with a concerned glance at Daryl and Paul. The hunter was starring unseeingly at the floor with his fists clenched. The pain on his face made Paul’s stomach lurch in fear and caused bile to rise in his throat.

If Dolohov is here…

No…! Paul absolutely refused to even think about that! Because there was no way this had happened…

There could be a hundred more reasons why that man had showed up here… There had to be a good reason why Harry hadn’t…
His desperate heart wouldn’t allow him to consider anything else. It just wouldn’t…

Harry had to be alive!

He had to be!

And Paul wouldn’t believe otherwise until he saw it with his own eyes. Gritting his teeth he looked back up at Daryl only to find his partner’s slated blue eyes shining with the same desperate conviction.

Crash!

Suddenly the whole building was shaking while ears splitting noise rattled them all out of their stupor. It seemed like Dolohov was attacking whatever protection Harry had erected around this place. And it felt like he was hell-bent on taking it down.

“Dad!” Carl’s panicked cry had them all rushing up to the second floor, where Rick’s son starred in fascinated horror out of the window his gun still ready to fire.

Looking outside Paul blinked a few times, thinking he needed to clear his vision until he realized that the silvery veil wasn’t before his eyes but surrounded the whole building. Paul recalled how the green eyed wizard had drawn the runes in bold movements and with his own blood on the cellar’s wall. Harry had built a rune ward for them. Harry had warded the place so they would be protected.

The barrier that had appeared between their hide-out and Dolohov, was shaking dangerously under the assault the British wizard let rain down on it. Colourful lights crashed forcefully into the veil again and again. And maybe it was just Paul’s imagination… but he got the impression that the silvery barrier had started to thin out… As another yellow light burst against it the whole damn building rattled under the pressure and for the blink of a second, tiny cracks appeared on the surface of the barrier.

“Fuck, yer saw this?” Daryl growled lowly. “That bastard nearly broke through…” The hunter’s hand was flexing nervously around his gun, as he threw Rick a strained look.

They remembered just all too well what chances Harry had given them if I came down to fighting with Dolohov…

“He knows how to inflict pain and torture. He enjoys...relishes in it! He's a blood purist. He doesn't care for Muggle lives... You'll be dead before you even realise that he has found you. Because to him your lives are completely worthless. And you will count yourself lucky if that happens before
you have to see what he will do to the children!” Harry had made sure that they would fear Dolohov.

Paul could see it in the way Rick and Michonne looked at each other and how they stood very close to Carl now. He saw it in Aaron’s tense shoulders and in the way the curly haired man glanced worriedly at the stairs that led down to the cell, where Eric and their little daughter waited for them.

“I did my best to make this place as secure as possible. I really hope that... That it holds.” Paul also remembered very well how uncertain Harry had sounded when he had said this. Their small wizard had already known that the protective veil wouldn’t be enough to keep a wizard of Dolohov’s calibre out forever… but Harry had also known that it would probably delay him…

Harry had bought them time. And now it was on them how to use it.

They needed to get their shit together before the last chance Harry had guaranteed them just evaporated. The odds already were against them.

“We need to get down to the others and we need a plan what we do when he breaks through, Rick.” Paul said as calmly as he could, drawing everyone’s attention on himself.

“When…” Michonne whispered dejectedly.

“Believin’ anythin’ else would be just foolish, Michonn’.” Daryl rasped roughly, southern drawl deepening even further.

“Fuck!” Rick cursed through clenched jaws, before he straightened up. At another time Paul would have marvelled at the sudden change in the blue eyed man’s expression and demeanour but right now he was glad that Rick was getting himself in the mind set necessary to take on the biggest threat they all had ever faced. Nodding tersely at all of them the former deputy Sheriff made his way down to the cell and the rest of their family. As Paul followed him with Daryl by his side, he couldn’t help but think that the man with the bow-legged swagger more than ever resembled the dangerous gunslinger, who had threatened him all those months ago over a truck.

Daryl and Paul had gotten in position their weapons come to the ready. Opposite from them Arron and Rosita had done the same.

The plan they had come up with was risky at the best… and it wasn’t much… But at least it gave them a fighting chance.
‘Shoot at anything that moves.’ That had been Harry’s advice to them… and that was exactly thing they were going to do!

Daryl was nervously biting on his thumb nail as the house groaned yet again under the fucker’s attacks. It wouldn’t be long now… In the last half an hour the barrier had creaked and rattled more and more with every spell the fucker had thrown at it.

*BANG!*

Grout crumbled from the ceiling and the lights flickered as they all heard the front door bursting open. The hunter pressed his shoulder against Paul’s in an attempt to comfort them both, as cold sweat was running down his back.

*The ward had fallen and their enemy was in the house.*

Rick snapped his fingers from his position to get their attention and motioned for them to be quite but on alert.

It was now or never. The show was on!

Daryl held his breath as he listened closely to the crunching sounds that indicated heavy boots walking through the remains of their broken door. The soft whispering of clothes added to it. A sign that that bastard didn’t even try to move carefully or to sneak in…

No, that man felt so secure of himself and his superiority that he thought he could just waltz in. Or rather it showed the irrelevance and poorness their every existence held to Antonin Dolohov.

Daryl gripped his gun a little tighter. Harry had been right this wasn’t Negan and this wasn’t the governor… not even Terminus…

For Dolohov this wasn’t about survival. He wasn’t looking for an angle per se. He didn’t want to use them neither wanted he what they had to live… No, this man was hunting them down for sport and their lives were worth nothing to him beyond the quick joy of killing them.

Giving Paul’s hand a quick squeeze, Daryl got ready.

In the moment the tip of Dolohov’s fucking boot stepped over the door way they opened fire from all directions hoping to surprise the man enough to get a shot in, like Carl had earlier. It was most likely their one and only chance to fight back. Dolohov dismissed them as helpless against him and his magic… If they were lucky they could use that to their advantage.
As the gunfire creased and the smoke still hung heavy in the air Daryl thought for a moment that they had really done it…

Until a mirthless chuckling pierced the cloud of grey smoke and a slow mocking clapping could be heard.

“That was impressive I have to say.” Dolohov’s icy British voice laughed at them. Deliberately relaxed the wizard sauntered into the room. “Absolutely useless, of course. But impressive none the less.”

Just when Daryl was about to pull the trigger again, Dolohov muttered a single word.

“Expelliarmus!”

And with a swishing motion of his wand Daryl’s and everyone else gun simply flew out of their hands… The hunter hadn’t even the chance to hold onto his weapon… it had been just gone from his hands so suddenly. Paralyzed in shock Daryl had to watch on helplessly as Dolohov twirled his wand again and just vanished all of their guns. Just like that!

_Holly fucking shit…!_ Daryl heart was beating painfully fast right now. Dread was spreading through his veins with an icy cold realization.

Their guns were gone! All of them… That bastard had disarmed them _all_ in mere seconds and now their only means of defence were just fucking gone!

_Fuck! They were totally fucked!_

This couldn’t get worse!

Turned out that Daryl was an idiot for even thinking that… Hadn’t he learned in the last few years that matters could always take a turn for the worse?!

Dolohov wasted no time as he was making sure that they wouldn’t try anything else. He froze them like Harry had done it that fateful night on the meadow.

They were trapped.

Grinning self-satisfied Dolohov strolled into the room taking note of everyone in the room. Daryl’s insides squeezed themselves together in unease at the look the wizard directed at Carl, Harry’s warnings ringing in his ears. Glancing at Rick out of the corner of his eye the hunter saw the same terrified panic in his brother’s wide eyes.
“You know I never expected Potter’s little wards to give me that much trouble. First that pesky blessing and now this. The mudblood was nothing if not determined to keep you protected.” Dolohov scoffed with a wry smile.

“It’s almost sad… to lose a wizard with that much potential, to think of the great things that boy would have been able to do with the right tutelage… all that little slut had to do was accept the Dark Lord’s invitation. That boy never knew when to back down and make things easier for himself. He didn’t back then and he surely didn’t now.”

Daryl shivered at the implications and he could hear the hitch in Paul’s breathing.

Dolohov was just baiting them. Just wanted to mess with their heads…

Harry couldn’t be dead…

He just couldn’t!

Grinning maliciously at them all Dolohov laughed at the sight of horrified shock.

“Not that any of this, matters any longer. Since as we speak that boy’s worthless blood is now soaking the forest soil.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm not really sure if I'm satisfied with this chapter (hides face) It's a heavy one and the fighting scene was quite hard to write. I hope you'll like it none the less!
Chapter 32

Carl felt sick. He hadn’t felt this helpless or afraid since the night they had met Negan for the first time. Back then he had thought that the Saviours and their leader were the biggest threat they could ever encounter. The sheer size of their group how they were organized…

Hell, how Negan governed over them and how they followed his agenda. But even if they had been ready to kill, to bully and oppress them… the Saviours had also wanted them alive to work for them.

This man, Dolohov, with those cold shark-like eyes was different…

He wasn’t here because he wanted something they had and he needed for survival… He didn’t hate them…

He just did not care at all. To the wizard their lives were inconsequential and he regarded them as third-class creatures, probably lower then vermin in his eyes.

Dolohov had no use for them beside the enjoyment of simply killing them or… to break them as forcefully as possible. Carl had seen it in the Dolohov’s expression…

The hunger.

It was the same vile hunger that Carl had seen in Dan’s expression when he had tried to ‘claim’ him… The blued eyed teen would never forget the greed and lust that had gleamed in Dan’s beady eyes as he had dragged his disgusting tongue over the shell of the teen’s ear. There were nights when Carl still woke up with a start barely able to hold back a scream, because he had dreamed about that night again....
Because he had smelled Dan’s vile stink again, because he had felt those rough hands ripping on his trousers again, because his ears were filled with those groaning and panting noises again…

…because in his nightmares Harry wasn’t always there to save him…

…like Harry wasn’t here to save them now…

Somewhere along the way Carl had come to rely heavily on the older boy, trusting that the wizard would always find the means to help them and to protect them. The younger Grimes had been so sure of it that he had risked not only his own life but also Tara’s and Harry’s lives on that belief. He had hurt his friend with this and it had put a heavy strain on their relationship. And even as Carl had apologized to the green eyed youth, they both had implicitly known that younger one hadn’t truly understood that he had made a mistake. Or why…

But Carl feared that he was beginning to understand now…

They had started to feel too safe.

Harry’s magic had given them the illusion that nothing else could hurt them anymore. That threats like Negan could be easily tricked or taken out…

They had failed to listen to Harry cautioning them. They had failed to understand what the British wizard had learned a long time ago: Magic could not solve all problems because it came with problems of its own. There was always someone stronger than you out there.

Harry had warned them.

* 

It was eerie silent. Despite the fact that they all were already unable to move… no one seemed to dare to even breathe anymore. Like a rabbit in front of a snake they seemed to be frozen as if they feared that one wrong move could cause the predator in the room to strike.

Dread and fear constricted Carl’s chest as he watched Dolohov stroll through the room examining everyone in there. It was easy to see what he was doing. It showed in the dismissive way he sniffed at the adults, giving them barely more than a glance. It showed it the way he licked his lips and the terrible gleam in his eyes as he looked at the children and teenagers. Carl wanted to hurl as those icy eyes roamed over his body, but nothing compared to the all-consuming horror when the man –fucking – purred at the sight of Judith.

“My, my, dear Salazar! Aren’t you a pretty, little treat?” Dolohov sounded disgustingly breathless as he starred transfixed at little girl’s blond locks. Carl’s stomach clenched in fright when he heard
his sister whimpering in angst, obviously terrified because she couldn’t move away from the strange predator looming over her.

“Get the fucking hell away from her, you sicko!”

To the teen’s surprise it had been Negan’s shout that had cut through the tense and deadly silent atmosphere.

“Negan, they left you alive?!” Dolohov’s only reaction was an unimpressed snort as he took in his ally, sitting slumped in the cell. Mockingly he raised an eye brow at the other man. “Pity… I had hoped that if the blessed wards wouldn’t take care of you than at least your enemies would…” The wizard sighed lightly if not a bit irritated. “That is… disappointing… since the vow prevents me from killing you myself. Well, then I have just to convince one of the present remedy that little problem.” Dolohov shrugged carelessly, a sharp smile pulling on his thin lips. “I’m sure we’ll find someone here, who’s burning to do the deed.”

“You god damn asshole! That was your plan all along! Sending me here to look for information… my ass!” Negan seethed, straining against the magic holding him in place. “You never planned on holding your part of the deal up!”

“Mah… that’s a hash accusation, my friend. One could argue that you were just all to ready to swear whatever I told you without checking the fine print or the subtext.” Dolohov grinned devilish at the prisoner. “You were in so far over your head and you didn’t even know. It amused me to no end, I assure you. Dumb, little muggle too greedy to realize when he got fucked over. It was a true delight!”

“Son of a bitch!” Negan screamed.

The Saviours’ leader frustration with situation was so daunting that Carl shivered in desperate horror. He wanted to rage, too… to shout… to fight… but somehow that seemed impossible and for the first time since the world had gone down…

Carl felt really hopeless.

Even when his mom had died… the world had kept spinning. At least his dad and Judith had been alive. Daryl, Carol and the others had been still there. Even after the prison had fallen und they had thought that Judith had died, his dad had been there and then Michonne and then Daryl and Harry…

They had always found a way to move on…

… a possibility to fight back…

But now…?
Rick watched Antonin Dolohov stroll leisurely through the room. The bastard couldn’t have looked more relaxed if he had been whistling a small jolly tune.

The former Sheriff couldn’t really think… there was shrill high-pitched buzzing sound ringing in his ears and before his eyes flickered Harry’s anguished face and the fear that had shone in his eyes, again and again. The scene when they had invaded Oceanside, how his foster son had puked at the reminder of the things Dolohov had done to him…

Both he and Natania had given their families the gist of what this man had done to them and probably others, but Rick was no fool…

There was a lot pain and horror that Harry and Natania had shared without words, just between each other. And those were the things that taunted the blue eyed man now… the terrible things that had been communicated in small winces, in haunted and horrified glances and in the way both, the young boy and the elderly woman, had curl on themselves as if to protect themselves from further harm.

Rick couldn’t get these pictures out of his head as he starred at Dolohov, who inspected his children with a hunger that had bile rising in his throat.

“He will not ask for men… he has no use for them! He likes them a lot younger. And he’ll take them all because he’s in the bad habit of breaking his playthings.”

Yeah, Rick could see this easily now… the implications hung dark and undeniable in the room clear for everyone to see.

This felt like the meadow all over again with Negan looming over them to force them into submission. But this time submission wouldn’t be enough… and Harry was not there to save them…

It felt like Rick’s fast breathing heart had been wrapped in barbed wire while a heavy weight pressed down on his chest. He was sure that he was going to die. But that wasn’t what he was afraid of…

No. Like Michonne, he was looking at Carl and Judith. Like Aaron was starring in feral wildness at Eric, who was cradling Gracie. Like every parent in the room they were terrified for their children.
Nothing could put the desperation Rick felt as he tried to fight the spell of into words. Like an angry bear he threw his every being against the invisible bonds that rendered him unmoving.

With no avail.

Grinding his teeth so hard that they ached and his vision clouded in red, Rick growled in enraged distress unable to find the capacity of mind to curse or shout at the British wizard. It only earned him a mockingly raised eyebrow and sickeningly broad smile. Unsympathetic pale grey eyes stared directly at the former Sheriff as Dolohov stooped in front of Carl and Judith.

“These two, they’re yours right?” The wizard looked so very pleased, obviously enjoying Rick’s pain and despair. The satisfied sigh he let out at Rick’s snarling, reminded him of someone savouring a good wine.

And it occurred to Alexandria’s leader right in this moment that the only reason why they weren’t dead already was because their anger, their rage, their despair, fear and panic was so irresistible delicious to that sadist.

It added to his pleasure to see them rage, cry and struggle against the inevitable.

Rick’s stomach dropped and just like that all fight drained out of him. He felt as if he was falling into the deepest abyss…

“What a beautiful little girl!” Dolohov hummed in delight as Judi whimpered, her big brown eyes – like Shane’s – flickered to him in a cry for help. His baby girl couldn’t understand why her daddy wasn’t coming for her, why he didn’t come to protect her.

Rick was suffocating, choking and sobbing all at once, howling in overwhelming hatred as he had to watch on powerless how Dolohov reached for his tiny and scared daughter. In the background he heard Carl, Michonne, Daryl and Paul screaming and shouting in protest…

Even Negan cursed loudly and violently…

But before Dolohov’s finger tips could make contact with Judith’s skin something shifted in the air, causing all of them to fall silent.

And for a moment time seemed to stand still.
Breaths caught in their throats and the hairs on their body standing up.

The runes Harry had drawn on the doorway with his blood had started to glow in an unassuming pale blue light. It was a feeling of overwhelming pressure taking up the room and Rick thought that he could practically taste the presence of magic on his tongue.

A familiar presence.

Its whispers filled the silence.

“Mo….from…”

“…. harm…”

“…you… be…”

At first it was barely audible or understandable but gaining in volume and getting clearer and clearer by the second.

“ … be safe fro… arm…”

“Mote… you… be ….from harm.”

“Mote you be safe from harm.” Harry’s voice whispered firmly into the still room.

And the magic followed suit.

Rick’s ears were ringing with Dolohov’s high pitched scream.

Blood splattered everywhere as invisible knives skinned Dolohov’s outstretched arm from the fingertips – that had been just an inch away from touching Judith – all the way up to the shoulder. In horrified and sickened fascination blue eyes observed how fabric and flesh got shredded, laying free muscles, tendons and bones.
A tremor rattled through the building, accompanied by a loud crack that had all of them flinching.

*Bang!*

For a moment the lights died while a thick cloud of dust wavered through the room making it impossible to see anything. Rick thought that he had seen another silhouette in the smoke…

Harsh panting sounds and pained whimpers were the only thing penetrating the darkness.

And then the light snapped back on as the dust settled…

…revealing not just Dolohov’s crumbled and fall form but also…

“How is this possible? What for Salazar’s sake does it take for you to kick the bloody bucket?” Dolohov screeched, eyes wild with pain and hatred. “You bitch! You were already dead when I left!”

Harry heavily favoured his uninjured side. Under all the blood and dirt Rick could see how pale the slender kid was… even if he wasn’t dead… this was certainly not good… Harry could barely hold himself upright. But an almost feral smile pulled at his lips.

“I… I have to thank you for that…” The green eyed teen wheezed out of breath. “Had we duelled anywhere else… I would not have made it…”

For a moment Dolohov starred uncomprehending at the younger wizard before cursed violently.

“Son of a dirty mudblood whore! The blessing!?” He hissed through gritted teeth sounding incredulous.

“Mother Nature looks out for those who honour it… Not that the likes of you know something about that in the first place when your dark magic does nothing but torture her and polluting was dear to it.” Harry coughed, carefully moving forward until he leaned against the wall.
“Oh, don’t sound so high and mighty!” Dolohov growled. “This…” He nodded at his arm. “…this was no light magic! You used that little girl as bait!”

Rick tensed at that… was that possible?

No… surely not…

Harry would never…

Harry would never risk Judith like that! He wouldn’t…?!

“No, I didn’t use her as bait I was just not so arrogant as to think that the first barrier would keep you out forever… This more of a second defence line…“ Heavy and alarmingly wet sounding coughs wrecked trough the teen again. “I wasn’t going to hand you my family on a silver plate.” Harry rasped, glaring at the older wizard with narrowed eyes.

Rick heard Jesus suck in a concerned breath when the green eyed Brit swayed dangerously. Unruly dark hair fell straggly into Harry’s face obscuring it from view, while it was clear that only the support of the wall was keeping the kid upright.

“And for your information while the protection spells might not have been exactly light magic neither did they tap into the dark arts…” Harry mumbled, his voice sounding decisively weaker than before. “You were just always too full of yourself and your pureblood shit to see what the elemental and ancient powers could really offer you.”

Suddenly surprisingly alert green eyes snapped up and starred Dolohov with sharp intensity down.

With pain and confusion clouding his face Dolohov frowned at Harry, before he seemed to notice something that his eyes going wide as saucers… “What…?”

In the twinkling of an eye Rick got a glimpse of blood running from where Harry’s palm touched the wall but before he could understand what was going on…

Energy sparked in a flash from Harry’s hand and all the other runes the young wizard had drawn on the walls before, were now glowing in a burning red…

Crash!

Whatever magic the teen had placed there, erupted so abruptly and so explosively, that it blew Negan’s cell door out of its hinges and caused Dolohov to fly like a ragdoll out of the room and to land in a heap on the street before the house…
In a sense it was strange that the magic had specifically selected Dolohov as a target, leaving everyone else in the room winded and rattled but else unharmed.

Harry slid down the wall and was panting as if he had run a marathon, each breath accompanied by a horrible wheezing sound. Rick noticed that he looked even paler and more exhausted now than before…

“HARRY!” Daryl and Jesus were already moving… Blinking Rick realized that he too could move again. Whatever Harry had done to Dolohov, had obviously broken the spell.

Thank god!

In a split second Alexandria’s leader had stormed to his children’s side overwhelmed with the need to gather them in his arms. But even completely driven by the need to reassure himself and them that they all were still alive and unharmed, Rick hesitated to touch a bloodied Judith.

The picture of Dolohov’s arm torn to shreds still very vivid in his head.

“You can touch her. Don’t worry.” Harry’s exhausted mumbling carried through the room. It was all the spurning Rick needed to bridge the last distance. Michonne was just a second behind him pressing kisses against Judith’s hair and squeezing Carl’s neck.

“Paul…” Harry mumbled tiredly, allowing himself to rest his forehead onto the bearded man’s shoulder for barely a minute but when his lover tried to pull him closer the small wizard retreated.

“Paul, stop!” Harry said softly, stroking his boyfriend’s face lovingly.

Green eyes sought out slated blue ones, that were filled with uneasy turmoil and bright cyan ones that were swimming with angst.

“The job isn’t done yet…” The British youth rasped out. Rick thought that his foster son sounded resigned, pleading to his lovers to understand.

“Nah!” Daryl growled out, shaking his head in obvious anger.

“I need to finish this… He’s vulnerable now. There will never be a better opportunity.” Harry hissed, his expression pinched in pain and exhaustion.

And while Jesus looked devastated and worried out of his mind, Rick flinched at the angry scowl that clouded Daryl’s face. The hunter jumped up with balled fists and pacing like a caged tiger in agitated and jerky movements, all the while grumbling and hissing like an angry cat.
“Nah!” The hunter barked at Harry as he suddenly spun around, shaking his head as if to throw off the very motion of Harry confronting Dolohov again. “Nah!”

“Daryl…!” With a wince Harry forced himself back on his feet, carefully approaching his oldest lover, like one would approach a spooked horse. His expression so gentle, that Rick felt his throat sizing up at the sight of it. Daryl didn’t seem to far much better, as he tried to turn his head away to avoid eye contact with the small wizard.

“Daryl, my sweet, loyal Hufflepuff.” Harry mumbled as he reached for the hunter’s face to caress his cheek.

“I said ‘Nah!’” Daryl breathed raggedly, his deep voice raspy and raw. Rick was almost sure that there were tears glittering in his brother’s eyes. He awkwardly cleared his throat when he saw how Harry raised himself on his tiptoes resting his forehead against Daryl’s, who had clenched his eyes shut. Watching this couldn’t have felt more intimate if the two lovers had been kissing.

“Why?” Daryl groused helplessly. “Why do ya always do this ta me? Ta us?” Rick’s heart stuttered at the pain in his bothers voice and expression.

“Oh love, I’ll never leave any of you on purpose. I know that you and Paul would move heaven and hell for me if our positions were reversed… I beg you, let me do the same for you. Let me protect you. Let me finish it once and for all.” Harry urged impossibly gently.

“I can’t.” Daryl eyes clenched shut, his forehead resting against Harry’s.

“We can’t.” Jesus seemed forlorn when he agreed with the hunter. His hands desperately holding onto the slender wizard, as afraid that the green eyed youth would just vanish again.

“Loves…”

“No! He could kill you!” The former Hilltop scout shook his head, tightening his hold on Harry.

“If I don’t go he’ll certainly kill you if not all of us. And I certainly can’t live with that. I can’t live without you.” Harry looked at his lovers. “Daryl, I wrote it once in a letter… and I say it now: You saved my life. Without you I would be dead, inside and out. Since we've met, you have given me the hope and the courage to hold on. You and Paul gave me love. And the two of you make me want to be alive. Without you… there would be no reason to move on. So please, let me go.” The soft and quiet tone was a stark contrast to the way Harry had stormed out on them when they had learned of Dolohov’s involvement. But surprisingly it wasn’t any easier to stomach…

Rick winced in sympathy when he saw how both Daryl and Jesus slumped in defeat. There was no argument he could think of to aid them in holding back Harry… The small wizard had been right from the beginning they were no match for Antonin Dolohov and as long as that man lived they were all in grave danger.

That man needed to die.

And that meant letting Harry go to fight him.
Harry hissed in pain and at the same time he knew that he wasn’t even feeling all of the damage Dolohov had done to him.

Mother might have patched him up but the young wizard had spent enough time with Hogwarts’s stern matron in the hospital wing to recognize that whatever the old entity had done was by one means enough. If he had to guess then it had done just sufficient to keep him alive. He could still feel the old magic drumming through his channels leaving him with a certain restlessness that pushed him forward, edging him on to finish what he had started.

Harry remembered the moment he had closed his eyes on the meadow thinking that it was over, his conscious dimming further and further and the buzzing sound of hundred angry hornets his last lullaby.

He had been too far gone already to realize that the magic that they had released in the fight… and more than likely the blood spilled on the meadow had woken Mother from her slumber. Harry deridingly suppressed the uncomfortable thought that it was probably the sacrifice of Jadis’ life that had been the key to summoning the ancient magic that had saved his life.

The old powers proven to be very… **loyal** to the ones they had bestowed their blessing on. The energy, that had kept his heart beating, as it stitched his wounds together and had replenished his blood levels, had felt enraged and concerned on his behalf.

Harry felt like an old doll that had been repaired in haste. It would sufficiently hold for now but still very fragile and easy to break again if someone played too roughly with him.

Heaving a sigh Harry summoned his potions out of his deep pockets. In quick succession and minimal wincing he drowned two Pepper-Ups and a Blood-Replenisher Potion under the critical eyes of his boyfriends and family. He didn’t allow himself to fall back into the comfort of Paul’s and Daryl’s arms, knowing that he lacked the strength to leave them again. So the green eyed youth settled on sharing another long look with each of them before he resolutely marched forward.

Negan’s solemn “Good luck, kid!”, the only thing disturbing the heavy silence in the house as he walked out into the streets of Alexandria.

*  

A soft wind had picked up, ruffling Harry’s torn clothes as it blew through the settlement. Never before had the green eyed teen seen Alexandria so… still and quiet… like a ghost town.

The thought had Harry shivering under the sinister apprehension that came with it. Streaks of blood marred the pavement and the street before the house. It wasn’t hard to guess that the magic had
thrown Dolohov there… but it didn’t reveal the man’s current whereabouts.

Lips pressed to a thin line Harry surveyed the surrounding houses.

_Fucking shit! The former Death Eater could be anywhere…!_

Taking deep breaths Harry tried to get a grip of his mounting panic. He needed to cool his head. He had managed to wound Dolohov during the fight in the meadow and his second defence line had rendered the bastard’s arm nearly unusable and maybe even unsavable. It was impossible that the older wizard had been able just to apperate out of Alexandria like that. He would have without a doubt risked to die by splinching had he tried that.

“Humeno revelio.”

_There!_ The spell had detected Dolohov! In the house diagonal across the street.

The dark wizard had probably taken refuge in the house to lick his wounds like a wounded snake waiting for a chance to either flee or destroy them all.

Filled with grim determination Harry gripped his wand tighter and made himself invisible.

Disguised like that he planned to sneak into his enemy’s hideout. But just when he was about to open the front door he saw something moving behind him in the reflection of the door’s windows…

Harry’s brain never really catching upon the meaning, he moved more out of instinct than comprehension… before a purple flame smashed into the wooden doorframe.

“Well, Fuck!” Wide eyed Harry cursed under his breath as the wood burned with cool purple fire.

Dolohov had been waiting for him.

The old bastard had bid his time until Harry had found him so he could attack him from behind. The seasoned Slytherin had tricked him long before Harry had even been ready to go after him.

“Oh Potter, that was nearly too easy.” Dolohov’s snobbish voice taunted through gritted teeth. The man was holding his right arm awkwardly with blood still seeping through a makeshift dressing. It was clear that he had tried to heal his marred flesh but had been unable to do it properly.

“Curcio” Dolohov hissed, his pale grey eyes alight with hatred and distain.

Harry was forced to roll through Mrs. Niedermeyer’s Hydragea bushes to avoid the curse’s red light. Suppressing groans of pain Gryffindor’s youngest seeker in a century silently thanked Wood for all those years of vigorous Qudditch training as he managed to duck away under another spell and simultaneously send an ‘Expulso’ at Dolohov’s feet causing the street under the man to explode with a bright blue light.
Dolohov grinned maliciously at him.

“Well, Potter. Let's see how it will go for you this time... With sooo much at stake...”

Too late Harry noticed his mistake. He had been so fixated on taking the older wizard down that he hadn't thought about the terrain they were fighting in...

Dolohov had lured him away from the hide-out and now the former Death Eater stood between Harry and his family...

Fuck!

Fucking fuck!

This was exactly what Harry had tried to avoid when he had left Alexandria to hunt Dolohov down. A magical fight in open terrain was one thing...

But a magical fight in the place he called home – the fragile place that was their only real protection against the walkers and the ruthless world that had come with them – that was his worst nightmare. Behind Dolohov was his family, his partners, his friends...

Incredible strong people but right now they were also so very defenceless...

They were Harry's sole reason to live and breathe. Fuck!

The cruel glint on Dolohov’s eyes let Harry know that the bastard certainly knew what he was doing and how much he enjoyed Harry's dilemma. The younger wizard had to be careful with any big attacks now because Dolohov could easily deflect them to the house, putting everyone there at risk. At the same time Harry couldn't protect himself and the house that was behind his enemy at the same time...

With one simple move Dolohov had manoeuvred Harry in the most vulnerable position.

Well, fuck Godric!

*

Rick flinched every time another crash or loud bang could be heard. At first it had been very quiet when Harry had gone outside and then all hell had broken loose...

Now it sounded like a war had broken out in the streets of Alexandria. As the tell-tale noises of crumbling and crashing stone drifted down to them. Rick cringed when he saw how tense and pale
Daryl and Jesus were as the effects of yet another small explosion could be heard and felt.

In Rick’s arms Judith whined in fear, her tiny fists tugging restlessly at his shirt her nose pressed into the crook of his neck.

“This is bullshit!” Carl suddenly growled out, pacing agitatedly and his one blue eye narrowed in stubborn anger. “We can’t just hide here.” In large steps he stormed to the stairs.

“Damn it! Carl!” Rick barked in alarm, already running after his son. Carl had made his way to one of the windows on the first floor when Daryl, Jesus and Rick stumbled in after him just when another explosion rattled the street.

“Carl!” The former Sheriff hissed, just about to pull the wayward teen back from the window when he got a good look at his son’s face. Carl was staring at the street in open shock…

…or whatever was left of the street…

Beside him Rick heard Jesus suck in a breath while Daryl had gone incredibly still. Of two houses only a few walls and rumble had been left and another three had taken serious damage. There were scorch marks marring once pristine facades and well-care for gardens had been up turned and destroyed. Gulping Rick noticed that something or someone had ripped huge holes into the streets and pavements. The blue eyed man thought he could even see the plumbing.

But the waste damage was not the most shocking thing to witness… It was the colourful lights that cracked like cannon shots, buzzed like angry bees or worse were silent as snakes.

“Holly. Fucking. Shit! Look at this!” They all jumped at baffled cursing.

Negan had sneaked out of his destroyed cell and had come after them. The Saviour’s leader leaned heavily against the window frame next to them, staring at the two fighting men down in the street, with shock and scared disbelieve written all over his expression.

Next to him Jesus and Daryl were already tensing up, getting ready to fight. But then Negan turned to them. His expression unusually solemn and drawn.

“Rick, I… Hell, man… I give up.”

“What?” Rick blinked at the sudden statement. He hadn’t expected that… Not at all.

“Fuck. I mean look at that shit show down there. The kid just fucking humoured me.” Negan chuckled mirthlessly, sounding utterly defeated. Shaking his head he pointed down at Harry and Dolohov, dark eyes bleak.

“Look at them…” He repeated, obviously overwhelmed by the display of foreign power that none of them could ever achieve. “They’re like fucking nuke bombs. That kid could have fucking obliterated the Sanctuary and all of us sorry shits with it, a long time ago. Hell, he didn’t need to. He could have just forced us under his thumb. Harry could have burned the whole world down and danced on it, had he wanted to.” Negan rambled on. Rick noticed surprised that the mouthy man sounded dazed and scared.

“I know when I’m finished. I’m done, fighting an already lost battle.” Negan rasped at last.
Transfixed they all watched Harry battle, sending out curses as he tried to evade them at the same time. Rick thought that Harry could have easily gotten a few more hits on Dolohov but it looked like the teen was mostly fighting to keep the man away from their hide-out.

The way the green eyed wizard moved, seemed almost graceful. Like a dance. It reminded Rick of the mock fight Harry had once with Jesus. Fluid and fast. Harry had been so proud back then of what he had accomplished… that he had gained the ability to fight properly now. That he would be able to protect himself now. And them.

Rick had never fought that he might feel regret about that. But right now watching Harry battle out there on his own… He couldn’t help but wish that he had still the ability to shield his foster son.

Daryl made a strangely strangled sound when Harry suddenly raised some of the asphalt to a small wall to fend off a series of reddish lights that smashed forcefully into this makeshift barrier send debris flying everywhere. They watched as the green eyed teen retailed, throwing himself out from behind the wall at the last possible moment, before the protective wall was bursting, sending out his knives and a light blue spell that reduced the wall next to Dolohov’s head to fucking dust while one of the daggers slashed the man’s cheek open.

Snarling like a feral animal the older man conjured a fire whip that caused the pavement under Harry’s feet to melt and had the younger wizard in a hurry to jump to the side to avoid having his feet cooked. Rick watched his foster son rolling through the dirt all the while pressing his wand hand on the ground, sending out an omnidirectional shockwave, the last of its vibrations even reaching them. Daryl’s hand gripping the windowsill had turned white with strain at the sight, while Jesus and Carl whooped a little when Dolohov got caught in the spell and sunk to his knees for a moment.

Transfixed they watched as Harry staggered to his feet panting heavily. They could hear his wheezing breaths even over the distance and for a moment Rick worried that the kid would collapse right where he stood. Battered and bruised didn’t even begin to describe what the green eyed teen looked like.

But while he managed to avoid any life threatening wounds the knives still left deep slashes in his left side.

Blood was seeping freely out of Harry’s injuries as he sought cover behind one of the destroyed houses’ walls.

“Come on, Potter! Back to hiding, like the bitch you are? That’s all you got? Are you tired?” Dolohov taunted, looking dishevelled and beaten up himself despite his confident words. “Well, then let’s see if you’re really done.” He smirked viciously, throwing a glace up to their windows.
Rick felt his belly dropping. The older wizard knew they were there and watching… That couldn’t be good…

_Not. At. All!_

With a wide sweeping motion Dolohov was about to send a spell in their direction but Harry reacted surprisingly fast considering all his injuries. The younger wizard had thrown himself between the house and the curse, erecting a shield that absorbed the offensive magic.

But while they all let out breaths of relief Negan cursed.

“Shit! That asshole!” He groused through gritted teeth. At their confused looks the leader of the Saviours scowled darkly at Dolohov, who grinned like he had just gotten the biggest Christmas present. “He just pushed the kid not only out of his comfort zone but also out of a perfectly good defence position.”

_Fuck! Negan was right!_

Dolohov wasted no time, immediately using Harry’s distraction to his advantage. In quick succession he fired a streak of red lights at the green eyed youth, shouting “Crucio”. Worried they watched how Harry managed to avoid the first two curses… but not the third…

Rick had never seen or heard anything like this…

_Never._

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH”

He had seen people die.

He had _heard_ people die.

But _this_…

Harry’s frail and slender body was arching away from the floor in an impossible curve before he coiled together twitching and convulsing, curling onto himself into a little ball. The picture was
accompanied by the most inhuman, screeching screams Rick had ever heard.

Another high pitched scream filled the air, causing them all to flinch badly. Rick’s chest was hurting. Each painful whimpering and pain-filled sound Harry made was like another claw piercing his rapidly beating heart, trying to rip it out. Carl’s hand around his upper arm was uncomfortably tight, his blunt nails digging into Rick’s skin.

Beside them Negan hissed and swore foully under his breath. The man had gone very, very pale. He had closed his dark eyes, swaying dangerously to the sound of Harry’s tortured screams. Rick could only imagine what pictures and scene Negan was reliving right now. Whatever Harry had done to the man, had probably left a lasting injurie to the Saviour’s leader psyche.

Listening to Harry’s torture was tearing them all to shreds.

And so there was nothing anyone could have done to hold Jesus and Daryl back after they had exchanged only one look before they had jumped out of the first story window with ease.

Rick knew that dark expression on Daryl’s face. It was hard, determined and it meant his brother was done backing down. And Jesus had look much the same, ready to take on the world and willing to burn it down if it became necessary to protect Harry. All Rick managed to do was to grab hold of Carl to stop his son from going after them, too. At least these two were seasoned fighters, with and without weapons.

It showed in the way they move swiftly, almost gracefully and most important silent through the rumble on the street. Ready to kill the son of a bitch that dared to hurt Harry with their bare hands if it came to it.

*

Daryl had no words for the fire burning through his veins. Anger and rage weren’t enough to describe the feelings that sat heavy in his chest and rolled in his guts. His thoughts and actions were driven by an unspeakable need to protect Harry.

He was done sitting around, choking on his fear that their beloved little wizard could die out here, sacrificing himself for them… all alone!

Glenn had once said that they would make it together and only together. And Daryl wasn’t about to leave Harry at the mercy of that bastard any longer. When the red spell had caused the green eyed teen to scream like that, something in him had… just snapped and boiled over.

When Daryl had looked at Paul he had seen the same determination in those cyan eyes reflected back at him. The blood chilling sounds Dolohov had forced from their boyfriend had shaken them to the core and at the same time it had created a strange, clear calmness in their minds, wiping
away the fear and panic that had paralyzed them to a helpless stupor until now.

In a way it was liberating to be freed from the oppressing weight that had born down on them since the moment Antonin Dolohov’s name had come over Harry’s lips and it had become clear that the slender wizard would set out on his own to protect them. Allowing Harry to go it had raked their hearts.

And just when they had just gotten him back... Harry had thrown himself right back into the fight, because he was still terrified to lose them. Their bright and sweet-hearted lover had shrouded himself willingly in darkness and shadows, hardening himself to fight and kill with magic, something he had sworn never to do… because he had been desperate and determined to protect them, even if it meant to lose a part of himself.

But right now Harry was being tortured… and if Dolohov thought that he could just kill the green eyed youth, then he was sorely mistaken.

They were in this together! And Daryl and Paul would fight to their last breath for their love.

And if they died…

Well, then at least they would do it together!

Daryl had drawn both of his big hunting knives. For a very short moment the hunter allowed himself to share a deep look with Paul, trying to convey all the things he couldn’t say out loud.

I love you.
I regret nothing.

The bearded hippie ninja gave him a sure and warm smile, cyan eyes bright and clear of any doubts.

I’m with you.
I love you.

As swiftly and silently as possible they moved together through the rumble on the street. Alexandria looked like a damn war zone. Negan had been right with one thing at least… without Harry they wouldn’t have stood a chance against Dolohov and had the green eyed boy really wanted to he could have wiped the Saviours from the face of the earth a long time ago…
laughter joined Harry pained sobs.

“Sing, my little pet! Sing for me!” He gloated in sick delight as he sent another red light at the slender teen, eliciting a round of anguished groans and whimpering. Harry was obviously trying to hold back the screams Dolohov was so eager to hear.

“Come on, my beauty… Sing my little bird! Sing! Louder!” The older wizard commanded clearly displeased with the muted response.

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!”

Daryl saw how Paul speeded up. His lover’s face was a mask of fury and urgency to get to Harry. The ninja practically propelled himself forward aiming a high kick at Dolohov’s head.

A kick that never connected with its target…

Paul’s foot was stopped by a shield a good few inches before it could even touch the man. The same went for the knives Daryl had tried to stick into the bastard’s head.

Fuck…!?

Disinterested grey eyes peered at them carelessly over a shoulder.

“My, my you really thought you could surprise me? That you could safe him?” Dolohov asked with a wry smile pulling at these cruel lips. A tiny wand movement had Daryl and Paul thrown to the ground and bound like cattle. Winded from the force of the spell, Daryl was gasping for breath and struggling against his bonds.

God fucking damn! How could they always fail like that?

“Stupid, little Muggles.” Dolohov grinned at them.

The man had crouched down beside Harry’s head. Daryl growled when he saw that Dolohov had gripped Harry’s hair tightly and had pulled the green eyed youths head up, forcing him to look at their bound forms.

“I’m going to force him to watch as I’ll slice you up… Chop, chop, chop and then I’ll drown him in your blood.” He hummed viciously at Harry. The fear and despair in his young lover’s eyes felt unbearable for Daryl.

“Hmmmm, Potter? Would you like that?” Dolohov taunted twisting his hand in Harry’s hair, causing the younger wizard to hiss in pain. “I have to admit I’m a little surprised that you have chosen two lovers. Did I whet your appetite, my pet?”
For one moment haunted green eyes bore into slated blue ones, before they turned to Dolohov in defeat.

“No! Please! I’ll do anything! Just please! Don’t kill them.” Harry pleaded weakly. Daryl heard Paul sob when their small lover beg for their lives.

“Ah, ah, ah!” Tutted Dolohov. “You should be careful what you promise me, my dear. I could decide to take you up on that offer.”

Daryl had never hated himself more than right now. The possibility that they had given Dolohov what he needed to only to kill Harry but to do that to him…

Again!

The hunter clenched his eyes shut, grinding his teeth together in sheer frustration.

“Please!” Harry coughed out, big green eyes delirious with anxiety.

“Oh… my sweet pet! I had nearly forgotten how beautiful you beg.” Dolohov’s hungry groan had Paul howl in rage and Daryl stomach twisting.

Tears were now flowing freely over Harry’s face and Dolohov seemed awfully delighted by it. Pulling the green eyed youth’s head further up by his raven locks the older man dragged his tongue over a tear-streaked cheek.

“Delicious! I’m almost tempted to let them live a little longer so they can watch when I fuck you raw and force them to listen to the haunting song of your screams.” Dolohov hummed thoughtfully, before he grinned conspiratorially at Harry. “Unfortunately for you, I’m only almost tempted… since I like the taste of your utter despair even more. I remember just how prettily you break.” The dark wizard stroked almost lovingly over bruised skin, making Harry wince and struggle in pain. “I have gotten the feeling that seeing these two die… it will break you in the most pleasant ways.” Grey eyes were disgustingly bright with joy and greed at the prospect, the former Death Eater was licking his lip, as if this was the most satisfying situation.

Daryl watched how that sick, sadist son of a bitch was twirling his wand between his fingers, a broad grin twisting his face into something horrible. And then the wand was pointed at Paul.

Daryl’s heart sized up and it felt like it had stopped beating all together.

“No…” Harry sobbed, tears running freely from his eyes as he tried to reach out to the hunter and Paul… fingers tips stretched out as far he could…

And Daryl wanted nothing more than to touch his lovers one more time…

“Avada…

But they were too too far away from each other…
“... Keda...”

“Stupor!”

“Expelliarmus!”

“Sectumsempra!”

Without a warning three new voices were shouting.

Dolohov’s body went rigid before he could finish the spell that had already been half-spoken on his lips. His wand flew in a high arch from his hand, just as invisible swords slash through the man’s body, causing rather deep wounds.

Shocked Daryl watched how blood spurted from their enemy as he fell to the ground.

“HARRY!” A familiar British voice yelled and a whirlwind consisting of a long cloak and bushy brown hair swept over to them.

The raven haired wizard was gapping at the young woman before them like he too couldn’t quite understand what he was seeing. And she wasn’t alone as an older woman followed her, looking somewhat more composed.

“Her... Hermione?! Professor McGonagall?!” Harry whispered sounding so utterly exhausted.

“Traitor! I always knew you were a traitor! The Dark Lord should have killed you.” Dolohov’s enraged yelling had them all looking at the third person that had come to their rescue and was currently sneering down on the heavily bleeding bastard on the ground.

It was a thin man with sallow skin and a large, hooked nose. He was dressed in flowing black robe which made him resemble an overgrown bat. His shoulder-length, greasy black hair framed his face in curtains. But his most outstanding features were lips that seemed permanently curled with
an air of distain and a pair of dark, penetrating eyes that resembled tunnels.

“A blood traitor! A fucking, dirty half-blood, that’s what you are, always have been!” Dolohov was practically spiting the words out, through blood stained teeth and in between shallow breaths.

The dark-haired wizard sneered down at the fallen man.

“And you have always been a sore loser Dolohov. Do us all a favour and die at least in silence.” Daryl shivered at cynical way the man spoke. The guy was creeping him out.

“Avada Kedavra.” The words were spoken firmly and with a cold control. The effect of the spell settled like a dark oily blanket over the atmosphere of the street.

And with a buzzing sound and a sickly green light... Antonin Dolohov drew his last breath, pale grey eyes staring unseeingly at the sky.

Chapter End Notes

So Dolohov is dead. *Yay* on that matter! ^^ I hope you liked the chapter.
The next chapter will deal with the aftermath of the fight. And Negan. And Snape. And how Daryl and Paul deal with them both being so near Harry :)
Chapter 33.1

Dolohov was dead.

Thank fuck!

Daryl couldn’t believe it! After all that fear, pain, rage and panic was Dolohov finally dead and they were still alive!

Daryl knew that he should have felt relived but somehow, he didn’t… The hunter was still as tense as before. He watched Dolohov’s killer, that creepy and greasy-haired man, with hawk eyes.

“Hermione?” Harry rasped weakly. The pained gasp from Harry had the hunter looking at the two women.

“Harry!” The young bushy-haired witch hiccupped, already on the way to throw herself at her childhood friend.

“Stop!” The green-eyed wizard wheezed threateningly, crawling protectively in front of Daryl's and Paul's still bound forms, causing Hermione to come to a sudden halt. The girl stared at her friend, brown eyes wide with fear and shock.

Next to him Daryl heard, how Paul curse under his breath at Harry’s selfless action.
Hadn’t their little wizard shielded them enough already?

Damn it!

Bright green eyes glowered dangerously at the young woman from behind beaten-up, flower-patterned glasses.

“I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.” He rasped roughly between laboured breaths. And for a moment Daryl thought that his youngest lover had lost his mind until a choked and teary, but fond laugh from the British witch answered the strange phase.

“Moody would be proud of you, you know?” Hermione smiled at her injured friend. “Constant vigilance!” She barked out, before offering: “Mischief managed.” with a barely-there smirk.

Only when she had said those words, that seemed to be part of an old catchphrase between them, all tension had bled out of Harry... and with it apparently the last of his strength. Like a puppet cut lose from its strings, Daryl and Paul had to watch helplessly how their lover crumbled to the floor. Dark bruises and still growing blood stains riddled Harry’s slender body, in a worrying amount. The hunter didn’t know if his heart could take any more of this, because it felt like it was about to shatter.

Immediately both, Hermione and the old woman, whom Harry had called Professor McGonagall, jumped forward to assist the raven-haired youth on the ground. When a loud shout of pain ripped from Harry’s mouth, caused Daryl to glower at the old witch who was now probing and prodding at his boyfriend’s wound.

Meeting his glare heads on, the British lady levelled Daryl with an unimpressed look. She reminded him a little of Natania, with her overly straight posture and air of authority she carried like a second skin. There was not even a hint of a doubt that this was a woman you did not mess with, old or not!

“I was Mr. Potter’s former head of house at Hogwarts and his Professor for Transfiguration, Minerva McGonagall.” She introduced herself very formally.

When Daryl failed to react immediately, she raised an imperious eyebrow at him. The message was clear: she demanded at least a name in return.

“Dixon. Daryl Dixon.” The hunter grumbled back lowly, avoiding her disapproving stare in favour of looking anxiously at Harry’s painfilled expression. He had never felt more like a dirty, uneducated white-trash than under strict eyes of this prim British Professor.

“Paul Rovia. But my friends used to call me Jesus.” Paul quipped without being prompted. There was something strange in his lover’s tone that had Daryl looking at him. The hunter was grinding his teeth at the sight of that fucking polite and closed-off smile on Paul’s face. It reminded him about the day he and Rick had first met the hippie ninja. Daryl hated it when their hippie ninja barricaded himself behind that stupid Jesus bullshit. It was something that had not happened since they started dating.
That Paul felt the need to do this now spoke volumes about his unease… not that Daryl could fault him for that this woman had a way of making him feel he must have done something wrong.

The elderly Professor gave Paul a piercing look, when Paul offered her that stupid nickname and the long hair man twitched nervously under her scrutiny.

“Well, I can see the resemblance.” She remarked drily, but Daryl thought that she had almost smiled. Her mouth looked less thin, anyway.

With a huff McGonagall waved her wand and the bonds, that had held him and Paul down, disappeared at last.

Their regained freedom finally allowed them to hurry over to Harry’s side. Nervously Paul’s shaking hands hovered over the slender youth’s broken body. The long-haired man was obviously unsure where to touch their small wizard without inflicting even more pain on him.

The hurt and worry on Paul’s face resonated deeply in Daryl, who wished that he could just simply bundle his two loves up and hide them away from the world. After everything that had happened today, living in the woods, far away from crazy wizards and mad assholes, who thought they could rule the world. A little camp just for the three of them. It wouldn’t be hard to find a good place with a stable water resource. They could hunt. Maybe they could take on a dog… – yeah, that sounded like damn dream!

Instead Daryl watched with a queasy feeling as Paul settled for carefully plugging Harry’s glasses off his nose, caressing very carefully a bruised and bloodied cheek. A part of the hunter sized up, when he took in the state of those hideous specs. They looked just as beaten-up as the British youth himself. Crooked and smeared and one glass had cracked in the fight.

Swallowing with difficulty Daryl gently tugged a stray raven lock behind a pale ear, earning him a small smile and a tiny exhausted sigh from Harry.

“Don’t worry. It’s alright.” The teen mumbled in an obvious attempt to reassure his lovers, but the way heavy eyelids started to drop over tired green eyes, did nothing to ease the tightness in Daryl’s chest. And in considering the way Paul sucked in a breath and the strained smile he offered Harry in return, he felt the same worry. The long-haired man looked to be close to tears.

“Here, give me the glasses. I’ll repair them.” Hermione offered softly, laying a comforting hand on Paul’s badly shaking ones. All it took was a whispered ‘Reparo’ and the specs looked as good as new.

In the light of the destruction and pain, it had created for them it felt almost strange to witness such light and repairing magic again. Feeling still uneasy Daryl threw another suspicious glance at the strange wizard that had come with Hermione and the elderly witch.

“Hermione!”

Carl’s shout rang through the streets, causing Daryl to tear his eyes away from Dolohov’s cooling corpse and the man who had killed him. The young woman kneeling by Harry’s side waved at the blue-eyed teen with a soft smile stretching over her lips.

“Hey, Carl.”
“Oh my god! What…? How…? What are you doing here?” Carl babbled as he ran over to them, stumbling through the rumble on the street.

“I would like to know the same…” Harry mumbled and despite his exhaustion, green eyes regarded his old friend and Professor with unveiled curiosity. The older woman seemed very busy scanning the young wizard’s injuries and applying some kind of healing spells on him very once in a while with a serious look on her face that did nothing to ease Daryl’s worries.

“Well. Thank Merlin, Miss Granger was sensible enough to inform us about your call and your warnings about Antonin Dolohov. She also confirmed our speculations that you would courageously try to confront him. Courageous but foolish as well, Mr. Potter! I thought the days when you charged forward to confront Mountain Trolls in the girl’s lavatories were over.” Here McGonagall threw a sharp and clearly disapproving look at Harry that had their green-eyed, brave lion cringing bashfully.

Daryl looked a little startled at Paul mouthing ‘Mountain Troll’ while Paul replied with a silent but wide eyed ‘girl’s lavatories’.

“Uhmm… I…” Harry stuttered.

“I appreciate it. But… but how…?! I mean… You can’t just apparate between continents. None of you knew the exact destination. And portkeys aren’t just lying around anymore, especially not international ones... And the goblins…” Harry was obviously struggling to make sense of the situation, as he leaned heavily against Paul’s side.

“The goblins were indeed not very forth coming.” McGonagall agreed, her already stern mouth thinning even more in displeasure. “It took Filius negotiating with them for hours and even then, they demanded a vast fee to bring us here… Mr. Longbottom has paid for most of it, out of his inheritance…”

“But the exact destination…?”

“The mirrors.” Hermione smiled tearfully at Harry. “The Professors were able to locate the position of your mirror through my own.” She chuckled wetly.

In response Harry was laughing too…

…or better he tried and flinched badly at the vibrations this caused to his chest.

Instead the green-eyed teen was now doubling over with hacking coughs. Daryl and Paul both hissed in horrified shock when blood stared to spill freely over Harry’s lips. Helplessly they watched as their little wizard’s body was wacked with tremors and nervous twitching. The hunter was sure that Harry was fighting hard to keep himself from screaming out loud…

And while Daryl and Paul were frozen with helplessness, not knowing what to do, Hermione and McGonagall reacted swiftly, casting spell after spell at the green-eyed wizard.
“Severus, hurry! We need you here!” The old woman called out, her voice firm but urgent.

Daryl didn’t even hear him moving and neither did Paul, both too caught up in the implications that name brought with it.

*Severus*?! As in *Severus Snape*…?!

Yes, looking at the hooked nose and the greasy hair again, Daryl knew now without a doubt that the man with the sour expression and cold eyes that had come with the British witches was indeed *Severus Snape*.

The man that had spied for Harry’s old Headmaster and had raped the teen on the orders of the Dark Lord to keep up pretences and so he could safe Harry later…

Automatically Daryl had started to grind his teeth and his fists were tightly clenched as he stared unseeing at the ground. Paul beside him startled badly when the Potions Professor’s tall, dark presence loomed behind them, long black robes giving him the aura of an overgrown bat.

“Move a side then.” He spoke in a soft, contained voice and apparently the only one completely unaffected by Harry’s pain. A pale, long fingered hand held a vial with a light green potion in it, as the stranger crouched down next to Harry.

As if in slow motion Daryl watch how Snape was about to touch the green-eyed teen.

The hunter felt his body move without making the conscious decision.

*BAM*!

Lighting fast he had struck the bastard square in the face. And damn, but the long, hooked nose of Severus Snape broke under his fist with the most satisfying, crunching sound. Although Daryl wasn’t someone who enjoyed violence for the sake of it, but he couldn’t deny that he relished in the pained groaning and the sight of blood flowing over that fucker’s face.

“Oh, my goodness, Daryl! Stop that!” Hermione shrieked just when the redneck was about to throw the next punch, while Snape slurred at him.

“You dirty mutt!”

“Hermione, keep out of this!” Paul’s hard voice cut through her protests as the young woman made a move to intervene. “If that man is indeed Severus Snape… He deserved that punch and more, for what he did to Harry!” There was something violent and blood thirsty in the voice of usually peace-keeping man.
“What the hell are you talking about?” McGonagall hissed dangerously as she held her wand at Daryl’s temple, causing the hunter to growl lowly at her.

“Daryl…” Barely more than a whisper, Harry’s plea halted the hunter’s instinct to beat the shit out of the scumbag, who glared at him out of dark, fathomless eyes.

“Back away from my colleague if you please, Mr. Dixon.” The old witch instructed firmly but Daryl just snarled at her again in an almost feral way. But if he had thought that he could intimidate the seasoned witch like that he was sorely mistaken, as her mouth thinned in disapproval.

“I beg your pardon but are you growling at me, young man?” McGonagall inquired curtly. Her expression indignantly put out. “I know this a difficult situation and I am sure that you are very worried about young Mr. Potter, but I will be not growled at!” She sniffed stiffly at him.

Despite himself Daryl felt himself flush in embarrassment, feeling like a the lowest und uncultivated of trash.

“Daryl??” Hesitantly a small hand tugged at his pant leg, and pleading green-eyes asked him silently to stop.

And just in this moment it dawned on Daryl that Harry had told only Paul and him about what Snape had done… Hermione and McGonagall didn’t know… They were clueless. Because Harry wanted them to be. The green eyed youth had trusted Daryl and Paul with this secret. And confronting the former Death Eater right now would also reveal something that wasn’t theirs to reveal… and it would meaning betraying the trust Harry had bestowed on his lovers.

Searching for Paul’s cyan eyes he received a tired and exhausted nod from his strong, little ninja. Yeah, Paul had understood this dilemma, too…

So, Daryl pulled back, biting his tongue with a last glower at Snape. All the while making room for a worried Hermione, who waved her wand over a disgruntled Potions Master, muttering “Episkey”. With a surprisingly loud crunching sound Snape’s nose snapped back into place.

Sneering and glaring the greasy-haired man climbed to his feet. “May I now, with your permission tend to Potter?” He hissed out in dripping sarcasm, not waiting for a response as he crouched down next to Harry again.

“Get away from him!” Someone barked abruptly.

Negan.

The Saviour’s leader had also jumped out of the window after Carl and Rick and was now levelling an impressive glare at Snape.

“What now?” The British teacher barked, clearly running out of patience with all the interruptions.

“I know your face! You’re one of them! I saw you! Don’t fucking touch Harry! You hear me?!” Negan seethed at the wizard, who barely spared him a glance.

“I take, you would rather have the boy suffer and maybe die then?” The hooked nosed man sneered in a sarcastic drawl, which seemed to infuriate Negan even more.
“Fuck you! You watched on as they tortured him! I saw you smirking and laughing when Dolohov…” The Saviour’s leader broke off abruptly, swallowing with visible difficulty.

Daryl felt like someone had pulled the rug from under him. This went so much farther than anything Harry had told them yet. And as irrational as it was, it left the bitter aftertaste of jealousy coursing through his veins. He wasn’t even sure, who he was really jealous of to be honest. But he could neither stand the thought of Snape having touched or seen Harry like that nor could he stomach that Negan had such intimate knowledge of this lover’s past.

A hand gently grabbed his arm, causing him to look into troubled cyan eyes. Paul had pressed his lips to a thin line and while he didn’t seem as angry or upset as Daryl felt, he looked certainly uneasy and pained about the situation. They shared a long searching look.

“Harry’s badly hurt.” It was the only thing that came over Paul’s lips in the end but the grave way he said it and the intense worry in his bright eyes, worked as well as a bucket of ice-cold water on the green flames burning Daryl’s guts.

*He was right. What did any of this matter if Harry was suffering…?*

If it was still uncertain that he would be well again…

And right now, their little wizard was pale as hell under purpling bruises, dirt and a vast amount of blood. Not speaking of the alarming, twitching shaking that reminded Daryl of the seizures Harry had endured when his magic had been still bound.

*Yeah, Paul was right. They could freak out later…*

Completely disinterested in their inner turmoil Snape had ignored them either way and had started to apply potion after potion giving out harsh and unfriendly instructions to the two witches.

“How can you let that man touch him?” Negan snarled at Daryl and Paul from behind. Still burning for an outlet to his anger the hunter wheeled around with barred teeth. But the expression Negan sported, stopped him from attacking the man. There was a wildness in his face that spoke of intense fear and trauma, that chilled Daryl to the bone. It was a familiar look… something Daryl had witnessed countless times… in Harry.

And the hunter realized that it had been caused by the imprint of green-eyed wizard’s memories on the man’s mind.

“After what he let that bastard do to the kid?! What kind of spineless son of a bitch would back down like that…?” Negan seethed at Daryl and Paul, who stared at the Saviour’s leader with an expression that screamed in equal parts of awkward pity and irritation.
“Shut it!” Daryl hissed back, angered by Negan’s audacity. “Yer hav’ no right ta sprout bullshit like that! Yer were just all too ready to see us all dead. Especially Harry! So, just shut the fuck up!”

His outburst caused a very particular reaction in Negan.

The man suddenly stopped his mad shouting, standing so very, very still… seeming almost frozen. Abruptly the Saviour’s leader started to shake his head as if trying to dislodge something troublesome clinging to him, all the while blinking as if in a light daze. Contradicting emotions ran over his face in quick succession, accompanied by laboured breaths and a strange sobbing sound.

“I meant what I said to Rick…” Negan finally growled at Daryl. “I am done fighting against you. I do know when I lost. After what Harry showed me… I don’t think I could ever lift a fucking finger against him again… That little fucker!” Negan choked out with a startled half-laugh, dragging a hand over his face, looking badly rattled…and broken…

It was a terrifying thought that Harry had done this on purpose to anyone. That he had the ability to do that.

Even if Negan had deserved it.

“What did Potter do to you?” Somehow, now they had garnered Snape’s attention and Daryl shivered under the scrutiny of those cold eyes and cynical mouth. Negan didn’t seem to fare much better, as he pressed his lips to a tight line, glaring maliciously at the former Death Eater.

Snape’s cloak whispered mysteriously as he swooped in on them excluding gravitas and authority.

“Tell me.” He drawled almost seductively, eyes like dark tunnels firmly fixed on Negan.

“Fuck…!” Negan hissed, swaying dangerously.

Daryl could see how the Negan’s eyes glossed over for a second like they had when Harry had looked into the man’s mind. Whatever Snape saw in Negan’s mind had the man sneering in bitter rage.

“That arrogant imbecile!”

Suddenly a light that Daryl identified as a mild stinging hex hit the Potions Master on the left arm, making him jump.

“Says the overgrown bat!” Harry’s irritated voice snapped from behind them. More than a little astonished Paul and Daryl stared at the green-eyed youth while Hermione coughed, trying unsuccessfully to hide a grin. With all his injuries Harry’s anger seemed to run on pure adrenalin. A spiteful glare was thrown over a black clad shoulder conveying a stark dislike for the younger wizard.
“Tell me, are you incapable of restraining yourself or do you take pride in being an arrogant and attention-seeking brat, Potter? Without the proper training you performed the mind arts on a mere muggle? Showing him *those* memories? *What else did you show him?*” Snape snarked bitterly at his former student.

Only Paul’s slender hand on his biceps held Daryl back from attacking the British bastard, but his lover’s cyan eyes were glaring at Snape, too.

“Oh, shove it! As if you have been a prime example of restraining your own grudges in the last years, you spiteful arse! Those were my memories! *Mine!* And I share them with whomever I like! You have absolutely no say in that. Especially not you!” Next to Daryl, Paul choked. Neither of them had ever heard the usually polite and shy teen being so rude to anyone…

“I do not take cheek from anyone, Potter . . . not even ‘the Chosen One’! You're a fool who wears his heart proudly on his sleeves, who cannot control his emotions, who wallows in sad memories and allows himself to be provoked so easily. You might be labouring under the delusion that the entire world is impressed with you . . . but I don’t care. To me, Potter, you are nothing but a nasty little boy who considers rules to be beneath him.” Snape barked back, dark red patches appearing on pale cheeks.

A lesser man might have pulled back at the sight of the furious Potions Master but not their green-eyed lion, who glared just as fiercely back at the man. But just when Harry was about to open his mouth – to argue back without a doubt – he got swatted up the head by a very stern looking McGonagall.

“Both of you will cease this unbecoming and outrageous squabbling, *right now*!” She admonished both of them very firmly. The sheepish look on Harry’s face and the bashful scowl on Snape’s made them both like scolded schoolboys.

“I’m sorry, Professor.” The green-eyed teen mumbled; cheeks flushed in embarrassment. It was an adorable look on their little wizard.

“I’ll take it that since Mr. Potter is well enough to quarrel with you that he’ll live, Severus?!” McGonagall remarked dryly, causing Snape’s scowl to deepen further.

“Of course.” He sneered. “Potter might require a few more potions, but he’ll live.”

“Very well then, I guess it would be appropriate to relocate further discussions to give all of us a moment to breathe.” The elderly witch nodded resolutely at them all.

“Uhm… sure Professor… My house is just a little down the road.” Harry blinked in surprise.

“That sounds acceptable. I am correct in the assumption that you have tea, Potter?” McGonagall already stood, clearly expecting to be led to their home.

Bewildered and more than a little overwhelmed by today’s happenings Daryl and Paul could do nothing more than gap stupidly as Harry’s former teacher stood regally in the midst of rumble and ruins, just invited herself calmly for tea into their home.

And speaking for himself the hunter didn’t know if he had the strength to fight left to fight the authoritarian old woman on that matter. If he was honest all he wanted, was to grab his two lovers...
and bury them all under a huge pile of blankets in their bed and sleep.

He just…

This day had killed him a hundred times over. Form being so useless against Dolohov, with Harry nearly dying twice in the same day… And now with Harry’s wizard-friends here, that seemed to analyse and judge every inch of his existence… and his place next to two the beautiful young men, that had become the centre of his life…

With Snape here, sneering at Harry like he was scum, knowing what that man had done…

Daryl felt old. And tired. He felt infinitely inadequate.

* 

With a pained wheeze Harry tried to get to his feet, failing spectacular. Only Daryl’s quick intervention prevented him from falling flat on his nose. His strong hunter grumbled under his breath, pulling the wizard’s lighter form securely against his broader body. Harry could sense that Daryl was near his breaking point. He felt it in the man’s tense muscles, and he saw it in the closed-off expression the archer sported, glaring at everyone. And the green-eyed youth wanted nothing more than to kiss that frowning mouth and to let his hands smooth those deep worry lines of Daryl’s forehead.

Underneath all that aggressive and gruff display lay a tender and vulnerable heart and Harry feared what the recent events could have done to both of his lovers, who battled each their own demons and insecurities.

Another ripple of pain killed all of Harry’s conscious thoughts and caused him to bury his face into the sweat soaked fabric of Daryl’s shirt, trying to muffle the shout that was building up in his throat. His lover’s familiar smell being the only comfort as he rode the waves of overwhelming pain.

The muscles in Daryl’s arms were bulging and quivering as the hunter held him close, staring down at him with wide blue eyes full of alarm and fear.

“You said he was alright!” The archer barked roughly at Snape, barring his teeth at the former Death Eater.

“I’ll said, he’ll live.” Snape sneered back cynically. “Not that he will be alright immediately.”

“Bastard!” Daryl snarked and Harry guessed that if his shaking body in the hunter’s arms hadn’t restricted his lover’s movements that he would have tried to break Snape’s over large nose, again.

“Gentleman!” McGonagall strict voice interrupted them firmly. “Let’s bring Mr. Potter to a better location, preferably a bed so we can finish treating his wounds and get some damn tea to calm the tempers down.”
Damn… McGonagall had cursed…

Well fuck, Harry knew his former head of house long enough, that they were on thin ice now with the prim old lady.

Breathing heavily the hunter grinded his teeth but nodded none the less and Harry couldn’t help but sigh in relief at the prospect to lie down. Very tenderly a calloused thumb brushed over the exposed skin on Harry’s neck and despite everything the British youth had to smile.

This was so Daryl, rough and aggressive one second and so gentle and careful the next. Handling Harry as if he feared that one wrong move could cause further injury and unable to stand the thought that he might be the one to inflict any more pain on his loved ones.

The sound of someone clearing their throat had Harry peeking up from his cage of protective arms. Rick hovered awkwardly behind them with Judith on his arm. The rest of Alexandria’s community slowly emerging from the hide-out. The sight of the small girl had Harry’s heartbeat picking up…

… only now it fully registered to his brain that Dolohov was gone. Dead. Snape had killed him.

Judi was safe.

Dolohov hadn’t gotten to her… she wouldn’t be hurt like that other little girl. This time Harry hadn’t been completely useless. Together they had managed to hold out just long enough. Harry felt his knees buckle under the utter relief that washed over him, forcing Daryl to hold him a little tighter as most of the teen’s weight now rested on him.

“Rick, may I hold Judith? Please?” Harry whispered, causing his foster father and his lovers to look at him in surprise. Rick visibly hesitated, apparently very unsure if Harry would be up to the task of supporting the little girl’s weight in his current state. Daryl and Paul were frowning in a similar manner, silently debating if granting the badly injured wizard’s wish wouldn’t do more harm than good to the teen.

But it seemed that it wasn’t their decision to make any way…

“Jude! Hey, hold still!” Rick had obviously problems to hold onto her. “Ouch!”

Harry winced in sympathy when the disgruntled toddler gripped a fistful of her dad’s beard and pulled roughly. But the teen couldn’t deny that he yearned to gather the precious little girl in his arms, to feel her weight warm and solid, to reassure himself that she was indeed still very much alive.
“Let the kid hold her, Rick!” Negan had watched the display between father and daughter with dark and solemn eyes, a forlorn smile twisting his lips.

And for the first time Harry realized that Negan probably knew exactly what he was feeling right now…

Snape had been right he had no training in the mind arts and yet he had pulled Negan into his memories to share some of his worst horrors. Harry had not just forced some pictures on the man. No, he had flooded the Saviour’s cocky leader with his own feelings and sensations. The smells, the pain, the helplessness and shame.

Negan did not only know now what had happened, he understood… Harry could sense that in the way the older man looked at the little girl with longing and relief clear on his exhausted face.

“Hell, if I thought you would even consider it, I would beg you to let me hold her myself.” Negan laughed in defeat.

The grimace, that appeared on Rick’s face in response to Negan’s words, was a strange mixture of disgust and pity. But the former Sheriff finally relented and brought Judith to where Harry and Daryl stood. Eagerly the slender teen hugged the small girl and was met with an overjoyed squeal, while the hunter’s strong arms made sure that his Lil’ Asskicker wouldn’t fall. With a sob that was half pain and half relief Harry buried his face in the child’s soft curls.

“She was alive and well. He hadn’t failed!”

Attentively he listened as Judith happily babbled, while tugging at his raven hair to make sure to keep his attention just on her. Harry chuckled tearfully, when she turned her big, round eyes on Daryl and Paul, apparently just noticing that they were there, too. Impatiently she patted her tiny hand against Paul’s arm to make him listen to her as well.

“What happened to the other little girl?” Negan’s question pulled Harry out of his small bubble. “The memory… it ended… before… Did she… Did she make it?” The man in the leather jacket asked carefully and the green-eyed wizard thought that maybe Negan wasn’t sure himself if he even wanted to hear the truth.

Out of the corner of his eyes Harry saw Snape flinching badly.

Yeah, that little girl’s fate had to weight on his conscious, too… As much as Snape’s prickish attitude grated on Harry’s nerves, he knew that old dungeon bat had neither enjoyed raping Harry nor had he enjoyed watching what had happened to that little girl. For a moment the young wizard wondered if Snape, too, woke up at night drenched in sweat, her shrill screams still ringing hauntingly in his ears…
Seeking as much comfort as possible in Daryl’ presence behind him and Paul’s next to him, Harry pressed a loving kiss on Judith’s blond curls.

“She died in my arms, bleeding to death.” He revealed finally.

His voice soft, his breath hitching, he fought desperately against the memories that threatened to drown them.

She had been so afraid… so hurt after what Dolohov had done to her. Harry remembered being horrified himself as the Death Eaters had forced him to watch, shouting and screaming himself raw, hoping despite everything that they would find a last shred of humanity in them. He remembered that Lucius Malfoy had looked very faint and more than a little green. And although Snape’s expression had been unfathomable… his dark eyes had been full of regret and deep pain when he had been ordered to leave Harry’s cell with the rest of the Death Eaters. When the man had sneaked back - probably to help - , she had already passed away.

Snape had just stood there staring at a sobbing Harry, who had still been rocking her cooling body.

“They left her corps with me for days afterwards. As a reminder… I think.” The green-eyed wizard told Negan tonelessly, who slumped down on the gutter, a faraway look in his eyes.

“Yeah, probably…” The man in the leather jacket muttered dejectedly, before he raised red rimmed eyes to look at Harry. “I… I don’t know if you believe me… but for what’s it worth. I am sorry.”

The British youth wasn’t sure what exactly the Saviour’s leader was apologizing for… but he seemed earnest about it.

“I told Rick that I am done… and I meant it, Harry. I am done fighting. I admit defeat. You won kid.” Negan’s broken tone had Harry swallowing heavily.

The British youth’s head was reeling with the implications. This would mean that the war with the Saviours was over… That their communities could be safe now… that they wouldn’t have to fight one another again. But could they trust anyone in that community ever again?

Blood had been shed on both sides…

There was so much to think about, and their next steps had to be taken mindfully…

But for now, …

“Thank you, I am glad to hear that.” Harry offered a little awkwardly but sincere. Exchanging a look with Rick, he added. “But what’s going to happen now, will be a group decision. There will be a trial.” With exhaustion etched onto his face, Negan nodded. “Rick, maybe you should call Natania. I think she really needs to know what happened… And she should be the one to decide what to do with Dolohov’s body.” Harry sighed, feeling suddenly bone tired but Harry’s gaze searched for Snape’s dark eyes.

The Potions Master was looking strangely at him, not surprised per se… but like he had just seen
something entirely unexpected.

Back in their house Paul and Daryl brought Harry and the Hogwarts group to their guest room on the ground floor, as it was the closest room with a comfortable bed.

Paul was the perfect picture of a polite and diplomatic host in the tense atmosphere. He just couldn’t help himself… Today was just a little too much. And when that strict old lady, who reminded him painfully of the matron that had run the group home, had appeared, Paul had just automatically slipped into full Jesus-mode.

In the past that had been easy…

It had been a skin that he had worn comfortably and with a feeling of security, but something had changed and now he felt almost sick adopting that old persona again. It took him a bit to realize that he had gotten so used to being himself with Harry and Daryl that going back to being aloof was almost as terrifying as getting too close had once been. And yet he had fallen back in those old patterns, maybe this was his way of dissociating… But all this reflecting only added to his discomfort.

What Paul really wanted was to fall into Daryl’s and Harry’s arms, just seeking comfort in the steady beats of their hearts. They had come so dangerously close to loosing each other today… and Paul had been so fucking useless in all of that.

That Harry was still alive… damn that they all were still alive… that had been thanks to the small wizard and the magical friends he had informed about Dolohov…

Paul hadn’t felt this helpless since the death of his family and the first year in the system. It made his skin itch.

And it still made him want to fucking run, so bad after all these years! But in the past the thought of running had come as a relief, now it caused his chest to cramp even worse. Before Daryl and Harry, Paul had been falling like there was no ground under him… his life and his actions had been driven by a never-ending panic and fear of constantly falling. All his life he had shied away from meaningful relationships, because he hadn’t been able to bear this floundering feeling. And so, he had craved crash after crash…

Alcohol, drugs, sex… when he started his martial arts training it had helped him immensely to cut back most of his bad habits but it hadn’t managed to ground the deep rootlessness that made up such a huge part of his psyche.

But Daryl and Harry had slowly but surely given him that security and stability he had longed for all this time. Those two had given him a place to call home and had filled a bit of the hole the loss of Tom and their parents had ripped into his heart.
Running away and leaving them, just wasn’t an option anymore without tearing himself to pieces in the process.

A thought that had Paul’s heart racing with happiness and fear alike. Loving like that was a gift he hadn’t expected anymore but losing it would destroy him beyond repair.

Hiding behind being Jesus wasn’t to cut it any longer…

While he smiled politely at Hermione and McGonagall, he couldn’t stop casting uneasy glances at Snape, who was now inspecting Harry’s small form on the bed. The green-eyed teen looked completely drained.

It was such a stark contrast to the display of power Harry had shown in the last hours that Paul found it difficult to wrap his mind around the drastic change. When Harry had set out to confront Dolohov, he had seemed so strong and so far away… putting this terrifying distance between himself and his lovers…

Some of that heart ache was still lingering between them, making it hard for Paul to reach out to his injured and vulnerable little wizard and to bridge the distance that Harry had forced on them.

But the sight of Snape starting to unbutton the Harry’s shirt with long potion-stained fingers and the way the young wizard clenched his jaws in discomfort, had Paul’s heart nearly leaped into his throat, ripping him effectively out of his pity party. It was easy to see that Harry had neither the strength nor the resolution to fight Snape about it and was going to bear with the close presence of his former Professor. But the hell if Paul let this happen.

Enough was enough! This was going too far!

It would be a cold day in hell, when he allowed the man that had raped Harry to undress him!

“I don’t think so!” Paul snapped angrily at Snape, gripping the man’s wrists in a strong hold. “That’s crossing a line! Harry told us what you did! And you will not undress him.”

“Are you stupid? I saved that brat’s life. And I’m trying to heal him now.” Snape sneered at him, apparently pretty fed up with their accusations all the time.

“Nah, we know that too, but that doesn’t mean we trust ya! Yer not going to undress him! And we won’t leave ya alone with him, either.” Daryl groused threateningly from behind.

“So what?” Snape snorted amused. “I am not allowed to undress Potter? I am sad to inform you that even we wizards need to see some of the damage before we can heal it.”

Harry’s big green eyes searched for Paul’s cyan ones and the former Hilltop scout felt his heart miss a beat at the sight of the sheer vulnerability that was trapped in them. Straightening his shoulders, the long-haired ninja prepared himself to shield Harry. They might have been useless in the fight against Dolohov and his dark magic but he would be damned if he would be useless now.
“Yes, you’re not going to undress him. I will and you will back up a bit and give him some space.” Paul replied, firmly ignoring the sarcastic bait Snape had laid out. He could keep his cool around that bastard.

He could.

And the way Harry’s shoulder lost some of their tension and the grateful smile on his love’s lips encouraged Paul that he was doing the right thing. Right now, the green-eyed wizard relied on his and Daryl’s protection.

“And what gives you the right to dictate who’s going to take off Potter’s clothes, I ask myself?” Snape mockingly drawled but there was something dangerous hidden in his voice.

Paul more felt than heard the way Daryl snarled at the conceited son of a bitch, who was clearly weighting and judging them and their place in Harry’s life. And that didn’t sit right with either of them!

But before the situation could escalate, the sound of someone timidly clearing their throat cut through the tense atmosphere. “Uhm, Professor?”

“What now, Granger? Is there not one occasion when you can be not an insufferable know-it all?” While not her biggest fan, Paul felt offended on the young woman’s behalf. The way Snape addressed her was just so incredibly rude.

“Severus! Mind your manners! This is entirely uncalled for.” McGonagall snapped at her fellow Professor, but Hermione wasn’t deterred by the man’s harsh attitude towards her. Instead of shying back she stepped a little closer, almost into Snape’s personal space, holding his gaze with confidence.

“They are Harry’s partners.” Hermione state more clearly and resolutely than Paul could have at the moment, before she added a belated. “Sir.”

It was almost comically how Snape’s and McGonagall’s eyes widened at the information. And while the greasy-haired man sneered a dismissive - “Don’t be ridiculous, girl!” - the elderly witch turned her sharp eyes on them, putting them under intense scrutiny.

This was way worse than the moment at the Christmas party when Tara had made fun of their age difference. At least then it had been people that already accepted their relationship, people that were their family… Even if it had been uncomfortable, deep down both Paul and Daryl had known that it had been good-natured teasing.

But this…

There was no acceptance in the eyes of either of Harry’s former professors. Just a good amount of incredulity, some disapproval and outright distain. And Paul didn’t like to admit it, but this felt devastating in a sense… the pressure of the judgement weighted heavy on him, mostly because Snape and McGonagall knew Harry for such a long time… and maybe because they were part of that other world Harry belonged to…
And like Daryl, Paul knew that there was always a chance that Harry could be sucked back into that wonderful and terrifying world of magic that held no place for either of them… A world they couldn’t just follow Harry into.

*And today that world had come twice to claim their small lover.*

Once in the form of Antonin Dolohov and once in the form of an old classmate and two former teachers… reminding them all that there was still a school full of magic, that Harry could go back to in a heartbeat.

“Uhm… she is right, you know. I am in a relationship with Daryl and Paul.” Harry interjected sending a small awkward but earnest smile at his former head of house, not even bothering with Snape. McGonagall only reaction was to raise her eyebrow even further in surprise and a small curious tilt of her head.

But Snape’s snarky voice interfered before she could say anything on the matter.

“Potter, how is it that you decided to take on two lovers? But I have to say it is somewhat fitting that you went for another flee-riddled mutt and someone that looks like a poor imitation of the messiah.” Paul felt himself flush in anger.

*How dared that bastard!*

*Daryl was no mutt!*

But it seemed like that insult was more meant for Harry than Daryl or Paul, since McGonagall intercepted the potential argument yet again, before the tired looking youth could retail.

“Oh Severus, personally I think that Mr. Rovia pulls the look off quite well and I see absolutely no similarity between Mr. Dixon and Sirius. And I *certainly* see no need why we should pull an old school yard feud into this, now do we?” She remarked very drily and all Paul could think was ‘*burned*’.

Damn he started to like that woman. She certainly knew how to reign in unruly children.

*Fuck!*”

Harry’s alarmed exclamation interrupted the ongoing glaring match between his lovers and Snape and McGonagall’s stern supervision.

“Mr. Potter, language!” The elderly witch berated her former student strictly. Harry flushed adorably in response and tried to shrug a little awkwardly

“Sorry Professor… but someone needs to do a perimeter check! I just… The fight… all that noise, the lights… Merlin, all the magic… we must have called all the walkers in a 20 miles radius to the community!” The tiny wizard in the bed was already trying to get up, but was abruptly halted in his movements.

“Where do you think, you’re going, Mr. Potter?” The elderly witched asked.
“Uhmm…”

“Yeah, I don’t think so.” McGonagall sniffed. “You’ll stay right there in the bed. I already saw you toppling over more than enough for one day.”

And honestly Paul thought that even a hardass like Rick would not argue with this woman.

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