The Falling Sickness

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Summary

Prompt from the kink meme: "-And yet he thinks that this is the very moment that defines them as a family - the one where Daryl has a goddamned seizure in the middle of dinner around the campfire."

Notes

A/N: The only experience I have of epilepsy and seizures is assisting those that suffer from them during one of these moments. Other than that everything else in this fic is based on research and asking a nurse for information, so please excuse any mistakes you find and take it all with a pinch of salt.
Chapter 1

Rick knows they’ve all come together as a group and have become something of a unit. It’s a mishmash of survivors and people that would usually never cross paths in their everyday life, but the outbreak had brought them together and through it all they made it work. Atlanta had driven them to living on the road, space was not a luxury any of them had and he knew it was tough being constantly surrounded by people without a minute’s peace. He knew they’d all had fights but they’d made up as well, helping each other out, some of them learning skills they had never needed before and trying their hardest because it was what needed to be done. The hardships of it all and the common ground of being in an unknown situation joined them all together in a way that never would have happened before. They’ve been through the terror at the CDC, the loss of loved ones and the awful realisation that they had to stab things that were once human in the head to survive.

And yet he thinks that this is the very moment that defines them as a family. The one where Daryl has a goddamned seizure in the middle of dinner around the campfire.

It’s so sudden that he barely has time to understand what’s happening before he’s on his feet, unsure whether to scan for danger or go over to the other man. Either way his body has already acted on instinct and he’s standing, brain working double time to work out what had happened to one of the more relaxing evenings that they’d had lately.

They’d been sitting around the fire, eating the rabbit and tinned vegetables between them, some laughing about old memories whilst other sat and smiled politely. The fire was low enough not to bring attention to them and blocked by a circle of their cars and the RV, but still T-Dog sat on the roof keeping an eye out for them all. Their camp was a quick hitch at the edge of the woods; using the natural cover to stay out of sight as they got some much needed rest. Everything had been reasonably normal considering the circumstances, Carl was even laughing as he and Sophia listened to Glenn recount a pizza delivery gone wrong. He’d been looking forward to a quiet night before more travelling tomorrow when it had happened.

Daryl had been quiet all evening, but that was just how the man was sometimes, keeping himself to himself and only joining in the chatting when necessary. He’d been sitting, watching the fire for a while, still as anything except for his leg bouncing up and down on the spot in a way that Rick had thought to just be nervous energy rushing free. Part way through kissing Lori gently, enjoying the safety of her presence and the feel of everything being normal for a while, he’d heard it, the sound of a man falling to the ground and panicked gasps around him.

Shane was on his feet as well, and in a look shared between them they move as one, both approaching Daryl and hissing at everyone else to keep the noise down. Daryl had slid to the floor in a heap; face down in the dirt and shaking in a way that was disturbing to watch. Behind him Rick can hear Lori tell Carl and Sophia not to watch and he’s grateful because the sight was upsetting even to the adults.

“Everything okay?” T-dog calls down from the RV, eyes wide in panic and gun grasped tightly in his hands, ready for anything but terrified all the same.

Rick nods, trying to get a grip on a situation that he wasn’t prepared for, glancing over to camp to double check on every one else as Shane knelt by the other man. “Yeah just stay on lookout.” Pointing to the eldest of their group he wants to make sure they’re still protected if he and Shane are occupied. “Dale go join him, just in case we’ve drawn any attention to ourselves we could use an extra pair of eyes.”
Turning back to the scene on the floor he kneels besides Shane and Daryl, wanting to help but completely lost as the man continues shaking violently before them. It’s disturbing to see, his eyes are rolled back in his head, body jerking suddenly and sharply, yet with a silence that somehow makes it worse. His and Shane’s training has them prepared for a lot of things, but reading about things in a book and actually doing them were two different things and he didn’t want to hurt Daryl or cause any more problems than there already were.

Shane makes the first move, shifting closer and placing his hand beneath Daryl’s head, not holding him there but just cushioning his skull from impacting the ground with every jerk. “I think he’s having some kind of fit.” His partner’s voice doesn’t betray his emotions and though Rick knows Shane is probably as panicked as he is, he doesn’t show it.

Nodding in understanding Rick finds himself fidgeting, unsure how to help but knowing he wanted to. At least as much as he could right now. “What do we do?”

“Remember my cousin Bobby? He used to have ’em.” Shane explains and Rick can remember hanging around with Shane’s family at barbeques, playing catch with his cousins and he puts the name to a face in his memories. It’s not much, but it’s something Shane had at least some kind of understanding of, so that was a step forward. “Was always told to get an adult.”

He’s not sure if Shane is trying to make a joke to lighten the situation but it’s not working and if his partner wasn’t still cradling Daryl’s head from hitting against the ground, he’d punch him right now. “We are the adults Shane. Do we move him or something? Put something in his mouth to stop him biting his tongue?”

Again when he speaks Shane is calm, glancing over to Rick and settling his free hand to his friend’s knee, giving him a tight smile that just spoke volumes between them. “No we gotta wait for the fit to stop first, just gotta make sure he don’t hurt himself too bad, clear the space around him so he doesn’t hit anything.” He indicates to the area around them and Rick moves to shove the crossbow and what small rocks there are aside to give them more space. “Don’t wanna put anything in his mouth, biting his tongue is better than choking on something.”

Rick has to agree with that and not for the first time he’s so grateful to have Shane here with him through all of this. Daryl looks so pale, and though it panics Rick to see his lips are slightly blue, Shane is watching him close enough that he’d say if it was a problem they needed to deal with.

“Is he okay? What’s happening?”

He’d almost forgotten about the rest of the group he was so focussed on keeping Daryl safe and doing what he needed to, but looking over the camp now he can see where Carl and Sophia were huddled against their mothers, scared for a member of their group as Lori and Carol tried to calm them down. Leaving Shane to watch the still fitting other man he takes control of the rest of the situation, doing what needs to be done.

“We think it’s a fit, either of you dealt with this before?” Looking up from where Daryl was still jerking, limbs heaving in different direction whilst his head rocked in Shane’s palm, his eyes rolled back and skin looking pale. Wiping at his mouth he tries to get a grip of himself, this was no time to panic. “All right then, Andrea take the kids inside the RV, they don’t need to see this right now, try and reassure them that Daryl’s fine. Glenn, get us some things, a blanket, maybe a pillow and some water or something? I dunno if he’ll need any medication when he wakes up, just bring whatever you’d get someone who was sick.”

Settling back down besides Shane and Daryl he can hear Andrea ushering Lori and Carol inside with the children, and through her own grief over her sister, Rick can tell she’s trying to be upbeat, promising them that Daryl’s just tired and fell over because of it. He knows they don’t buy it, but
Shane is still there, cradling Daryl’s head whilst his other hand was held gently to his chest, feeling Daryl’s breathing continue to hitch with every jerk. “We wait for it to stop, shouldn’t be more than a few minutes but if he has more than one too close together or this one goes on a long while things could get pretty bad pretty fast.”

“Like what?”

“Don’t matter yet, let’s just wait it out with him.” And Shane looks at him with such intensity that Rick knows he doesn’t want to know what would happen if the fits continued. Either way he had a feeling they wouldn’t be able to cope with it.

Nodding Rick tries to stop his heartbeat from being quite as frantic as it was, now was not the time for him to lose control, not when Daryl was clearly unable to look after himself right now. Glenn returns with a pile of mismatched items, a blanket and cushion from the RV, as well as their haphazard first aid kit and the saddlebags off of Daryl’s bike.

“Thought he might have had them before and might have something for it in his stuff.” The young man shrugs, bouncing on tiptoes and clearly eager to help despite feeling on edge about the whole thing. Rick tries to give him a reassuring smile, one that had more confidence than himself right now and patted at his leg from where he knelt.

“Hey, it’ll be fine. “ He keeps his voice calm, used to dealing with people in this sort of situation and knowing that showing his own insecurities wouldn’t help anyone. “Best thing you could do right now is grab one of the maps and see if you can find a pharmacy in the area, we might need to go on a run tomorrow if Daryl needs anything. Then get some rest all right?”

“Yeah, yeah I got it. You or Daryl need anything though, come get me all right?”

“Got it.” Rick agrees watching as Glenn does as he’s asked, glancing back over his shoulder a couple of times before climbing into the RV and closing the door firmly behind himself. Letting out a breath he hadn’t known he’d been holding Rick faces their current situation and looks to Shane for direction. “Shane is he going to be okay?”

“Should be after it stops.” His partner doesn’t give false smiles to him, he doesn’t try to pass this situation off as anything more than what it was. Scary and something they weren’t sure they could fix. Rick is glad that Shane doesn’t sugar coat things for him but they two of them share a look of utter relief when Daryl’s jerking subsides and the other man is simply lying on the floor unconscious. “Here he’s calming down now, help me get him on his side, recovery position should be pretty safe for him about now.”

Rick helps as best he can, being gentle as he moves Daryl’s limbs into position before rolling him, trying to ignore the small tremors that roll across Daryl’s muscles so often. He’s never seen someone fit before but he was glad that it was over, making Daryl’s quiet form look more normal now he wasn’t seizing. The smaller quakes soon die down too, leaving Daryl on the floor in front of them and looking as if he were doing no more than sleeping on the grass below.

Shane nudges him none to gently in the ribs and Rick hands over the cushion he indicates towards, letting Shane slip his hand free and settle Daryl onto the soft pillow instead. Taking the blanket up he goes to drape it across Daryl, pausing when he takes note of something he hadn’t noticed before due to his focus being on the seizing. “Um Shane?” He doesn’t want to embarrass Daryl, but Shane was the sort of expert at the moment. “He wet his pants…”

“Yeah, that happens sometimes.” Shane keeps his voice low, not wanting to draw the attention of
those on watch, and Rick is surprised how different this man is now compared to the kid he’d been friends with in school. The kind of guy that would splash water on the front of someone’s pants to accuse them of having an accident and make a mockery of them for fun. Now here he was tugging a blanket over their unconscious partner with a shrug.

Moving to sit cross legged instead of kneeling, Rick settles himself as Shane does, watching as his partner runs his fingers through his curly hair in that way he knows means he’s stressed. “All right, what’s the plan now?” He asks, knowing that sometimes it helped to speak things through and share the burden of knowledge with someone else.

“We wait. He’ll wake up on his own but don’t be surprised if he’s a little different from normal.”

“Different how?”

“My aunt used to say that Bobby’s brain used to lose control of his body and everything just kind of short circuited for a while, I was there once after it was over and he was waking up.” Shane shrugs, looking off at the night sky and Rick knows it’s hard to remember family when this was all they had anymore. Shifting a little closer he tucks the edges of the blanket around Daryl and nudges for him to continue, not wanting his best friend to get lost in painful memories. “He was out of it for quite a while the poor kid. Of course I teased him for it at the time, but I think its coz I was scared how different he was from normal.”

Rick nods, patient in waiting for some answers but glad that this was taking his mind off watching Daryl like a hawk. He’s so still in comparison to before, lying on the grass as if nothing had happened and he and Shane had shared some kind of crazy dream.

“He was confused, real confused, like he didn’t know what just happened to him.” Shane continues, picking at the grass and tearing it to shreds before grabbing another handful. “And he didn’t remember any of it, which upset him of course, plus he had headaches for a few hours afterwards and he was just…off you know? Like when he spoke he didn’t sound like Bobby, and he’d sort of be a bit weird for a while afterwards.” Watching Shane shake his head, Rick knows he wishes he could explain it more but didn’t have the words to do so. “Usually my aunt would take him home after he’d had a fit, let him sleep it off as if it were some kind of hangover.”

He can understand that feeling though and he latches on to an analogy he can relate to. “Suppose it kind of is. I mean if your brain is short circuiting and making your body do that, well I’d be tired too.” Rick admits, gesturing to where Daryl still sleeps, not even twitching.

Shane gives a small chuckle, one that lets Rick know that he’s at least helped with some of the tension he’s feeling. “Yeah we just gotta play nice when he wakes up. Hope he’s had this before and knows what to do.”

“You think he has?” Rick asks. “Had it before I mean.”

Shane nods, confident as always and watching Daryl’s breathing. “Yeah. It’s rare for an adult to just have a fit out of the blue and weren’t like nothing traumatising happened to us today.” The other man snorts before continuing, and Rick has to agree with what he says. “Well no more traumatic than it usually is nowadays. Bet he has had ‘em before and just didn’t tell us.”

“Wish he had, least then we could have been prepared for this.” Though he has to admit it hadn’t exactly been on their list of questions to ask when getting to know each other. He figured that if anyone had anything they needed medical assistance for they would have said something. Really he should have known the Dixon would have been far too stubborn to admit to having any kind of weakness.
“Just be glad it happened now and not whilst he was on that bike or out hunting. We’d be a man down if it had.” Shane says and Rick has to agree that in a way they were fortunate that it had happened now, when they were safe and able to deal with it as a team.

A groan from the floor beside them had them both shifting forward, Shane’s arm keeping Rick from getting too close and Rick figures they don’t want to crowd Daryl too much. The smaller man shifts a little, a shaky hand reaching up to rub at his eyes before he blinks sleepily up at them, looking for all the world like a lost kid. He’s never seen Daryl Dixon look so vulnerable and it makes him want to soothe the confusion he sees in the other man’s eyes when he looks at them both.

“Hey Daryl.” He keeps his voice soft, heeding Shane’s warning and sitting far enough away that he’s not crowding but he can get to Daryl’s side if he needed him. “It’s okay, you’re okay.”

In a second Daryl is scrabbling upwards, shoving against the dirt and trying to get up and away until Shane is there holding him, keeping him down and hushing him as best he can. “Easy, easy now man.” Rick can see that it’s far easier for Shane to restrain Daryl than normal, simply placing a hand on his shoulder and one on his chest to press him back down to the pillow beneath him. “You’re all right okay?”

Daryl looks so lost right now, held in place by Shane with his eyes flitting back and forth worriedly as he tries to get a grasp of what’s going on. Rick can see his lips moving but no words coming out, and he can almost feel the panic and confusion the other man is emitting. “It’s all right Daryl. It’s Rick and Shane, it’s just us okay? Everyone else is asleep and it’s just you and us here. You had a seizure, but you’re okay now.”

It doesn’t seem to calm Daryl down much and it’s almost as if Rick can see his brain try to process the information piece by piece. “Wher-m how’d it?” Daryl huffs, squirming on the floor and raising his hands to his head, massaging at his temples and grimacing in pain and frustration.

Shane pats at Daryl’s chest gently, though Rick knows he’s making sure the other man is still breathing calmly and safely too. “It’s okay man. Nothing to worry about all right?” Daryl still isn’t calm, but he doesn’t move away from the touch and doesn’t squirm to get free either so he takes it as a good sign. “You just had a seizure after dinner that’s all. You had them before?”

Daryl nods, face still covered by his hands and not meeting either of them in the eye. Rick knows he’s probably embarrassed by the whole thing and expecting some kind of reprimand for not telling them about it, but now was not the time to bring that up. Again Daryl goes to speak, but when he does his words are mumbled and slurred, quiet in the darkness of the night. “Hur’s ‘n t’rd.”

Though it takes Rick a few moment to work out what the other man is attempting to say, Shane nods almost immediately, voice just as even as before and not mocking in anyway despite Daryl’s obvious discomfort. “I know man, you just gotta take your time is all. Give it a few minutes and it’ll get better.”

They sit for a while in silence, Daryl still hidden beneath his arm and Shane still watching his chest and his breathing. Rick feels like the odd man out, wondering if he should leave them to it since Shane seems to know exactly what he’s doing. But he doesn’t want Daryl to think he’s disgusted with him or anything or to think that he was only here until he was conscious before deciding he was fine. He knew sometimes the worst part of recovery was after the initial impact had taken place.

When Daryl clears his throat he’s quick to offer assistance, wanting to do what he could despite being unsure of how exactly he would be helping. “Need some water or anything? You got any
Daryl shakes his head and sits up, shaky fingers holding onto the blanket tightly and keeping it at his waist as he props himself up. Shane’s hands are still there, hovering, ready to catch him if he fell or just steady him if his still recovering body couldn’t take it right now. Rick pretends he doesn’t see the red scattered across Daryl’s cheeks or notice how the other man won’t meet either of their eyes when he finally speaks quietly. “N-need some clean pants.”

Passing over the saddle bag Rick gives Daryl a few moments to search for what he wants but can’t help but feel for the man when his shaking fingers don’t allow him to get very far. Moving closer Rick pretends not to see the flinch from Daryl as he takes the bag and hunts through it himself, fishing out a clean pair of underwear and pants before setting them at Daryl’s side. “If you need a hand…”

Rick stops himself mid sentence when Daryl shakes his head fiercely, clearing not helping his headache but desperate to at least retain some dignity despite the situation. Understanding completely Rick stands to move aside, Shane following to give the man at least the sense of privacy despite them both listening for the sound of any problems. After a few minutes Rick hears the sound of Daryl clearing his voice and after checking to see he was decent he figures that was Daryl’s way of allowing them back over to him.

He’s moved away from where the incident had happened, and was instead sitting next to the fire with the blanket wrapped about his shoulders, hunkered down and watching the flames instead of looking at either of them. They move to sit either side of him, but with enough space to not seem to be crowding the man after an event that he clearly saw as shameful.

“Head feeling a bit clearer?” Shane asks, tossing a few twigs into the slowly dying fire but watching as Daryl nods quietly in response. “That’s good. Real good.” Daryl doesn’t reply, just watches the flames and lets them all pretend he’s flushed red from the heat and nothing else. “Know you gotta be tired, but just in case of anything else happening the two of us’ll stay in the tent with you tonight.”

Rick watches as a shiver runs through Daryl’s body, a quick jerk all over before he settles back to watch the fire. It takes a few moments for Daryl to compose himself, but when he does he almost sounds like the old Daryl again. “Don’t need no babysitters.”

“We know that.” He reassures, not wanting to cause any more distress than they have to when Daryl’s clearly been through enough tonight. “We just wanna make sure you’re all right. You scared the shit out of us Daryl, least let us stay for our own peace of mind.”

It works and when he makes it out to be entirely for them and not for him instead, Daryl nods jerkily, relenting to let the three of them shuffle in to the one tent they’d set up originally for the Grimes family to share. Rick barely has himself comfortable in the middle of the sleeping area and yet beside him Daryl is cocooned in the blanket, turned away from the two of them and facing the side of the tent. He can’t say he knows what the other man is feeling right now, but he can take a wild stab in the dark and come up with a damned good guess. On his other side he knows that Shane won’t be sleeping much tonight, too riled up with worry just as he is, but Daryl didn’t have to know that.

“You’ll feel better after some sleep Daryl.” Shane says, his words stumbling over Rick in the middle to attempt to penetrate Daryl’s self made nest on the other side of the tent. “The rest’ll do you good man.”

Daryl doesn’t reply, just curls up a little tighter and stays turned away. Rick figures he’s not in the mood for kind words of reassurance from a couple of cops who’d seen him at his most vulnerable.
He can understand that and closes his eyes to let Daryl be, figuring they all deserve a rest after the stress of the night.
Chapter 2

Daryl always hates the day after one of his funny turns. Usually it was bad enough when he had Merle there to help him get through it, but now without his brother who may not have understood but knew how to deal with it all beside him, it makes it worse. He sleeps for longer than he usually does and even when he awakes he stays inside the tent just listening to the sounds of the camp being packed up and ready for them to continue their journey. A part of him knows he should be helping but right now every single part of him feels awful and he’s not sure he’s ready to deal with it all right now.

His back aches like hell, as does his legs and arms. It’s probably the most annoying part of it all is that it doesn’t just end with the seizure, he knows he won’t be completely back to normal for at least another day or so. Hunting is completely out of the question right now and usually he always found that to be relaxing, but he’s not sure he could even lift his bow let alone load it and catch anything. Tugging the blanket a little closer he tries to focus on anything but the headache and residue shame that he feels knowing that these people he barely knew had been there to see him like that.

It had been months since he’d had his last seizure. Honestly there had been so much going on lately that he hadn’t even thought about what to do if he had another one. Besides, what exactly was he meant to tell these people about it all? “Sorry to give you something else to panic over, but occasionally I have seizures so just make sure I don’t choke or anything, thanks.” The only people that had ever had any kind of sense about the whole thing had been doctors, nurses, his teacher at school and after being a first hand witness, Merle. Everyone else just kind of panicked over the whole thing.

People always looked at him different once they knew, as if he was no longer capable of looking after himself and needed constant caring in case he just keeled over. Tugging the blanket around him a little tighter he ignores the voices around him, chatting as they packed up outside, they still sound fuzzy anyway, voices mixing into noise and static in his ears. He didn’t need those people out there treating him any different just because he’d had a funny turn in front of them. They’d at least had some kind of respect for him before all of this and he’d be damned if he was going to lose that now because of a damned fit.

He knows he can’t take much longer just lying here resting, there’s no time in this world for that sort of thing and he wasn’t having them act like he was sick either. The only damned problem is that everything takes so god damned long afterwards. Thinking things through and planning what he was going to do next seemed to have to make it through a load of barriers before he could finally do it. His fingers were still shaky and the headache kept thumping behind his temples wasn’t helping as he tried to sit up, taking his time to get to his knees before pausing as he tried to fold up the damned blanket.

Fucking fingers weren’t working properly again. They kept pinching and opening without his say so, grasping too tightly or too loosely until he was just sick of trying anymore. Leaving the blanket where he’d been he instead decides to just suck it up and make an appearance, steeling himself for the stares and questions about last night as he slowly climbs out of the tent opening.

Daryl is fully aware of how unstable he must look, everything aches and he knows he’s a little shaky but dammit these people were not going to start looking at him as if he was weak. They needed to move out today and he was not going to hold them up.

They’re staring. He can feel it when they all look and god it makes his skin itch and he wants to tell them to fuck off and mind their own business, but he knows what it’s like trying to speak after
an attack and he’s really not in the mood to hear his own slurred speech. Ignoring it all as best he
can he moves to begin taking down the tent, hooking out the pegs and ignoring how much effort
such a simple task takes.

“How you feeling man?”

He doesn’t look up when Shane comes over to help him, hooking out the other pegs and winding
up the guidelines as if it was nothing at all. Daryl both hates and is glad for the help at the same
time. Shrugging as best he can he gives a feeble grunt in answer and he’s pleased when Shane
seems to know what that means.

“Good.” The other man nods, and Daryl is grateful that he doesn’t so much stare as just glance
over when his fingers don’t quite work folding away the tent. “We’re gonna head out soon
enough, keep going towards Fort Benning and see if we can find any more supplies on the way
through.”

In a way it’s nice to be talking about anything other than his health issues, and he’s kind of
grateful that Shane at least isn’t treating him any different from before, the only problem was his
hearing still wasn’t exactly great. There’s a fuzz that joins the end of words and even though he
knows they’re careful about the level of their noise, sometimes it’ll feel as if Shane is shouting
when Daryl knows he’s not. Still he nods as best he can without worsening his headache and lets
Shane buckle the tent into its packaging when his fingers fumble over the straps and fastenings.
When the other man stands Daryl has to give himself a moment, just trying to focus on getting the
strength to move from the floor where he knelt, finding his muscles just aching in want to rest
again.

“You want anything to eat man?” And Shane is there, not asking but just offering a hand to help
him up, just a natural offering when someone was trying to stand. Swallowing back the nausea
that rolls through his stomach he gives a little shake of his head in reply and allows Shane to help
him stand, ignoring the way he ends up gripping the other man’s arm a little when he’s upright,
steadying himself before letting go.

Everyone else is packed up and ready to go, it seems they’d been waiting for him to be ready to
move. Idiots should have woken him if they wanted to just go. He wasn’t fucking fragile. Angry
at their stupidity and his inability to know they’d wasted time for him, he heads over to his truck,
knowing that Merle’s bike was definitely not a viable option right now when he was feeling like
this. He’s relieved to find the bike already up in the bed of the truck, the others having already tied
it down and gotten it ready to move for him whilst he’d been out.

“Ready to get going?” Rick is cheerful as always, giving him that damned good boy smile and
watching him closely as he tugs on the straps across the bike. He makes out he’s checking them
over, but really, he just needs something to keep his hands occupied from shaking.

Taking a breath he swallows instinctively, giving himself time to plan his words and hopefully get
everything in order and understandable the first time. When he speaks he’s careful, slow and
sounding like a damned idiot, but at least the slurring wasn’t do bad. “Would have been ready
sooner if you’d woken me up.”

The look on Rick’s face makes him wish he hadn’t fucking said a damned thing. Fuck he looked
as if he was ready to wrap Daryl back up in that damned blanket and get him lying down again.
When Rick does speak his voice is low, quiet and understanding in a way Daryl really doesn’t
want to hear right now. “You needed some rest Daryl, it’s no big deal. You’re in the RV today,
we’re rotating drivers around to give everyone a break.”

No, they just didn’t want him behind the wheel at the moment. Which was fair enough, he knew
being in control of a vehicle wasn’t something he was capable of right now, but Rick could at least have the fucking guts to say it to his face. Instead the man was pussyfooting around him like he was some sort of invalid, fragile and pathetic, someone that needed to be cared for or something.

Snorting in annoyance he heads to the RV, managing to jump up the step and settle himself at the shitty table before his legs completely give way. It’s more frustrating than anything else, to be so fucking useless when he couldn’t even remember it happening. It was as if he’d just woken up feeling like shit for no reason, like a hangover without the good part the night before. Leaning back against the seats he watches out the window, ignoring the world as everyone else moves to the vehicles and gets ready to head out.

He hopes whoever is driving his truck isn’t going to fuck the thing up, he’s had it so long he knows that you have to give it a bit of a kick to get into the right gear and that sometimes there’ll be a bit of a squeak if you go fast enough. Sighing he folds his arms on the tabletop, resting his head there and ignoring whoever the hell sits opposite him as he tries to just not think about anything at all. Sometimes it was just easier to lose the day after an attack as well and just carry on whenever he felt normal again.

There’s a while where everything is quiet except for the sound of the cars moving across the road, taking them closer to Fort Benning and hopefully some semblance of safety. The nausea in his stomach makes him squirm a little in discomfort and even though he knew he wasn’t going to physically be sick, it was still as uncomfortable as hell and had him groaning a little at the sensation.

“Daryl? You okay? Do we need to stop?” Fucks sake, the Chinaman sounds panicked, almost frantic as if he’s going to up and drop dead right there on the table. Lifting a hand free from the tabletop he raises his middle finger to the idiot sitting opposite. “I don’t know if that means yes or no…”

Slamming his palm to the table he doesn’t care that it makes the headache thump a little louder or the other members of the RV to look at him like he’s crazy, it’s worth it to see the man sitting opposite jump out of his skin in fright. He was not some fragile little flower than needed to stop a convoy of vehicles because his stomach wouldn’t settle.

Glenn seems to understand the smack and shuts up, watching him with worried eyes when he moves to grab the crossbow someone had put on the seat next to him. It’s not like he could use it right now, but sometimes it was just reassuring to have a weapon, it tended to keep everyone else at bay. Plucking at the string he lets himself fidget, concentrating on just getting through this unsettling period of not feeling quite right in himself, chewing on his lower lip when his body decides he’s sitting far too still.

The world goes by, the noise of the RV settles into a static buzz in his ears and Glenn keeps himself busy instead of staring at him all the time. He can feel Dale keep checking the rear view mirror to see him, unable to keep his nose out of other people’s business. Least Andrea was still too busy wanting to kill herself to give a shit about him.

Moving to pluck at the crossbow string idly, he looks down at the feeling of wood in his hands, an arrow between his fingers being spun in an unconscious habit. There’s a moment of panic in his mind where he can’t find his crossbow, and the blank part of his memory that doesn’t recall having removed it from his lap. Swallowing back more nausea he scans the RV, giving out a light sigh of relief when it’s there, sitting on the seat beside him.

He didn’t remember putting it there or taking up the arrow to fidget with instead. The blank spots in his memory were more unsettling than the fucking headache and made him feel like he was
going insane. Running his fingers through his hair he glances up to find Andrea sitting on the other side of the table, watching him with a curious look and so many unsaid questions. He didn’t remember Glenn moving. Goddamnit.

Chewing on his thumbnail he just goes back to settling his head on his arms, wanting to just sleep this all away and ignore the looks they were all giving him. When Dale begins waffling on about his wife, talking about how she’d been when she was ill, so weak and frail, lost in herself and the illness he wants to fucking shout for him to shut up and mind his own damned business. This was nothing like that. He wasn’t fucking dying, he just had funny turns every so often. They didn’t fucking get it and now they were going to be treating him different and constantly think he was going to start fitting.

Dale’s voice is fuzzy at the edges, blurring in his ears and merging into one, but he knows he’s being his usual blabbering self, thinking he knows everything and relating everything in the world to a memory of his own. He wants to react and make it all stop, but the amount of effort required is just too much for now so instead he stays where he is and tries to rest, wanting to be on his own on the bike and away from these people for a few minutes.

He doesn’t know how long he’s been dozing but when he’s fully aware of what’s happening Dale is there, placing a hand on his shoulder to wake him and giving that understanding smile that drives him mad. Daryl wants to escape but the man has him trapped, standing right in the gap he needs to get through to get out. Clenching his hands into fists he doesn’t look at him and instead just looks at his lap, not wanting to listen, just wanting to escape.

“You know it took my Irma a long time to finally admit that she was ill.” Oh God, as if it wasn’t bad enough the whole RV got the speech now he was getting the one on one version. “I wouldn’t accept it of course, dragged her to every single doctor possible to try and get some solutions but she had made up her mind. She got weaker, there were days where she wouldn’t eat and would just sleep the hours away, she’d say it was as if her arms and legs were made of lead and she couldn’t get them to work.”

Daryl wants to cover his ears and yell for the man to shut up, but his mouth is doing that fucked up trembling thing again so instead he chews on his thumbnail to hide it.

“She kept a lot of it a secret from me, hiding the headaches and the vomiting, pretending she was fine to struggle on through the days. I think she wanted to prove something, that she was strong and better than some illness.” Dale continues and the headache continues to throb behind his temples, making him angry in a mix of emotion that suddenly swells within him. It bursts free as he stands up, shoving the old man aside and storming past to get out of the RV, to get some air and just be away from the words, the looks and the fucking assumptions everyone now had.

He knows Dale is going to be upset with him for shoving but really he doesn’t give much of a shit right now. It’s all too fucking much and they’re laying it all on him now when his brain still isn’t quite working properly. It’s frustrating and unfair as hell for them to do this. Yanking open the door of his own truck he ignores where Shane and Rick have a map spread across the hood and the way they watch him when he climbs into the driver’s seat.

Slamming the door shut behind himself he wraps his still shaking fingers around the wheel and leans his forehead against the cracked and broken leather, feeling the heat of the sun against his skin. Daryl sits there for a while, just breathing and aching all over, as if his body hated him for moving from its relatively comfortable spot in the RV. He can feel T-Dog beside him, watching him and wanting to ask, but he’s grateful when the other man stays silent.

He still hates the other man for dropping the fucking keys on Merle and leaving him there, but what difference would it make if he kept on about it? They were a group now and he supposed
he’d just have to make the best of it all. Nausea rolls through him again and he tenses, squeezing the leather and pressing his head there harder to get through it.

“You okay man?” T-Dog asks and Daryl wants to snap that he’d be just fucking fine if Merle was here to help him through this. Glaring over to the other man he doesn’t say anything, just gives a tight nod and grits his teeth through the discomfort.

The driver’s side door opens and Daryl knows Shane and Rick are watching him, Shane doing that stupid shifting weight from foot to foot thing when he’s going to say something he knows Daryl ain’t gonna like. “You know you ain’t driving man.” Shane tells him, no question in the words, just a pure statement they all know to be true. “You ain’t ready to yet.”

Gripping the wheel a bit tighter he knows he can’t drive his own truck, even if he knows everything about it. But the thought of going back into the RV with the others is even worse so instead he simply turns to T-Dog with a glare. “Get out.”

T-Dog rolls his eyes, but opens the passenger door all the same, hopping out of the truck and not mentioning the way he’d stammered. “Godammit kicking a man out of his own seat. You best not think history is going to repeat itself here.” He huffs, heading to the RV and allowing Daryl the space to scoot across the seat to the passenger side. Daryl knows he should feel bad, but this is his truck after all and T-Dog did owe him in a sense due to what he did to Merle.

“Daryl that ain’t what I meant.” Shane continues, leaning on the truck and trying to catch his eye. Daryl knows the other man is trying to help, Shane seems to be the only one not looking at him different, but fuck the seizures, and right now he needed to be in his truck away from so many people. “You need to be somewhere with space just in case-”

“Wouldn’t be the first time I had a fit in this truck and it probably won’t be the last.” He cuts in, words rushed together and some slurred, but he knows they both understood him well enough. It’s the first time he’s spoken about his funny turns to them, he guesses they think that means something, but it doesn’t. He just wants to do what he wants right now.

“All right. We’ve only got a few more miles till we hit the highway then we’ll see how we’re doing.” Rick agrees after a while, giving Shane a pat on the back and a nod to Daryl before heading back to the car with the families in. Daryl can’t help but give a small sigh as he leans back against the familiar seat, picking at the loose threads underneath and glad to just be somewhere he can feel a little more stable. It’s not even strange not to be driving, it’s just weird for it not to be Merle in the seat instead.

They start driving again and Shane has the decency to give up on conversation when he makes it clear he’s not interested. Instead they just drive, Shane focussing on the road ahead and him dozing against the window as the world rushes by. It’s not much, but being in a place he knows helps and when the nausea settles down to a tolerable level, he feels almost like himself again.
Chapter 3

It isn’t that Shane doesn’t like driving, it’s just a very different experience when any cars on the road were abandoned or destroyed. Bodies litter the highway, scattered about with blood drying in smears over everything. At the first traffic snarl they all pull in for a break, everyone needing to stretch their legs and take a bathroom break, and there was a good chance they could find something useful in the mass of cars left there.

Parking up Shane makes sure all the vehicles are pointed outwards, ready to just be jumped in a driven off if anything dangerous appeared. They haven’t seen more than the occasional walker since the quarry but he was not going to start relaxing about it any time soon, they had to be constantly on edge. Just because something seemed safe didn’t mean it was, they’d learnt that lesson at the CDC and he was not in the mood to repeat that moment.

Taking one of their water bottles he takes a gulp, it’s warm from the sun but then so is he and he knows they all need to keep hydrated if they’re going to keep their strength up. It’s hot, nearing midafternoon and there was barely any breeze to be felt, leaving them all sticky and uncomfortable in the enclosed space of the vehicles. Propping open the door he takes a second to stretch his legs, glancing over to where Daryl remained pressed against the window, and for a second Shane is worried they’ve lost him again he seems so out of it.

“Here man, drink some water.” He speaks loud enough to catch Daryl’s attention, snapping the other man out of his daydream and bringing him back to the here and now. Shane doesn’t mention that Daryl glances around himself as if unsure of where he was for a few moments before taking the bottle, sipping at the water slowly before handing it back. “Feeling any better?”

Daryl gives a half hearted shrug and a grunt in response, Shane figures that’s good enough and at least the other man seemed more alert now than he had been before. He doesn’t want to piss the other man off, it wasn’t like the two of them didn’t rub each other up the wrong way on a normal day, but it was obvious that Daryl still wasn’t quite himself. So instead of asking for an elaboration, he instead focuses on the job at hand.

“We’re gonna take a bit of a pit stop for a while. The kids need to stretch their legs, give the RV a break before it overheats again and see if there’s anything worth taking from any of these cars. You up for a bit of a scavenger hunt?” Keeping his voice light he doesn’t mention that Rick and he didn’t feel comfortable leaving him alone quite yet, so it had been decided that if Daryl wanted to help with anything, he would be shadowed the whole time. It wasn’t that Shane didn’t trust the other man, he just remembers how suddenly the fits could come on.

“Yes.” Daryl shrugs and slips out of the truck, hanging onto the door for balance as he finds his feet following Shane across the road. Everything is grimy and stale, but nothing looked as if it had been touched too much since being left. Glancing to the rest of the group Shane takes note of everyone’s position, noting that Glenn was on lookout and the kids were close to their mothers.

“I ain’t gonna just keel over you know.”

He nods, keeping his gun holstered but ready just in case as they headed towards one of the cars. “I know man.” Still it didn’t hurt to make sure, and Daryl hasn’t exactly been complaining about being monitored, so he figures maybe the man knows it’s for his own good.

“Never had more than one at a time.” Daryl continues, leaning against the side of the people carrier as Shane pops open the trunk, letting the two of them begin rummaging through the items thrown in there. They both choose to ignore the bodies in the front seats and continue looking.
“Well you never know when it’s going to happen, best to be careful when you’re not a hundred percent yet.” Shane isn’t sure if Daryl is trying to be abrasive or reassuring, he seems to be trying to explain and defend himself at the same time, leaving him not sure what the other man wants from him. They’re fishing out some rope and tins of food in silence for a while before Daryl gives a loud sigh and confession.

“I did know.”

Turning to face the other man, Shane isn’t sure where he’s coming from but he sure wanted to know. Had there been a way to prevent the whole thing? Had they gone through all of that shit because Daryl was too full of himself to admit something was wrong? “What?”

Daryl shrugs beside him, eyes averted to the trunk they were going through and not meeting Shane’s eyes, at least he had the decency to look sheepish about it. The way he answers makes it seem as if it wasn’t a big deal, as if this sort of thing was nothing to take note of and the suddenness of the fit hadn’t sent he and Rick into a panic. “Sometimes I can feel it’s going to happen. I just thought maybe if I went careful I could stop it.” The other man shrugs again, moving to lean against the open trunk and chew on a thumb nail. “Didn’t work.”

“Clearly.” Shane snorts, taking a moment to gather himself and not snap. His patience wasn’t the best, and knowing Daryl had known about it was frustrating as hell. Still he manages to keep himself relatively calm, not raising his voice but speaking with enough venom that he knows Daryl can hear the firmness of his words. “Well next time, how about you let us know? I thought Rick was gonna have a panic attack when you went down.”

Still looking abashed, Daryl continues chewing at his nail and though the man’s colour is better than earlier, Shane can still see where his fingers tremble a little. “Ain’t like I can help it.” Daryl mutters, moving to search through the trunk with more conviction, as if he was determined not to look like a scolded child any longer.

Giving a small sigh, Shane lets them focus on the task at hand, glancing up every so often to check on everyone else and the tree line for any walkers. “I know, but next time tell us what to look out for, or let us know all right?” He’s still angry, wishing he already knew what the signs were and wondering if he could have stopped the kids and everyone else from seeing it happen at all. Daryl was a secretive son of a bitch, and normally he wouldn’t mind, but seriously if there was one thing that should be shared with the group, it was medical issues.

“It’s more a feeling than anything you can see, except the twitches and shit.” Daryl continues, voice steadier as he throws anything they don’t want out of the way, not caring or showing any respect as some items hit the bodies in the car. Maybe it’s his way of getting it all out, or maybe he just needs a distraction from baring something so personal with another person. “Sometimes things go kind of fuzzy and I feel sick, or I do weird stuff without realising.” He pauses to smirk and Shane can see the pain of remembering the world before all of this. “One time in the middle of watching TV I started taking off my shirt for no reason before I had one, Merle thought I was going crazy.”

Shane has to give a snort at that, glad that whatever residue anger Daryl had was being vented through humour and not directed at him. It wasn’t as if he hadn’t been trying to help this entire time, Daryl was just stubborn as hell to accept help. “We’ll keep an eye out for stripping symptoms then.” He jokes, grabbing at some blankets and jackets for spare clothing, tossing them to the pile of things they were taking. “If you’re ever half naked without good cause, I’ll get you to lay down.” Pausing for a second he can see the look Daryl is giving him without even turning to face the other man. “Ignore how that sounds, you’re not my type.”

“Right back at you.” Daryl snorts, continuing in their hunt before closing the trunk, moving to the
next vehicle and beginning anew. Shane wonders if this isn’t Daryl’s first time stealing from cars, but realises this might not be the best time to bring it up. Instead he continues working with him, moving around the vehicle to check the hot spots, glove box, any hidden compartments that would hold any useful medication or items. He’s preoccupied with trying to read the peeling label off a pill box he almost misses Daryl’s next question. “How’d you know what to do anyway? Most people just don’t and make it worse.”

“My cousin, he had ‘em sometimes.” He speaks as if it doesn’t ache to think about. Pretending that the memories of family parties and birthdays weren’t a thing of the past to be forgotten before they became too painful. “My aunt gave us all a crash course in helping him out if it happened. Remembered most of it when you went down.” He explains, watching as Daryl takes a moment to sit in the trunk of the almost empty car, clearly needing a break but not willing to ask.

“You did good.” And Shane figures that’s the closest either he or Rick were going to get to a thank you. He’ll take what he can, especially when this was clearly difficult for Daryl to talk about. The other man sits and sorts through various items in a rucksack, tossing aside the crap and keeping the good. It’s a distraction, but Shane doesn’t point it out, better to keep the other man comfortable if he could. “It sucks having everyone panic about it. Don’t help at all.” Daryl mumbles and Shane has to nod along with that, wondering just how bad it had been before all of this.

“How often do you usually have them?” He knows this sort of thing didn’t just happen out of the blue. Daryl had mentioned having them before, some even in the truck so he must have a vague idea of what his body’s reactions were. A part of him wants to ask about any triggers, wondering if any sudden gunfire and muzzle flashes would set Daryl off if they weren’t careful. If there was a situation where they had to be firing, he didn’t want one member down and seizing in the middle of it.

Daryl snorts, pocketing a candy bar and fishing out a pack of cigarettes, yanking a crumpled one out and straightening it as much as possible before lighting it. Of course the other man had a lighter on him, he was Merle’s brother after all. “Ain’t like I got a schedule to keep.” Shane watches as he blows out a stream of smoke and wonders how that can taste nice on an empty stomach and if Daryl should even be smoking at all. “It just happens every so often, I have a few a year, last one was months ago.”

“Got any medication for it?” Or anyway they could limit it from happening again. Things were dangerous now and this wasn’t something they could sit down and deal with every month, if there was something Daryl could take to keep it at bay, things would be easier. He knew there was stuff for it. Bobby had something for it back then, surely they could find a pharmacy for it?

“Nah. Could never afford nothing.” The look of frustration and disappointment on Shane’s face must show, because Daryl is quick to continue. “It ain’t too bad anyway, don’t have as many as other people do. I can handle it.”

Walking away from the trunk for a moment Shane runs his fingers through his hair, feeling the sweat bead down the back of his neck in the heat of the day. He can’t believe the other man is so nonchalant about this whole thing. Was he not aware of their situation? Or what could happen? Pacing back over he leans before him against the edge of the trunk, and he knows he’s using his cop voice when he speaks again. “Daryl, what if you get one when out hunting? Or when on the bike?”

“Ain’t never happened.” He can hear the frustration in his voice, the way he bristles and sits a little straighter, and braces himself as if ready for a fight. Shane may be many things, but he wasn’t the kind of man to hit someone who was already down. “Usually had Merle with me. Most likely be dead before I get another one anyway.” Daryl spits, flicking the cigarette away and sliding from
the trunk, grabbing the rucksack of supplies and heading back towards his truck with anger in his steps.

“Don’t talk like that.” Shane snaps, not willing to start hearing bullshit like that, not whilst he was here trying his hardest to keep the group safe, including Daryl. Following the other man he grabs their other supplies, throwing them in the back of Daryl’s truck and securing it all in place. He’s hot and frustrated, with Daryl being a stroppy child about the whole thing and the worry of danger around them he is not in the mood for all of this. “We’re doing fine. I just want us to be prepared for when it happens again.” He’s trying to be reasonable but sometimes talking to the other man was like banging his head against a brick wall.

“Whatever.” Daryl hisses, rolling his eyes and folding his arms across his chest, already defensive and it’s clear to Shane that whatever this conversation was, it was over now. “You can tell everyone else to stop fucking watching me too, I don’t need them getting chewed on by a walker cause they were too busy checking on me. I don’t need nothing from no one, make sure they know that.” Shane watches as Daryl begins stalking away to the tree line, clearly wanting to be by himself for a moment even if it wasn’t best for him at the moment. “And tell the kids to quit fucking staring like I’m possessed. I’m fine!”

Checking their perimeter to see if any walkers had been drawn from the man’s shouting he glares in Daryl’s direction, watching the other man stumble a little and wondering if he should go after him. They had decided to keep an eye on him after all and he wasn’t going to deal with Rick’s bitching if Daryl got bit because he couldn’t keep his temper in check. “Where’re you going?” He calls, jogging after Daryl, hand on his holster and aggravated at the way this had turned out.

“For a piss!” Daryl snarls and spins on his heel to face him, clearly still angry and ready for that fight that wasn’t going to happen. “Wanna come hold my hand or somethin’?”

Clearly Daryl was feeling better if he was being this much of a dick again, he muses, a part of him glad to have the biting attitude back after yesterday. “Hey screw you man, I’m just trying to help.” He replies, stopping in tracks and able to feel Glenn’s eyes on his back as he waits back from following Daryl, if the man wanted space he could give him it. Even if it wasn’t a good idea.

“Don’t need your help! Don’t need anyone’s help!” And with a final yell and flick of his wrist Daryl is out of sight in the trees, his extended middle finger making Shane curse inwardly and yank on his hair in frustration. He’s got no doubt that Rick is going to be pissed, but what was he meant to do? Daryl wasn’t a kid and if the other man had been through fits before then he knew what he was and wasn’t capable of, and surely he wouldn’t put himself and others at risk because of his pride?

Shane decides to go and tell Rick anyway, just in case he was wrong.
Chapter 4

Daryl is lucky for the next few months, despite all the stress and injury he goes through the only fit he has is after he’d been shot by Andrea and it wasn’t so bad when he was in a bed and could blame it on the blood loss. Hershel had asked questions of him, offered him medication and helped him get back on his feet. Daryl was loathe to admit it but after the loss of Shane, it was kind of reassuring to have someone in the group that knew what to do in that situation.

The winter was tough, constantly on the move, hunting for food, water, somewhere to rest without any panic and the semblance of safety, but they struggled through it together and Daryl was so glad that he hadn’t gotten ill during that time. So much had happened since his last attack he honestly had forgotten all about having a potential fit, there had been too much to focus on with the baby, the prison, Woodbury and now Merle. He’d just had more to deal with and really it’s not until they’re walking back up to the prison, Merle grinning like an idiot at the adrenaline high and Rick scowling at their now situation, that the little niggle in his mind begins calling out again.

His stomach has been playing up the last few hours, but he figured that between abandoning the group, having Merle find out about his scars and the fight to come home, he’d assumed it was just anxiety over it all. Things had been tough, and though he’d tried to make the right choice the first time, he’d managed to not only piss off Merle, but upset the group as well. He was shit at picking and choosing, he’d never had to before when Merle was the only one who cared about him, but things were different now. Daryl wonders if they’d still be willing to take him back.

The fight had been intense, and seeing Rick fighting so hard to protect the prison and keep his people safe had made him fight harder, wanting to prove himself as a part of it all. He deserved to be here, he never should have left and for once in their lives, Merle would have to follow his lead instead. The walkers go down one by one, soiling the ground and leaving the three of them panting heavily and taking note of the overrun courtyard they’d lost. It makes him feel even sicker, stomach churning harshly as he notes everything they’d lost and that if he’d been here maybe he could have stopped it.

Merle is loud as always, grinning like this had been his plan all along and prodding at Rick with his words until Daryl’s head begins to ache. He doesn’t want them to fight, he just wants to go home and start trying to get things back in order and like they were before with the addition of Merle. Rick bites back, not willing to let things settle as easily as he used to and willing to fight every second to get Merle to stay in line. His brother won’t stop, never one to back down from a fight if he didn’t have to and right now even though this had been their choice, Merle was acting as if it meant nothing.

Not willing to get involved in another fight he simply shoves at his brother, trying to get Merle to shut the hell up when his head was aching and it felt like it was taking longer to blink than usual. Merle grunts in annoyance and Rick gives a sigh before leading them in, heading up through the walkway down the side of the courtyard with him trailing behind them. There’s no fear of walkers in here and he lets his crossbow lay across his back, his fingers have an uncomfortable feeling in them so it’s a relief to get the weight off of them.

It’s hard to keep up with the two of them, he feels a little uneasy on his feet and when he closes his eyes for a second everything’s off kilter when he opens them again. The colour is wrong, spots of it not quite clear, some of it’s blurry and there’s a drifting motion to everything that he knows shouldn’t be there. It’s unsettling, and he pauses as his stomach rolls to try and get himself feeling a bit more stable. He wasn’t sure what was wrong with him, maybe the fight at Woodbury and then the one with the walkers had knocked him more than he’d thought and now he was relaxing
he was paying the price.

Glancing up when everything’s stable again he moves as quickly as he can to catch back up to Merle and Rick, the pounding in his ears not able to tune out their arguing. In the entryway Glenn and Maggie meet them, faces furious and already shouting. Daryl can barely stand the noise of them all together, complaining and screaming, becoming a mass of noise and hatred. He wonders if he’s made the right choice to come back, maybe he was the only one who could really cope with Merle after all.

“What the hell is he doing here? He’s not welcome.” Glenn spits, bruised, angry and defending his home from what he sees as an invader. Daryl doesn’t know how to solve this so he stays quiet and hopes that Merle won’t make it worse.

Of course Merle has never been so good to him. “Hey don’t be like that now Chinaman, I thought we had a connection.”

Maggie is angry, looking as if she were going to slap Merle in a second if this problem wasn’t fixed. Daryl wouldn’t put it past her, he’d seen what she did to Shane before at the farm. “Rick you cannot be serious, you know what he did.” The girl is tough, not backing down and glaring Merle dead in the eye, ready and willing for a fight.

“Oh please, you’re upset over a few punches?” Waving his stumped arm in their faces with a snicker, Merle really wasn’t helping. “Heck I lost a hand and me and Officer Friendly are getting on just fine.” He gestures to Rick with a grin, cocky as ever and really Daryl figured he was asking for it now.

“It’s not like we’ve got much of a choice.” Rick hisses, holstering his weapons and standing between Merle and Glenn, a physical barrier between them both to stop anymore physical violence. “You heard Daryl, they come as a pair so you want one, you deal with the other.” The man gestures towards him, making him take a step back when the colour switches back off and on again before his stomach rolls at suddenly being involved in the fight. Fortunately Rick carries on, not forcing him to say his piece to defend himself. “He saved my life out there, that’s enough to give him a free pass for now.”

“So it doesn’t matter what he did to me?” Glenn huffs, pacing a little and riled up, even Maggie’s soothing hands weren’t placating him right now. “What he could do to someone else? Carl? Your baby? You ever think about that?”

As usual the mention of the kids gets everyone riled up, Merle defending himself from Glenn’s accusations whilst Rick tries to stop them from shouting so loud. All the walkers in the courtyard are growling at them, champing at the fences and getting riled up from the noise. The stench of rot they bring with them makes Daryl’s stomach roll again, his head pounds even more and his fingers are trembling again.

In a second everything falls into place, as if his brain had taken forever to piece it all together and realise what was going on. Way back when he was a kid the doctors had called it an aura, his body already starting to notice the signs of a fit and trying to tell him before it shut down completely. He was always taught to try and tell someone, or get somewhere safe and stabilise himself, but between all the yelling, the fighting and being ignored on the sidelines, he’s not sure exactly what to do.

Merle was yelling, getting in Glenn’s face and pushing back against where Rick’s palm is holding him back from starting something. The walkers are snarling, his head is pounding and when he tries to speak his fucking jaw won’t work properly, lips trembling and words are too hard to form right now. His crossbow hits against his back, heavy edges poking at him when he stumbles
forward. Pressing into Merle’s back he latches his fingers into his jacket, giving a groan of pain and worry as he presses his forehead between Merle’s shoulder blades.

The yelling stops but his headache doesn’t, leaving him wincing in pain as Merle tries to turn to look at him. Rick’s hand is on his lower back, asking him what’s wrong, Glenn and Maggie are asking questions again and he can feel his body give a slight tremor like a preview before the main event. “Daryl? What’s the matter?”

He winces when Merle moves to face him, bracing him as he feels unsteady and between he and Rick Daryl’s pretty sure they’re the only things keeping him upright. Again he laces his trembling fingers into Merle’s jacket, clinging to him as his vision fucks up again, lips trembling as he manages to half explain. “Mer, ‘m gonna…gonna f-fit.” He stutters, hating being so weak, feeling other hands press over his sides and someone moves his arms to slip off his bow and bag, taking them away and leaving him trembling and feeling naked and vulnerable.

Daryl is used to clinging to Merle when he was like this, trusting his big brother to look after him when he was at his weakest, but having the others there, it’s more than embarrassing. “I got you.” Merle’s voice is calm, something to hang onto when the world goes topsy turvy before his eyes and his stomach rolls at the loss of control. “It’s okay, I got you baby brother.”

There’s voices, the scent of walkers and death, Merle’s jacket is removed from his grip and before he can let out any noise of panic, everything goes dark and there is no more anything for him to cling on to.
Chapter 5

Rick hates the feeling of absolute helplessness that comes over him when Daryl fits. He’s been there through two before this and he thought he had some semblance of readiness to help with it all, but he freezes again when Daryl’s body begins shaking spasmodically. Its as if everything he knows flies out the window and he’s left disturbed and worried by the sudden turn of events, unable to even come up with how to help Daryl through this. He wishes Shane were still here.

He takes a step back when Merle moves into action, using his good hand to cradle Daryl’s head as he worked them down to the floor, holding his brother close as he could and easing them to the ground. Merle sits, all thoughts of fighting having vanished, his focus purely on Daryl as his brother trembles and jerks in his grip. Beside himself Rick can hear Glenn swearing at the situation, not in anger but as a way to vent the upset at seeing a friend have to go through this. Maggie is quiet, a look on her face of pure understanding before she nods to him.

“We’ll go tell my dad.” She tells him, linking her fingers between Glenn’s before tugging on him to follow her. “Get a bunk set up for him and get what you need. He can’t stay on the perch after this, he’s going to need a proper bed to rest in.” Maggie nods again, there’s no worry in her eyes, just pure determination and a sense of control over her actions. Rick can only nod in reply, eyes still fixed on Daryl.

“We’ll secure a cell for him and Merle to share.” Glenn adds and Rick is surprised that after everything all it takes is this to get Glenn thinking straight again. He can still feel the anger and he knows Glenn and Merle were not going to be friends anytime soon, but he’s willing to allow him in their home for Daryl and that’s enough for the moment. “Get his things in there for when he wakes up.”

“Clear everyone else out of the cellblock. Don’t tell them what’s happened, just think of something for them to all do, check the watchtowers or something.” Rick doesn’t need to point out that he wants Daryl to have some semblance of privacy for this situation, the other man was so private that he knew something like this would be unwanted attention from the others. It doesn’t hurt that everyone else would be away from Merle until he was locked away inside.

Glenn nods before turning to head back inside with Maggie, taking Daryl’s crossbow and bag with them, and closing the door firmly behind themselves, leaving Rick outside with Merle and his still fitting brother. He almost doesn’t want to interrupt, Merle seems to know what he’s doing and Rick isn’t sure if he’d be any help at all, but he was not going to risk leaving them out here when Daryl was down. Stepping over to where Merle sits with Daryl’s head cradled in his lap, he can see how there’s only one thing Merle is focussed on right now and tat’s his brother.

“Quit your staring officer friendly.” Merle growls, defensive and on edge, holding Daryl close and though he doesn’t look up Rick knows the man wouldn’t do anything to risk his brother. So when he steps closer, crouching by Merle’s side, unable to stop watching as Daryl jerks painfully, he doesn’t feel endangered at all.

“Anything I can do to help?” He keeps his voice calm, not wanting to rile Merle up or seem as if he was mocking the situation. Honestly it still frightened him to see his friend like this, so vulnerable and weak compared to how he was every other day. There’s nothing to move away from Daryl’s limbs and no way he could injure his head with Merle holding his head like that, and really that was all Rick could remember being told to do right now.

Merle gives him a questioning look before turning back to his brother and hushing him, reaching out to wipe away the spit that foams at the corners of Daryl’s mouth. “Not till he’s finished getting
through it. We’ll move him once it’s over.” He replies and Rick can hear a sadness in his voice that he didn’t think the older Dixon was capable of. It seemed when it came to Daryl Merle was the same as any other older brother. “Gotta say you’re taking this well, most folks freak the hell out and start screaming.”

Rick moves to sit on the ground properly, getting comfortable as he waited for the fit to work its way out of Daryl’s body. It’s not much but he places a hand on Daryl’s knee, enough to reassure himself whilst not pushing Merle’s buttons. “He’s had them before.” He replies, remembering it all too clearly. “The first time was after the CDC, in the middle of eating he just went down, scared the crap out of everyone I can tell you that. Other was after he took an arrow to the side, blood loss set it off he said.”

Merle grunts at that, clearly not aware of his brother’s injury from before and Rick supposed maybe it wasn’t the best tactic to let the man know the injuries Daryl had sustained whilst in his group. “So you think you’re an expert then?” And like that Merle is angry again, growling at him as if Rick was trying to muscle in on something that had been purely Merle’s to handle before all of this. It’s strange to think of the other man as jealous of his friendship with Daryl, but it’s been a year since they’d seen each other and Rick supposed he could understand a little.

Shaking his head he doesn’t want to cause an argument so he tries to sound humble, being as honest as he could with Merle whilst Daryl’s leg jerks beneath his touch. “Nowhere near. Shane knew what to do the first time, then we had Hershel, Maggie’s father, a vet, to help with the next. I was just on the sidelines really, trying to help where I could.” He explains, knowing that really he’d not helped at all but more supervised the whole thing and kept the place clear of prying eyes. Honestly he was just crowd control.

Daryl chokes a little and Merle is distracted for a moment to tilt his brother’s head, moving to wipe at the drool on his chin and settle them into a more comfortable position. The moment had been enough to cut the anger off before it could grow and Rick is pleased that when Merle speaks again, he’s as calm as he could be in this situation. “Well you must have done good enough.”

He takes it as a thank you, but doesn’t push for more. Instead he watches the way Merle has Daryl’s head in his lap, tilted enough so he wouldn’t choke on his own spit and cupping his head gently. “Not as good as you.” Rick points out.

“Had plenty of practice over the years.” Merle laughs a little at that, but there’s no humour in it, just a taste of bitterness that hangs between them both. “Was pretty much the only one who could handle him when this shit happened. Mom would scream, cry and be nothing but more of a problem, as for dad? Well fucker never helped at all. So I had to learn and learn I did.” He nods in understanding, running his fingers through his hair and squeezing at Daryl’s knee when he gives particularly vicious all over body twitch.

“Must have been tough.”

“No tougher than any of the other shit we had to learn to get by.” Merle shrugs, not seemingly bothered at letting Rick know about their shitty home life. Rick had always suspected it hadn’t been healthy when he saw little glimpses through Daryl’s words and behaviour, but having confirmation just made him nod solemnly in reply. “He’s calming down, we’ll move him in a minute.”

Glancing down to the other man Rick can see the shaking beginning to calm down, Daryl’s limbs were still jerking about roughly, but they were slower, more sluggish now. He’s relieved it’s coming to an end, remembering Shane’s warning of what could happen if a fit went on for too long. They sit for a few minutes with Daryl, just waiting in-between the final shivers and jerks of his body until finally he relaxes, all tension gone and leaving Daryl flopped on the floor like a
Still wanting to help as much as he could, Rick meets Merle’s eyes, not willing to let the man go through this by himself if he didn’t have to. “How’re we going to do this?”

“Help me get him up and I’ll carry him inside.” Merle leaves no room for discussion, nodding for Rick to stand and keep Daryl steady as he got up himself, the action nowhere near smooth with the lack of a hand. It doesn’t seem to slow him down too much though and within moments Merle is gathering his brother into his arms as gently as possible.

The ways he moves it makes it clear that this isn’t the first time Merle has had to do this and Rick remembers Daryl muttering about Merle having been there before. He can imagine this same image in a thousand other scenarios, Daryl’s head tucked under Merle’s chin as he took his brother to safety. Rick helps as much as he can, walking alongside Merle and helping to support Daryl’s head as much as he could, unable to stop a jolt of panic at the sight of blood and drool dribbling down his chin. “He’s bleeding from his mouth.”

“Probably bit his tongue again. Nothing serious.” Merle shrugs, unfazed by the reveal, and Rick figures that if anyone would know if it was a reason to panic, it would be Merle. So he holds the doors open for the other man, leading him to the cell block and heading for the cell that Hershel is propped outside of, the same kind smile on his face that he always has.

Rick doesn’t know how the other man is going to react being near Merle Dixon, the man who took his daughter hostage and beat his would be son in law to within an inch of his life, but Hershel is nothing but professional. “Get him on the bunk and we’ll take a look at him.” Hershel nods, using his crutches to follow Merle inside, giving Rick a look of understanding at their current situation.

It’s quiet as Hershel looks Daryl over, checking his eyes and mouth, noting the bitten tongue and making sure they knew to keep an eye on the bleeding. Rick nods in answer but Merle looks like he’s heard it all before, pacing in frustration and Rick isn’t sure if it’s at being in a cell or just being separated from his brother for a moment. There’s a few questions Hershel asks, Merle answers some before his patience is gone, snapping at the older man before stalking over to perch on the edge of Daryl’s bunk and claiming they were done.

Holding out a hand to Hershel he hopes the other man doesn’t take offense at Merle’s brash personality, but Rick knows most of it is all over the stress of their new situation and Daryl having a fit. “Thanks Hershel, we’ve got it from here, we’ll come get you if anything changes.” He reassures him, letting the older man leave them with the still passed out Daryl.

“You can go too Sheriff.” Merle is watching Daryl intently, finger combing his hair from his face and mopping up the blood tainted drool from his chin every so often. Rick knows Daryl is safe here with Merle but he’s going anywhere, at least not yet, not when he wanted to make sure the other man was all right for himself.

Moving to sit on the bunk on the opposite side of the cell Rick gives the Dixon’s their space, not wanting to interrupt if he wasn’t particularly wanted but not willing to leave either. “Not until he wakes up.” He reasons, making sure Merle knows he’d have to deal with this compromise.

The other man snarls a little, standing, pacing around the room a little glaring at Rick before crouching to go through Daryl’s bag. “He won’t want you here. The fits make him shy.” Merle explains, yanking out some fresh clothes for Daryl. Glancing over to where the other man still slept, Rick can see the reason for the change of clothes but doesn’t bring it up, it wasn’t something to mock or jeer at, not when Daryl had no control over himself.
Instead he shrugs to Merle when the other man takes his place back on Daryl’s bunk, perched on
the edge as a shield between his brother and the rest of the world. “Nothing I haven’t handled
before.” He explains, and he can see when Merle understands him and gives a tense nod in reply
before turning his attention back to his brother. Rick doesn’t mind being ignored, not for this sort
of reason, he knows he’s interrupting something the brothers have shared for years, but Daryl was
his friend just as much as he was Merle’s brother and he needed to make sure he was okay.

“Had his first one when he was seven.” Rick looks up when Merle speaks, the other man is still
focussed on Daryl and Rick is pretty sure Merle is simply talking at him, not to him. So he stays
quiet and takes all that Merle is willing to give him. “Doctors said he’d probably had some minor
ones in his sleep or some without noticing since he don’t remember it happening. They wanted to
give him medication, but we couldn’t ever afford it. He’s not as bad as some people, only has
them a few times a year, but it still fucking sucks to see him like this.” Merle sighs, using the rag
from Daryl’s back pocket to mop where Daryl has dribbled again, this time without any blood
staining it.

It’s one of the few times that he sees Merle as a real person, not the man who was high on the roof
in Atlanta and acting an idiot, but someone who really cared about his brother. Rick knew it was
the reason they were both here, each of them caring for Daryl in their own way and not willing to
lose him again. He shouldn’t have made Daryl try and choose, he should have shut down Glenn
in an instant, because he knew as bad as they’d seen Merle, he was still family to Daryl and still
someone he loved.

A small groan from Daryl makes him stand up, not moving to the other man yet but ready to help
if he needed it. Merle is instantly alert, hushing Daryl quietly and running his fingers through his
hair gently as he slowly starts to come around. Daryl looks panicked again but the second he goes
to shift Merle is keeping him down, hushing him still and running his fingers through his hair.
“You’re okay baby brother.” Merle croons, shifting to be close enough so he could whisper to
Daryl and still be heard, keeping his brother’s focus on him and him only. “I got you, Merle’s got
you all right?”

Daryl doesn’t respond, he just blinks up at Merle and then Rick in confusion, laying back against
the pillow beneath him before raising his shaking hands to press over his eyes. Rick can see he’s
shaking, his lips are trembling and he feels rude being here when Daryl was like this, when the
man was trying to recover from losing control. Merle continues hushing him, moving to stroke
over Daryl’s chest when he begins to hiccup and making soothing noises to his distressed brother.

He doesn’t want to make this anymore painful than it already was and right now Daryl looked to
be even more of a wreck than the first time, tears leaking from beneath his hands and down to the
pillow below. Instead of interrupting it all Rick instead catches Merle’s attention, nodding to him
in understanding before pointing to the door and heading that way. Right now they didn’t need
him there making Daryl feel more embarrassed for what had happened, and as much as he didn’t
want to he knew he could trust Merle with this one thing.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Merle hates seeing his brother like this. Over the years he’s become quite an expert at dealing with Daryl’s funny turns, but being able to deal with something didn’t make it any easier. Every time it happens he feels helpless to do anything really worthwhile since he can’t make them stop and the worst part was the waiting for it all to be over. Whenever Daryl starts fitting he remembers every other time they’ve been through the same thing; when Daryl was seven and had his first one, when they were out hunting and his brother had gone down, when he’d been called to go get him from school after a vicious one and when Daryl had even had one in the truck.

Their lives are always interrupted by these fucking fits and though he knows it’s not Daryl’s fault he can’t help but get made that his brother got this shitty lot in life.

Sitting beside his brother on the bunk he can see how badly this way has caught him, it had been pretty vicious by the looks of things and if Daryl wasn’t willing to meet his eyes then he knew it was bad. Merle had been through enough of them to not be phased by anything that happened from it all, but sometimes it just got too much for Daryl to deal with. He stays as calm as he can in this situation, trapped in a cell with his unwell brother and trying to help as best he can whilst surrounded by people that wanted him dead. It was more stressful than usual but he’d just have to deal with it.

“You’re all right.” He murmurs, hand still rubbing over Daryl’s hitching chest and keeping an eye on his breathing, they didn’t need him to have a panic attack right after a fit, who knew what would happen. “Everything’s all right baby brother.”

Daryl shakes his head beneath his hands, there’s still some tremors running through his body as his nerves try to sort themselves out and his brain kicks back into gear. The doctors had tried to explain it all to them both, using diagrams and plenty of textbooks with words neither of them really understood but really who cared what the scientific terms for things were, he had the hands one experience and that was what helped.

“Yes it is I swear to you, everything’s just peachy you don’t got to worry about a thing.” There was no point complaining about his situation when Daryl was like this, he didn’t need anymore stress to think about, right now he needed to just focus on himself and getting stable again. Reaching up with his brother’s red rag he moves to mop at his chin again where Daryl was drooling without noticing, his body too busy getting everything else working first. Daryl flinches a little beneath his touch but he’s used to it, he’s more skittish than usual after this.

He gives his brother a few minutes to gather himself before nudging at his side, not wanting to push but there was only so much he could guess at, he needed to know some real answers. “You ready to come out of there yet?” Merle taps at his arms where Daryl’s face was still hidden in his hands, the tears leaking from beneath his fingers and soaking the pillow beneath his head. Daryl flinches a little beneath his touch but he’s used to it, he’s more skittish than usual after this.

Nodding to himself Merle sighs and settles back to wait it all out. Sometimes it was more difficult for Daryl to get a grip of himself and he’d learnt it was better not to push him if he didn’t have to. The period after a fit was a difficult one to get through, sometimes Daryl could shrug it off easy enough and though he’d be tired and achy for a while he’d be good enough to carry on with the day. Times like this though it was tougher and it always depended on exactly where the fit had
affected him this time. If the tears were anything to judge by then it had hit the emotional centre of his brain this time and probably sent him spiralling beyond reason and made him feel worse.

“Gonna need to talk to me Daryl.” His brother may not want to talk right now, but he needed to make sure nothing else felt more wrong than usual. He’s careful when he moves, not wanting to make Daryl flinch away anymore and using his good hand he moves one of Daryl’s arms away from his face, not minding when his brother immediately drapes the other across both of his eyes to hide himself from view.

Taking Daryl’s hand he stays beside him for a moment, just running his thumb over the back of his hand for a second before giving a gentle squeeze. “Like when you were little remember? Two for yes, one for no, okay?” Daryl hiccups, curling in on himself a little more but he squeezes Merle’s hand twice so he takes that as a sign to continue. They’d come up with the system years ago, when Daryl was either too humiliated to open his mouth or when talking was damned near impossible after a fit. It was enough to get the answers he needed, so they’d stuck with it.

“Good job.” Daryl wasn’t a kid anymore, he was a grown man but fuck it if the fits didn’t make him look exactly like that seven year old who’d been terrified when his body had fitted for the first time. Sometimes gentle encouragement made this easier than yelling for him to get over it. “Headache?” One squeeze. “Feel sick?” Two squeezes. “Going to be sick?” Two squeezes followed by one squeeze, not sure then. “Wait here then.”

Of course Daryl isn’t going anywhere at the moment but sometimes his brother needed the reassurance of knowing he was leaving for a moment. Besides talking seemed to keep Daryl calmer through all of this and though he was still hiccupping on a sob every so often it wasn’t nearly as bad as earlier. Stepping outside of the cell he’s really not surprised to find Rick down the ways a bit, sitting on the steps that lead up to the perch and watching him carefully. Knew they wouldn’t trust him that much.

“He okay?” Of course he’s not okay, he never is right afterwards he’s always at least a little shaky and off his game, but he doesn’t snap to Officer friendly, instead he tries to keep as calm as he can.

“Need water, a bucket or something in case he pukes, and something easy for him to eat. Crackers or something.” He walks over, not wanting to be too far away from Daryl but not wanting to yell his brother’s business across the cell block. “And get me a book, doesn’t matter what it is.”

“I can do that.” Rick nods, still looking worried and peering behind Merle to the cell when he stands, clearly on edge to help as best he could. Merle does not like the man at all, the stump at the end of his arm itches to smack around the man’s head but he can behave himself for now, for Daryl. Turning back to the cell he gives a little sigh at the position he’s been put in but knows he’ll struggle through right now. “Merle?” Stopping in his tracks he glances back to Rick, raising an eyebrow when the man steps closer, he looks embarrassed but determined when he speaks. “Leave the clothes that need washing outside the cell, I’ll get them for him.”

Grunting in acknowledgement he heads back to Daryl, hating that the other man knows everything his brother hated others finding out about. The fits sucked in more ways than one, not only were they uncomfortable but they were humiliating as well when Daryl lost control of his body. Stepping a little heavier than usual he makes sure Daryl knows he’s there before he retakes his seat, pleased when Daryl automatically reaches out for his hand instead of shying away.

“Supplies on the way all right?” Two squeezes and a small shaky sigh. Better.

“Ready to come out of there yet?” Daryl doesn’t squeeze a reply but slowly his other arm moves down to reveal his face, tearstained and blotchy with a blush covering his cheeks. Dropping his brother’s hand for a moment he moves to wipe away the tears with the rag, ignoring the way he
squirms away like he’d used to as a kid. “Much better now I don’t gotta worry about you suffocating yourself.” When he’s done Daryl takes up his hand again, clearly not ready to talk yet and Merle could work with that.

“Not surprised your mouth isn’t working boy, you bit your tongue pretty good this time round.” He smirks, trying to get Daryl at ease at least a little bit despite the way he was feeling. Leaning closer he gestures for his brother to lean closer, patting his hand before moving up to cup his face. “Let me see.” Daryl opens his mouth obediently, but remains laying down, probably trying not to aggravate his stomach if it was feeling unstable. His tongue isn’t bleeding anymore but it’s bruised, some dents from each individual tooth decorate it but it’s not too bad and nothing is hanging off. “Swollen a bit, you’re probably going to be lisping for a while but you’ve had worse.”

Daryl closes his mouth and makes a noise of annoyance, his nose wrinkling a little and huffing. Merle ruffles his hair a little before sitting back and taking Daryl’s hand again. “Aching anywhere?” Two squeezes, and a small huff. “Just the usual aches?” Two squeezes again, least there wasn’t anything new to worry about. “Do you think you’re all right to get changed?” And like that Daryl can’t meet his eyes anymore, letting go of his hand and rolling onto his side to hide away again.

Merle knows it’s tough to admit to needing help in the first place but something like this just really drove it home how much these fits affected him. “Ain’t like I ain’t helped you before.” He shrugs, it’s one of the few times he won’t take the piss out of Daryl since he really can’t help it from happening. “Unless you wanna wait until you’re feeling a bit more stable?” Because sometimes the tremors he got afterwards could set him off again and there was no point changing clothes if he’d only ruin them.

He gets a small shrug in reply and takes that as a yes since Daryl wasn’t talking right now. Letting out a sigh he stands up again at the sound of someone outside, moving to intercept Rick and take the items from him. “How’s he doing?” The cop asks, trying to peer around Merle and into the cell, making him bristle a little and stand taller, wanting to stop him from seeing Daryl in this state, even if the other man had dealt with it before.

“Fine.” Giving a shrug in reply he peers at the title of the book, some shit with a picture of a rabbit on the front, either way it would do for the moment. “Don’t think he’ll be up for visitors anytime soon, and talking ain’t gonna be easy with his tongue all chewed up.” He hates having to tell him these things but maybe it’ll get the other man to back off a little and give them more space than he already was. Sure he knew they didn’t trust him, but right now Daryl needed him, he wasn’t going to do anything to risk him right now.

“They’re all just worried about him is all. They hate seeing him like this, it’s upsetting especially for Carl, he really looks up to him you know?”

Wracking his memory back to the quarry before all this he remembers the kid, a short thing with freckles and an innocent look in his eyes and an ability for getting into trouble. The kid had liked Daryl back then, thinking he was cool with his crossbow and asking to have a go at it whenever he could. Snorting a little he rubs at the back of his neck, pinning the bucket and other items to his side with his injured arm. “Tell them he’s fine. Just a little out of it right now. He’ll be all right to see them tomorrow after he’s got some rest.”

That’s about as nice as he can get and Rick seems to accept that when Merle turns his back on him to return to Daryl, listening to the cop walk away down the hall to a further distance, hopefully completely away from them both. Setting the bucket down by the side of the bunk he retakes his seat, reaching out to pat at Daryl’s side when his brother gives another small tremor.
“Seems like you’ve got an admirer out there. Officer Friendly’s kid seems to think you’re a hero or something, wanted to know if you were all right.” He can tell Daryl is listening, turning to him a little and paying more attention. “Told him to say you were fine, just tired and needed some sleep.”

Daryl grunts in understanding and that must have been the right answer to give, because slowly and with a little bit of assistance his brother sits himself up, still a little wobbly but managing. “How about we get you changed and see if you can keep anything down?” The blush is still clear on Daryl’s cheeks but he gives a small nod, reaching out a hand for the clean clothes and managing to swing his legs over the side of the bunk. “Need a hand? I’ve only got one though.”

That at least makes Daryl give a small shaky smile and if Merle’s not mistaken a little cough of a laugh. It’s pathetic but he knows it helps. Daryl’s fingers cling to his jacket when they stand, needing the extra support and leaning on Merle when he stumbles. It takes time for Daryl’s fingers to work out the intricacies of buttons and zippers but Merle gives him as much time as he needs, simply being there to hold him up and watching the wall as Daryl gets himself changed. His brother knew he wouldn’t laugh at him right now, but still it didn’t mean he wanted any more help than he had to have.

The wet pants get tossed across the cell towards the doorway and Daryl gives a slight huff when he’s decently covered, letting Merle know he could look again. Daryl’s still flushed and though one hand is still fist in Merle’s shirt he nods down to where his other hand is gripping his pants, holding them up by the waistband since his shaking fingers hadn’t been able to figure out the fastenings. Merle doesn’t wait to be asked and though he can only offer one hand to help it’s enough for them to work out everything in a few minutes between them.

He remembers every time he’d had to help his brother dress himself in that moment, whether it be after a fit or just when he was too small to figure out buttons and fastenings. Smiling a little at the memoires he pats at his brother’s side when he’s dressed again and lets him get back onto the bunk, sitting this time against the wall.

He kicks the wet clothes closer to the hallway, knowing Officer Friendly would take them away like he’d said and grabbing the supplies from the bucket. Setting the book between them he offers Daryl the bottle of water and half a pack of crackers, glad when his brother takes the water to at least rinse his mouth of the taste of blood. Some of it trickles down his chin from his shaking, but Merle just holds out the rag for him afterwards. “You should try and eat something, might settle your stomach.”

Daryl shakes his head a little at that, sipping slowly at the water and lifting his legs onto the bed, letting his bare feet rest on the edge. “Just one? A bite is all I’m asking for, won’t be much at all and you know sometimes it makes you feel better.” Breaking off the corner of a cracker he offers it to Daryl, taking the rest for himself and crunching through it, no point wasting food.

When Daryl groans and shoves his hand away, hunching over himself and pressing a hand to his mouth Merle just shoves the bucket into his grip, wincing at the sounds of heaving and tossing aside the crackers to the floor. “Or not.” He shrugs, hating the sound of his brother losing whatever small amount of food he’d managed to keep down so far. “My fault, sorry.”

Glancing over he can practically feel Daryl shaking as he clings to the bucket, face hidden as he stays over it, dry heaving and choking up bile. Placing his hand between his brother’s shoulders he rubs at his back, trying to help as best he can through all of this. Daryl’s stomach clenches, making him hunch even further as he gags, heaving up nothing but bile and spitting it into the bucket. Merle moves his hand to stroke Daryl’s hair from his face, noting how long it had gotten since he’d seen him last, it had only ever gotten this long when he’d been away, unable to cut it for his brother.
“Gonna need to cut this rat’s nest off your head soon enough. Must get in your eyes when you’re hunting.” Daryl doesn’t answer, just shivers a little and takes a gulp of water to rinse out his mouth before spitting it into the bucket. He’s careful when he leans over, setting the bucket on the ground within reaching distance and sitting back.

Before he can get comfortable Merle nudges him to lay down, moving to let Daryl rest his head on his lap so he can stroke through his hair. “Easy, I got you.” His brother doesn’t protest and that’s a sign of how he’s feeling right now if he’ll stay in this position willingly. This was how they used to sit when he was younger, when the fits used to scare the shit out of Daryl and make them both ignore school for a few days to get over it all. They’d curl on the couch under a ratty blanket and watch shit TV together, ignoring the rest of the world and just helping each other return to normal.

Daryl isn’t in the mood to talk and there’s no TV to watch shitty movies on, but he knows his brother needs a distraction from the feelings in his body and the worries running through his mind. Honestly if he had to guess he’d say the stress of everything that had happened in the past couple of days had set him off into a fit and now he was paying for it all. Right now he didn’t want Daryl to worry about him being a part of this prison group or any arguments that might arise between them all, he just wanted him to feel better. So ignoring the weight of Woodbury and Governor in the back of his mind, he takes the book and sets it to rest against Daryl’s shoulder, propping it open for himself and willing to distract them both from their worries.

His brother settles easily enough, tugging the blanket around himself and only tensing when his body gives a small jerk and though he reaches for the bucket once, he doesn’t bring anything back up. Merle’s even feeling generous enough to not knock away his hand when Daryl begins chewing on his thumb in that annoying habit he’s had since forever. Instead he focuses on the words and begins to read.

“The primroses were over. Towards the edge of the wood, where the ground became open and sloped down to an old fence and a brambly ditch beyond, only a few fading patches of pale yellow still showed among the dog’s mercury and oak-tree roots. On the other side of the fence, the upper part of the field was full of rabbit-holes. In places the grass was gone altogether and everywhere there were clusters of dry droppings, through which nothing but the ragwort would grow. A hundred yards away, at the bottom of the slope, ran the brook, no more than three feet wide, half-choked with king-cups, water-cress and blue brook-lime. The cart-track crossed by a brick culvert and climbed the opposite slope to a five-barred gate in the thorn hedge. The gate lead into the lane.” He reads, propping the pages open with his stump and only removing his fingers from Daryl’s hair when he needed to turn the page. His brother doesn’t make a sound but he can feel his fingers of his free hand knot in the fabric of his pants, holding himself close and letting himself be looked after just this one time.

Merle doesn’t like these people but he loves his little brother and though he knows they don’t trust him at all, he knows they can see that one fact. It’s clear in the way Rick watches them from the doorway when Daryl has fallen asleep and Merle carries on reading to him anyway.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: The book Merle is reading to Daryl is ‘Watership Down’ by Richard Adams. It's a book about rabbits trying to find somewhere safe to live and the trials and fights they have to go through to achieve that, I figured it would be a book the Dixon’s would enjoy and the parallels with the series are quite nice too.
When he wakes up everything feels like a complete blur and a part of him expects to still be in Woodbury, locked away in a dark space and bound like an animal whilst they discussed what to do with him. He’s sure some of that is all a bad dream, mixed memories churning together with what had really happened and leaving him completely unsure as to what was going on. Daryl remembers Merle, he remembers fighting with Rick and heading back to the prison but then everything gets a little fucked up in his head and he knows the reason why.

Fucking fits just couldn’t cut him some slack for once could they?

He was used to not remembering things afterwards but right now his mind was awash with other things, things he knows haven’t happened recently. Sometimes his mind got a little more fucked up than usual afterwards and he knows it’s his mind’s way of trying to fix everything afterwards. Merle had always said his brain was like a filing cabinet and during the fits it was like someone was grabbing all the files and throwing them out of order, mixing them up and afterwards his brain had to sit and go through them to get them back in the right places.

Thing is, that meant memories could come and go in seconds, almost glitching across his eyes and swiping through his mind. Flashes of family, or good times and bad and usually leaving him feeling more of a wreck than usual. Taking a deep breath he closes his eyes once more, just for a second to get his bearings and the scent he picks up brings back more and more memories of Merle.

Merle looking after him during and after a fit, Merle calling their dad a prick for not caring, Merle stroking through his hair and snoring so fucking loudly he’s surprised he still manages to sleep through it. Curling his shaky fingers into a fist he punches at Merle’s thigh that he’s been using as a pillow, waking his brother with a start and giving a slight huff of annoyance when a book slips closed on the back of his head.

“The fuck brother?” Merle asks, yawning loudly, stretching beneath him and complaining about an ache in his neck from falling asleep against the wall. There’s no real anger there though, not when he doesn’t bother moving from his spot and instead lets the memories of Merle reading to him flit through his mind, something about rabbits and finding home. “Christ I’m hungry, we got anything other than crackers in this shitheap?”

And like that Merle is up, shoving Daryl from his spot and climbing out from beneath him, uncaring if he’s shoved a little too viciously and his head starts pounding again. Merle cares about him, he knows that, but there’s only so much he can take before it’s tough love all over again. Really Daryl doesn’t mind too much, sometimes it’s easier to be pushed into normalcy again.

He goes to speak, carefully pushing himself up to a sitting position and giving himself a few moments for his head to stop spinning. However, as soon as he opens his mouth he can feel the soreness of his tongue, the ache and throb of it and how it’s swollen in his mouth from where he’d bitten it. Speaking was difficult enough after a fit, with the stuttering and slurring, now he was as good as mute until he felt better.

Sighing a little he nods carefully to Merle, blearily watching as his brother stretches, working out the kinks in his body and squeezing at where his leg clearly has pins and needles. “Well move your ass then, come on show me around this place.” Merle demands, going over to grab at his arm and get him onto his feet. It’s rough and hurts his arm a little, but it’s much needed help and Daryl knows this is how Merle’s brand of help goes.
His feet don’t quite work so well anymore and he stumbles a lot, grabbing onto Merle and practically sticking to his side as they make a slow walk to the main area of the cell block and the makeshift kitchen. The whole time Merle complains about nothing, keeping the noise going and helping Daryl focus on anything other than the buzzing and memories in his head. It helps, in Merle’s stupid way.

It’s difficult to do much of anything and he just feels so tired and useless right now. He’s grateful when Merle deposits him in a seat at the table, leaving him to slump against the surface of the wood whilst his brother rummages through their supplies for something. A can of pineapple crush seems good enough for Merle right now and soon enough Daryl is half leaning on his brother’s side as he eats.

The headache makes him squirm a little in his seat, uncomfortable in his own skin and hating being out in the open when he feels like this. The rest of the group all seemed to have made themselves scarce, giving them room to manoeuvre and leaving him to feel vulnerable without their prying eyes. All of them except for one of course and he doesn’t know if he’s more pleased or worried when Rick walks over to join them.

“You’re awake, that’s good right?”

He shrugs in reply, listening to Merle eat noisily beside him and not meeting Rick’s eyes. He hates this, least Merle knew everything about him, sure it was embarrassing but it wasn’t as bad with Merle. Meanwhile Rick was still new to all this and Daryl was suddenly extremely aware that he hadn’t come home wearing these pants. Godamn it.

“He just needs to take it easy for a while, he’ll be right as rain soon enough.” He hates when Merle speaks as if he’s not there, but it’s not like he could speak for himself right now. Besides they don’t have time for him to rest, not when Woodbury would be out and looking for revenge for everything they’d done. Swallowing deeply he wonders if he could try to speak, but it all hurts so much and his mouth is pretty much aching too much to try, so he gives up.

Daryl feels useless and having Rick see him like this really isn’t helping, not when he should be helping them build defences or keeping an eye out for any danger. They were not in a good position right now and here he was feeling sorry for himself when he should be sucking it up and getting over it. Huffing a little he hates that it takes so much effort to keep his head up, even leaning against Merle’s side doesn’t make it much easier and he hates that Rick keeps giving him sympathetic glances and speaks in a softer tone when he opens his mouth.

“We’ve got all our defences up and running, we’re taking turns on watch to keep an eye on things and we’ve got more ammo and weapons at the ready.” It’s as if the other man can read his mind and knows his worries and he’s not sure if that’s a good thing or not right now. “If nothing else we can give a good fight and since the yard is full of walkers now, well they won’t exactly be able to walk up to the front door.” Rick points out and Daryl gives a feeble shrug, if only to show that he’d heard and understood. It didn’t stop the guilt from churning in his gut.

Merle gives a snort beside him, his nails tapping at the side of the tin can before he speaks, giving Daryl’s headache more reason to continue. “Doesn’t mean the Governor is going to stop. He’s a tough son of a bitch, ruthless, relentless, this isn’t someone who’s going to walk away from this. You’ve not started a battle, you’ve started a war Officer Friendly. One you can’t win.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence Merle.”

The conversation makes him feel uneasy and though he knows Rick is trying to remain at least a little calm for his sake he can hear the tension in his voice. Merle isn’t that considerate and as usual his brother is more than happy to prod and poke until there’s a fight for him to win. It makes him
feel even worse.

“I’m serious, you’ve got what a few guns? Women and children? He’s got military trained guys that were taught to kill, people who are willing to give their lives to do what he wants. The man is insane, but he’s a damned fine public speaker, he’s got everyone calling you guys terrorists.” Merle scoffs, pointing out everything that they’re afraid of, finding all the flaws and bringing them out into the open so they couldn’t be ignored.

“I’m not going to turn my people into soldiers to win this war.” Rick snarls and Daryl hates that he fucking flinches a little when he raises his voice. Neither of them notice. “I will not make them do anything more than defend what is theirs. We worked hard to take this prison, to find somewhere safe after months on the road, he is not going to take that from us, we’ve got too much here.”

The fight is on now, and each word is directed to hurt the other. Daryl figures that they would be all out brawling if they could but both seemed to be aware that more violence wasn’t the answer right now. Still the constant stream of anger makes his head hurt, and clenching his fingers in his hair doesn’t help distract him at all. Slumping further onto the table top he closes his eyes, trying to ignore them as they bicker, dredging up long hidden memories and letting them all mix into one blur in his mind.

“What? Walls and fences? You can find that anywhere else, make them anywhere else where he’s not pointing his gun. You may be willing to risk yourself for this place but I’m not.”

He can remember Merle’s voice like this before, loud and heard through too thin walls and the pillow he has clenched over his head. Tightening his grip he tries to block it all out but there’s more smashing and yelling in the other room, loud thumps of a fight and he just knows someone is going to die tonight. Blood would spatter knuckles, clothes would be torn, words would be cursed at each other and he’d have to listen to it all because there was no escape for him.

“Then you’re still not with us Merle and you can leave.”

Then Merle had gone and it had been him and only him, a new target, the favourite now gone left him as open game and he hated it. Hiding away from shouts became something of the past and instead he was trying to avoid hits, trying to tiptoe through life and his father’s voice curled in echoes around his ears. He remembers screaming, he remembers crying he remembers hating himself and his father and the rest of the world for everything he had to grit his teeth and get through.

Memories blur into the present, mixing before his closed eyelids until he’s standing, slamming his hands on the tabletop and ignoring the spots of muted colour in his vision. “Thtop!” His mouth doesn’t work well, his tongue is swollen and the word isn’t clear but it’s enough and the yelling ceases immediately.

Rick and Merle are watching him, both looking worried and he doesn’t care. Right now he doesn’t need them, he doesn’t want them either. His legs are shaky when he moves, making the unsteady journey back to the cell he and Merle had been sharing and ignoring when they call after him. Wiping at his mouth with the back of his hand he doesn’t care that he’s drooling or that he feels like he’s going to be sick, he just wants to get away from them, away from everything.

He stumbles, they call for him again and somehow through the trembling in his jaw and the swollen tongue he manages some kind of garbled curse that makes them back off. They just didn’t get it, right now he didn’t need to be babied, even if he was barely capable of walking by himself, he needed to get over it and help them. Getting to the cell feels like quite the success and there’s nothing more he can do than snatch up his bow and slump onto the bunk, curling in the sheets and facing the wall, ignoring when he can feel their presence in the doorway.
They apologise, or at least Rick does, Merle calls him an ungrateful little shit, but he ignores them both, hating that their voices mix in with the memories still rattling about his skull. It’s all too much, his shivers, limbs jerking a little without his consent and for a second he’s afraid he’s going to fit again. But it subsides and though he doesn’t feel much better, at least he’s still in the here and now. Sort of.

Gripping his bow tighter he keeps his eyes closed against the headache and the rolling in his stomach, really not in the mood to throw up again. The weight is comfortable in his hands, something familiar to hang onto when his emotions and memories were all mixed up, battling in his mind for his attention. Footsteps echo down the hallway and he’s glad they’re leaving him to it, probably hoping he’ll sleep off the bad mood and going off to make plans for the defence of the prison.

Right now he knows sleep isn’t going to come, not when he’s too lost in his head and for a second he can smell mom’s perfume. He remembers her a little, bright smile, dull eyes and the smell of stale smoke and cheap perfume. A woman destroyed by her life, broken down until she was nothing and then taken away from him. He wonders if she minded, or if she was grateful to not have to deal with it all anymore. It hurts to remember her, he’d been so young when they’d lost her that he sometimes worries that he’s remembering her wrong. Some of the things he remembers might have been wrong, or maybe they were things he’d thought to himself after her death as he’d tried to cope with it all. It wasn’t like he could ever ask about her either, she was a forbidden topic in their house.

Groaning a little he rubs at his eyes, trying to get rid of the images there and instead focusing on the bright swirls of colours that flicker beneath his eyelids. It helps a little and he can push her to the back of his mind, letting him focus on the bow in his grip. He remembers using it for the first time and hurting himself, he remembers almost cutting off a finger the first time he’d tried to make his own arrow, and he remembers wondering how far he could run afterwards if he just pointed it at his dad’s head and pulled the trigger.

That makes him wretch a little and he swallows back the feeling, gagging on the taste of bile and breathing heavily for a moment to regain some sort of composure. It’s the worst feeling in the world to be lost in his own mind as well as his body but it wasn’t like he had much of a choice until his stupid brain worked out how to be in control of everything again.

“Daryl?”

For a second he thinks he’s hearing things, but peering over his shoulder he realises that Carl really is standing there in the doorway of the cell, clutching his baby sister tightly and peering in to him through the darkness. Giving a grunt of acknowledgement he wonders what the kid wants and if his dad knows he’s here, probably not.

It doesn’t shock him when Carl takes the noise as an invite and enters the cell, coming right over to perch on the bunk beside him and settle his baby sister onto his lap more comfortably. “Dad said you still weren’t feeling too good and to leave you to sleep.” Snorting a little he can see how well Carl had listened to that advice. “But I wanted to check that you were okay.”

He can’t really articulate an answer in words right now, so instead Daryl settles for a half shrug and a wave of his hand, hating that he’s still shaking. His stomach is still rolling a little and when he opens his eyes the colours mix into a mass of grey and white so he decides against opening them again. The baby gives a little whine and Carl hushes her, Daryl can feel as he begins a rocking motion where he sits, it doesn’t help his stomach but he doesn’t tell him to stop since Lil Asskicker quietens.
“Everyone worries about you, you know? When this happens, it’s like no one else knows what to do to help. I know Hershel says sometimes the best thing to do is to leave you alone, but I don’t want to.” Carl shrugs, the kid keeps his voice low which Daryl is grateful for but his headache is still getting worse, pounding behind his eyes and making his head feel heavier than usual. “Mom always used to sit with me when I was sick.”

Daryl wants to explain that this isn’t really the same kind of thing as being sick, nor is it anywhere near being shot and operated on, it’s just his brain being a dickhead for a while. But the words fail him and besides his jaw is trembling too much for him to even attempt to speak and yet another tremor runs down his limbs. He knows what Carl is trying to say though and he’s grateful for that, but it doesn’t stop the feeling of worry that creeps through him when he opens his eyes and the colours blur and swirl in front of him again.

His stomach clenches, his head throbs and with a small groan he feels another tremor course through his body, brief but enough to get him to try and explain what was happening. Gripping his bow tighter he knows he should be pushing it out of the way but right now the weight is reassuring as he tries to get his stupid mouth to work and form words. “Car-“ He wants to say don’t panic, he wants to tell him to get the baby out of the way but the words catch in his throat and he wheezes a little before trying again. “Get…”

It’s as far as he gets before everything gets to be too much, his words fail him, everything goes fuzzy before him and he can only hear the faint yells of Carl calling for help as he loses control of his body all over again.
Chapter 8

Rick hears Carl yelling for him and it’s the worst sound in the world nowadays. If someone ever risked making so much noise it meant there was imminent danger, and if Carl was the one yelling it meant his son was the one in harm’s way. It’s a natural reaction for him to run now, to sprint towards the sound of his son’s worried yell and try to find him, calling his name and begging for him to be safe and alright.

The cellblock makes their voices echo but Carl finds him, hopping out of the cell and clutching his baby sister close to his chest as she starts bawling. He hates that sound, even if it’s a sign of her being so alive it’s also the background noise that haunts his dreams of Lori’s death. Carl looks panicked, scared and completely unsure of what the hell to do, moving closer to his father and looking back and forth between him, the baby and back inside the cell.

“He…he just started…” His son tries to explain and looking into the cell he can see the problem immediately, a chill of worry heading down his spine as he nods in understanding and stepping into action.

“Merle!” He yells out, placing a hand on his son’s shoulder to try and calm him down even when he was panicked himself. It’s not the first time he’s been in this position, but it is the first time on his own and he needs backup for this. “It’s okay Carl, it’s okay I need you to take Judith and go find Hershel alright?”

Carl nods but he’s shifting his weight from foot to foot, worried and not listening properly. “But Daryl…”

Shaking his head he crouches down to meet his son’s eye level, needing to have him focussed even though Judith’s screaming is making them both cringe at the sound. “Daryl needs Hershel at the minute alright? He needs Merle to help here and you to go and get Hershel for him you hear me?” Finally his son nods, shifting his grip on the baby and holding her tighter before moving to leave and find their resident doctor. “Good job.”

His son moves, not running with the baby but moving with haste and Rick yells out for Daryl’s brother once more before entering his cell, trying to swallow back the worry and do what needs to be done. Honestly he tries not to think as he moves, trying to ignore that it was Daryl that was in trouble and instead just thinking of what to do. His crossbow is in the way, gripped in Daryl’s fingers and he takes the time to get it free, loosening his hold until he can slide it away across the floor. He doesn’t know why the man had been holding the bow whilst in bed, but now is not the time to ask, not when Daryl was like this.

The other man is shaking, his entire body trembling in stuttered jerks and Rick can see when the back of his hands knocks against the wall the bunk is pressed against. Moving closer he leans over Daryl to hold down his wrists, to keep him steady and not let him hurt himself anymore than he already had. It seems he doesn’t have enough hands though and he wants to keep his legs steady and brace his head as well. He wonders if he should stop with his arms and move to his head instead, but right now the mattress was stopping his head from hitting anything too hard or painfully.

“What the hell Officer Friendly? Between you hollering and the baby squawking it’s a wonder you ain’t got walkers biting you-“

Rick can hear the second Merle notices what’s going on and loses interest in picking a fight. In a moment Merle is moving, shoving him aside a little to look over Daryl and swearing under his
breath. “Carl said he just started fitting.” He explains, not letting go of Daryl but looking to the
other man for advice, for him to lead the way in this.

“He ain’t never had two so close together before.” Merle mutters, his voice is low and Rick can
see the panic in his eyes as he shoves the blankets away, checking over his brother’s jerking body.
He tries his best to help as Merle kneels besides the bunk, pressing his hands where Merle
indicates to try and help as the older Dixon presses a hand to Daryl’s forehead to keep him steady.

“I take it that’s not good?” Rick remembers Shane saying as much, but his friend hadn’t
elaborated and right now he wishes he knew what they were preparing for. The world had
changed around them, there were no medical facilities, they only had the basics and anyone could
be lost because of complications.

Merle shakes his head, staying knelt by his brother’s bedside and Rick can see that he’s dealing
with Daryl’s older brother right now, not the aggressive and hostile Merle Dixon. “One is bad
enough but two in such a short time?” Rick checks his watch, timing the fit and counting down
the minutes. “He’s gonna be feeling it that’s for sure.”

They’re quiet for a few moments; the only noise is the sound of Daryl’s still fitting body jerking
against the sheets of the bunk. It makes him feel on edge but he can’t think of anything to say to
cover it, so instead Rick stays silent, keeping Daryl’s body as steady as he can and praying for it to
be over for him soon.

Finally the sound of crutches against the floor and the quick trot of boots interrupts them and Rick
turns to watch over his shoulder as Hershel limps his way into the cell, a sorrowful look on his
face at the scene before himself. Merle glances up briefly before keeping his attention on his
brother, so Rick takes the time to fill him in on what he knows. Besides Hershel Carl is watching
Daryl, lips drawn into a grim line as he watches someone he’d come to see as family go through
something that looked so painful.

“You say he’s never had this many so close together before Merle?” Hershel asks, limping closer,
leaning on his crutches as he peers over Daryl. As usual the old man gives nothing away with his
expression and Rick has hope since he doesn’t look panicked.

Shaking his head again Merle keeps his eyes on Daryl, jaw tense but not snapping. Rick’s pleased
that despite the stressful situation of having his brother fitting, Merle is keeping some kind of
control over his temper. “Never.”

Shifting a little Rick watches as Hershel leans back against the wall, Daryl is still fitting before
him, Merle is tense and right now he just wants this to be over. He knows they can’t do anything
until Daryl stops seizing, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t want to try. It seems the feeling is also
shared by his son. “Dad can I help?” Carl asks, standing in the doorway and peering closer,
curious but not wanting to get in the way.

“All out please, go look after Judith.” He doesn’t want to snap, instead he tries to sound firm but
Daryl is jerking beneath his hands, the fit isn’t subsiding and he knows he sounds angrier with his
sound than he intends to. But then Daryl gives a particularly hard jerk and he’s too busy to look
back and see if his son is hurt by it.

“Maggie and Beth have got her.” And there’s that stubborn tone of a teenager, one who wasn’t
going to listen or back down without a fight. If there was ever a time he just wished that Carl
would behave, it was now and yet his son doesn’t want to comply. “I want to help Daryl.” Carl
sounds so stubborn, so determined and Christ Rick doesn’t know if he can deal with it right now.

“Listen Junior Sheriff, right now Daryl wouldn’t want you seeing this let alone helping. So do as
your old man says and get the hell out of here.” Merle snarls, the anger snapping out of him in one burst against his son and Rick doesn’t feel the need to defend Carl when he’d been wanting to reprimand him himself.

He expects Carl to back down, but it’s a sign of how hardened this world has made him when he instead fights back, a bite in his voice that Rick hasn’t heard before. “No way, there’s got to be something I can do to help.” There’s going to be a fight, he can feel Daryl jolt beneath his hands, Merle makes a move to stand and he’s not sure who to tell to back off first.

Fortunately Hershel is there, taking a step forwards and glancing between the two of them and Daryl. “There is.” He interrupts, pointing to Carl and nodding to Rick as he gives his instructions. “Carl, go hunt through the cleared cells and find any blankets, pillows, mattresses, anything soft you can find. Then go get our medical supplies and bring me any and all medication we’ve got.”

It works, Carl gives a nod, the sheriff’s hat on his head bobbing for a second before he’s moving, hand on his holster and running off to the safely cleared parts of their home. Rick nods to Hershel, grateful for the distraction that would make Carl feel helpful and get him away from being underfoot. Daryl’s body shudders, there’s a choked sound and Merle is hissing through his teeth, tilting Daryl’s head when he begins to drool over himself.

“What the hell you planning?” The older Dixon snarls, Daryl gives a snort beneath their hands and one harsh jolt, his body freezing for a second before relaxing, going still and Rick feels himself give a relieved sigh even if he knows they’re not in the clear yet.

Finally he feels safe to release Daryl, standing from the floor and stretching his legs free of the pins and needles feeling caught in the muscles. “Hershel?” He asks, running fingers through his hair and watching as Merle mops at the drool from his brother’s chin.

Daryl doesn’t look good. He’s pale, drooling over himself with his limbs splayed over the small bunk. He can see bruises forming over the tops of his arm from where he’d gotten caught on the crossbow before Rick had removed it, dark over the pale skin and he feels bad for the damage he allowed Daryl to cause himself when he had no control.

“If he’s never had seizures close together before then this could be the start of a bad turn.” Hershel explains, voice calm and in control, something they need right now when one of their strongest was out of commission. “He needs somewhere safe to be and right now a prison cell isn’t the most comfortable place for him. Now he’s stable enough to be left for a moment the two of you are going to drag out that spare bunk, get as many mattresses and pillows you can find and make him a new bed on the floor. Roll blankets up as barriers against the walls, pad it out with any pillows Carl brings back and at least if he does continue fitting Daryl’s got somewhere safe to do it without any risk of damaging himself.”

It makes sense; right now Daryl was in danger of hurting himself if no one else was here to help him out. They’d have to make him secure and down on the floor surrounded by their softest items would seem like the most logical choice. Moving across the cell he’s ready to start shifting the extra bunk out and get preparing, but it seems Merle has no intent of moving from his brother’s chin.

“You’re making him sound like a godamned baby old man.” Merle snarls, temper up, worry clear in his eyes and to Rick’s eyes he looks unsure as to what to do next, and relying on others wasn’t exactly the Dixon way of doing things. “What you wanna get him a fuckin’ crib too?”

Rick’s quick to intervene, not willing for this to become another fight between them all when they all wanted the same thing out of this. “It’s not like that Merle, we just want Daryl to be safe and if he’s got somewhere padded like that to rest then we know he can’t hurt himself if he fits again.”
He tries to explain, keeping his voice calm, needing this argument to stop before it even begins and get them focussed on actually helping Daryl instead of fighting over what was the best way to do it.

Fortunately Carl returns, skidding into the cell doorway with his arms bundled full of pillows, blankets and seemingly every single piece of relatively soft bedding he could find. “Here.” His son pants, the hat askew on his hair as he half smiles, clearly pleased at having been able to help. Dropping the bedding to the corner his son shifts the weight of the medical bag a little, moving to place it on the end of Daryl’s bed to search through it. “I got everything I could find Hershel, what are we looking for?”

He’s grateful that Carl takes the focus off of their solution, turning instead to get them thinking about how they were going to help. His son rummages through the bag with Hershel, looking over labels, shaking bottles of pills and trying to find what the vet mentions.

“Lorazepam.” Hershel mutters, squinting over labels of bottles, looking over the clear liquids and looking for any imperfections. “Being a prison they should have anticonvulsants on hand for whenever an inmate decided to inject themselves with whatever they could find, so we should have picked some up.” With a smile of success he holds aloft a small bottle, the medication inside untainted and ready for use. “I need a clean syringe, a swab and a tourniquet.” Hershel tells Carl and immediately his son is picking them out of their pockets, laying them neatly on a piece of towel besides Daryl’s feet on the bed, ready for Hershel to use.

Merle is on edge glancing at the syringe when the elderly vet steps closer to begin filling it, tapping at the plastic casing and grabbing up the tourniquet. “Whoa now, what the hell you giving to him Farmer Joe?” The elder Dixon asks, holding up a hand to stop the proceedings and Rick has to wonder why suddenly Merle had an aversion to drugs.

“Relax he’s a doctor.” Rick explains, taking up the tourniquet and moving to tie it about Daryl’s arm himself, allowing Hershel to lean on his crutches and steady himself to perch on the edge of the bed. Carl helps; the perfect assistant even if Rick would rather his son wasn’t here right now. Shrugging a little he tightens the rubber tubing, reaching to swab over Daryl’s pale flesh and letting Hershel find a suitable vein. “More or less.”

Hershel is calm when he talks, a man used to stressful situations and keeping himself and his emotions under control. Rick is grateful for it, especially when Merle looks like he’s ready to start hitting someone soon. “It’s going to stop him from having anymore seizures for the moment. Give his body and mind time to recover, get him stable and strong for a long enough period of time that he’ll be able to think straight, hopefully eat and drink something. We can’t afford for him to have any more seizures right now.”

He knows that much is true. Daryl is weak, he’s unwell and hasn’t had time to recover, and they need him to have the time to let him get better. Right now the drugs will do that and Rick is willing to wrestle Merle to the ground to let that happen right now. Merle doesn’t give in, but he grits his teeth, runs his fingers through Daryl’s hair and lets Hershel inject him. Rick moves to begin dragging out the other bunk; Carl heading over to help and leaving Merle beside his brother’s bedside with Hershel perched on the edge of the bed.

It’s tough work, but between he and Carl they manage to get the floor clear enough to begin laying down mattresses, covering them in sheets and barricading the walls with pillows and rolled up sheets. It’s not a lot, but it’s better than the bunk and Daryl would have more room if he needed it. Rubbing at the back of his head he can’t think of any other way to help, but there is one worry on his mind. “Hershel, do we need to cuff him? Just in case he…”

“He ain’t gonna fucking die of a seizure.” Merle snarls, standing from his place beside Daryl’s
bunk and pointing his prosthetic in Rick’s face. He’s angry and Rick can understand that, but it’s not going to help anyone here and it’s certainly not going to get Daryl any better. “He’s had ‘em before and he’ll have ‘em again.” Rick knows that, he knows this isn’t something he can fix permanently, but right now they just had to get him through this moment and keep everyone safe.

“But never this many in such a short time.” Hershel moves from checking over the patient, giving a firm pat to Daryl’s sleeping side before standing up. “His brain is working overtime right now, his body is exhausted and the stress of it all isn’t good for him.” It had been their yelling that had made Daryl worse, he feels guilty, he feels responsible and if he could give Daryl a stress free life to stop these fits from happening then he would. But right now there is no better option and he’s doing what he can, giving what he has to his friend. “People have died from less.” Hershel points out and fuck Rick knows he’s right.

They don’t have a lot of medical supplies; they don’t have doctors, nurses, therapy, the equipment and things needed to save Daryl if he takes a turn for the worse. Fits were bad, it was a problem for the brain and though they could fix broken bones and infections, helping with brain injury or potential damage was something beyond their range of ability. They needed to stop this getting worse now, because this was bad enough, but worse was practically a death sentence and Rick didn’t know if he could cope with losing the other man at all, let alone in such an unfair way.

Between he and Merle they manage to move Daryl from the bunk to the newly made sleeping space on the floor. Merle focuses on his brother, his movements are jerky with repressed anger, but Rick is pleased that he doesn’t let it out. It’s a lot from the other man, and they may not even like each other, but they’re making it work for the sake of the unconscious man they all care for.

“He’s not going to die.” Carl breaks the silence, crouched by Daryl’s head and moving to straighten out the collar of his shirt. Despite it all his son looks certain, nodding to himself and not looking up as he moves Daryl’s hair from his eyes. “Daryl’s strong, he’ll be fine, we just need to wait for him to wake up and he’ll be fine.”

His son sounds so determined, there’s no doubt in his mind that Daryl is going to fine and up and about as soon as he wakes up. Rick isn’t sure how to explain all of this to Carl, it wasn’t like his son knew anything about seizures or how they could affect the hunter when they hit. He knows it could get worse, he knows it could get better and he also knows that there’s no way to guess what was going to happen until it did. For all they knew Daryl could continue seizing, he could get worse, do irreparable damage to his brain and be lost to them all. “Carl…”

“He’s going to be fine.” Carl snaps again, looking up to meet his eyes and Rick can see the stress there as well as the need for hope. He wasn’t going to break that for his son, not after everything that had happened with Lori.

“Kid’s right.” Merle grunts, stretching his arms out from being cramped on the floor and tugging the blanket higher over the still unconscious Daryl. He’s a surprising back up for Carl, but Rick figures they all need the hope at the moment to cling to, especially when Daryl meant so much to all of them. “He’s going to be fine, my baby brother is stronger than you might think.” Merle nods and Rick stands with his hands on his hips, looking over the sleeping Daryl and nodding along even if the fear within himself hasn’t shrunk at all.
It’s like dragging himself up from the bottom of a pool of water, clawing through the weight of the liquid around him and praying to surface and be able to breathe easier. His eyelids feel heavy, and though Daryl knows he wants to open his eyes, right now it feels almost impossible to do so. There’s an ache throughout his entire body, he feels as though he’s on fire and burning in his muscles all over, almost like he’d run a marathon or two and just collapsed. It hurts. Actually, hurts was a fucking understatement, he feels like shit and somehow it was difficult to even make his body listen to what he wants it to do.

His mouth feels stale, there’s a slightly metallic taste underneath it all and when he presses his tongue to the top of his mouth there’s a stab of aching pain that runs through it. That makes him choke on a cough, and when he goes to cover his mouth his arm only twitches in response instead of moving fully. It’s aggravating and exhausting at the same time, but finally, finally he gets his eyes open and he considers that a step towards success.

Everything is far too bright even though logically he knows that’s wrong because there’s not a lot of light where he is, it still makes his eyes hurt with the strain and the ache of it all. Christ even thinking hurts right now, so he tries his best to stop doing so much of it. He’s lying down, he knows that much, and wherever he is he’s surrounded by a mass of white and pale coloured sheets all around him. It’s soft though, cushioning his aching body and he’s grateful for that as he feels himself slump further into his makeshift bed, there’s definitely multiple layers of softness and god it’s heaven to not have anything jabbing into him.

The fog in his head doesn’t seem to want to clear right now, so instead Daryl remains where he is, still and just focuses on breathing for the moment. He doesn’t know where he is, he doesn’t remember a lot of what the hell caused him to be in this position but he figures it must have been something bad to knock him out of commission like this. It’s with a soft groan that he finally manages to shift a little against his makeshift bed, trying to blink back the headache and the nausea and find out what the hell had happened to him.

“I just want to help, why’re you being such a dick about this?”

“Carl, language!”

“You listen to me you little shit, I know my brother and he wouldn’t want you in there seeing him like this.”

Carl. Rick. Merle. He knows those voices, he knows them all and fuck that helps knock a few things into place. If they’re here then his father is not, they’re not on the road if there are walls here and the bars mean they’re at the prison. Merle was here at the prison? Yeah, yeah Merle was here because Merle was talking back and other people could hear him, so he was definitely here. It wasn’t like before in the creek, Merle was here and there weren’t no walker chewing on his boot.

His fingers feel tingly, as if there’s been no blood running through them in a while and they’ve seized up from lack of movement. Gently he begins moving them one by one, watching through bleary eyes as they twitch and curl, each one in turn before he clenches them into a loose fist. It’s a lot of effort and he’d be lying if he said it didn’t hurt to even move that much, but if Merle was here at the prison, that meant fighting and he had to be there to bail Merle out of it. As always.

It was his job. It was his duty. Merle was his older brother, the only one who would ever give even half a shit about him and he wasn’t there to stop the yelling from happening. He’d never been so good at stopping the yelling before, when he was small and weak, only able to dart out of
the way of thrown beer bottles and duck under his bed to stay safe. It wasn’t like that anymore. He
was grown now, big enough to defend himself, to defend Merle and be a better brother. That was
his job, when Merle got out of hand he had to calm him down, make the fight stop before it ended
up with broken bones and another police report.

Moving makes his bones ache, his muscles ache and his entire body feels like it’s just not going to
work anymore. The sheets beneath him are soft though, and when he manages to move his head
just a little the softness feels good against his skin. It’s sad, he’s an adult but this is nice, getting to
lie here like a baby without a care in the world because there was no way he could do anything
anyway. He feels useless, but it’s the good kind of useless, the kind of useless where his mind just
couldn’t care any less that he’s being pathetic right now.

There are other things to think about, like the voices, where he is, what’s going on and why he
feels so tired all over.

“You’ve been watching him for hours, you’re no good to anyone when you’re exhausted and he
hasn’t stirred yet. You need to let someone else watch him so you can get some rest.”

“Do not try and tell me what I need to do, you don’t know shit about what I need or what Daryl
needs.”

“I know he needs someone to look after him right now, someone who cares about him.”

Rick, Merle, Carl.

Rick. He liked Rick, Rick was a good man. A man to follow through the darkness that their lives
have become and rely on to keep them all safe. He was there to help, to be there to look after Rick
when he was looking after everyone else. Sometimes that happened, otherwise if you spent too
much time looking after others without looking after yourself bad things happened. It had
happened to Merle when they were kids.

Merle. He loves Merle and there ain’t no two ways about it. His big brother would kick his ass if
he ever said it out loud, but it’s there anyway and they both know it. Merle is Merle. His big
brother, his saviour, everything he wanted to be as a kid and everything he tried to avoid being as
an adult. Weren’t nothin’ good about Merle as a person, but as a brother he was everything he’d
ever had. The mother that wasn’t drunk, the father that didn’t hate him, all the family he’d ever
needed. It was always just them, just the two of them together against the world, and now here
they were, in a group, in his family. His new family. He’d made the wrong choice at first but he
remembers fixing it, he remembers coming back, he remembers Rick and Merle and colours that
weren’t meant to be there and he remembers yelling before nothing else.

Carl. The kid. Only he weren’t much of a kid no more except in age. Kid was strong, didn’t cry
much any more and didn’t shrug off the chores he didn’t want to do. Daryl figures he was the
opposite of Carl when he was that age. He’d been a little shit, scared of being in the same room as
his monsters and spending days hiding in the forest away from the things that frightened him. Carl
wasn’t like that, he was determined, he took down walkers without flinching, understood the need
to kill to survive, fuck the kid had taken down his own mom. He’d cried when he’d lost his own
mom, numb, feeling like it wasn’t real, lost and alone and in tears for most nights after. Carl
wasn’t like him, Carl was better than him, stronger than him.

They were going to make it. All of them.

He knew it. Between the three of them there was no way they weren’t going to make it. Merle
was always going to survive everything. Of course he would, he was Merle. Nothing could kill
Merle but Merle. His older brother had survived it all, their father, the drugs, prison, the army,
cutting off his own hand and still fucking going because dammit Merle weren’t never gonna run out of fuel. Damned brother was going to outlast the rest of them that’s for sure. Just out of spite probably, just to prove he could and that the rest of them were all pussies.

Daryl feels sick. His stomach doesn’t feel right. It feels empty and full all at the same time, the muscles around it aching as if he’s been puking for the past few hours when he’s sure he hasn’t. He’s tired but not sleepy, he’s aching but not wanting to stay still and that sucks. Right now everything sucks and he just wants answers.

Why does everything hurt right now? Had he gone and done something fucking stupid again? Andrea hadn’t shot him, she was in Woodbury, dancing next to the Governor and screaming about something as everyone else brays for him and Merle to die. Fuck his head hurts.

“Don’t you ever say that I don’t care about him!”

“You were missing for almost a year! Daryl always said you would just leave, he said he was used to it. He doesn’t need you right now. He needs people who want to be there for him.”

“Glenn this isn’t helping anyone.”

Merle, Glenn, Maggie.

Almost a year. It ain’t like he hasn’t been away from Merle for longer than that before anyway. Besides he was an adult now, didn’t need his big brother to do everything for him no more, he could look after himself. He’d learnt to look after himself. Things had just gotten a little fucked up recently with the walkers and everything, and he’d somehow come to give a shit about people other than himself.

But Merle, he’d always care about Merle. Because Merle always came back even if he left in the first place. No matter what, even through prison and the army and the drugs, Merle always ended up coming back. Coming back for him. They didn’t say it, but no one else would ever understand them as well as they understood each other. Because Merle had been there, he’d survived it all first and then Daryl had followed in his footsteps. Always following Merle.

Now he knew about the scars. Years of hiding them away all for nothing and now when they really didn’t have the time to deal with it, he knew. It hurts something inside of him for Merle to know, but not as much as his back aches from whatever had happened to him. The scars feel tight, stretched across his shoulders and aching deeply, like they’re carving deeper and deeper into his body with each moment.

Groaning to himself he clenches his fingers into another fist, shifting his hand beside his face to see it better as he repeats the action. It helps. Having something to focus on that isn’t pain helps.

He knows Glenn and Maggie are trying to help, but yelling at Merle makes him worse. It starts a fight and as soon as there’s a fight, Merle just has to win no matter what. They don’t know that, he should tell them but he can’t get up right now. Gritting his teeth with frustration he clenches his fingers into a fist again. It helps.

Fights never helped anybody and right now with Glenn still injured it meant Merle would probably be able to knock him out with one hit. And Maggie? Merle didn’t give a shit what was between your legs; he’d smack you either way if you got on the wrong side of him. Fuck the lovebirds were going to fuck this up and make Merle do something dumb if he didn’t help, but moving is too fucking hard. He had to stop him; it was his job to look after Merle now godammit, the asshole only had one hand, if he got kicked out the dumbass was going to die out there.
He doesn’t want him to get hurt. He doesn’t want anyone else to get hurt just because they were fighting over him.

He hated when people fought over him.

“He chose to come back to us Rick, he knew exactly what would happen out there if it was just the two of them. He knew just how much chance he had of surviving out there with just Merle to look after him. Daryl needs us right now, he needs his family.”

“I’m his fucking family, we’re blood me and Daryl and none of y’all will ever understand that!”

Blood. If blood meant so much then why had all of his abandoned him at one time or another? Mom had gone up in smoke. Dad had abandoned caring for him before he was even born really. And Merle, Merle came and went in and out of his life easy enough. If blood was the most important thing, then how come he was never anyone’s most important person?

It hurt to think about.

Everything fucking hurts right now.

Fucking fits. That what all of this was. Fucking fits fucking him up and leaving him damn near crippled afterwards. He remembers hurting; he remembers Carl and maybe the baby or something, but then nothing again. That’s the worst part, the lack of memory. Maybe it was all in his head, maybe everything was all in his head and he was being nothing more than a problem for everyone right now. He was meant to be an adult, meant to be able to look after himself and here he was on his belly and needing to be cared for liked a damned baby.

Carefully he moves his arm, releasing his fingers from a fist and reaching beneath the mass of blankets that are piled on top of him. Feeling down his body the aches and pains don’t go away, he still feels tired and torn, ripped apart and put back together the wrong way after everything that had happened. There’s a towel beneath his lower half, and he’s ashamed to find out that it had good reason to be there. Really was nothing more than a fucking baby after a fit.

He can feel himself flush, blush across his cheeks and shame in his belly as he drags his hand away. There’s not a lot he can do about being wet right now, not when he can’t even sit himself up without feeling like he was going to puke. Least he was covered, the blankets hiding his problem from the rest of the world.

The shouting continues outside the cell he’s in, building up until his head is throbbing and he can feel his heartbeat in his ears. It hurts, it reminds him of home and when he was too small to do anything about it. Right now he feels small, he feels incapable of caring for himself and everyone around him that he cares about, and that fucking sucks.

His fingers tremble as he lifts them to his face, wiping at his eyes and the traitorous tears that leak from them. It’s not that he’s upset, he just feels useless. His scars itch, his arms and legs feel like lead and here he is lying on the floor and unable to do much more than cry to himself as his real family and found family argue over him outside. Fucking pathetic.

A shadow falls over him and honestly, Daryl isn’t sure if he even wants to look up and find out who is seeing him looking so pathetic. But everything hurts and he’s always had someone there to help him through this time after a fit before. Was it so weak to want someone else with him right now?

So he manages to look up, shifting just enough to find Carl peering at him from the doorway. The yelling continues outside as the kid looks him over and Daryl can’t help but curl up smaller over it
all. Carl doesn’t speak, the kid doesn’t make a damned sound as he walks over, keeping himself quiet and probably not wanting to get involved in all the chaos happening outside. It reminds him of being the kid’s age, sneaking around during arguments and keeping out of the line of fire. He hates that.

Carl doesn’t make a fuss of him, he doesn’t ask questions or bother him at all really. A part of him wonders if the kid is doing it so he’s not noticed, but then he also wonders if maybe Carl knows that that’s not what he needs right now. The kid kicks off his shoes, padding in to Daryl’s current nest of sheets, blankets and towels to sit next to him.

He’s never been so good with people, but Carl was easier to handle than most and right now he may not be very proud of his position, but at least Carl wasn’t going to mock him. He just knew it. The kid could be trusted. So when Carl’s fingers move to cradle his head and lift him for a few moments, he doesn’t complain, he simply allows it and lets the kid place his head onto his leg. He’s not used to gentleness in his life, but he doesn’t stop it, not when Carl simply sits with his head in his lap and begins stroking through his hair lightly.

The kid had told him that his mom used to sit with him when he was ill; Daryl can’t remember if the same was true of his own mother. He likes to think she would have, but it’s unlikely. His head hurts thinking about it, so he tries not to, he tries not to focus on anything at all but it’s all so hard. The voices outside the cell are too loud and full of anger, his clothing is stuck to his body with wetness and his muscles refuse to stop aching no matter how still he lays.

It’s not surprising when Carl’s fingers move to stroke over his cheek, wiping away the tears that he can’t stop from falling. He feels pathetic, a dumb baby they have to look after just as much as the actual baby, and unable to do anything about it.

“It’s okay Daryl.” Carl tells him, voice soft and caring, something he’d only heard in rare times throughout his life. “We’re going to look after you.” He whispers and Daryl is grateful, because right now he’s not so sure he can look after himself anymore.
His muscles are still burning with a deep ache that won’t seem to ease off no matter how still he lies. Daryl finds the time dragging by painfully slowly, but despite how bored he must be sitting here with him, Carl doesn’t leave or complain for a second. He still has his head resting on the kid’s leg, Carl’s fingers combing through his hair in a soothing motion and it’s actually helping. As the time moves on, Daryl finds it easier and easier to get his breathing in sync with Carl’s fingers, breathing in as they bury in his hair and out as they drift over the back of his neck.

He’s torn in two at the moment, wanting to be alone to wallow in his misery yet needing the company and the steady comb of Carl’s fingers to keep him breathing steadily. It’s like he’s lost between himself and the real world, his body in pain, uncomfortable and leaving him sprawled on the edge of thinking straight and being able to make the right decision. Right now the kid kind of feels like his anchor, since the yelling and fighting between his brother and everybody else outside of the cell feel like waves crashing over him.

They’re still yelling. Fighting over him. Arguing about who will be watching over him tonight, but none of them are actually taking a step to be with him, other than the kid. If nothing else, that has made Daryl’s choice for him, not that anyone is asking his opinion on the matter.

In times like this, he feels pathetic. The fits screw him up in the most basic of ways, leaving him curled up on the floor like a child and looking to someone two decades younger than himself for some kind of comfort. Carl’s a good kid, Daryl knows that and he respects the kid and all he’s done, all he’s been through. But it doesn’t make it feel any better to be depending on a thirteen year old right now just because his body doesn’t want to work right.

Hell, here he was, still curled on the floor, feeling exhausted, lying on a towel soaked with his own piss, and unable to even do the most basic things by himself because his damned body has betrayed him. Fuck, he still can’t even talk properly right now. That just makes him feel even more damned pathetic and he can’t help but groan to himself a little and Carl automatically strokes through his hair a little harder, adding a little more pressure on his scalp, just enough to reassure Daryl that he’s still there.

It helps. As much as he doesn’t want to admit to being a complete pussy, having someone take care of him actually helps. He’s used to being on his own; he was even before all of this became just him. Sure, Merle was there sometimes — when he was younger mostly — but once he got older and proved he could keep himself alive, Merle had gone and fucked off. So he’d kept himself alive, but when it came to the seizures, there was only so much he was capable of. He remembers getting an aura when out hunting, stumbling his way back home as fast as he could and not managing to make it. Waking up on a bed of dirt and leaves had been confusing to say the least, and somehow he’d managed to make his way back home and collapse onto his bed for the next couple of days to get over it.

So actually having people care about his well being is nice. Unexpected, but nice.

It takes time but the yelling calms down to a more tolerable level, to the point that his head isn’t throbbing quite so badly with a headache anymore. Still he doesn’t want to get involved, even if usually he’s the one getting Merle out of fights; right now he’s not going to be much help. But if they’ve gone quiet it means they’ve either reached a choice or just run out of steam and right now Daryl isn’t so sure he wants to deal with Merle muttering about being stuck with his people, or Rick mentioning how being near Merle isn’t good for him. Right now he doesn’t need that.

When he can hear the vibrations of footsteps coming towards the cell, he finds the strength to roll
over onto his other side, facing Carl and the wall he’s leaning against with his eyes closed tightly. Maybe hiding away from his problems won’t fix them, and maybe it's childish, but right now it feels kind of like the only option he has left. Carl seems to understand him, maybe it’s because he is acting like such a child, but either way the kid simply rests a hand on his hair and doesn’t move when someone enters the cell.

“Carl? I thought you went…”

“Get the hell out of here kid and leave him alone.”

God, Rick and Merle already sound so pissed and they’ve barely opened their mouths. He can’t deal with this right now, not when his own voice isn’t under his control, not when he can’t even change his pants because he feels so damned weak. Fortunately, Carl knows what he wants and the kid is soon tensing a little, probably scowling, wearing the same look his mother wore when she was being stubborn and sticking up for him.

“He’s sleeping.” Carl lies straight out to his own father and Daryl’s brother, his fingers still in Daryl’s hair and holding him protectively. “I came in here and sat with him until he fell asleep. He’s fine, just tired.” The kid tells them both, shifting with what Daryl guesses to be a small shrug.

There’s a sigh, Rick shuffles his weight, probably shifting from foot to foot with his hands on his hips and there is the usual heaviness in his voice when he speaks again. “Carl…”

“No, Dad.” Christ, the kid sounds so grown up, nowhere near that smiling young brat in the quarry who made mud pies and chased the girls with dirty fingers. “I’m fine, Daryl’s fine. I’m staying here with him.” Carl sounds so damned determined, and Daryl knows that this is the young man who’s going to survive in this mess of a world.

For a moment he thinks they’ve got their own way, but of course when Merle’s around Daryl never has his own way. “No way kid, he wouldn’t want you here when he’s like this.” His older brother growls out, probably wanting to be threatening but having the brains not to threaten the kid in front of his father; the same man that had left Merle chained to a roof. Daryl knows it’s all Merle’s selfishness on behalf of his one remaining hand and nothing to do with wanting to remain peaceful with these people.

Daryl is almost ready to forget the fake sleeping act, ready to roll over and half slur some words of annoyance at his brother, but Carl’s fingers comb through his hair once more and yet again the kid is standing up for him.

“Well he didn’t ask me to leave.” Carl is calm when he speaks, but there’s a threat there, and right now Daryl can hear so much of his father in his voice that he can’t help but smile a little. “And I wasn’t too busy out there fighting over nothing to sit with him. I want to stay with him, just for tonight or until Daryl tells me to go away.” Daryl wants that too, Carl’s presence is helping and he likes that. “Dad, come on, you’ve gotta keep an eye on the perimeter and Merle is a better shot than me if something does happen. What difference would it make if I stay with Daryl? If anything happens we’re all in the same cellblock, and I’ll yell for help if I need it. Everyone else is like ten feet away anyway.”

And there is silence for a moment; apart from a small snort from Merle that Daryl knows to read as a sign of his brother feeling uncomfortable. But there’s no more shouting, no more fighting, and his head appreciates that a lot. Staying on Carl’s lap he waits for an answer, knowing that no matter how much Carl fights, or what he wants, right now the pair of them are still under the rule of the other two men in the room. And if that doesn’t make Daryl feel like a child, then nothing ever will.
Rick is the one who breaks the silence, his voice back to a level of calm, but Daryl can hear the unsureness of it all when the other man speaks. “You are a better shot, and I know you need to rest too. You’re not going to do that if you’re in here with Daryl.” Fuck, they sound like a pair of parents bickering over their children. “It’s your call, he’s your brother.”

Daryl can almost feel the stunned silence radiating from Merle across the cell. A part of him almost wants to laugh at the absurdity of the situation.

“You yell if you need anything.” Merle snaps. Daryl knows he’s got his teeth grit and the only reason Merle is giving in is because he must be exhausted too. The only sleep his brother had was sitting up against a cold wall with Daryl across his lap; Merle needs some real rest too. “I mean anything, boy. He so much as twitches wrong, and you come get me. Understood?”

He can feel when Carl nods above him and then there’s the sound of Merle leaving with a huff to the next empty cell down. Daryl knows it must be hard, but it’s not like he hasn’t dealt with the aftermath of the fits without his brother before. Right now he just needed the reassurance that Carl would let him do what he wanted and not push him to get better faster.

Rick is still there, loitering in the doorway and probably over thinking his choices as he often does, but his son can read him so well that it’s no surprise when the kid is talking again. “Dad, I can handle this. Besides, Daryl’s probably just going to sleep and I’ll make sure to yell if anything happens. We have water and stuff to snack on if he needs it. We’ll be fine.”

That was all they ever needed these days, food and drink, it was the basics of their survival and the main thing they searched for. Daryl knows he’s pathetic enough at the moment to need help even with eating and drinking. He’s beyond looking after himself, pretty much as helpless as the damned baby. At least if it’s just he and Carl it won’t be quite as embarrassing to fail at looking after himself.

There’s a moment of silence between them all. Daryl can hear the noise of people settling in for sleep in the cells around them and damn, he hasn’t even seen Carol since he got back. She must be worried sick about him. Carl’s fingers curl through his hair again; calm and soothing, grounding him from his worries as Rick finally gives in.

“Alright, you can stay with him, but like Merle said, if anything seems wrong then you call for us.” Rick instructs, sounding firm and direct but there’s an undertone of worry in his voice that Daryl hates being the cause of. It feels like pity and he’s always hated pity. “I appreciate you wanting to help Daryl, and Merle does too even if he won’t say it. But this is serious Carl; it’s not a little illness. This is something that Daryl might need help with if it gets worse. So don’t be afraid to call even if you’re only a little unsure. S’better to be safe than sorry.”

Rick’s been their leader for so long; ever since leaving the farm when they were all lost and afraid on the road. Following his lead comes naturally now, and even his stubborn teenage son nods and agrees without so much as a sniff of a fight.

“I got it dad. I won’t let you down.”

With a bid of goodnight, Rick is turning on his heel and Daryl can hear the swish of the curtain being tugged shut behind him. They’re alone again, just the two of them in a cell of their own in the darkness of the night. It’s a relief and Daryl lets himself open his eyes slowly, peering up through his lashes to find Carl watching him closely.

“Thanks.” He mutters with a slur, feeling ashamed that he’d hidden away from Merle and Rick, but still glad he did it.
Carl shrugs lopsidedly, a small smile on the corner of his lips as he looks down to Daryl. “It’s alright, you just weren’t ready to see them yet, is all.”

It’s not entirely true, but the kid doesn’t need to know just how pathetic Daryl is feeling right now. “Mhm.” He hums in agreement, shifting a little and tugging the blanket up to hide his own mouth. Carl doesn’t need to see him drool all over himself like a baby every time he tries to talk.

Daryl hates when he bites his tongue badly; it always causes such a fucking problem afterwards. When he was younger it wasn’t so bad, usually he could trail after Merle and heck, his brother spoke enough for the both of them anyway. Now though, he kind of has to respond when Carl asks a question of him. The kid is being nice enough to look after him, so he at least deserves a few damn answers.

“Are you feeling any better?” Carl asks him, fingers still carding their way through Daryl’s hair smoothly.

Daryl’s lips brush against the fabric of the blanket when he speaks, muffling his already slurred words and hiding him when his tongue stumbles over them like a child. “I’m not feelin’ worse.” He manages to explain, even if his head is throbbing and moving seems to be far too much to even think about right now.

“Well that’s good. You could try to eat something if you want?” Carl’s fingers move from Daryl's hair to reach beside himself, grabbing up what must be some meagre supplies for them both. “Maybe it will help you feel even better?”

It’s with a grunt that Daryl shakes his head in protest. His stomach may not be churning quite so badly anymore, but he still doesn’t want to risk it. It isn’t worth it; if he was sick again it would only be a waste of their limited supply of food. Besides, he wouldn’t be able to hunt anytime soon, meaning their current supplies are all they have to rely on while he's damn near useless.

“You’ll be alright, Daryl. It’s okay to be sick sometimes, and if you rest now, you’ll feel better sooner.” The kid sounds so sure of himself, like he can see the damn future or something.

Daryl huffs a little in response, hoping that Carl is right but knowing that this isn’t the sort of thing that a few hours sleep will fix. Sure, he needs his rest, but he needs days, not hours.

“I’ll look after you.”

And that right there is the whole damn problem. Not only does he need someone to help him look after himself, a kid no less, but it also means he isn’t the only one at risk. Right now, the prison is vulnerable. The Governor is out there somewhere, planning and plotting. Meanwhile, Daryl is lying on his back like some useless fucking baby and distracting Rick, Merle, Carl and everybody else from focusing on the real threat just outside their doors. Being unwell after a fit is one thing, but being a burden is something Daryl thought he grew out of years ago.

They don’t have time for this. Daryl knows he’s one of their better shots nowadays, and after the loss of some of their own, it means the numbers definitely aren’t on their side anymore against the threat of Woodbury. They’re outmanned, outgunned, and even though the prison is good defensively there’s only so long it would be able to hold out if they were under siege. The truth of it is that the Governor wouldn’t even have to do anything to kill them all. He could just sit and wait for them to run out of food and die of starvation.

A tremble runs through Daryl's body, from his head to his toes, moving down every muscle of his arms and legs until his fingers are twitching and clenching impulsively into the blankets around him. Carl tenses beneath him, the kid’s fingers moving to cradle his head again and Daryl
supposes he must look like a train wreck right now. He grits his teeth together, squeezes his eyes shut tightly and prays for it to hurry up and be over soon.

Thankfully it does subside, merely a tremor running through his still recovering muscles and working its way out of his system. It makes him sigh when it’s over, blinking himself back into the here and now and able to feel when Carl relaxes beneath him. The kid looks worried, completely unsure of what the hell that was and yet trying his best to look controlled. Reaching up Daryl wipes the back of his hand over his mouth, his fingers still shake a little as he smears away the drool but it helps him feel as if he’s got a little more control over himself if he’s not dribbling like a toddler.

“’s like an aftershock.” He huffs, voice merely a coarse whisper in the dark and making Carl lean down closer to hear him. “You know when there’s earthquakes and stuff, there’re aftershocks. ’s like that for a while after.” It’s not the best explanation, but it’s the best he can do.

His upbringing hadn’t exactly given him the chance to learn exactly the right words for his condition or the effects of it. It had never mattered before but right now he wishes he had more answers to give the kid. It feels like Carl deserves to know, or at least to have something to ease his worries. He wants to make the kid feel better, Carl doesn’t deserve to worry over him, but still Daryl can feel the way the kid’s fingers tighten a little in his hair.

“Does it mean it’s getting better?” Carl asks him.

“Don’t really get better.” He tries to explain, fingers clenching in the fabric of the blankets and fully aware of how it helps him feel less exposed when he’s so vulnerable. “It just comes and goes I guess. But it’ll stop soon.” He hopes.

Because he doesn’t have time for this anymore. When the world wasn’t overrun by walkers it was bad enough, trying to make sure he was somewhere safe, or with Merle when a fit took him was tough enough but at least he always had time to recover. Right now he might not only take more time, that he didn’t have, to recover, but other people could get hurt because of it. Two fits so close is bad, but what’s worse is that he’s not the only one affected this time. People could die because of his need for time they don’t have.

Getting lost in his thoughts isn’t helping anybody and if there’s one thing he hated more than people pitying him, it’s people pitying themselves and Dixon’s don’t do that. Looking up he can see Carl sitting above him, leaning back against the hard wall of the cell with his eyes half closed as he continues stroking through Daryl’s hair. It’s not good for the kid to try and rest like that, he needs a real night’s rest in case anything happens.

Lifting a hand he curls his still trembling fingers into a loose fist and taps at Carl’s side, getting the kid’s attention. “You need to lay down.” He mumbles, shifting his weight enough to lift off of Carl’s thigh to let the kid move himself. “Need some sleep.”

“I’m fine, you need sleep more.” Carl tells him, but still Daryl can see the way the kid stretches his legs and moves into a more comfortable position.

“Don’t.” Because he doesn’t think he can handle another fight, not right now and not when he was one of the people involved. It would only worsen his headache and right now he doesn’t need to aggravate his condition if he can help it. “I ain’t fighting.”

Carl shifts, Daryl barely has enough energy to care as the kid shuffles around, moving from being his pillow to instead lying beside him. It’s not exactly what he wants, but at least the kid has his own blanket and Daryl has to admit that the bundle of sheets and things they’re lying on is comfortable after all. So he lets it slide, not because he’s exhausted, but because he knows the kid
won’t take the bunk even if he tells him to.

“Wake me if you need me, Daryl.” Carl yawns, hat placed beside them on the floor and gun alongside it. They’re both cautious nowadays, and even if Daryl knows he can barely defend himself right now, he knows that Carl would do his best if anything were to happen. So he’s not calm, he’s not relaxed really, he still feels damned shaky and unwell, but it’s not too bad.

As he finally begins to drift off, he figures things could be worse.
Chapter 11

Carl has been an only child for so long, having baby Judith to suddenly care for was very strange. But he’s handling it, he’s learning every day how to be a big brother and how to love her in all the right ways and make sure that she has everything she needs. It’s different, but it feels right and he’s proud to have somebody of his own to look after instead of always being the one people are looking out for.

Then Daryl has another funny turn and he’s suddenly found himself trusted with the care of the other man. Not that he minds at all, in fact he’d practically volunteered himself for the role when he’d crept in to Daryl’s cell and let the older man stay close when he felt so unwell. There had been a fight about it, but he could understand why they didn’t want him there. Merle was a big brother too but he was also exhausted and Carl knew that tired minds made bad decisions and even worse shots. They all needed rest, and right now Daryl was willing to do that with him beside him.

He stays close, he strokes through Daryl’s hair that evening, he lets him hide away in his lap and he lies for him when he has to. It works and before long the two of them are lying beside each other on the floor, both curled in the blankets and multiple layers of soft items that make up their current safety zone for Daryl. He’s worried about Daryl.

The fits are something he has no hope of understanding, all he knows is that they make Daryl unable to do much of anything for a while and he hates how it makes him look so unwell. His mom and the other adults had always tried to keep it hidden from him. Daryl is always so damned strong for all of them, he’d refused to lose anybody else after his mom and T-Dog, but now here he was barely able to care for himself. So Carl looks after him as best he can, he makes sure to give Daryl all the care the other man gives to others and stays by him the whole night.

Cuddled into the sheets, Carl has one hand pressed between Daryl’s shoulder blades as he sleeps, keeping track on him even if his sleep. So when the body beneath his hands gives a sudden jerk and Daryl is snapping awake with a gasp, Carl is awake in seconds and trying to help as best he can. Running his hands over the other man’s side he tries to roll him over, getting Daryl onto his back and able to see how hard he’s gasping as he shakes. It’s not like before, Daryl is awake clearly and watching him, his whole body trembling, almost like he’s got the shivers and can’t stop. He’s wrapped in a blanket still, clutching at it like a lifeline with his shaking fingers and looking a little frightened. Carl has never seen Daryl look frightened before.

“Daryl?” He calls for the other man but there’s no answer, and that makes him panic even more.

Scrambling for the lantern on the floor beside him, he flicks it on, using the dim light to see by and try to help Daryl as much as he can. Running his hands over the other man’s side he tries to roll him over, getting Daryl onto his back and able to see how hard he’s gasping as he shakes. It’s not like before, Daryl is awake clearly and watching him, his whole body trembling, almost like he’s got the shivers and can’t stop. He’s wrapped in a blanket still, clutching at it like a lifeline with his shaking fingers and looking a little frightened. Carl has never seen Daryl look frightened before.

“Daryl? Daryl it’s okay. I’m here. I’m here.” Carl tries to reassure him, even if he’s not sure how having him here will help, he hopes it at least calms Daryl down from looking so scared.

Looking over the other man, Carl can see that it’s not so bad; at least not a full on fit, but it’s still not good. He’s shaking; even Daryl’s teeth are chattering a little bit, he’s still curled up small and looking like he’s lost. Carl knows there is something wrong and he’d made a promise to his dad and Daryl’s brother to make sure that Daryl was safe.

“Wait here okay? I’ll go get your brother.” He tells him, moving to get to his feet and only
stopping when Daryl grabs at his wrist and practically yanks him back down to the floor.

It’s clear that Daryl still can’t speak properly yet, his bitten tongue and shaking lips meaning he can only produce a simple sound. “Nuh.” Seems to be all he can muster, and even in the dim light of the lantern Carl can see how ashamed Daryl looks over it all.

Still he sits, ready to be patient when Daryl clearly wasn’t well, and maybe he just needed things explained a little more. He knew fits were in the brain; maybe it had somehow affected Daryl’s memory or something. Placing a hand over Daryl’s, he squeezes lightly, trying to give him a brave smile to help keep him calm as he explains. “Daryl? I said I’d go get him if-“

“Don’t n-need ‘im.” Daryl’s gruff voice interrupts him, stumbling over the words, but even if it’s a little shaky, Carl can hear the determination in it. Still he has to try.

“But Daryl-“

“No.” And Daryl is shaking his head, moving to sit up and Carl has to move to support him, as his shaking body can’t quite hold itself up. He moves them to be propped against the wall together, sitting close, him at Daryl’s side and giving him an extra prop to use as he tries to stay steady. It hurts to see him like this, and it makes something ache inside Carl’s chest to see the other man that was always so strong, looking so defeated. “Jus’…Jus’ st-stay.” Daryl whispers to him in a slurred voice and of course Carl isn’t going to say no.

Instead he stays where he is, sitting on their padded floor with Daryl, trying not to panic when the other man curls up beside him, burying himself into his knees like a child, still wrapped in a blanket. It makes Daryl look small, and it makes Carl feel bad to see him like this.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to go and get someone? I could get Hershel?” He points out, hoping that Daryl will at least accept the help of their resident doctor.

Daryl gives a small huff, maybe it would have been a laugh on a better day, but for now it’s just a small huff of breath, a little shaky on the edges and with a tremble catching too. Carl watches as he clutches the blanket closer, his fingers knotted in the edge and working the fabric in his grip and rubbing it gently. He hates seeing him on edge, so uncertain and unsure when usually Daryl was the one with his head steady and looking for the stability in a situation. Now he looks broken, like a kid, leaving Carl suddenly in the position of protector and guardian all at once. But this is what being a big brother is like and he’d promised to look after him, and if he couldn’t go and get somebody else, then he could at least try to help Daryl here.

“You want it to just be us?” Carl asks, keeping his voice low, quiet in the dead of the night and hoping to let Daryl feel like he’s willing to keep this a secret between just the two of them. He is, but he knows that this could also be a dangerous secret to keep if Daryl is unwell.

The older man nods, still curled up, clutching his blanket and unfortunately he’s still shaking. It makes Carl feel out of his depth, but he doesn’t want to look as lost as he feels. Right now Daryl needs someone to help him and he fully intends to be that person.

“Okay.” Carl agrees. “But you have to let me help you Daryl. I don’t know what to do.” He points out, ready to do anything the other man asks; ready to give him anything he needs to make him feel better.

Daryl’s body gives a shudder, one that’s all over, and Carl winces as he clenches his teeth together, trying to get through the trembling by pressing further into the wall. The hunter clenches his fists, grips the blanket and lets his head thunk back against the wall, breathing heavily through his nose for a moment before replying. “‘m fine.”
It makes Carl want to yell, because this is what adults do to him all the time. They always tell him that everything is fine; they lie and try to hide the problems so that he can’t help out and fix them. He’s not going to allow it, not tonight. “No you’re not fine Daryl, you’re shaking.” Carl points out, moving to face the other man, kneeling before him on the floor and taking a deep breath. He remembers his dad dealing with situations like this, being calm and direct to get answers he needs. “Are you going to have a fit?”

Daryl is watching him, closes his eyes for a minute and breathes deeply, looking small and nothing like the man that Carl sees on a daily basis. He kind of feels a little honoured to be allowed to see this side of Daryl, but he also knows it’s not to be taken lightly. If Daryl is trusting him, then he needs to be respectful of that.

“I don’t want to.” Daryl mutters into his own knees.

Carl nods, settling to be more comfortable on the floor, sitting cross-legged before Daryl and reaching out to place a hand on his knees to get his attention. “I know you don’t want to, but are you going to?” He asks, because if Daryl is going to have a fit then he needs to get somebody else, no matter what Daryl wants.

He watches as Daryl chews on his lower lip, fingers still trembling as he grips at the edge of the blanket, twisting the fabric around them to try and ground himself. “I dunno.” Daryl tells him, giving a shaky shrug before huffing again, as if this could be taken as funny when it was anything but. “I…I dunno. I don’t want to. Never had so many so close ‘fore. Dunno what’ll happen if I do. Can’t afford to.” He slurs, his words catching on chewed lips, on a bitten tongue and Carl knows that it’s only because he’s used to Daryl’s quiet way of speech that he can understand him.

So he gives him a moment to gather his thoughts, because he can see that the older man is clearly upset. Daryl is small, hidden away from the world in the shadows of the night and looking like he needs someone to help him.

“Daryl? Talk to me.” Carl places both hands on the other man’s knees, trying to give him the stability to focus on instead of his shivering. He wants to be the person to help Daryl through this. “I can’t help if I don’t know the problem.”

“Never had so many so close.” Daryl mumbles, head down, almost as if he’s ashamed of something he can’t control. “I… I know what’ll happen. I know what can happen. I read the books, I listened to the doctors when Merle didn’t wanna know.” There’s a pause, as if Daryl is afraid to tell him, but Carl holds his knee tighter and knows he can handle the truth. “If I keep fittin’ then shit is gonna hit the fan Carl. My brain can’t cope, it’s already fucked enough, any more fits is gonna bust it for good. Could have a stroke, could fit and fit and fit ‘til I die.”

It’s scary. Carl knows they’ve dealt with a lot of shit over the past year they’ve been forced to survive together, but this was huge. Honestly he knew fits were bad, but he never had any idea that they could be so bad. Daryl could die, and if there’s nothing else he can say, there is one thing he knows for sure.

“I don’t want you to die Daryl.”

Because they’ve already lost so many people. This world was destroying them all and he doesn’t know if he can deal with losing someone else he feels so close to. They were family now, and he’d already lost his mom not so long ago, he doesn’t want to lose somebody he considers an honorary uncle or brother or something too. It’s not fair and he’s not going to let it happen if he can help it.

“What about that drug Hershel gave you?” Carl asks, remembering watching their doctor look
after Daryl before. They had drugs now, medication that could help and if they’d saved him from a bullet wound then surely they could save Daryl from having another fit. “The one in the needle? He said it would stop you from fitting again.”

Daryl looks a little confused and Carl remembers that he’d been out of it at the time. But for what it’s worth Daryl seems to understand what had happened before, and has more knowledge of the situation than Carl did. “Lorazepam?” He asks and Carl nods, remembering having to go through the labels to find it. But then Daryl says something he’s not expecting. “I don’t want it.”

“Why not?” Because he’s under the impression that medication makes you better, so why didn’t Daryl want any?

There’s a soft sigh from the hunter but Carl is pleased to see that though Daryl’s hands are still a little shaky, he’s not trembling anywhere near as violently as before. He still looks weak, but not like he’s about to collapse in the next few seconds. It’s a good sign at least, but it doesn’t mean they’re out of the danger zone yet. Daryl was still unwell, and he needs to look after him.

“Daryl, maybe it would help to take some more of the drugs to stop you from fitting again?” Carl tells him, but when Daryl looks up to meet his eyes, he just looks so upset by the thought of it. Sniffing back whatever upset he’s been experiencing, Daryl wipes at his eyes and face before replying. “Say I take it, and it works. Then next time I have a fit, I take it again. Then the next time, and the next and then before long my body is dependant on it, and we run out of the drugs. You know what’ll happen after that? My body can’t handle the fits by itself anymore and I end up fitting until I die anyway.” Daryl growls, and Carl can feel the frustration in the way he speaks and the way he acts.

But he understands and in a way he’s kind of happy that Daryl is planning for the future. It means he’s planning to be around for a while and he wants to prepare for that. It’s good, it’s something he wants, because he doesn’t want Daryl to give up. They all need to be strong and one of the main things he’d learnt on the road, was that you had to want to live in order to survive.

“You don’t want to become dependant on it.” He nods, completely understanding why Daryl is worried about it, but that just leaves them in the same situation. “Then how else can we help?” Carl asks, because they’re in the same spot and even if Daryl’s shaking has subsided a little, it’s still a worry on his mind.

“Can’t.” Daryl huffs, still curled in on himself, each time he blinks it looks like it’s harder and harder to keep the tears back. Carl really hates that, because every time he’s seen Daryl cry it’s been for awful reasons. Shifting a little closer he tentatively lays a hand on Daryl’s knee, glad that the older man doesn’t shove him away, but instead places one of his own hands over Carl’s.

“Can’t fix this.”

It hurts to hear Daryl sound so defeated and Carl makes sure to squeeze at the hunter’s knee a little to show that he’s there and he cares. Daryl shouldn’t ever have to feel alone in this, he’s got them now, he’s got their mismatched together family and Carl is going to look after him as best he can. It seems that it’s too much all building up inside of him and Carl feels himself wilt when a few tears slip down Daryl’s cheeks and land on their joined together hands.

For someone who always seemed so closed off, Daryl was one of the most emotionally driven people that Carl has ever met. He’s honest, he’s brave and when he’s upset, he lets it show. It hurts to see it and Carl can only bite back his own emotions as he kneels beside the man he thinks of as an honorary uncle. He wants to help as best he can, but Daryl seems too caught up in his own worries right now.
“C-can’t fix this Carl.” Daryl stutters, his lips falling over his words as he speaks, the tears mixing with his wounded tongue in a way that makes it a little difficult to understand. So Carl makes sure to listen closely. “An’ we ain’t got t-t-time for it. Got the Governor out there an’ Woodbury and the baby and shit. Ain’ got time. I can’t fix it, I can’t make myself better an’ I don’t wanna be the reason we ain’t coverin’ our asses.” There’s a small sob that catches in Daryl’s throat and Carl feels like the world is falling apart around him as Daryl curls over his knees and stays huddle in a blanket as he cries.

Carl knows he’s the youngest apart from Judith, he’s the kid here, he’s the one who was crying into his mother’s arms not so long ago and worrying about bogeymen in the closet and monsters in the dark. Now here he was trying to be strong as the strongest person he knows breaks down in front of him. Giving a squeeze to Daryl’s knee, he doesn’t hug him, but he leans into Daryl’s shoulder, pressing them together against the wall of the cell as Daryl shakes with both tears and tremors.

He isn’t sure where to begin with this. In no way did he know what Daryl was going through and he can understand Daryl’s fear over the situation. The older man doesn’t want to be a problem, he doesn’t want to distract them of be a burden when he wasn’t used to it. Daryl had given them so damned much though; maybe it was time for them to give back to him.

Resting his head against Daryl’s, he tries to get his attention, prying him away from hiding to meets his eyes as he talks. “Daryl, you’ve got to listen to me.” He starts, trying to find the exact words he wants to say.

There is no way to fix this, there was no real answer to it at all, and he’s not exactly qualified to deal with this. But he knows he respects and admires Daryl, and the man deserved him to try his best. If he couldn’t go and get Merle or Hershel, then he’d just have to do what he could to get Daryl resting and not worrying so much about what might or might not happen. They were living by the day here, and each hour that they survived was another hour they became stronger. He wasn’t going to let Daryl worry himself into another fit.

“Listen to me.” He starts, holding Daryl’s knee tightly, desperate to hold him steady and help him. “When Judith was born, you were there for us. You told us that we weren’t going to lose anybody else. Remember? Not her. And you saved her, you went and got her formula, you got her eating, you held her and saved her because you were determined not to lose anybody else.

“When my dad was figuring things out, you were the one keeping us together. Telling us what to do, how to secure the place and fix things. If it weren’t for you, I don’t know if we’d have a home here at the prison. I don’t know if we could have all held it together to be there for my dad when he got better.

“I know you think this makes you weak, but it doesn’t. It’s not your fault Daryl, you can’t help it and we all know if you could fix it then you would. You’ve looked after all of us when we needed it, let us help you now. We’ve dealt with everything else that’s been thrown at us and we’ve survived it, we’ll survive this too. My dad will deal with the Governor. We’re going to stay here and we’re going to get stronger, together, as a family.

“This isn’t going to beat you. We’re not going to let it. So you need to stop worrying, and you need to rest or you’re not going to get better.”

For a while nothing happens. Daryl remains still beside him, only the occasional shakes and sobs wracking his body as the silence stretches between them. He has nothing else to say, he’s said all he can, tried to help all he can and he knows that if it doesn’t work, he needs to go and get his dad or Merle or someone else to help.
But then Daryl’s hand turns to grip his own, trembling fingers squeezing lightly at Carl’s own and Daryl peeks out from being hidden in his arms just enough to meet his eyes. Using his spare hand to wipe away the tears, Daryl sniffs back the upset, sitting a little straighter before giving Carl a brief but firm nod. It’s not a lot, but it’s a start, it’s something and Carl gives him a small smile in return, pleased that he’d managed to help in his own way.

It’s not a lot that he can give, he’s not as old and learned in the ways of the world as everybody else, but he tries and sometimes he thinks that might be more important. So Carl continues to sit with Daryl in the dimness of the night, holding the hunter’s hand and letting him wipe away the tears and be weak for just a moment. Daryl is always so damned strong all the time; a few moments right now aren’t going to hurt anybody. In fact, it might help.

They don’t need to talk right now, they just need to be there for each other, so Carl remains quiet, lets the world around them continue spinning as he just waits it out with Daryl. Sometimes the older man shivers, the tremors going through his body in spasmodic intervals and leaving him gritting his teeth through them. But nothing turns into a full blown fit and Carl knows that both of them are very grateful for that. Daryl doesn’t want to have another one and he knows it’s only going to get better if he can go longer and longer without having one. Each minute without a fit only makes him stronger and before long there are no more tears, less shivers and though Daryl is still wrapped in a blanket beside him, he doesn’t look quite so fragile.

Carl can’t imagine having to cope with such an illness. The worst he’d ever had was the measles when he was a baby, and then a few bugs he’d picked up when little. Sure he’d been shot, but that wasn’t the same as an illness. But every time he’d been ill in bed, he remembers his mom being there beside him. She used to stroke through his hair, sing to him or hum nursery rhymes as they lay in her bed. He was always allowed in his parents bed when he was ill, his head on his mom’s chest as they watched cartoons all day and he got homemade soup and toast to try and eat. Being ill was never good, but it helped.

Now though he didn’t have anything like that to offer Daryl. He wondered if the other man had ever had anything like that when he’d been a kid, but from the way Daryl had told him about his mother’s death, maybe she hadn’t been that kind of mother. He knew that Daryl had Merle and though he knows the older Dixon cares for his baby brother, he can’t imagine him ever being so gentle and kind.

Still Carl is here, and maybe it’s not homemade soup in bed, but he squeezes Daryl’s hand, he curls a bit close into his side and lets him take his time. He can’t be Daryl’s mother, but he can be his friend and try his best to help. In a way he’s thinking of it as practice. Judith won’t have that comfort when she gets ill either. She’ll need someone to looks after her, to make her feel better and hold her when she’s sick. He’s not been a big brother for long, but he figures that in a way, this is good practice.

It makes him smile, giving a small chuckle as he thinks about it. Here he was, a teenager, learning how to be a big brother to a man probably three times his age. Daryl already had his own older brother, but right now since Merle needed his own rest, Carl was more than happy to be a temporary replacement. It’s the least he can do for everything that Daryl has done for them.

“How are you feeling?” Carl finally asks Daryl, squeezing the other man’s hand to try and offer some strength to him if he needs it.

It seems to work and Daryl gives a small smile in his direction, squeezing his hand back before letting go, sitting a little straighter and looking a better colour in the dim light. “Better.” Daryl nods, unclenching his grip on the blanket and holding his hands before him. “Ain’t so shaky.” He points out and Carl has to agree that he seems more stable, it looks like he’s got more control of his body and not like he’s about to collapse at any moment.
Grabbing up a bottle of water, Carl passes it to the other man, pleased when Daryl actually manages to take a small sip, then another, until he’s actually managed to take a decent drink or water. It’s good progress and he’s hopeful that it’ll get Daryl back on his feet in no time. “That’s good, see? I told you to let us look after you.” He points out, but he feels it’s still too soon to offer food yet. Maybe in the morning when Daryl had got more sleep. “Are you well enough to try and get more sleep? I promise I’ll keep an eye on you Daryl.”

There’s a small grunt of acknowledgement and it seems that all the exhaustion has crept up on Daryl, leaving him unwilling to argue anymore. But he’s not shaking, there are no more tremors wracking through his body as the older man shifts to retake his position in the nest on the floor. Carl moves alongside him, dropping to the mass of pillows and sheets, sighing a little before turning off the lamp and leaving them in darkness.

Daryl moves alongside him, squirming to get comfortable he thinks, but then there’s a blanket thrown across him and Daryl is sighing as Carl finally feels the other man actually relax. It makes him feel good to know that he has helped, even if it was in the smallest way. He never wants Daryl to feel alone or lost, the other man didn’t deserve to feel like that. Daryl was a part of his family now and Carl was going to do his best to keep him safe.

Maybe he’ll end up being a good big brother after all.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It takes time.

That’s the thing these days, they always have time. Before there was always reasons to put things off. Couldn’t go and do what you wanted because there were more responsibilities that had to be put first. Work, relationships, school, money, education, anything that was an excuse to put things off. There had never been time before the walkers, now it was all they had. There was no endgame they were heading towards anymore. They just had the here and now, and that meant they had the time for everything.

So it had taken time, but they got there in the end.

It hadn’t been easy. Nothing ever was these days. The Governor had been relentless, practically knocking at their door and demanding for their surrender. The fits had made it even worse for him, lining up to knock him down on his ass and leaving him pretty damned near useless. He’d protested of course, tried to help, tried to push himself and ignore his stupid, pathetic body and do what was needed to protect his family. It had been to no end.

He’d helped as best he could, sat and come up with a plan with everybody else. They’d all agreed not to give up the prison, not without a fight. They’d given so much to get here, to have the safe place they could call home, and baby Judith wouldn’t be able to survive on the road. They needed this place, and they’d be damned if some puffed up asshole was going to take it from them. So they’d planned, they’d blocked up pathways and set their trap. Sure it wasn’t offensive like he was used to, but using the Governor’s own headstrong attitude against himself was the best plan they had. Everyone had put in to it all, channelling the pathways to get the attackers where they wanted them, they’d learned how to use the heavy-duty weapons and been prepared to do what was needed to get the job done.

Of course he’d wanted to help. Sitting on the sidelines and not participating wasn’t exactly Daryl’s style, and he was ready to stand beside his family and take out their enemy. He’d still been a little shaky. At the time eating hadn’t been easy, his stomach was almost constantly rebelling against him, and the headaches hadn’t gotten much better. But he’d wanted to help, even if his body had still been recovering from the fits being so close together.

He’d wanted to be there, alongside them all and fighting for what was theirs. The prison wasn’t just a place, it was their home. It could be a future for them all, and now he’d gone and made himself a godamned family, he didn’t intend to stand by and let them throw themselves into the line of fire without him there willing to do the same. They were a family, a team, and he’d made it clear that he didn’t intend to be shoved aside.

However, if Rick wasn’t firm enough with the choice, Merle had made it damned clear that he wasn’t going to be involved in the actual fighting. His brother had stuck with them at the prison, gritting his teeth and actually trying to behave himself around people he didn’t necessarily like, just to make sure he stayed here and stayed safe when he was feeling so weak. He’d protested, wanted to fight to be able to stay where he’d earned his place. Merle had shoved at him, made him remember just how damned weak he was, reminded him how after a fit he needs the time to recover, and after two so close? He was pretty much pathetic. He’d fought, wanted to prove himself, wanted to be there; but it was all for nothing.
He’d found his place outside the prison fences, hiding in the brush on the outskirts and nothing more than just a viewer of it all. Alongside him stood Carl, Hershel and Beth, baby Judith bundled in her arms and the four of them too weak to be of any help with the fighting. Carl was about as pissed off with the decision as he was, but the kid had stood firm, the two of them making sure they kept the others safe if they couldn’t be inside. They’d watched as it had happened, fingers crossed, hoping that everything would turn out alright, praying for some kind of conclusion to this damned war would be reached.

Daryl’s fingers had been shaking a little on his bow, he remembers Merle stringing it for him because his muscles hadn’t been up to it, and he’d made sure to be ready to fire it at anybody who came in their direction who wasn’t family. In the end he hadn’t been the one to pull the trigger, instead it had been Carl and he still feels sick to his stomach when he remembers how cold the kid had looked. There had been no remorse, no second-guessing, Carl had just pulled the trigger and that was that.

“He was lowering his weapon son.” Hershel had spoken, but instead of the usual respect showed the older man, there was nothing but anger in his reply.

“He would have killed us first if he’d had the chance.”

The kid was thirteen, and the one he’d shot dead couldn’t have been much older than that. Daryl knows they do what they have to nowadays, he gets that, but it’s still so new, so fresh and real compared to just talking about it. There was a huge difference between being ready to shoot the dangerous, threatening enemy, and being ready to kill a kid who’d been on the wrong side of the war. His stomach had rolled, and even if he’d blamed it on his still recovering body, he knew there was something else behind it. He can understand Carl’s anger; he gets it, especially when he knows what had happened to the kid’s mom because his dad had let someone live instead of ending the threat.

Didn’t make it right though. Didn’t make it right at all.

Things had been different after that. They’d watched as the Governor had fled, their side victorious but not celebrating, not ready to breathe that sigh of relief until they knew it was over for real. It had been tense, their group gathering together back inside, behind the safety of walls and fences as Rick had pressed on for answers. He’d sat in their cellblock, the baby in his arms, still feeling queasy when Rick had set out with Merle, Glenn and Maggie to find out what had happened. They’d only seen the Governor retreat, and no one wanted this war to continue if it didn’t have to. It had been a push for surrender, or maybe Rick had just gone out there to finish the job, to point the gun and pull the trigger, to get rid of the potential future problem.

“My dad will get him. He will.” Carl tells him, sitting on the tabletop beside him, too short legs swinging, unable to scrape the floor just yet from this height. It had made Daryl focus on rocking the baby, stroking through Judith’s hair and wondering if Rick would come back with his gun one bullet lighter and the same focussed glare that Carl had worn on his face. “We’ll keep this group safe. Right Daryl?”

He understands. He does, so he nods, but he’s still not sure how he feels about it all. His whole life had been spent without people, now he’d found some and even if he knows he’d die for them, he’s not so sure if he could kill for them so easily.

It doesn’t matter. Rick returns, and so does the remains of Woodbury. They’d followed Merle, even if his brother was an asshole; he was also pretty good at rallying people to his side of things. All it had taken was some words, honesty from Merle, an explanation that things had been tainted by the Governor’s lies and that they were not terrorists at all. In fact, they were the best chance of helping the survivors continue now that Woodbury was without a leader. They’d trailed in,
stepping off the buses, from cars, new people staring up at their prison, looking over the fences, the defences, and their mismatched little family.

He’d stood, a little lost with the baby cradled in one arm and his other hand placed on the holster at his hip, as they’d trailed in. They’d made a family at first, but now somehow it was becoming a community, and he’s not so sure how good he’ll be able to cope with it. Merle had joined him, must have been able to read the look on his face and given him one of those shit eating grins that usually didn’t bode well for him.

“How turn that frown upside down Darylina.” His brother had teased, elbowing at his side in what was actually a pretty affectionate gesture coming from Merle. “Animals live in herds for a reason you know?”

Safety in numbers. He knew that. Why live on your own when living in a group meant someone else could get eaten instead of you? It had been one of the reasons that Merle had coaxed him into joining the group at the quarry in the first place. That, and the thought of stealing everything they could from them in order to survive. But here they were, a year and some change down the line, and still with the same people. Or the ones that had survived anyhow. And Daryl had known he didn’t want any of them to die instead of him.

Judith had stirred against his shoulder, neck muscles still too weak to hold up her own head, mittens on the end of her baby grow to stop her from scratching herself with her own nails, and she’d drooled over his shirt because she was still learning how to swallow when it wasn’t around the teat of a bottle. Helpless. Weak. Dependant on others. Not much different to how he’d been a few days prior, after two fits so close together. He’d held her close, given her the support she had needed, and tried his best to help her when she couldn’t help herself. Daryl knows how to survive, he’d spent his whole damned life having to learn how to do it by himself, but he knew it wasn’t just about his own survival anymore.

They lived together, formed bonds with these people, had become a team, a family, for good reason. Sure at first it had been about survival and fear, but over time it had grown into something else. He and Merle had spent their whole lives fighting to survive, pushing to get through the next day, and they’d been so used to doing it alone. But then they’d found the group, somehow they’d been reunited and they’d survived together. Sure Merle wasn’t the best liked, but Merle was just that kind of person, difficult to live with, but even more difficult to live without. They might be living as a group, but he hadn’t wanted to sacrifice anybody else just for him.

They could have left him. When the first fit had happened on the road, out in the open, when he’d never told anybody about them. Could have just left him there on the ground in a puddle of his own piss to be chewed on by walkers. But they hadn’t. They’d helped him, kept him stable, even with their own children on the road with them and afraid, they’d not pushed him to hurry up and get well so they could move on. They’d given him time, given him support and he was only still around because of them being there for him.

So he’d cradled the baby, rocked her a little and let her drool over his shoulder when he’d met Merle’s eye. “Be dead right now if it weren’t for them.” He’d pointed out, remembering days of barely being able to think in a straight line let alone walk one. “Ain’t losing anybody else Merle. These people ain’t just fodder to throw to the walkers so we can get away. They kept me alive when I was out, let you in despite what you’d done to Glenn, and hadn’t tossed us aside when it would have been so much easier to let us go. Them being here now? They earned that.” He’d meant every word of it.

Merle had nodded, looked over him and the baby, and he knows his brother had been thinking of just how weak he’d been a few days beforehand. If he’d had been in there fighting, who knows what could have happened to him. The fits always left him weak, vulnerable, and at no point had
this group, this family that had formed around him, held that against him. Could have left him to die, could have spent the time he was out doing anything more productive, but instead they’d stayed with him, helped him, let him be weak because they’d be strong for him. It worked, it helped, they were more than just a band of survivors now; they were family.

He needed these people, and it had taken time to getting used to, but it worked now. Merle had been there, he’d understood, and even if he hadn’t thought it could work, Merle had proven himself. Forty plus damned years of being a prick, and yet now was the time that Merle decided to better himself. It had been a long time coming, but Daryl was finally starting to see the impossible happen.

Those months after the Woodbury people had arrived had been tough. Everybody had had to find their place in the group, and it didn’t take long for it to be clear to everybody that no one was getting away with hiding. They’d begun training those who had been hidden away from the walkers how to take them out. Maybe it was just stabbing them through the fences, but it was something to get them used to the feel of killing something that used to be human. Those who were good at organising helped with the stock, keeping things at a good level and making sure that they didn’t go crazy and use everything they had. Carol had taken the lead in the domestic department, still a great shot and only getting better, but she was good at taking the lead and keeping the more menial tasks filled. It was all very well being able to kill walkers, but someone had to sterilise their water and make sure things were sanitary enough for humans to survive without falling to something stupid like an infection. Rick had been a strange one, leaving the leadership to a council, and instead focussing on farming, on spending time with his children and providing for them all in other ways. Daryl wouldn’t lie and say he was comfortable with it, but he’d always been the type to follow, and not having Rick at the helm left him feeling a little unsettled.

By far the person who had changed the most had been Merle.

His brother had knuckled down, quit the bullshit and actually made himself useful. Sure he was still an asshole, still said shit that riled people up the wrong way, but he figured that was just Merle and nothing was ever gonna change that part. But he’d tried. Daryl had watched, as Merle had been the person he’d been in Woodbury, someone decent enough to get along with, someone that people could trust with their safety. He’d made things easier for the Woodbury folks to settle in, stopping any worries, biting any thoughts of resentment off and keeping them in line until they all fell into place. Sure, Merle wasn’t going to ever be Glenn, Maggie or Michonne’s friend, but he made himself more tolerable, and didn’t start fights with them purposefully, and didn’t rub it in when he helped them with something. It had taken a long ass time, but he’d say that Merle was actually growing as a person.

The months hadn’t been easy. They had lost some people in runs, from walkers, from silly mistakes, and a couple of the older Woodbury folk just from natural causes. It was a luxury that they hadn’t had before, to die peacefully, safe and looked after right until the very end. It wasn’t perfect, but the prison was working and every week it grew more and more.

There was fresh water from the river that they pumped in, sterilised and could use without worry. Rick and Carl had started farming, using Hershel’s knowledge and their strength to build a farm, to give them sustainable food and let them plan for a future. He and Merle hunted, made traps, snares, brought in meat for everybody and the much-needed fresh protein was a damned sight better than the canned crap. They’d brought people in from outside the prison. People who had been on the road, people that had been just how they were a few months back, lost and afraid, in need of a break. Their community had grown, it had been through a few rough spots sure, but they got through them and came out stronger for it.
The real relief for him had been the lack of fits. He’d never been able to pin down a direct cause to them. Wasn’t like he kept a diary, or had ever even bothered trying to pin down a trigger for them through his life, but for whatever reason, they’d subsided for the meantime. He’d been worried before, when he’d had two so close together, and even if Merle hadn’t said it out loud, he’d known his brother was just as scared. They both knew the risks, knew the complications that could arise from the seizures. His body couldn’t cope with so much stress and heck he knew he’d been lucky to only have seizures when he could have potentially had a stroke and died from it. Heck he knew he didn’t have it nowhere as bad as others. Fuck a ton of people had probably gone and died of seizures, strokes, brain damage and their body just up and quitting on them when they hadn’t had their medication.

He’d refused it. Even in the days when he’d felt shaky he’d refused it because he didn’t want to become dependant on it. That would only cause a whole heap of problems down the line and it wasn’t like he hadn’t gone the rest of his life without it. Medication to keep him stable would only make him worse, it would only keep him fine if he continued to take it, and they didn’t have the security of knowing they’d always have enough. So it wasn’t worth the risk, not when he had been just fine the rest of his life without it.

Merle had talked to him about it. One night when he’d felt shaky all over. It hadn’t been anything really, just a moment of feeling dazed, he’d had to pause mid step he’d felt so lightheaded and he remembers how heavy his crossbow had felt on his back. He’d had to blink through it, trying to focus when everything had gone a little sideways and the colours had danced in front of his face. Merle had been at his side in seconds, taking the bow from his back, passing it to Glenn and grabbing at him arm, fingers snaking around his elbow to steady him when he’d wobbled a little. He’d protested, once everything had settled back to where it was meant to be in his vision he’d tried to shake him off, tried to reassure everyone and let them know he was fine.

Then he’d stumbled again, fallen over his own feet and only been saved from knocking himself out on the edge of the table by Merle keeping him upright. It had been hard to admit to needing help again, but that evening he’d gotten the shakes, and no amount of food or sugary drinks had made it stop. Hershel had warned him of pushing himself when he wasn’t one hundred percent, and even if their unofficial doctor hadn’t been able to keep him from wanting to continue, Merle had put his foot down. Thing is, people know his brother is a pushy asshole, usually they would all roll their eyes at Merle throwing his weight around to get his own way, but they’d never seen him do it for any reason other than his own want. Not that time. Merle had gone full on big brother mode, and their new family had seen it in full force.

Daryl had been made to stay in their cell, in his safe space on the floor, still padded out with their pillows and sheets. Even if he’d felt stable for weeks on end, everyone else still worried, his family worried, and Merle especially worried about him. So the safe space had stayed and he’d not exactly protested at having to sleep there. Was better than having to fight with Merle over who got the top bunk. So he’d stayed on the floor, and on days like that when he’d felt shaky, it was better for him, and he’d rather be fucking prepared for a fit than to be caught off guard. Merle had pretty much stood guard over him, pushing him back down when he’d tried to stand, barked at him to stop fighting, and eventually sat on the bottom bunk and talked to him for a while about things.

There had been the suggestion for him to take some of the medication, to let Hershel give him some, just to stop it before it could even become a problem. But he’d refused, even if Merle kept pushing and pushing, he didn’t want any, didn’t want to give his control over to something as unreliable as medication. Maybe a part of it came from watching Merle before, when his brother could barely go a day without popping a pill, or snorting a line, or injecting some shit into his body. Either way he’d refused, and short of knocking him out and forcing it upon him, Merle had had to suck it up and listen to what he wanted.
He’d felt awful of course, spending the hours lying down and resting when everybody else was working hard with the day-to-day chores of the prison. Running a community like this took effort from everyone, from the young kids to the older generation, and he’d been lying on his back like a bitch and trying to get his vision to stop blurring so much. It had been frustrating, but every time he got up and managed to stagger halfway out the cellblock, Merle had found him and practically dragged his ass back to the cell to lie down. Even Glenn and Maggie had been amused to see that little spat that ended up with Merle scruffing him by the back of his shirt and literally hoisting him back to his safe space. That little scene had pissed him off, but the fact that he’d been too weak to fight back had only proven Merle’s point.

Thankfully it had only been a day. Just one day of feeling ill and not his usual self, out of a few months of being fine. He’d take that over another fit any day. After Hershel had checked him over, and he’d proven to be able to walk unaided as well as proven his vision wasn’t compromised, he’d been allowed back in the game. Merle had still been his shadow for the next day, but he could understand it, he’d been a little worried too.

When the sickness had swept over the prison population, Merle had pretty much made certain that he’d stayed away. His brother had been the one to insist he go on the run for medication, and stay clear from the illness. It’s not that he’d wanted to abandon them in their time of need, he hadn’t, but he’d known he’d be better out there, finding the medication, finding a solution to the problem instead of staying there. Merle had been firm, but he’d understood. If he’d caught the sickness, it could have set him off, let his body get weak and then the fits could hit him hard and knock him down permanently. The dead kind of permanently.

So he’d left, gone on the run, found the medication they’d needed and returned home to a thinned out herd. People had died, come back as walkers and chaos had reigned through the cellblocks. He’d seen Rick, seen the man’s face strained as he’d been forced into a position of leadership yet again, the stress and worry latching onto him and not letting go. Rick was a man made to lead, and it seemed his months of hiding away from it had finally come to an end. They’d tried to help, given out the medicine, helped people get back to their full strength, rebuilt broken walls, restocked the used ammo, done everything they could until the prison was beginning to look like it had before. When it was whole, when it was working like a well-oiled machine and giving them a future to look forward to.

Then the tank had rolled up to the gates.

And a few hours later it had gone from a whole community and a future, to just he and Beth running through the woods and trying to avoid the death that followed them.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I finally got around to updating The Falling Sickness! I know this chapter is more of a filler, and I apologise for that, but I find it difficult to time skip and wanted to let you guys see how having Merle survive had an impact on things. This fic is now actually planned out and isn't just me going with whatever comes out, so there is that reassurance for you all. I know it takes me a while to update and I do apologise for that, but until writing fanfiction pays the bills, it can't be my priority unfortunately. Either way, thank you guys for being so patient and understanding, as always your comments are really appreciated as is any ideas etc. You can contact me through my tumblr, or through the messages here and please feel free to ask questions, give ideas, or just pop by to say high. I'm trying to get better at responding to messages, I know
that's a bad habit of mine so I apologise, but know that every single one is read and cherished and really does help give inspiration and keep the drive to write going. Love you guys and thanks again! <3 xxx
They run. The walkers follow, so they run some more. They're both panting, he keeps Beth ahead of him so he knows she's in the clear, and they just run for what feels like a lifetime. His legs feel like jelly, his lungs are on fire but he knows they have to keep moving. The prison was nothing more than a beacon for walkers now, spewing smoke, covered in blood, and the perfect lure for the herds that wander the roads nearby. It's still not enough to get all of their attention, and there are still clutches that follow them, attracted by the noise, the movement, and the blood still pumping through their veins so hard that Daryl can hear it in his ears with each step. It's frantic, it's terrifying, but they keep running because what else did they have left anymore?

So they run. It reminds him of when he and Merle had been kids, when they would spend hours on end just running through the woods because they could. But now it's because they want to survive, just he and Beth out here, in the wild and without the safety of fences and walls to protect them. They're on their own, nothing but them, the walkers and death lurking on the sidelines. He feels sick, the scent of smoke and death is still thick in his nostrils, but he can't shake it loose. He hadn't seen anybody. No one. Not Rick. Not Carl. Not the baby. Not Merle. Nobody else except Beth. She's the only one he'd found, the only one who had found him, and now it was just the two of them together.

It takes time for them to outrun the walkers, and by the time they're in the clear they're both panting, hunched over, trying to catch their breath and just breathe through the chaos that they've just experienced. It's the two of them. Just them, the clothes on their backs and their limited weapons. The crossbow and their knives. That's it. He can survive, he knows he can, he's don't it before and he'll do it again. But now there is Beth here with him, and he's not so sure she's going to be able to keep up.

She's a farm girl sure, grown up country and he knows she's got some backbone and spark inside of her just to get this far. He’s seen her learn to shoot, he’s been with her on the road before the prison, and he’s watched as she’d learnt to gut food, how to scavenge from the shit left behind by the living, and how to get by without anything to make things more comfortable. He knows she can do it, if she wants to, but that’s the question. Does she want to? The poor girl has just lost her father in the most horrific and brutal of ways, and honestly he doesn’t think he’d be surprised if Beth just wanted to give up.

It had happened before. Maybe nobody talked about it, but he remembers hearing about it on the farm, just a passing comment between people, Maggie worrying out loud to Glenn, and then there had been the clean white bandages over her wrists. If she’d felt the need to give up before, it can’t have gotten any easier now. The world seemed shit before, and now, out here on the road, with her dad brutally murdered, and only him for company; well he wouldn’t blame her for thinking of taking the easy way out.

It’s never been an option for himself. Sure he’d had tough times, he’d been the overly emotional teenager once, and he’d had pretty fucking dire thoughts that might had made him think of other ways out of his lot in life. But he’d never been allowed to give up. Merle hadn’t let him. Sometimes it had felt a lot like if Merle hadn’t been allowed to give up, then Daryl wasn’t allowed either. His brother had made him survive. Taught him how to hunt to feed himself, how to live off of nothing and keep going. There hadn’t been an option to quit, so it had never crossed his mind before.
Now though. Well he gets it now. He still doesn’t want to quit, not while he’s still breathing, but he can understand why people had turned to that option after everything went to shit. But they’re in this together now. Just the two of them. They hadn’t seen anybody else since the damned prison. As far as they knew, everybody else was dead. Everybody else probably was dead.

Fuck.

But he can’t stop. If he stops, then she stops. And they’ve come too far to just give up now when things were bleak. So he catches his breath, he helps Beth check her ammo and they both decide there is no point to lugging around her assault rifle when there was nothing really left to fire. So they toss it, bury it so nobody else with ammo could potentially find it, and that leaves them with barely anything at all to defend themselves with. He has his bow, and they both have their knives. That’s it. That’s all they have along with the clothes on their backs.

It doesn’t feel like nearly enough.

They haven’t been on the road since before the prison, and even if Daryl knows he can fall back into that life, he worries that Beth can’t. They’d gotten comfortable living inside, become domesticated almost. It’s left them thrown in at the deep end and right now they had to sink or swim. He knows he’s going to carry on, he knows he can do it, and he’s sure that he’s going to survive this next journey. It’s just finding the will to do it. Not wanting to give in was one thing, but wanting to continue was another.

To his surprise, it’s Beth that leads him.

That scared little girl from the farm was gone now, and instead she was the one to take charge. He feels hollow, lost and even if he won’t admit it, he’s afraid of their future. Beth is afraid too, she tells him so, but she’s also so damned sure that they’re going to make it. She’s thinking ahead, picking berries, leaving carvings in trees for others to find them if they could, and giving him someone to follow. The main thing he wants is to survive, to keep Beth alive, and he focuses on that while she leads him down the train tracks. It feels a little hopeless to him, to think of anybody else having survived the prison when they’d seen nobody, but Beth has hope.

“What’s the point of living if you don’t have hope?” She tells him, and he can’t quite find an answer for her.

So he works. He sets them up a camp, they find supplies, water, a sheet to make a make shift tent, string and cans to make an alarm system, and it might take them a whole day, but they get a camp. It gives them a base of operations, somewhere to begin each day, and once he’s got the lay of the land down he can begin assessing the game in the area. It’s mainly squirrels, the few that haven’t settled for winter yet at least, but one day he’s lucky enough to find a snake. Sure, maybe it’s not what they’re used to, but it’s food and right now, it’s enough. So he kills it, he cooks it, and they have a snake barbeque to keep them satisfied for the day.

“I want a drink.” She tells him out of the blue, and after he tosses their juice supply her way, she only sighs and shakes her head. “No, I mean a real drink. Alcohol. My dad never allowed any in the house, so I’ve never even tried it.” Beth explains and for a moment he can only watch her in complete confusion. It almost feels insane to be thinking about such a thing right now, and Daryl also finds it difficult to grasp the fact that the young girl has never been exposed to alcohol. He’d had his first sip of beer at the age of eight. His first taste of hard liquor at nine. Heck he’d been drinking with Merle since he was fifteen.

Beth watches him, picking at her snake and shrugging to him at his look. Maybe she understands how silly it is to want something like that, but fuck they’re both in a pretty screwed up place right now. Everyone they know is dead, they’re on their own, eating barbequed snake and hoping not
to be snuck up on by walkers when they’re out taking a piss. It’s been a stressful few days, maybe he can forgive her for not making the best of choices right now.

But he’s the responsible adult, unfortunately. Means he’s in charge and should be saying no. Should be.

But a part of him can’t quite deny her this one thing. They’re both lost right now, looking for something, looking for faith maybe, or just answers, maybe a reason to continue going on. The world is against them, he feels more alone than ever before, and he knows Beth can feel that same pain. Losing family hurts like hell, and losing Merle, again, for the second time after the end of the world, makes something inside of him feel hollow. He knows she’s looking to him for guidance, but he doesn’t feel like much of a leader right now. He never has been one to lead.

It seems he’s taking too long to answer, because Beth is up, huffing out a loud sigh like teenagers are want to do when the world is against them, and grabbing up what meagre supplies they have. “Fine. If you aren’t going to help, then I’ll go and find some myself.” She tells him, looking spiteful, looking angry with both him and the world around them. “I can take care of myself.”

She stomps off through the brush, loud enough that he knows he’ll be able to track her easily. He’s always told everybody he could take care of himself. Merle made sure he knew how to take care of himself from a young age. But to be honest, he doesn’t feel very much like taking care of himself right now. Tossing aside the remains of the snake, he grabs up their stuff, stuffing the alarms and make shift tent into his bag before following after her. It occurs to him that he hasn’t really spoken much in the past few days, barely more than five words to Beth. There is a guilt that churns inside of his gut, but honestly, he just doesn’t feel like talking much anymore.

It’s easy to follow Beth. She’s not used to walking quietly like he is, and besides she’s a teenager proving a point, which means a lot of stomping around. It’s easy to find her, to take out the walker she’s struggling with, and he doesn’t even feel like arguing with her when she starts snapping about him following her. Instead he waits for her to stop, his head already aching a little from all the drama, until she’s quiet and waiting for him to stop.

“Storm’s comin’.” He points out, nodding to the slowly gathering clouds above them, dark and grey, angry and looking to kick off the start of winter for them all. With the weather getting colder, they don’t need to get rained on, it would soak them through, make them ill, and they really need to stay on top of their game for the moment. “We need a place to stay.”

Beth sighs, but nods in understanding, tucking her hair behind her ear and sheathing her knife. “Alright. But I still want that drink.” She mumbles, but Daryl knows even she can feel the chill beginning in the air. He can almost taste the storm coming their way, and he knows she can too.

“I’ll get you one. Promise.” He tells her. Because when it came to the end of the world, most people were probably stockpiling alcohol. If they find somewhere half decent to hole up in, there will most likely be booze stashed away somewhere. Maybe it’s the Dixon genes in him, but he’s always been good at finding booze. Both of them are lost, they have no idea which way to go, so he nods for Beth to lead the way. So long as they’re heading away from the smouldering remains of the prison, he’s fine with it.

The funeral home is a diamond in the rough. Daryl has no idea how the fuck it’s stayed so pristine and untouched for so long, but it’s here and with the rain beginning to pelt down over them, they’re grateful for it. It’s dry, it’s clean and it’s empty, apart from a few walkers that have been dressed up nice enough for a funeral. He’s completely bemused with the whole thing. But Beth seems to think it’s beautiful, that even after everything that’s happened, somebody has given the dead a proper send off. He shrugs and continues exploring the place, more pleased about the stash of food and water in the kitchen.
They eat like kings that night. A real southern feast, both of them gorging themselves on what they’ve found as they sit together in the viewing room. Beth plays the keyboard, sings a few words of a song and it almost helps to make this place feel more homely. For a moment, he swears he almost feels a glimmer of hope for them both. It’s what makes him hunt down the alcohol, finding a lone bottle of whiskey stashed beneath the stairs, hidden from view, possibly used to give some strength to those who were grieving on the worst day of their life. Either way, his hunt is a success, and when he produces the bottle and gets a smile out of Beth, it feels like it’s worth the bad decision.

Beth really hadn’t been lying when she’d said about never having drank before. He can see it when she tries to sling it back, like a girl who has watched too many movies and thinks harsh liquor goes down as smooth as lemonade. It even makes him smile a little when she coughs, tongue sticking out and trying to wipe the taste out of her mouth. It’s not a good idea to continue, she’s young and inexperienced, he’s never a happy drunk, but it’s the end of the world. They’re all allowed to make bad decisions sometimes.

So they sit in the viewing room on the floor, a glass each with the bottle of whiskey between them as they sip and drink, and talk. Well, Beth talks, he mainly listens, but he’s never been much of a talker.

“I don’t think we’re the only ones left.” She tells him, swirling her drinks around her glass, probably copying the move off of some TV show and trying to make it seem like she knows what she’s doing. “We can’t be. We’ve all been through so much shit before this, we can’t be the only ones who made it. We’re all strong, and I just, I can’t believe that this is it.”

He can see how hollow she feels, because it’s the same aching chasm that he has inside of him. It’s been there the past few days, since the prison fell, since he’d lost most of the people he’s ever cared about. Rick. Carl. There was no chance of Carol ever coming back after being cast out by Rick. Baby Judith. Merle. Fuck he feels empty nowadays. The whiskey just splashes off the sides of the crater inside of him, but it’s better than feeling so empty all the time.

“I miss them.” Beth confesses, and he glances up when it sounds like she’s about to cry. “I miss them so much. I miss my dad. I miss Maggie. I miss them all.” She hiccups on a sob, wiping at her eyes and just looking so damned small. He wishes he could do something, wishes he knew how to say anything that could make her feel better, but he’s never been good with that sort of thing. Instead he fills her glass again, taking a pull straight from the bottle before he sets it aside.

“That’s it?” And she sounds angry, so fucking angry with him right then. “That’s all you have? That’s all you can think of doing right now?”

Daryl shrugs, he’s never been so good with confrontation, and automatically he’s lowering his eyes to the ground, picking at his shoelaces, trying to avoid her anger as much as he can when he’s the only other person in the room. Possibly in the world now other than Beth. “They’re dead.” He eventually mumbles, again shrugging, hoping that she can see he isn’t trying to be an ass on purpose. It’s something that kind of comes naturally to him. “Can’t fix that.”

But God he would if he could. If he could give up his own life for any of them to be in his place, he would. A thousand times over, he would do it. If he’d only fought harder, been faster, or never stopped trying to find the Governor out there. Instead he’d given up, let himself get lax, let himself become domesticated and stayed inside the prison walls. If he had been stronger, maybe it wouldn’t have happened. If he hadn’t let his fucking fits make him weak and frail, maybe he would have had the energy to stop the place from falling. It eats him up inside, and he can’t stop thinking about it.
“So?” Beth huffs at him, arms folded, brow furrowed and tears still on her face. Drying from her upset and turning into tears of anger and frustration. “That’s it? That’s all you’ve got?” She asks him, gesturing to the half empty glasses between them, where his attempt at consoling her has fallen flat. “We’ve lost everybody, and you just shrug it off and offer me more drink?”

Maybe it’s just the Dixon in him. The solution to a lot of problems in the Dixon world was to drink. Accidental second child you never wanted? Have a drink. Marriage not turning out the way you wanted? Have a drink. Husband beat you daily? Have a drink and a pack of cigarettes while you’re at it to burn yourself up. Dad an asshole and left you to raise your younger brother your never asked for? Hell, pull a Merle and double up with drink and drugs to really fuck things up. Born into a family that didn’t want you, and can’t afford the medication to stop you from fitting? Fucking have a drink.

“You’re the one who wanted booze.” He points out, trying not to seem uncaring, but it’s easier when he doesn’t have to think about the shit they’ve survived and others haven’t.

“That’s not the point Daryl!” Beth is almost screaming at him, it’s a position he’s been in before. Quite often actually. It’s not a surprise to him that he recoils a little bit away from her. “The point is… don’t you care? Didn’t you care about any of us? You act like it meant nothing, like we meant nothing to you. Is that it? After everything we’ve been through, didn’t you give a damn about anybody other than yourself?” She asks him, and he can’t deal with this shit right now.

It hurts to think of what they’ve lost. Who they’ve lost. It’s like he’s been ripped away from everything he’d ever wanted. Before the walkers he’d never had much of a family, and then somehow after it all he’d gone and found one, only to have it blown away from him. Literally. With a tank. God it fucking hurts to think of them all. His head hurts, the storm rages on outside, pouring buckets, thunder and lightening rolling around the black sky, but it feels like it’s in his head instead. The headache is pounding through him, raw and feeling like it’s burning behind his eyes.

He doesn’t want to deal with this right now. It feels too raw inside of him, like if he lets one little bit of it loose, it’ll just continue falling until there is an avalanche of emotions he doesn’t want to deal with. Survival doesn’t rely on emotions, it relies on skills, and he knows if he lets himself get lost in how he feels, then he’s going to lose it. So he gets up, ignoring Beth and trying to walk away from it all, to catch a break from everything that’s bearing down on him.

“Don’t walk away from me!” She snaps. “You don’t get to walk away after everything we’ve been through together.” And she’s there, yanking on his arm, getting him to stop, even if he wants to snatch it back and run without ever looking back.

Everything right now feels like far too much, he’s overwhelmed, with a buzz of whiskey in the back of his head, and a headache that’s pounding away behind his temples. He doesn’t want to do this, but Beth keeps pushing and pushing, keeps calling him out on being such a dick and how much he’s let them all down. He knows that. Knows what a fucking asshole he is, and hearing it fall from her lips just hurts so fucking much.

“You really don’t give a shit do you? If I died right now, would you care? Or would it just be another weight off your shoulders?” She asks him and fuck that hurts. Because he was so ready to be a loner. At the beginning of it all he’d followed Merle, fallen back into the role of the little brother and done as he was told. He’d tried to not care about anybody but the two of them, but then Merle had gone and gotten lost, he’d fallen in with those people, his people, and they’d become family. His first real family. Of course he cared about them. God did he fucking care about them.

And now they were gone, and he’s left feeling so damned empty.
“Is that all we were to you? Problems? Just people to be thrown to the walkers so you could get away faster?” She asks, and he’s shaking his head, because of course that’s not true. He would have given them anything, even his own life but it hadn’t been enough. Beth’s fingers catch in his sleeve, snagging him, keeping him from ripping away and trying to hide from it all. The headache is pounding, throbbing behind his eyes, making him hang his head and squeeze his eyes shut to try and get some kind of control over everything.

“You really think that?” He finally manages to mutter, twisting in her grip to get free, to meet her eyes and say this face to face. “You really think I don’t care?” It hurts to hear it, because God he cared about them all so much. He feels like half of a person now because he’s lost them all.

It breaks him. Whatever strength he had, it’s gone, and he can feel his body slump along with his emotions. It all just breaks inside of him, making him crumple a little when Beth’s arms wrap around him from behind. Then she’s hushing him, and it’s not until then that he realises he’s crying, tears falling down his face as he stutters on heavy breaths. She’s holding him up, she’s the one keeping him together even though he feels like he’s falling apart.

“I miss them all. I’m so tired of losing people.” He tells her, and it feels like he’s baring so much of himself to her. Every little part of weakness that he’d always been told to hide, was coming out and put on full show for her. Because even if he tries to hide it, he is an emotional person, he does have feelings and he’ll even admit to loving his make shift family after the end of the world. And to lose that, it just feels like he’s been gutted.

He had a friend he’d never looked for in Rick. Carol and he had understood each other on a level he’d never had with somebody else before. Glenn and Maggie had felt like siblings he’d never had. He’d had respect from Hershel, the father he’d never been lucky enough to have. Carl and Judith had been adopted in almost as his own despite his lack of experience with kids. And Merle. Fucking Merle.

That’s where it hurts the most, because he’d just found him again. “I miss Merle…” Because that was his brother. The person who had practically raised his bratty little ass and made him who he was. Maybe they weren’t the kind to say how they felt, but he knows he loved his brother, and this time the thought of him not coming back, scares him. Nothing could kill Merle but Merle. His brother was dead, and now he doesn’t know what to do with himself. He feels lost, small, like it’s just he and Beth against the world and he doesn’t know if they can make it.

His head is fucking killing him, and when it’s mixed with the emotional uproar and the alcohol, well he feels like fucking shit. Everything inside of him is rolling around, whether to try and all squeeze back inside or wanting to burst out of him, he’s not sure. All he knows is that he feels like shit. Bringing his hands up to his head, he rubs at his temples, trying to get the monster ache to calm down a little. His stomach is rolling, he feels flushed, and it doesn’t help that it feels like things are breaking up around him.

Beth is before him, then she’s behind him, and he can’t keep track of what she’s saying. She’s soothing him, then she’s hugging him, then she’s tutting and sighing and it feels like she’s jumping back and forth between everything. Or maybe he’s just not remembering the moments in-between each action. It feels fuzzy, everything feels like static around him and he isn’t sure if it’s the energy in the air from the storm happening around him. Every time he blinks it feels like an hour has passed, and he really does know that this was a damned bad idea.

“Daryl? Are you okay?” She asks, dainty fingers around his wrist, tugging on him, looking into his eyes and frowning a little at what she sees there. He can’t quite get the energy to nod, but it seems he doesn’t have to, because Beth is tugging for him to follow her, moving over to sit on the floor with him. “Sit, you look shaky.” She instructs and he finds himself giving a small huff of a
“You sound like Maggie.” He manages to mumble, but then everything tips sideways and he’s groaning, closing his eyes as Beth steadies him back upright by the shoulder.

“I’ll take that as a compliment.” She’s smiling, but he can see it slip when she takes a real good look over him. He’s probably not a pretty picture, and the pulsing headache behind his eyes tells him he’s got to look like a complete wreck. Beth reaches up to wipe at his cheeks, removing the tears tracks that still shine there for him when he clearly looks pathetic enough to not be able to do it himself. “Daryl you really don’t look too good…”

He knows that. He could at least work that much out. With the shakiness in his fingers, along with the headache and the feeling of rolling nausea in his stomach, he knows what’s coming and really he’d brought it upon himself. Too much stress. Too much emotion. Too much alcohol. Too much of absolutely everything for his damned body to take. Even if it sucks, he still finds himself giving a little laugh when he tells her, “I’m gonna fit.” Because hey, why not let his fucking illness kick them when they’re down?

For what it’s worth, Beth doesn’t freak out, in fact, if anything she seems pretty calm about it all. More calm than he tended to be when he knew what was coming. “Okay, okay well the good thing is, you’re already sitting on the floor. We should get you lying down and in a safe spot for it…” She directs him, and if he didn’t think he’d throw up, he’d probably laugh when they both seem to have the same idea.

It’s hard work to half crawl and half be dragged into the coffin by Beth. But it’s padded, it’s somewhere he can’t hurt himself, his limbs can’t jerk about and hit anything if he’s all tucked up inside of the walls. His body is just about giving up on him, and Beth has to be the one to take off his boots, and smooth his hair away from his face when he’s incapable of it. He can feel it coming, already things are dancing about in muted colours in front of his eyes, and he really hates how damned pathetic it makes him feel. His breath catches in his throat when his hands begin shaking, when he can feel the jerks begin, and from his position inside of the coffin he can’t see above the wooden walls encroaching upon his vision. It makes him feel alone, it makes him feel small, and he knows he sounds pathetic when he gives a tiny whimper.

“Hey it’s okay.” But Beth is there, leaning over the edge of the coffin to see him, easing him to rest back against the pillowed headrest with a gentle smile. “I’m right here. I’m right here Daryl, and I’ll be here when you wake up okay?”

It helps. Even if he feels shaky when the world goes dark around him, at least he knows he’s not alone. The jerks and trembles overwhelm him, he can hear rather than feel when his feet smack against the sides of the coffin, the backs of his hands hit the padded walls, and he’s grateful that he’s not alone in this. It hurts, his body isn’t responding to his internal commands, and he knows he’ll be a mess when he wakes up, but they will deal with that when it does happen. For now, all he can do is try not to fight it when his eyes roll back and he loses all control again.

Chapter End Notes

A/N/: So yet again thanks for the patience, the awesome comments and support you guys. You’re all awesome. Just wanted to ask that nobody gets the wrong idea here and assumes there may be any Bethyl coming in this fic. I see Daryl and Beth as having more of a sibling relationship, and this fic is gen, meaning there are only
canon pairings, or any pairings that are involved are mentioned in passing and not the focus of the fic. So please no comments about Bethyl, or how much you want to see it from me or anything. There are other fics on this site for that, The Falling Sickness is not one of them. Thanks guys <3

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!