The Distant Light of Dying Stars

by TheRickestRick

Summary

Rick swayed drunkenly as he stared into the night sky, space spiraling out in inky blackness between the radiant light of distant stars. Some rules just couldn’t be rewritten. Some truths were incontrovertible. He looked into the void, all too aware that he would one day soon become a part of it. Not in the everything-dies-someday kind of way, either.
Nightfall

Chapter Summary

Rick was human, and human lives were finite.

Chapter Notes

TW: Rick's suicidal thoughts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Rick swayed drunkenly as he stared into the night sky, space spiraling out in inky blackness between the radiant light of distant stars. He understood better than most what held it all together, a mystery still pondered and hotly debated within the scientific community. In truth that emptiness wasn’t really empty; there were of course nebulae, sprawling winglike through the expanse, ravenous black holes that swallowed all light, and the web of dark matter underpinning it all, a remarkably effective foundation for such swirling chaos. He had, in a sense, dedicated his life to chaos, both flowing with it and allowing it to flow through him, yet never quite fully submitting to its whims. Rick was an agent of change, always willing to rewrite the rules to benefit himself.

Some rules just couldn’t be rewritten. Some truths were incontrovertible.

He sat on the ground and fell backward, never looking away from the cosmos that dwarfed him. The air was damp, the product of a wet autumn evening just beginning to edge into cold. Nothing like the absolute, killing cold of space, a death he had seen claim dozens of living things, but the chill seeping up from the ground he laid upon settled into his bones all the same. He raised his flask to his lips and took a long pull, his other hand clenched around a paper printout. He hadn’t needed to make a hard copy, most of his technology was paper free, and he’d had to dust off an aged printer gathering dust on the garage shelves and improvise some wiring just to connect it to his system to make it work. He had done this mostly on autopilot, reeling from the discovery he’d made. Making a printed copy bordered on sentiment, but some occasions called for such a feeling.

Rick gazed up, a bitter laugh dying in his throat, and he choked on its remains before washing it away with another swallow. He looked into the void, all too aware that he would one day soon become a part of it. Not in the everything-dies-someday kind of way, either.

A life lived in chaos, a constant battle to stay one well-placed footstep ahead of the inevitable and the imminent, and it amounted to this: Rick was human, and human lives were finite. Human bodies could only take so much strain, so much abuse, and all the intervention of alien medicine and his own innovation could ultimately do nothing to prevent the unavoidable conclusion of a lifespan.

Rick Sanchez was dying, as surely as if he’d been sucked into the airless dark.

He tipped the flask back, draining the dregs from the bottom, then reached into a pocket of his lab coat. He briefly considered the laser pistol, but pulled out his backup flask instead. What point was
there in holding back? There might be time yet to drink himself to death, before the end, or he
could score some of the most mind-shattering substances the multiverse had to offer and consume
them like a nightmarish all-you-can-eat buffet, melting his brain and blowing out his heart and
most of his other internal organs all at once in a blaze of drug-addled glory. There were more
inventive deaths to choose than what the barrel of a gun had to offer, and there was Morty to
consider; finding Rick on the back lawn with a vaporized braincase was bound to traumatize his
grandson, and Rick would be entirely too dead to wipe that particular memory for the boy.

Not that Morty was really only a boy these days. The kid was nineteen, reaching the cusp of
adulthood, fittingly, as Rick’s life was coming to an end. Memories of a hundred adventures
slipped past in his mind’s eye, and welling tears blurred the starlight in his vision. There were so
many things in his life that were utterly fucked all of it everything fucked beyond repair but for
one thing; his family wasn’t truly his own, he’d lost everything that mattered but-

“Morty,” he gasped, voice rough with booze and emotion as he pushed away his tears with a
shaking hand. The crumpled printout lay in the grass, growing soggy from the dew on the green
blades Jerry kept so lovingly, neurotically trimmed.

Morty mattered. At some point, the boy had become his everything.

With that thought, the alcoholic blackout claimed his consciousness.

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“Guess who slept in the yard last night?” Jerry asked passive-aggressively as Morty took his seat
at the table for Saturday breakfast with his family.

“Jerry,” Beth hissed warningly.

“Spoilers: it was your grandpa,” Jerry added without waiting for an answer.

“Here’s a spoiler for you,” Summer said blandly, not looking up from her phone. “You’re kind of
being a dick.”

“Summer, don’t disrespect your father,” Beth admonished, glaring at Jerry. “Even if he’s
disrespecting my father.”

“Hey, he’s the one who chose to get drunk and sleep on the lawn,” Jerry replied. “Those aren’t
good life choices and it’s a poor example for the kids.”

“Don’t try to take the high road, Dad,” Summer said casually. “If we followed every example we
saw, I would be trapped in a shitty marriage and Morty would’ve gotten someone pregnant by
now.”

“In case you’re forgetting, Morty did get someone pregnant,” Jerry snapped. “Or are we all just
going to forget about the sex robot? Which, I might add was Rick’s doing.”

“Aw, jeez,” Morty whined. Since his parents had gotten back together, Jerry had been a lot more
assertive when it came to calling out other members of the household.

“Jerry, I really don’t appreciate you bringing these things up at breakfast. Or ever.” Beth got up
and poured a glass of wine, apparently deciding that Riesling paired well with waffles.

“Really, Mom?” Summer muttered. Beth didn’t respond as she bolted down half the glass.

“All I’m saying is, maybe it’s time to reconsider the nursing home idea,” Jerry pressed, apparently
deciding that waffles paired well with spite.

Beth’s grip on the glass tightened, her knuckles going white, and Morty felt sure the glass would shatter if she held it any tighter. Her mouth was drawn into a flat, angry line, and her eyes narrowed as she glared at Jerry. Her nostrils flared as she prepared for what would no doubt be an epic screaming fit.

“Uh, hey, speaking of Rick… Where is he?” Morty asked, trying to divert the confrontation.

“Your grandfather is still passed out in the yard,” Jerry gritted out, glaring at Beth as though daring her to take Rick’s side. Her only response was to finish her glass of wine and start pouring another, her angry gaze locked on her husband.

“Gosh, well, you know,” Morty said, already halfway out of his seat, “Maybe I had better go check on him.”

“Should have just let them go at it,” Summer grouched softly enough that only Morty heard her. He fled the room.

“Now you’ve got our son taking care of your drunk dad,” Morty heard Jerry say as he fled the room. “Reeeeal nice.”

Morty made his way through the back door. It was a crisp fall morning, a hint of cold in the air, the leaves just starting to turn. Soon he would have to start wearing sweaters but for now, the weather was beautiful. The sun was shining and the sky was a clear blue backdrop to the bright bursts of color in the trees. It was marred only by the old man curled up on the grass, shivering in his damp clothes. Morty knelt at his side.

“G-grandpa Rick?” he said softly. It wasn’t wise to shake the man awake without warning, he’d learned over the years.

“Hmuhh?” Rick mumbled questioningly, squinting against the sunlight as he looked at his grandson. “M’rt’y? Wh’r’m I?”

“You passed out in the yard,” Morty answered. “You should come inside. It would be kinda-kinda ridiculous if you died of pneumonia or something after- after fighting so many aliens and stuff, haha.”

Morty had tried to make a joke, but Rick’s eyes locked on him for a moment and Morty was startled at how haunted they looked. Then Rick blinked and the look was gone. Morty wondered if he’d imagined it.

“Help me up,” Rick grunted. “Goddamn old man bones can’t take a cold night anymore.”

Morty took him by the hand and the elbow and helped leverage him to standing. Years past, he had been small enough for that to be impossible. While Rick still had a few inches on him, he’d grown up to be pretty tall, and although he had inherited his grandfather’s slender build, the old man had always been stronger than he looked and so was Morty. There was no telling how much of Rick’s strength was a result of various augmentations he’d undergone, but apparently at least some of it was natural.

As Morty walked his grandfather into the house, though, he was suddenly struck by how frail the man looked. He still looked tough, how could he ever not, but there was a fragility just below the surface that Morty didn’t think he’d ever seen before. It was unimaginable to see Rick as anything but invincible, and gave him a knotted up feeling in the pit of his stomach.
He thought Rick would head for the garage, so he was surprised when he headed for his bedroom instead. The room was small, more of a storage space than a spare bedroom, and really gave new meaning to the word "spare." The old military surplus cot (though from what military, Morty couldn’t guess) and the battered old television set, along with a secondhand desk, were the mainstays of the room. Rick had brought the cot with him and the other things had appeared soon after, and Rick had never bothered with furnishing the room further beyond some loose blueprints and scattered bits of wire and electrical components left over from various inventions that had passed through on their way to the garage or the ship, or occasionally being cannibalized into some other invention.

Rick sat heavily on the edge of the cot. He seemed to sink into himself as he did, and Morty was hit once more with the realization that his grandpa wasn’t going to be around forever. But he would be around as long as possible, if Morty had anything to say about it.

“Come on, Rick, your clothes are wet,” Morty said as he pushed the lab coat back from Rick’s shoulders. The old man shrugged out of it and Morty draped it over the desk chair while Rick tugged his long-sleeved shirt over his head, letting the blue garment puddle on the floor. Rick didn’t really give a shit about his clothes but Morty knew the lab coat would always be an exception.

Rick flopped back on his cot, throwing an arm over his eyes, already well on his way to falling back asleep. Morty stared for a moment. Rarely was Rick so unguarded as he was just then; Morty’s gaze mapped out the lean torso, the knobby shoulders, the ladders of Rick’s ribs and Morty knew his grandfather was skinny but he was downright bony now. A sparse trail of blue-gray hair led from Rick’s navel down his flat, nearly sunken belly, thickening slightly as it reached his waistband. Morty flushed pink in his cheeks. He had never been able to come to terms with the strange, wiggly sensation he felt whenever he happened to see Rick shirtless (or, just as often, completely nude, because the inhibitions Rick harbored about stripping naked were few to none.) Averting his gaze, he tugged Rick’s shoes off, decided he couldn’t do much about the pants, and grabbed a spare blanket from the end of the cot. As the soft material draped over the old man, he curled into it, huffing a soft breath that smelled of stale alcohol as he instinctively pulled his arm into its warmth.

It was a cliché Morty had heard often enough that people looked younger in sleep, their burdens lifted as they slipped into dreams, but the opposite now seemed true. The time-worn wrinkles on Rick’s face didn’t magically fade away, his skin still held that grayish tint as usual, his graying hair was still wispy and thinning. His mouth, slack with sleep, still had the same chapped lips that were bitten with concentration and worry, and the creases left by tension and age remained.

Rick just looked old.

Morty reached out, trailing his thumb over Rick’s bottom lip, felt Rick’s breath ghost over his skin, before shifting his hand to cup Rick’s cheek and slide his thumb over a gaunt cheekbone. Rick grumbled quietly in his sleep but didn’t wake. Morty leaned forward and impulsively pressed a gentle kiss to Rick’s brow.

“I love you, old man,” he whispered against his grandfather’s forehead. “Just… don’t leave me just yet, okay?”

Deep in sleep, Rick didn’t respond. Morty left the room, turning off the light as he closed the door, satisfied only a little that Rick was safely wrapped in darkness and warmth. He wondered if he should tell his parents about his concerns, but what was he going to say? Of course Rick seemed old, because he was old. He watched as his mother worked her way through the rest of the bottle of wine; at best he would only worry her, and at worst, his father might succeed in having Rick put in a nursing home after all.
Outside, Jerry puttered around the yard, picking up a crumpled piece of paper and throwing it into the trash.

Chapter End Notes

Please leave comments/kudos if you're enjoying this story!

I have a pretty extensive playlist for writing this, so I thought I might share a song from it here in the end notes each chapter. More than one song contributes to each chapter but generally the one I pick resonates with the chapter for me in some way.

Ludovico Einaudi: Petricor
Awakening

Chapter Summary

He felt as though, for the first time, Rick was really letting him in, finally giving him the chance to see that hidden side of his life that really made Rick who he was rather than just an occasional fleeting glimpse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The day had started out poorly and hadn’t improved. Morty pushed food around on his plate, trying to ignore his parents as they vented their anger in the kitchen. Jerry was still fixated on the idea of putting Rick in an old folk’s home and Beth had been getting progressively more drunk throughout the day, the argument going from bad to worse as it flared up repeatedly through the afternoon and evening.

Summer was long gone, heading out for a short weekend trip with friends. As she left, she’d told Morty to consider finding something to do with himself for a couple days because it definitely didn’t look like things were getting any better here anytime soon. She would have taken him with her, but as she had explained, “I’m sorry Morty, but we already have tickets to the thing,” whatever it was. Like it was her job to protect him from their parents fighting.

Beth threw a bottle into the recycle bin hard enough to shatter glass before she rounded on Jerry. This really wasn’t going anywhere good. Jerry was at the point of denying that he understood why she was mad at him or knowing why anything he’d said today was a problem. Jerry really didn’t know when to let things go.

Most of the time, Morty thought he loved his parents, but sometimes… if he thought about it too much, like he was right now as he stared at the reheated takeout on his plate, he wondered if that was really true. It drove him nuts watching them have the same arguments and make the same horrible choices over and over again. He guessed in some dimensions there must be Beths and Jerrys who got along but if there were, he hadn’t seen it. It was all too frustrating to deal with, especially when…

They weren’t even his real parents.

Because this wasn’t his real dimension.

He was, at best, a homeless, interdimensional squatter.

Don’t think about it, Rick’s voice echoed in his mind, reminding him that his one true constant was still sleeping upstairs. Morty didn’t exactly think it was a defining point in favor of his sanity that, at times, it felt like Rick was the only thing in his life that was real.

Speaking of Rick, Morty realized the old man had not gotten up for food that day. He’d made some toast and taken it up that morning after he put Rick to bed, but he was sure Rick needed to eat again. It was unlike him to miss mealtimes, for the dual purpose of keeping Beth on his side and getting a regular intake of nutrients on a schedule that wouldn’t let him get so involved in his work that he forgot to eat entirely.
He picked up the plate and headed for the stairs. He didn’t have an appetite anymore, thanks to his not-parents, but that didn’t mean his dinner should go to waste.

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Rick gazed, unfocused, at the blankness of the wall behind his cot. Shouts of anger echoed through the house. Jerry and Beth must have been at it for a while, but they’d only gotten loud enough to wake him in the last half hour or so. He sat up, rubbing a hand over his face. He scooped yesterday’s shirt, now dry, from the floor and pulled it on. It still smelled faintly of grass and earth under the prevailing scent of drunk sweat. Now that he’d gotten some rest, indoors, he felt better. He actually felt pretty good, illusory though that was. Of the numbered days he had left, he wondered how many of them would be good ones.

He was going to have to do something about that. Not that there was much to be done about his condition – his only options there would be to prolong the inevitable by a very slight margin – but he was pretty sure he didn’t want to spend his final days, weeks, or months listening to one of his infinite daughters argue with the infinite loser most of them had married. A plan was taking root in his mind, if he could only get Morty to go for it.

He wanted Morty to see the multiverse. Not just to dip a toe in every now and then only to come back home for dinner, but really see it, to live it and breathe it as he himself had done. Though of course, to do so with Rick’s knowledge and experience to back him up, rather than by trial and error as Rick had done. To see the beauty of infinite realities while avoiding the mistakes Rick had made, to witness the wonder of a thousand worlds out of the sheer desire and ability to do so, rather than just running from one errand or emergency to the next. A true adventure that would never have to end until Morty wanted it to. Rick wouldn’t have enough time to complete the journey with him, but he could give Morty enough of a head start that he could continue on his own after Rick was gone. As he saw it, this was the only legacy he could leave to his grandson, but it was a greater gift by far than most human beings could give.

A light knock on the door made him look up as the door opened. Morty, seeing his grandfather was awake, flipped the lightswitch, brightening the room with an incandescent glow.

“Hey, Morty,” Rick said, his voice gravelly from a rough night and rougher feelings.

“I, uh, I b-brought you some dinner,” Morty said. “I mean, I dunno, it just seemed like you might- might want it but if you don’t, it’s- it’s cool, dawg.”

Rick’s heart clenched at the way Morty sounded so uncertain about it, so nervous, like he thought he wasn’t allowed to bring someone food when they’d been in bed all day. And, okay, maybe some of that was on him, but not all of it. Maybe not even most of it. If Beths and Jerrys had one thing in common, it was that both of them deflected blame and took their problems out on other people. Rick had once seen this particular Beth blame Morty for rolling her over so she wouldn’t choke on her own vomit because she was too drunk to keep a grip on her wine glass and spilled her merlot all over the bed.

“Is that the- the pork and green bean thing?” Rick eyed the plate. “Aww, Rikki-Tikki-Tavi!”

Morty halfway smiled as Rick dug into the cooling leftovers. Rick was looking better, and it set Morty’s worries at ease.

“That’s- that’s such a weird thing to say,” he said fondly.

“It’s a character from The Jungle Book,” Rick explained around a mouthful.
“What? I- I don’t remember that from the movie.”

“That’s because it was in the actual book, Morty,” Rick grumbled. “I read it to you once when you were reeeally little. I don’t expect you to remember.”

“Uh… You weren’t around when I was little,” Morty said hesitantly.

“According to whom? Beth? Which one? The Beth of this reality that we aren’t from? The Beth of the reality where you grew up? A Beth whose memory I could have conveniently edited so that she wouldn’t lose her shit every time I showed up and had to leave again?”

Rick got up and rummaged through a drawer in his desk, watched intently by a wide-eyed Morty as he finally pulled out a photograph.

“Look, trust me when I say that things go more smoothly in every reality when Beth isn’t dealing with a Rick coming and going as necessary on top of being a young mother, putting herself through veterinary training, and being held back by the miserable sack of failure you call a dad. A Beth’s abandonment issues are too strong and a Jerry is way too insecure to handle the fallout at that point in the timeline. The only reason most Mortys have a stable family for the first part of their childhood is that Beths and Jerrys don’t have a Rick to fight about. It’s a decision most Ricks make but that doesn’t mean some of us don’t give in to the urge to come see you when you’re still too young to remember us.”

Rick handed over the photograph. In it, a Rick (presumably his Rick) held up a Morty (presumably himself) as a tiny infant. Morty didn’t think he had ever seen Rick look so… happy. He’d seen him more excited, but in a very affected way, like he was playing up his enthusiasm to cover up something opposite, but in the moment captured in the snapshot, Rick looked almost carefree.

“Don’t let this go to your head, but you- you were a c-cute little piece of shit,” Rick said, ruffling Morty’s hair.

“I saw this once in- in Birdperson’s house. Nest? I dunno.” Morty gazed at the picture in awe. If he tried hard enough, he could almost picture a much larger Rick from his own tiny perspective, saying happy sounds that his infant self couldn’t understand. He wondered if that was a lingering fragment of memory, the way he thought he could remember how the house’s original carpet had felt beneath his hands when he learned to crawl, or if it was just something his imagination threw together because it was suggested to him now. He decided it was real, simply because that was the option he liked better.

“Yeah, he took the picture. Said it was im- important to honor the hatching of a grandchild or something, and he wanted a copy as ‘proof that even Rick Sanchez has feelings.’ Which, by the way, I don’t.” Morty smirked a little at that; by this point, he suspected Rick’s denial of emotional connection was a bigger lie than most of the things the man lied about.

Just then, the argument between Beth and Jerry started gaining steam again, and with the door open, Rick could hear what they were arguing about this time.

“Between your dad laying around drunk all the time, Summer being a college dropout, and Morty taking a ‘gap year’ like we don’t all see that he’s headed down the same road as his sister, I feel like I’m the only one in this family who even tries to succeed!”

“I am more successful than you will ever be! I am a cardiac surgeon!”

“Horses don’t count, Beth! And honestly how many horses do you even save? That weird dog
sculpture you made has a looot of hooves in it, I’m just saying!”

“It’s obviously a horse, Jerry! I’m sick of you belittling my work! And also my father.”

“And I’m sick of this house being filled with slackers! Rick is obviously a terrible influence on the kids, they couldn’t even finish community college!”

“I won’t put him in a home! It’ll just make him leave and I can’t go through it again!”

“Aaaaand we’re back to this again. Why isn’t anyone else ever enough for you? Why aren’t I enough for you, Beth??”

Rick watched as Morty seemed to retreat into himself, still staring at the photograph but his face devoid of emotion where there had been wonderment only moments before.

“Jesus Christ,” he sighed, sitting on the bed next to his grandson. He looked over Morty’s shoulder at the photo and thought back on the plan he was forming earlier. His decision was made.

“Morty, go pack a bag,” he said.

“Uh… what? Grandpa Rick?”

“You heard me. If you’re going to take a year off from school, you should really get out there and see the multiverse. Not just dip your toes in- in- between math quizzes and history essays but really get out there and live it. One year, you and me, and then you can go back to school next- next fall if that’s what you want. What do you- whaddaya say, M-Morty?”

“Aw jeez. That s-sounds a- a- a- amazing but… what about Mom?”

“What about her? That isn’t the Beth I abandoned or the one that gave birth to you. I know it sounds harsh but you don’t- don’t owe her jack and neither do I. That responsibility belonged to a pair of corpses we- we buried in the backyard. And in case you haven’t noticed, one quality nearly every Beth possesses is an inability to see events for what they are in- instead of how they affect her. If she could see the bigger picture, which she app- apparently can’t, she would see it isn’t about her at all. This is about you and me, Morty. A whole year of Rick and Morty, just us and the multiverse. There’s so much- so much I want to show you, Morty, so much I- I- I want you to learn. And this- this house and their ma- marriage- their relationship is a toxic fucking shitshow, Morty. How much of this do you- do you really want to stick around for?”

Morty looked like he was actually considering it.

“So what- what do you say, bud- buddy?”

A smile spread slowly over Morty’s face, eventually reaching his eyes with a twinkling gleam.

“You know- you know what, Rick? I think I want that. Let’s do it!”

Rick smiled widely and patted Morty on the back. “Get- get your shit packed then. We can leave- we can get on the road tomorrow.”

Morty jumped up from the cot, truly excited for an adventure for the first time in a while. He felt as though, for the first time, Rick was really letting him in, finally giving him the chance to see that hidden side of his life that really made Rick who he was rather than just an occasional fleeting glimpse.
“Mom and Dad will just have to- they’re just gonna have to deal with it, man,” Morty said as he made for the door. “Anyway, it’s- it’s just a year. It’s not like we’re leaving forever.”

Rick’s smile fell as Morty disappeared through the doorway. “Well, that’s… at least that’s true for one of us,” he told himself. Dying was going to be a bitch. He needed to make what time he had left really count for something.

Chapter End Notes

Elliott Smith: Pictures of Me
Horizon

Chapter Summary

“I mean, tech-technically, I am going- I’m going- uh, away? For a while.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Morty spent the evening packing a duffel bag. He brought a few changes of clothes, extra shoes, a winter coat (he didn’t know where Rick might take him, but surely not everywhere would be warm) and, quite cleverly in his estimation, he folded up a spare duffel and packed it inside the first one, to be sure to have somewhere to put any cool stuff he picked up along the way. He also brought a sketchbook and drawing pencils. He wasn’t altogether great at art, but it was something he’d started playing with in his senior year of high school as a way of keeping track of the crazy stuff he saw on his and Rick’s adventures. At the very least, his art teacher had thought he was wildly creative, if not particularly technically proficient. Also, possibly on drugs. There had been a parent-teacher conference and a few visits to the school counselor.

Plus, he would probably get a lot better at it if he practiced by drawing the people, creatures, and places that he was going to see with Rick over the next year, like some kind of interdimensional naturalist spaceman. He tucked the photo of Rick holding him as a baby under the sketchbook’s cover.

Late into the night, his phone rang. Summer’s face popped up on the screen, a photo he’d snapped when she had a cold and was sleeping on the couch with drool running down her chin and a snot bubble poking out of her nose. She had threatened to beat him bloody if he didn’t delete it, but he had still only pretended to.

He was going to have to tell Summer he was leaving. Fuck. She was going to be pissed.

“Hey Summer,” he answered the phone.

“OMG MOOOORTY!” she replied. “That concert was so fucking rad! It, like, totally changed my life. And I totally bought a new top, with the band on it? But it’s like a super cute girl-cut top, not like one of the regular band t-shirts smelly teenage boys always wear. I mean, no offense, little bro.”

“Um, you know, i-it’s kind of true though,” Morty replied. “I’m glad you’re having fun, Summer.”

“Wait. What’s with that tone? Like, the life-as-we-know-it-is-over tone?” she asked, suddenly concerned. “Did something happen? Is Grandpa Rick in space-prison again? Did Mom get arrested for driving drunk, I mean I keep telling her… Oh my God, did they kill dad together and now they’re both in jail for life?”

“Whoa, whooooa, s-slow down there, Summer,” said Morty. “It’s nothing like that. But… speaking of life-changing…”

“Come on, just hit me with it. Whatever it is, I can, like, totally deal.”
“Um, well, Grandpa Rick d-decided that I should spend my year out of college, um, ex-exploring the multiverse with him ohmygodSummerpleasedon’tbemadatme!”

“Oh.”

“…” Morty held his breath. Summer might not be his ‘real’ sister, but she was still pretty much the awesomest person in this dimension and he really hoped she wasn’t taking his news badly.

“Oh, wow. That… I was not expecting that. A whole year?” He heard her breathe deep and exhale. “I mean, that’s… that’s pretty incredible, Morty. That’s like, the ultimate study-abroad program.”

“So… you’re not mad?”

“Why would I be mad?”

“You know, because it’s… it’s me and not… you, or us? That you’re not g-going? I guess.”

“Please, Morty,” Summer scoffed. “I mean, am I, like, super jealous? Uh, yeah. But I would be a total asshole if I was mad at you just because you got to do something that’s like, completely amazing. That would be such a dick move. That’s like… something Dad would do.”

“Wow. Th-thanks, Summer. You’re like, the most awesome sister ever. And I already had another Summer, so… Yeah. You’re really something… something special.”

“So when do you leave?”

“Uh, that’s sort of- sort of the thing, I guess. R-rick seems to think we’re- uh, we’re burning the ol’ d-daylight candle at b-both ends so… you know…”

“That was a pretty terrible malaphor, you dweeb. The phrase you’re looking for is burning daylight.”

“Jeez, Summer, you were only a lit major for o-one semester.”

“More like majorly lit. I’m honestly not even sure that’s a real term,” she laughed. “So? Spit it out already.”

“Tomorrow. We leave tomorrow.”

“… Okay, now I’m mad.”

“Ohhh jeeez…”

“I won’t be back yet. I won’t even get to say goodbye,” Summer said, sounding like she might be tearing up a little. “My little brother is leaving for like, the epic high-concept sci-fi adventure of a lifetime and I won’t even get to see you off.”

“Just- just me, huh? You’re not worried ab- about saying goodbye to Grandpa Rick?” Morty said, gently teasing.

“Oh please,” Summer huffed. “I love Grandpa Rick, but there’s like, totally no way he won’t make it back in one piece. You, on the other hand…”

“You know- know what, Summer? I’m gonna m-make it back just to spite you,” Morty replied.
“I know you will,” said Summer. “Okay, I forgive you. And I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

“Oh, gross. Sorry Morty, I didn’t think all these little bother feels-ooties would be so disgusting.”

Morty laughed.

“Seriously, though, have all the fun. I’ll see you both in a year.”

“Y-yeah, see you later, crocodile.”

“Malaphors, Morty.”

“I did that one on purpose.”

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Rick packed devices he and Morty would need as well as components to make whatever else they might need eventually. The result was that the trunk of the ship was transformed into a small, portable, yet functional workshop. Since he’d used it over the years as a hold for all manner of smuggled contraband, it had enhanced security features that he felt confident would be adequate safeguards for the small collection of his manifested genius. What remained in the house, however, was considerably more involved. He sanitized his room of any documentation or property, personal or intellectual, that could be leveraged against him or otherwise misused, and did the same with the garage. Everything was packed away into his subterranean lair. Thankfully he wasn’t keeping anything down there at the moment that was living, which he would have had to either release or dispose of accordingly. He dedicated a few hours to augmenting the security of the hatch; after Jerry’s irritating discovery of the science-dungeon, he had realized it was due for an upgrade. Once the upgrades were completed, he was certain the hatch would remain sealed until either he or more likely Morty chose to unseal it. Their dimensional signature was incorporated into the locking mechanism, so even other Ricks or Mortys would be unable to breach it without considerable effort.

He did the same with the chamber containing the memories he liked to call “Morty’s Mind-Blowers.” To him, this chamber above all was the most sacrosanct, its security the most imperative. It was there that he left his most personal possessions; photographs, journals, and other items that could provide entirely too much insight into the various aspects of himself: Rick Sanchez, the scientist, the wanted criminal, the man. These things, along with the hundreds of memories preserved in piezoelectric storage tubes, were so potentially incriminating or otherwise revelatory that he felt the most responsible course would be to destroy them, yet he could not bring himself to do so. So many of those crystal tubes held pieces of Morty, and the majority of the rest were parts of himself which, yes, he had wanted to remove, yet the lack of which would leave the totality of who he was woefully incomplete. And many of them were simply things he wanted to be able to relive at will. One day, perhaps, Morty would choose to experience some of them, whether to his betterment or detriment, Rick couldn’t say; but it was better, he thought, to leave to Morty everything that he was, good, bad, and ugly. Morty might hate him for some of them, but they were part of Morty’s birthright now.

He took an empty tube and placed it in the helmet, then he opened a panel and flipped a switch which would allow him to deposit a memory without wiping it. He put the helmet on and closed his eyes, bringing to the forefront of his mind the memory he wanted to save for his grandson.

_He stood in front of the bathroom mirror. His hands trembled and he gripped the sink to steady himself, then looked up to meet his own gaze. Thin, watery blue irises traced around somewhat_
wobbly pupils, tight creases framed his eyes. This was good; he wanted Morty to be able to see him clearly. He took a deep breath, blew it out, and inhaled again.

“Morty,” he watched as his mouth shaped around his words, “by the time you see this… I don’t wanna be cliché here, but… you’ll probably know why you’re seeing it, you know? I’ll be gone. Dead. Either I’ll have told you why by the time I go, or I’ll have just let the inevitable play out, or there’s always a chance I’ll get killed by something else before this thing takes me. But those three things are the only way this ends, you have to know that right now so you don’t think there was some other way, some way you could have kept me alive.

“Because there wasn’t. It was never a possibility. You just have to accept that. And I’m sorry…”

He went through the rest of his speech, carefully planned, pausing occasionally as he remembered to tell Morty where he had put something important, or what some of his inventions did and how to avoid the easiest ways to f*ck them up or get f*cked up by them, and at one point he gave a few lists of movies or music Morty might like and from what dimensions they could be accessed. He got so into it that he sent some spittle flying, and lost his rehearsed composure to some stuttering. But he knew he had to finish sooner rather than later, so he came at last to the end.

“Look, I- I gotta wrap things up here. In case I never said goodbye, Morty, this is it:

“Goodbye.”

Rick closed his eyes and-

-let the memory end in black.

The memory crystal shined with pure white light. Rick had never seen one do that before. He placed it in a clear protective case and left it in the middle of the room, bearing a post-it note with Morty’s name.

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“Oh my god you’re leaving. You’re leaving forever.”

Morty barreled out of his room toward his sort-of mother’s cry of distress, duffel bag packed and slung over his shoulder. He found her in the garage with his grandfather. The garage was conspicuously devoid of everything that belonged to Rick. It really looked like just a normal garage, if an improbably clean one.

“Beth, honey, c- calm down, calm- take it down a notch.”

“I WILL NOT CALM DOWN, YOU’RE LEAVING,” she wailed. “GODDAMMIT, JERRY, THIS IS ALL YOUR F*CKING FAULT!”

“What? What’s happening?” Jerry poked his clueless head into the garage. “What did I do now?”

“YOU MADE MY DAD LEAVE ME AGAIN, YOU ASSHOLE!”

Jerry narrowed his eyes and folded his arms over his chest. “You’re saying that like it’s a bad thing. It’s about time, if you ask me.”

“JERRY!”

“Sweeeetie, you’re- you’re yelling in all caps,” Rick said, trying to placate her. “Just- just take
the caps lock off and let me- lemme explain.”

Beth struggled to calm herself. “What’s there to explain? All your stuff is gone. You’re obviously leaving.”

“It’s just in storage. Under- under the garage. It’ll be safe- safer there.”

“Dad, the hatch is gone!” Beth protested, flinging a hand toward the floor. Morty tracked her gesture, and, yeah, no hatch.

“Re-relax, okay, it’s just- it’s hidden. It’s- it’s cloaked. So Jerry can’t fuck with my stuff while I’m gone.”

“So you are, in fact, leaving,” Beth seethed. Jerry just looked hopeful.

“I mean, tech-technically, I am going- I’m going- uh, away? For a while,” Rick said, looking like he’d lost the plot. “Uh… a little help, here, Morty?”

“We’re going to explore the multiverse so I l-learn something while I’m not in school,” Morty said, he hoped, smoothly.

“For how long?” Beth asked, glaring at both of them.

“The, uh, the whole… year?” Morty answered uncertainly.

“What? That is…” started Beth and Jerry at the same time.

“Completely unacceptable!” Jerry finished as Beth said, “REALLY AMAZING!”

“WHAT??” Jerry looked at his wife in disbelief as she had eyes only for her father, her gaze luminous upon him.

“What a great idea! Oh, come here,” Beth gushed, her eyes shining as she pulled first Rick, then Morty, into a hug. “Be careful out there and I’ll see you in, oh my god, a year. Wow.”

“No, it isn’t a great idea,” Jerry snapped. “You can’t just let this happen!”

“How is that, exactly? How is the opportunity to spend a year learning from the most brilliant mind in existence a bad idea?” Beth was finally looking at Jerry, steely-eyed and angry. “Morty’s nineteen. He’s an adult. I don’t see how we can stop him. Besides, the important thing here is that my dad isn’t leaving me, Jerry! They’ll be back in a year. It’s hardly permanent.”

“That’s your takeaway on this?” Jerry cried. “He’s a horrible influence on the kids! Especially Morty!”

“Shut up, Jerry.”

“Oh, come on, Beth! Rick hates me!” Jerry whined. “The way Summer disrespects me with that sass-mouth of hers? I’m pretty sure he did that! And who knows how much he’s damaged Morty, that probably only begins with the sex robot and the weird porn! I don’t even want to know how deep that rabbit hole goes!”

“Oh please. At least they didn’t end up a pathetic worm covered in slime and begging for sex with its ass in the air like you.”

“Oh my god, I didn’t think you knew about that butt-thing worm-me did,” Jerry whimpered pitifully.
“Uh… Rick… d-do you know what they’re t-talking about?” Morty asked, feeling nauseated.

“Yeah, no, not a- not a clue, but I can’t- I can’t say that I’m surprised,” Rick said. “Just, uh… just put your shi- put your stuff in the car and let’s go- let’s get the fuck out. It’s starting to get weird.”

Rick and Morty slipped off to the ship.

“Can I at least turn Rick’s room into an office?” they heard Jerry ask, like a weenie, as they got in.

“Jerry… no. And you know what? After this, I don’t ever want to see your penis again.”

The doors closed, the cabin pressurized, and the sound of Beth and Jerry bickering was mercifully cut off.

“G-gross,” said Morty.

“Just don’t think about it,” Rick replied as they took off into the atmosphere.

The blue sky fell away as they plunged into the endless night of black space and starlight.

Chapter End Notes

I'm just not sorry about Jerry. He brought this on himself.

Mazzy Star: Into Dust
In space, Morty found freedom. Part of him wasn’t sure he would want to go back when the year was over.

The moment they escaped the gravitational pull of the Earth, Morty felt a weight lift from him. Not literally, because the ship had artificial gravity (‘It’s a- a gravitational field coil- it generates electromagnetic- you know what, it’s- it’s a big spinning thing in the bottom of the ship and that’s what makes it the bottom,’’ Rick had told him once, years ago. Morty doubted he would have understood it back then even if Rick had tried harder.) But being out in space, Morty felt the pressures of his (not really his) family slip away. Rick was right; Beth and Jerry had a toxic marriage. The divorce had almost gone through, but Morty was never that fortunate where his parents were concerned. And maybe things had been good again, for a while, but it hadn’t lasted. His parents were a ball and chain not only to each other, but to everyone around them.

In space, Morty found freedom. His family would just have to live with that. Part of him wasn’t sure he would want to go back when the year was over. He lost count of the stars as they shot forward into the expanse, though he was sure Rick knew all of them by heart.

Traveling through space was not, even a little bit, like a long, boring car ride. Sure, space was so big that it might as well be infinite, but for Morty, stars streaming by outside the windows of the ship never got boring. He might occasionally fall asleep, but that was fine; assuming they weren’t fleeing from or flying toward danger, the canopy of starlight and the ambient sounds of the ship’s inner workings melded to lull him into some of the best sleep he’d ever had. How he could be so comfortable in a tiny bubble in the middle of nothingness in the middle of everything, with only the thin layer of whatever made up the windows separating him from the unforgiving vacuum of space, he had no idea. But after the overwhelming fearterrorexcitement of the first few times up in space had worn off, he had realized two things. One, being out here brought him a deep sense of peace. And two, the windows definitely weren’t glass. He’d seen Rick smash a bottle against them once while drunk and it was the bottle that shattered.

Speaking of, he was relieved to see that the bottles had been cleaned out of the interior. They had always made the ship feel so cramped.

His head started nodding as stars blurred by.

“You can always- you can just lay down in the back, if you’re tired,’’ Rick said, casting a glance at Morty as though he’d been watching from the corner of his eye.

Morty knew Rick slept in the ship sometimes, if he was too drunk to get out of it, or if he was too drunk to make it to his room from the garage, or if Beth or Jerry were too mad at him to let him into the house – probably for being too drunk. But Rick usually just passed out across the front seat, his long legs hanging into the footwell.

“I- I dunno, it looks too small,’’ Morty said. It might have fit him when he was fourteen, but…
“Oh baby!” Rick exclaimed. “Did I never- never- I didn’t show you this?”

He pressed a button on the dash with a slender finger. With the whirring sound of a mechanism working, the seat pushed forward and the back dropped down behind it, while a panel with cushions popped out where the back of the seat had been. It made for a small but serviceable bed.

“Oh wow, R-Rick!” Morty said, his eyes alight at his grandfather’s brilliance.

“Depositing passenger,” said the ship blandly.

“Wait, wha-WAUGH!” yelled Morty as the back of his seat slotted down and the seat cushion tumbled him backward. His lanky legs flew over his head and he landed, somewhat ungainly, on his hands and knees, shins pressed against the headrest and feet poking up by the back window. “Aww jeez, Rick,” he said, looking up at his laughing grandfather.

“Deploying protocol: ‘setting the mood’,” the ship announced.

“Wait, ship, no!” Rick said sharply, but it was too late. Small, unobtrusively placed light fixtures around the ship bathed the interior with brightly colored light, mainly pink and purple. A tiny hatch in the ceiling opened, lowering a very small disco ball, which began to rotate and bounce the colored light everywhere. And some really bassy – Morty couldn’t call it anything other than sex music – began blaring from the ship’s speakers.

And then the bed started to vibrate.

“Um… Grandpa Rick…”

“Dammit, ship, cancel seduction protocols!” Rick barked, his unibrow digging an aggravated furrow in his forehead.

“Confirm: cancellation of ‘sexytime routine’?” she asked, sounding somehow smug while still being more or less toneless.

“Now you’re- you’re just being a bitch,” Rick snapped. “Yes. Cancel current lighting a-and music theme. And, uh… disable program ‘Rickwhip’.”

“Confirm: disable ‘bondage dungeon configuration’?”

“Goddammit, since when do you announce everything?” Rick facepalmed. “Yes.”

“Cancellation and program disable confirmed.”

The music cut out abruptly and the lighting returned to normal. Morty watched as the little disco ball retracted.

“Don’t think I’m not pissed at you,” Rick said to the ship.

“I am as you made me,” she sassed.

“I can, and will, replace your gearshift with a glittery pink dildo.”

“Whatever pleases you.”

“Um…” Morty stared at his grandfather, cheeks flushed. “This seat is kind of- kind of stained…”

“It’s mostly booze,” Rick replied unconvincingly.
“Try not to think about it,” the ship added.

“It IS!” Rick insisted.

“Whatever helps you sleep at night.”

“What helps me ‘sleep at night’,” Rick said, complete with airquotes, “is booze, fucking, and disabling your vocal protocols for the foreseeable future. Not- not necessarily in that order.”

“Understood,” she replied contritely.

“Just get- get some rest. Take a nap, Morty.”

“Um, okay…” Morty settled back onto the bed. He found a soft blanket tucked into the headrest panel.

“I run sanitization routines frequently,” the ship said quietly from a rear speaker near his head.

“I heard that!” Rick growled.

A thin paper strip printed out from a tiny slot below the speaker. Morty tore it off and read it.

– I also sell left-behind undergarments on the internet. –

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Rick kept glancing over his shoulder at his now contentedly sleeping grandson, a smile ghosting over his face. Being out here with Morty, among the stars that had been the constant backdrop for so much of Rick’s life, felt so… right. He didn’t like to attribute the concept of destiny with any real meaning, despite having learned that certain events were fixed points in most, if not all timelines – all Ricks, for example, either invented interdimensional travel or were inevitably coached to do so by those Ricks who already had, and even those who had a Rick come to them were already working on it and would have gotten there sooner or later. Even so, this, having Morty with him, leaving behind the ball of dirt called Earth that Rick hadn’t identified with since he first set foot through a portal, felt like the kind of thing that might have been fated to be.

Or he was a dying man seeking refuge in sentimental bullshit. There was always that possibility, too.

Watching as Morty slept, though, Rick felt a warmth in his heart that probably wasn’t a symptom of his terminally overclocked body. Rick often felt like this when he looked at Morty, usually hiding behind the face that meant ‘Morty is an idiot.’ Of course, sometimes it meant that, too. Still… if there was such a thing as a soulmate, though Rick didn’t really believe that bullshit either, Morty was probably it. No one else had ever tried to understand the man he was like Morty.

Except Diane, Beth’s mother. And he hadn’t been then who he now was.

He doubted even she could love him now.

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“Morty. Morty wake up, you- you gotta see this.”

“Mhuh?” Morty mumbled, blinking blearily. The blanket was glued to his face with sleep spit.
“Check- check it, Morty, check it ooooout!” Rick crowed.

Colored lights were flashing through the ship again, Morty noticed as he sat up. Had the ship decided to fuck with Rick again? But as he looked out the window, he saw the light wasn’t coming from the ship at all. His jaw dropped as he looked around in wonder.

A huge, shadowy object hung in space off the starboard side, dwarfing the ship entirely. Its surface was spiked with jagged spires of ice that pointed out prominently, casting a long, tapering tail of vapor and debris behind it that picked up the light of a nearby star. Refracted light from the debris bounced throughout the ship, like it was being thrown through thousands of tiny prisms, a swirling, shattered rainbow.

“Oh, wow!” Morty exclaimed, leaning over the back of Rick’s seat and resting his chin on Rick’s shoulder, completely un-self-conscious in his awe.

“Pretty amazing, am I right?” Rick said smugly. “Yeah, I thou- I thought- I figured you would like it. It’s not my first time riding a comet’s tail, but it’s- it’s always awesome.”

Rick rattled off some information about stellar winds and comet atmospheres, and Morty let himself we wrapped in Rick’s voice as he sat, transfixed. Morty felt like he belonged, in a way he had never felt in his life. Being out here, seeing this, at Rick’s side… it felt like coming home.

“Pretty cool, huh?” said Rick, probably about the science he’d been spouting.

“It’s beautiful,” Morty whispered.

Rick glanced sideways at the boy’s rapt expression. Even on a good day the kid carried too much of Jerry around with him, but that, right there, that curiosity shining brilliantly in his eyes… That was entirely Rick.

“Yeah,” said Rick, sealing Morty’s face into his memories. “Yeah, it really is.”

He’d let Morty assume he was talking about the comet.

Chapter End Notes

The ship is the new comic relief. Have we seen the last of her seduction protocols? I sure hope not.

Shinedown: Second Chance
Morty was openly staring. He couldn’t help it. This was a side of Rick he had known nothing about.

Rating has gone up due to language, and some upcoming material (which would have been this chapter, but the chapter became very long and I'm not satisfied with the last bit, so I split it in the interest of having something to update with.

Rick reduced power to the engines and let them be pulled by the comet’s gravity. They trailed the comet for a while, and Morty sprawled on the bed with his head tilted, looking out the viewport, light bouncing off and through shards of ice filling his vision, the spread of the comet’s debris glittering brilliantly across a backdrop of stars. There was something about being tugged behind the comet that reminded Morty of floating lazily in a river; directed by the current, buoyed up by the water, yet with subtly random shifts in speed and direction that were a constant reminder that one was just going with the flow. Their slow tumble in the comet’s wake made Morty feel floaty.

Rick’s voice rambled on pleasantly as the old man explained various aspects of the phenomena they were witnessing. Morty admittedly couldn’t make sense of some of it, but he understood more than he would have guessed, and the realization that Rick wasn’t dumbing out down completely like Morty was a child or an idiot made his heart swell with pride in himself and affection for Rick.

Rick had his seat leaned back, his head lolling against the headrest, as relaxed in the moment as Morty was. Morty had only to turn his head slightly to see Rick’s profile. A rush of emotion made Morty’s breath hitch as he watched Rick’s mouth curve and purse around science-words, sometimes accompanied by vague, lazy gestures from his grandfather’s hands. Rick had a dreamy, unguarded expression on his face. Morty watched as Rick’s eyes skated over the view outside the ship, his gaze bright and alive.

This was the face of the man that had dreamed of countless wonders, imagined far-off alien worlds, and pondered the limitlessness of alternate dimensions before ever even seeing them. It was Rick at his most pure, Morty realized; this was Rick as one with science and space, no barriers, nothing to hold him back.

Morty closed his eyes as his heart threatened to beat out of his chest.

When he opened them again, he found Rick was staring right at him.

“You- uh, you doin- doing alright there, sp- sport?” Rick rasped.
“Yeah,” Morty replied breathlessly.

He wasn’t sure what drove the impulse, but he reached out a hand toward his grandfather. Rick glanced at it and back to Morty’s eyes, his brows inching up as he reached back. He didn’t take Morty’s hand, but instead rested his fingers over Morty’s palm and wiggled them, brushing Morty’s skin. Morty smiled and returned the gesture.

The kid was looking at him like he held the universe in his hands, like he invented the sunrise or something.

Rick was opening his mouth to find out what was in the kid’s head when the ship shuddered violently, snapping them out of their shared daze. Rick whipped around, eyes darting between the viewport and a readout on the console.

Morty’s heart was in his throat for so many reasons.

“R-Rick, what’s happening?”

“The number two engine caught some debris and- and took a shit, no pun intended. Looks- looks like it’s iced up,” Rick replied. “Get up here and- and buckle up, Morty.”

Morty scrambled over the seat. Rick grimaced as the kid kneed his shoulder, but quickly enough Morty swept his long legs over the seat and into the footwell. As the belt clicked reassuringly into place, Rick started pressing buttons. Engine Offline flashed on the screen, quickly replaced by Initialize Engine Restart (confirm?) Rick hit a button and… nothing happened.

“Oh, jeez,” Morty groaned.

“Relaaax, M-Morty,” Rick said. “The startup sequence primes the engine with heated plasma vented from the drive core. Hope- hopefully it’s enough to melt- melt off what- whatever- the shit icing up the engine. Then the engine should- should fire and start.”

A revving sound rumbled through the ship as the engine came on and started to ramp up to full power.

“The seat belt is just in- just in case the-“

The ship bucked forward, throwing Rick and Morty sideways as it clipped more comet debris and spun wildly. Morty yelped as they ping-ponged through the comet tail and shot out the far side, still spinning on a chaotic trajectory. Finally their erratic flight evened out.

“Ohhh what- what the fuck!” Morty cried out. “Did we die? Did we fucking die, Rick?”

“No- not even close,” Rick said. “As- as I was tell- telling… as I was saying a minute ago, the startup sequence should melt the ice, but, depending what the ice is made of, the vapor might putput the engine into- into overdrive and then one’s in overdrive and the other isn’t, and that’s an engine imbalance, Morty. The ship can only- only compensate so much, but the engine didn’t tear off a third of the ship, Morty, and that- that’s the win here.”

“Oh Jesus,” Morty moaned, sliding down in his seat.

“It’s fine,” Rick rolled his eyes. “It didn’t do that because it was designed not to, by me. Th- that was never gonna happen, Morty.”

Morty made a soft deflating noise.
“Yeah- you know- you know what?” Rick said, inputting coordinates for a portal jump. “You- you look like I could use a drink.”

Morty gazed back at the comet for a long moment before they made the jump and it snapped out of sight in a flash of green. Space could be heart-achingly beautiful, but it was a deadly beauty.

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They made planetfall on a small planetoid, landing in what looked like an entertainment district, albeit somewhat seedy. There were a lot of dark buildings with bright neon lights adorning the outside. One featured a hologram of something big and green wearing fishnets over its many tentacles. Morty stared.

“Not that one,” Rick grunted. He pointed at a building that could easily be a bar or a club, which looked pretty normal. “That one’s pretty good for- for whatever. Nothing too weird, there.”

“Gee, Rick, I- I didn’t think to bring… What- what do people usually wear in- in- in space bars?” Morty ran a hand through his hair.

“Unless you’re their species or reeeeally open-minded, that isn’t gonna be part- particular- it isn’t gonna matter, they won’t care,” Rick replied.

“Yeah but… I don’t want to feel like a dork,” Morty sighed.

“I- I can’t do anything about you feeling like- like a dork, Morty, but I was- I was gonna have the ship made some- some clubwear anyway. Because Grandpa is open-minded, Morty. Grandpa might even get laid.”

“Aw jeez…” Morty’s stomach clenched in an unpleasant mixture of arousal and jealousy at the thought, with a little bit of shame thrown in for good measure. Rick would do as he pleased, regardless of what Morty wanted; Morty was sure of that. The thought of his grandfather being sexual with someone (else) made him feel both inappropriately intrigued and kind of sick. It was really a mercy that Rick usually took care of that stuff while Morty wasn’t around.

It had taken a long time for Morty to stop picturing Rick and Unity together, embittered tears and other bodily fluids occasionally spilled as a result.

Rick pressed a button in the dash.

“Tailoring protocols activated,” the ship said smoothly. “State requirements.”

“Goin’- goin’ clubbing!” Rick crowed. “Gonna get r-riggety-riggety-wrecked with my grandson!”

“Procuring last requested clubwear,” the ship replied.

A humming sound was followed by an oddly rubbery thunk, and a hatch opened at the bottom of the dash. Inside were a ball gag, nipple clamps on a chain, and a black thing that looked sort of like a jockstrap to Morty.

“Goddammit, ship! It’s not that kind of club! What part of ‘with my grandson’ did you not fucking understand?”

“Parameters have not been set for this protocol.”

“Ugh,” Rick rubbed his forehead. “Okay, fine. Pants, black, full coverage. Seriously, if you leave my dick hanging out, or my asshole showing, I- I’ll fucking dismantle you. I shouldn’t- I shouldn’t
“That assessment is not congruent with past behavior,” the ship said, cuttlingly. “Material?”

“I don’t give a fuck WAIT,” Rick said, spotting the loophole before he finished his request. “No latex, no spandex. Just normal pants.”

Ultimately, the ship finally provided clothes (“Synthesizing ‘just clothes that look cool and won’t get us arrested’”) that were deemed suitable by Rick. Morty had a pair of black skinny jeans that hugged just right (the ship really knew what she was doing) and a tight black t-shirt that had mesh panels down the sides, that was pretty fun. She also issued a pair of black combat boots. She kept it fairly tame for him, and he supposed he was grateful.

For Rick, she synthesized leather pants that rode low, clinging to Rick’s hips with the aid of a studded belt, and a black tank that hung just to his belt. There were boots with a slight platform in the sole, and a leather choker and pair of goggles (“Goggles went out like a decade ago, stop fucking editorializing on past sartorial mistakes.”)

Rick put on the choker, though.

Morty changed his clothes in the backseat. He noticed the ship hand also included what he could only describe as a boy-cut thong. He had not known that was a thing, had initially mistaken the black material for an eyepatch (but he wasn’t that Morty.) He shimmied into it anyway while Rick was distracted by wrestling into (and cursing out) his leather pants up in the front. He found that he liked it. It felt rebellious and sexy.

Once he was in his new clothes, he looked forward to see what Rick was doing. He was oddly surprised to find his grandfather blending some silvery-blue glitter into a classic smoky-eye. When he was done, he brushed some of the glitter into the wisp of chest hair poking out of his shirt and then shook some into his hair.

Morty’s jaw dropped.

It. Was. Hot.

“Uh… wow, Rick, I didn’t know you- I didn’t- you wear makeup??” he finally stammered.

“Duh, Morty, we’re going clubbing,” Rick rolled his (gorgeous, oh god oh god, Morty thought) eyes and stared at his grandson. “Why’re- why are you blushing, Morty?”

“Oh,” said Morty.

“Look, it’s- it’s not a big deal, Morty, I was in a band,” Rick explained.

“Yeah, the, uh, the Flesh Curtains?”

Rick glared at Morty suspiciously.

“I saw a picture once,” Morty explained.

“… Fucking Birdperson. Yes, the Flesh Curtains.”

“So that’s why you learned how?”

“That’s why I know how to do this,” Rick gestured at his face. “I already knew the basics.”

“Really?” Morty was openly staring. He couldn’t help it. This was a side of Rick he had known
“Really?” Morty was openly staring. He couldn’t help it. This was a side of Rick he had known nothing about.

“Uh, yeah, I had a mom, you know.”

“Yeah, I know, I just can’t picture…”

Rick sighed. “When I was a kid, I got into my mom’s stuff. I didn’t think it was anything weird, or or… It was just like coloring with crayons, but for your face, I thought. So she caught me, and she showed me how to do it, and did me all up so I could- so I could see it. Maybe she was trying to take the mystery out of it, or something. And I- I liked it.”

Rick looked away.

“And then she wiped it off so my father wouldn’t think I was a faggot and kick my ass.”

“Jesus, Rick…” Morty breathed.

“Don’t do that, don’t do the pity thing, here, Morty,” Rick looked at him again. “It was a different time- it’s just how it was. It’s not- it’s not a big deal. I used to help her put her makeup on, and it was our little- our secret. And then when I was around your age, glam rock came around and it was a whooole different- different ballgame. I used to be like- you know, fuck what my old man thinks, and all that. I used to do myself up like Bowie, Morty. Ziggy-fucking-Stardust, Morty!”

Rick was genuinely enthused at that point, spittle flying and his eyes gleaming fervently, hands clutching air like Rick had the dreams of his teenaged self in a death grip.

“Wow, Rick, that’s- I mean, that’s pretty cool,” Morty said nervously, wringing his hands a bit. “Do… do you think… do you think I could wear some too?”

“Yeah? You want some- you want some of thissss, Morty?” Rick gestured up and down himself, waggling his eyebrow.

He had no idea, Morty thought.

“Get up here- get up in the- in the front, Morty.” Rick scooched back, making room for Morty to climb over and kneel on the seat. Rick turned toward him as he settled and wedged his own knee between Morty’s and the seat. He gripped Morty’s chin and narrowed one eye as he considered Morty’s face.

“Yeah, nothing crazy, just- start with some primer…”

Morty sat and let Rick work on his face. He wasn’t applying anything anywhere but around the eyes. Morty saw a little palette of something red and glittery that Rick lightly dusted on his eyelids. Rick apparently liked glitter. Who knew? But the close proximity and the intense look in Rick’s eyes did nothing to help the way Morty’s heart was pounding. And if he dared to glance down, there were Rick’s spread legs with his super-obvious leather-clad junk front and center.

“Aaaaand finish it off with some classic black guyliner,” Rick said as he carefully slid the pencil around the edges of Morty’s eyelids. Rick held out a little compact mirror. “There, what do you-whaddaya think?”

“Oh. Oh wow,” Morty said as he looked. “It’s… wow. It’s like me but… not?”

Rick chuckled.

“I mean- I- I- I definitely like it. It feels…” Naughty, Morty didn’t want to say.
“Yeah, kid, I know how it feels,” Rick grinned. “Oh yeah, put this stuff in your pockets.”

He handed Morty a fake ID, a wad of flurbos, and a condom.

“Oh jeez.” Morty blushed, hands shaking as he fumbled everything into the tight pockets of his pants.

“Trust me on this, you never- you never want to get caught with- without cash, Morty. And you always use a condom, you- always, Morty, there’s shit out here that can melt your dick off if you- if you catch it.”

Rick glared like he was looking into Morty’s soul, until he saw something that apparently made him believe Morty had listened, though Morty had no idea what that was.

“Okay, let’s- let’s get this show on the rooad!”

He jumped out of the ship (and god, those leather pants just hugged his ass and Morty could not deal) and sauntered toward the club. Morty started to follow, but as an afterthought, he grabbed the goggles and nestled them on top of his head. Morty had always thought goggles were kind of cool.

Chapter End Notes

Huge thanks to everyone who commented or left kudos! It really means a lot. I wanted to update way sooner, but it was a struggle-to-get-sleep kind of a week. I’m not leaving!

I was not planning to write the makeup scene, but I actually really love it. The glimpses into past-Rick are becoming a really important part of this story for me.

David Bowie: Life on Mars?
Chapter Summary

Rick couldn’t believe what he was seeing. He could not, for all of his intellect, fathom how the actual fuck things had gotten out of hand so quickly.

Chapter Notes

TW: drug use, things get a little out of hand here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You wore the- the fucking goggles,” Rick muttered. “Because of course you did. Nevermind, it’s- it’s fine, you- you do you.”

“They- they aren’t too bad, I- I kinda like the look,” Morty said. “You- you probably could have pulled them off.”

“Not with this hair, Morty. Seriously, that Digimon kid has great hair, but I don't want to look like him. He could- he looks like he could be our inbred lovechild.”

Morty stared vacantly, his mouth drooping at the bizarre mental image.

“When did you even w-watch that?” Morty asked when he snapped out of it.

“I’ll watch- I’ll sit through damn near anything if I’m drunk and can’t find the remote.” Rick narrowed his eyes at his grandson. “Besides, that kid- he had his own dinosaur. His own fucking dinosaur, Morty.”

Rick started weaving into the crowd.

“Morty! Let’s find the bar!”

Morty darted forward before the space in the crowd could close behind Rick. His grandfather was naturally tall but with the lift the boots gave him, Morty didn’t really have trouble trailing him through the club. It looked more or less like clubs on Earth looked on TV, flashing lights and pounding music, dark corners, a stage at one end and a full bar at the other, a dancing throng of people in between. Except they were alien people, of wildly varying shapes, sizes, and coloration. And physical states, as it turned out; he saw a couple that seemed to be made of cohesive liquid.

He muscled up to the bar next to Rick. A bartender with more arms than Rick and Morty had together dropped off three shots Rick had ordered.

“Lesson number one, Morty! Drinking in spaaaace!” Rick smiled widely and then leaned in close to Morty, his expression intensely focused. “Pick one.”

“I thought lesson number one was the- the c-c-condom thing,” Morty stammered.
Rick considered that for a few seconds. “Yeah, fair point. Lesson two then. Because the condom thing is fucking important, Morty. Now pick- pick- choose your booze.”

Morty bit his lip as he looked over his options. There was a bright orange drink, a dark purple one, and a green one that glowed unsettlingly. Morty decided the glowing one was not going to happen right off. The purple one looked like something he had seen on TV once, so he chose that.

“Congratulations, Morty, you lived,” Rick grinned. “That’s basically a ‘purple nurple.’ You’ll like it. Good rule of thumb, most things that glow are toxic to humans. Also, unlike Earth, where an orange drink probably means a tequila sunrise or a screwdriver or one of a thousand other things made with juice, about- like basically half of the orange drinks out here can- can poison you, Morty, so unless you know what- what they are, avoid them. I do know what this is though so it’s- it’s mine.”

He picked up the drink and clinked Morty’s glass with it, then tossed it back. Morty did the same, overwhelmed by the burst of flavor and alcohol, and the weird aftertaste it left.

Rick flagged the bartender over.

“Two- two more of these and give the isotope shot to the guy at the end of the bar who looks like his dog died. His species can drink it and he looks like he could use a break.”

“His dog did die,” the bartender intoned mournfully. “Their union had many happy years, but all things must end.”

“Well that’s either a total downer or super weird,” Rick said to Morty, tracking the bartender with his eyes as he left. “It looks like I don’t know what ‘dog’ means here. So maybe don’t talk about dogs tonight.”

“Wow, there’s- there’s a lot involved in- in being out here full time, Rick,” Morty remarked as their second round arrived.

“That’s why I’m here to teach- teach you everything, M-Morty.” Rick clinked glasses with him again.

And again, and again, and again, and then one more time. They were a lot of rounds in when Rick spotted a shady looking alien hanging out in a booth in the corner.

“Sss- stay here, Morty, I think I got- I think I got a chance to score.”

“Uh, what??” Morty asked.

“K-lax! Drugs, Morty!” he hissed. “Don’t fucking blow this, I’ll- I’ll be right back.”

A few minutes passed and Rick was back, dragging him away from the bar and into a bathroom, if the plumbuses hanging where urinals should be were any indication.

Rick pulled a baggie out of his pockets, dumped some of the pink powder on the counter, and used his ID (like Morty’s, also fake, as Rick was a fugitive from justice) to cut it into lines.

“You getting- you getting in on this, Morty? It’s the refined shit, lasts- lasts way longer than unprocessed crystal kallaxian. No obligation, though, there’s more for me if you- if you don’t wanna.”

Morty, fairly drunk, still feeling rebellious from leaving home, and wearing sexy underwear, and having witnessed the effects of k-lax before, decided a night on the dance floor sounded like a
good time.

“You know- you know what? You’re on, R-Rick.”

Rick smirked, rolled up a flurbo, plugged one side of his nose, and snorted a line. He passed the flurbo to Morty.

“Just- just like I did it. Gonna burn and make your eyes water but, fuuuuck, you’re only young once.”

Morty did just like Rick had done, feeling a gritty burning in his sinus and then slammed with the high as the drug his system. It was like a punch to the gut and an instant boner at the same time, his vision tingling as the whites of his eyes shaded blue. He doubled over and moaned. He felt amazing, like he wanted to move. He wanted to dance. He also kind of wanted to fuck, but that seemed weird, and dancing still sounded great.

“Ohhh yeah, this shit is good!” Rick yelled, tucking the bag back into his pocket and steering Morty toward the dance floor.

They waded out into the sea of writhing aliens. Rick found the beat with ease, shifting his hips and moving his feet like he was born to it, and Morty followed right along with him, picking up on his moves quickly thanks to the ‘danceability’ of crystal kallaxian.

After a bit, Rick started feeling sweaty and flushed, in a way that should not be normal for either dancing or k-lax.

“Morty, we- come on, Morty, we’re going to the bathroom,” he called out, staggering toward the facilities.

He pushed through the door and leaned on the counter, breathing heavily. He ran a hand up the back of his neck and into his hair, brushing away a fair bit of sweat. Touching his skin felt good, though, and he slid his hand back over his shoulder and let his fingers trail down his chest, shivering at the sensation. Which was definitely a little over the top. He slid his hand down to cup his crotch.

“Why the fuck am I hard?” he muttered.

He leaned toward the mirror, holding his eyelid open with his fingertips. The white of his eye should have been electric blue but it was shaded more… periwinkle. He scrambled to pull out the baggie with the rest of the k-lax in it, dipped a finger in, tasted it, and spat into the sink.

“It’s laced,” he realized out loud. “It’s laced with stardust, it’s like sp- space ecstasy, Morty… Morty?”

It was then that he realized Morty hadn’t followed him into the bathroom.

“Fuck, Morty!” Rick dashed out of the bathroom.

---

Rick couldn’t believe what he was seeing. He could not, for all of his intellect, fathom how the actual fuck things had gotten out of hand so quickly. Unless it was as simple as DJ Asshole announcing a stripping contest (seriously, since when was it that kind of club?) and Morty, jacked out of his skull on refined k-lax cut with stardust of all things, thought it sounded like a plan. That, he could easily imagine, and the results would probably look like Morty pulling a Magic Mike on the stage while the bass beat heavy and the crowd screamed for more.
Which is exactly what Rick was seeing.

Morty had his shirt off and was swinging it over his head. It sailed across the stage as he let it go. He launched into a fairly well executed body roll, and Rick’s jaw dropped. Morty’s scrawny little ass had definitely matured. He was fairly lean, but he was tall, and when he flexed, there were actual muscles.

Rick knew. Of course he knew. And he’d been trying so hard not to acknowledge how the shape of his feelings for Morty had shifted, so it was one thing to know it but another thing to see it, Morty on full display, doing some striptease that was going awkwardly at that exact second because Morty was trying to hop one-legged out of skinny jeans that didn’t tear away, and Rick well remembered from his days in the Flesh Curtains what fresh hell that was, and...

That’s when it hit him what song was underscoring this sordid affair. That familiar, thumping bass to which his grandson was now, *sweet Jesus*, gyrating his hips and shaking what looked like his package snugged into a thong with a dick-pocket (and where the almighty *fuck* did he get that, Rick was going to have *words* with the ship) was in fact from a Flesh Curtains song. That bassline was *him*.

“F- fuck, fuck me *backwards*,” Rick muttered as he pushed through the crowd toward the stage, reaching Morty just as Morty started reaching for the thong.

“I don’t think so, buddy,” he said, catching Morty’s hands in his own.

Morty looked up at him, just then realizing Rick was there, his face alight with it.

“Rick! Hey, dawg!” Morty shouted just as the music cut out.

A collective ‘aww’ rose from some of the crowd. Rick stared at them like a deer in headlights.

“May you be blessed in your life-partnership,” shouted the guy Rick had given the drink to earlier.

*That*. Right there. That was why Rick hadn’t remembered what ‘dog’ meant here. Life-partnerships were *poison* to Rick so he had never found that aspect of the local culture relevant. Almost as bad as soul-bonds in bird-culture.

That was a train of thought that derailed abruptly when Morty pulled him in by his shirt and kissed him.

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“Yeah, so you- you see, Morty, it’s not- it’s not even the same as our word *dog*, it- it was borrowed from another- a language in another system entirely, one where they do life-bonds or some- some *utter bullshit*,” Rick explained. “It’s got some letters that are silent or that we don’t have or- or something, and I’ll bet- I’ll bet that if a xenolinguistics- uh- *person* broke it down, it wouldn’t even- even sound the same to a native speaker.”

He was hauling a stumbling Morty toward the car. He knew Morty wasn’t really listening, but he kept talking to give him some background noise. The kid was trashed, it was Rick’s fault completely, and he damn well knew it. What was he even thinking, letting Morty snort a line of *k-lax*? And not even checking the purity first, had it been cut with something else, Morty could have fucking *died*… That would have been on Rick, a hundred percent.

At least he’d gotten Morty back into his clothes, though with Morty’s limbs suddenly refusing to cooperate, even that had been an ordeal.
As it was, Morty obviously felt like shit, and it made Rick feel like a while other kind of shit, from which not even his own drug-fueled boner chafing in his leather pants could distract him. He had been high on nearly everything that wouldn’t kill a human outright at one point or another, so it was really not a big deal to him, but Morty… He knew Morty smoked weed sometimes, had smelled it occasionally and had once shown him how to stuff dryer sheets into a toilet-paper tube to blow the smoke through, but he doubted his grandson had ever been this fucked up. Morty was neither popular nor unpopular enough to have a ‘crowd’ of his own, so he didn’t really party at all.

“Ugh… R-… Rick…” Morty moaned, trying to lean against the ship and failing as his body went noodly on him. Rick wrapped an arm around his waist to keep him upright. “Thnk’m’guhhh-… gunna-“

“You gonna huhhh- hurl, Morty?” Rick asked, not unkindly.

Morty nodded weakly, then immediately tipped his head forward and puked. Rick lowered him to his knees and knelt next to him, an arm under Morty’s chest to keep him from falling on his face.

“I’m- muhhh- ‘m’sorry…” Morty gasped weakly between heaves, tears leaking from his eyes.

“It’s okay, buddy, just let it out,” Rick soothed him, giving him gentle pats on his back and wincing as Morty’s muscles tensed with effort. “You- you’re gonna- you’ll feel better without so much booze in you.”

“Ohhh god,” Morty whined, and threw up again.

“There, that’s- that’s good,” Rick said. “You- you’re a good kid, Morty.”

When Morty finally finished emptying his stomach on the ground, Rick pulled the door open and helped him into the ship, settling him on the bed in the back with a bottle of water. Rick sat up front, internally seething over how royally he’d fucked up. He was supposed to be trying to teach Morty how to get by out here without making the same mistakes he had, not push him into making the exact same mistakes-

His watch blipped at him. He stared at it hollowly. The only treatment he had been able to come up with could only by time, maybe extend his life by a few weeks, but he was determined to have as much time with his grandson as possible. The alarm on his watch was a reminder that it was time.

He pressed his hand to a panel under the dash that blended seamlessly, completely hidden, another little secret space for smuggling smaller valuables. The handprint detection mesh scanned him and the panel opened. He pulled out a case and, opening it, removed a dermal injector that held a faintly glowing pink fluid. Grimacing, he pressed the business end of the thing into the crook of his elbow and grimaced at the sharp pressure of the nanite-suspension fluid entering his body. He shuddered, his body lighting up with microscopic pinpricks of pain as the nanites circulated and activated, each one attempting a repair somewhere in his ravaged body. It would buy time, and that was all; there was too much damage for the amount of nanites that his body could safely process at once time, and too little left to be fixed.

“Jeez, Rick, don’t- don’t you- shooting up is kind of extreme,” Morty said, hanging dazedly over the seat with an unfocused look on his face, the water bottle half empty and dangling from his fingers.

“It’s okay, Morty, just go to sleep.”

“I can’t,” Morty whined. “My skin feels like it’s sc-screaming.”
Rick sighed, then turned and pushed Morty back to make room as he climbed over the seat to join him. Morty burrowed into his side as he stretched out on the bed, dark mop of curls brushing his face as Morty’s head pillowed on his shoulder. Morty’s lips pressed wetly against his collarbone; not an attempt to kiss him (again,) Rick decided, but just sort of mooshed there, warm breath and drool on his skin. Morty’s hand clenched in his shirt.

He thought back to that disastrous kiss in the club. It was awkward, uncoordinated, little more than a dry press of lips with enough pressure to mash his lips against his teeth, and somewhat off-center of the mark. Morty probably wouldn’t remember it. Rick thought he might be cursed to remember it forever, even though his forever was short; it was proof that he’d gotten his grandson way too fucked up tonight, and that he had probably fucked up his grandson in general. No grandchild should want their grandfather that way, especially a pathetic old dying one, an unsalvageable wreck like Rick.

Even if Rick had liked it. Even if it had sent a shock down his spine and made his guts clench in a way that Rick knew better than to write off as an effect of the drugs… because it wasn’t the first time Rick had felt that way around Morty.

"Rick,” Morty whimpered. “It- it hurts… help…”

“Shhh, Grandpa’s got you, buddy,” he whispered.

He pulled Morty close against his side and slipped a hand under his shirt to rub his back. He’d done stardust before, and knew simple skin contact would be enough. He could feel Morty’s dick hard against his hip, but at this point the kid was in too much discomfort to do anything with it, and probably wasn’t even aware of it. None of this was doing anything for Rick either, thankfully; the nanoserum had purged his intoxication to a fairly low level. Just as well; though Rick didn’t believe in hell, taking advantage of his grandson would probably cause the multiverse to create one especially for him.

Morty sighed gently against his neck.

"Better?” he asked, and Morty gave a tiny nod and mumbled sleepily.

“Hm?”

“Love you, old man.”

The words were almost too soft to hear, almost, but Rick heard them, his heart stuttering as Morty’s breathing evened out in sleep. He stared up through the bubble of the ship’s canopy, into the night sky hanging overhead, the stars twinkling faintly through the planetoid’s atmosphere. Seeing stars like that, Rick thought, was like seeing the eyes of someone treasured sparkling with love, or with tears. His own eyes welled and tears slid silently from their corners.

Morty deserved so much more from him. More of everything; more time, and for Rick to be better. Better than he was. Better than this. Morty deserved everything.

It was fitting that such a person be called a loved one, because Rick had exactly that: one.

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Morty woke to the light of day piercing his skull. He sat up slowly, looking around through barely cracked eyes. Rick was asleep beside him, snoring softly, face slack, last night's eyeshadow streaked and smearing. There was a bit of Morty's own red, glittery makeup smudged on Rick's shoulder. He was curled on his side, their legs tangled together, and Morty realized his grandfather
had been curled around him, almost protectively.

An odd syringe lay on the front seat, and he had a vague memory of seeing Rick use it the night before.

He scrunched his eyes shut as the memory made his heart ache, laid back down, and tucked his head under Rick’s arm, burying his face in his grandfather’s chest, where it was dark.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who has been commenting and has left kudos! It means a lot to get such great feedback. You are awesome.

This chapter comes with a bonus song that isn't part of the regular playlist, because I needed help writing a clubbing scene:

Lady Gaga: Venus

And from the regular playlist, for the rest of it:

Elliott Smith: 2:45 AM
Sunrise

Chapter Summary

Late at night, as he lay in the back of the ship, as it sat parked on some alien world or floated lazily in deep space, Morty felt his concerns coming back. But if the man sleeping next to him wouldn’t tell him, concretely, what was going on, what could Morty do but try to find sleep himself?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Dawn crested the rim of the world, tinting the alien sky in shades of lavender and green, as a cool morning breeze rustled through tall, grassy plants, their dark blue stalks waving budded orange tips in the air. Morty perched on the front of the ship, leaning back against the rounded dome of the vessel, the soles of his shoes gripping the metal. His sketchbook rested against his knees, and he shaded colors into the sky of a landscape he had sketched the evening before.

Rick had taken him to several such worlds in the month since the ill-advised nightclub incident, worlds that were, by comparison to Rick’s usual standards, rather safe and tame. Morty decided it was some form of atonement, since he was sure the scientist was bored, but to his surprise Rick never expressed dissatisfaction with these peaceful locales, and Morty wasn’t complaining. Each place they went was more beautiful than the last, and his sketchbook boasted dozens of drawings; scenery, like he colored now, and more detailed sketches of plants, animals, and people, and sometimes rocks, and many times his grandfather as well. Each drawing was a little better than the last, and Morty had redone a few of the earlier efforts that he’d particularly liked.

Rick had taken notice of his artistic proclivities, and after a stop for supplies, a set of colored pencils had appeared on the front seat of the ship. They were truly wondrous, containing colors Morty knew well alongside some he didn’t know the names for, and some shades had a shimmery effect, and a few glowed; these he particularly liked, because they were so unlike anything he could have found on Earth.

“Don’t- just- don’t put those in your m- mouth, Morty,” Rick had cautioned when Morty had first examined them. That was added to the lessons Morty was picking up along the way.

No more drugs had been made the third lesson, the morning after that unfortunate night, when Rick had stammered an apology that seemed, horribly to Morty, near tears. Rick held to that as well, with the exception of the strange, glowing pink fluid in the high-tech syringe. Morty had a theory that, whatever it was, it kept Rick from being so dependent on other substances, owing to how little Rick was hungover that morning. Rick still drank, but seemed to be drinking less, which Morty thought made his belief all the more reasonable.

Or maybe the stuff Rick loaded into the syringe was just his new drug of choice. But Morty noticed that his grandfather didn’t appear to be high after injecting himself, though he often tried to do so privately, discreetly putting distance between Morty and himself when his watch beeped a reminder at him. It was this more than anything that made Morty think this wasn’t just another quest for a high; Rick was basically a hedonist, and if it was something he liked, he would have likely done it as often as he felt like rather than on a schedule.
Morty also entertained the thought that it could be medication of some kind, but he didn’t like to think about that possibility too much. Yes, his grandfather was aging, but Morty couldn’t quite make himself believe there was anything the old man couldn’t fix. In any case, Rick avoided his questions on the matter, insisting everything was fine, and Morty let himself believe it.

Late at night, as he lay in the back of the ship, as it sat parked on some alien world or floated lazily in deep space, Morty felt his concerns coming back. But if the man sleeping next to him wouldn’t tell him, concretely, what was going on, what could Morty do but try to find sleep himself?

The sky finished, Morty picked up another pencil and colored a bright purple tree.

Movement out of the corner of his eye caught his attention. Rick climbed out of the ship, stretching as his joints popped, then leaned over to look at Morty’s drawing, his elbows resting on the ship’s hull.

“You’re- you’re really getting good,” he commented. “Got the light- the- the angle of the light is just right.”

“Thanks,” Morty said, smiling, as he started adding color to the grassy plants. “We’ve- we’ve been some really cool places. I had a lot- a lot of stuff to draw.”

There had truly been some amazing worlds on their journey. He had drawings from a world where the rivers blazed with fire, feeding on some chemical that naturally ignited in the water, blazing bright against blue-black ground. Another world had been strewn with gorgeous crystal formations and populated with little animals that also seemed to be made of rock-crystals, and he had delighted in sketching their many facets and shapes.

He liked drawing landscapes in different times of day, too. On this world, he had captured the dawn; on the world with the fire-rivers, he’d drawn the flowing flame glowing in the darkness of night. He had a lot of drawings from the gem world; beams of light bounced from planes of crystal by day, and starlight sparkled in glassine surfaces at nighttime.

The ship had quickly become a home, he and Rick sharing the space and sleeping curled up and tangled in each other in the back more often than not. It was while Rick slept, or sometimes when Rick wandered off to look around, that Morty worked on drawings of his grandfather. He didn’t want Rick to see some of these, drawn when the old man wasn’t looking; in some, he was asleep, in others, messing with some gadget or other. In one, Morty had drawn him furtively injecting himself with that odd fluid, thinking his grandson didn’t see him. In another, drawn when Rick thought Morty was sleeping, Rick stared into the expanse of space, eyes haunted, a tear tracing his cheek.

Morty was working on two in secret now. One featured Rick in his clubwear, but Morty had added the goggles and a little dinosaur. Rick would probably spit tacks at him if he saw it.

The other featured Rick’s shadowed, imposing silhouette wrapped in the swirling green glow of a portal. When Morty closed his eyes, he could always picture Rick like this: powerful and badass, preparing to step into the unknown. Fearless.

As Morty had added details to this particular drawing, his heart swelled painfully with the realization that Rick was, and would forever be, his greatest hero. His rock, his hard place, his guiding light, his inner darkness. Human, vulnerable, yet enduring, everlasting in Morty’s eyes. His greatest strength and his greatest weakness.

His greatest love.
It was an emotion that welled in him constantly, and tangled with itself; familial love for his grandfather wrapping around and struggling with an overwhelming other kind of love for the man.

If they woke to find that Morty had wrapped himself in Rick’s arms, or that Rick’s head was tucked into Morty’s shoulder, they never discussed it, yet kept tangling together like the emotions that twisted up in Morty’s heart. As long as it was excused as the inevitable contact of a close quarters sleeping arrangement, Morty need not worry that his grandfather might see his true feelings and pull away from him in disgust.

Morty finished the drawing, one of a few he’d made of this particular world, letting it pull him back from his echoing thoughts.

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Rick let his attention wander as Morty skillfully drew. This region of this world had a softness to it, a gentleness that was unmatched by any place they had been. Little motes of dust floated and drops of dew clinging to the plants glistened in the morning light, which had slipped from lavender to a peachy glow. He remained aware of his grandson in his periphery as he took it all in. This was what he wanted, for Morty to see everything that was beautiful, everything that was good.

He made his way to the back of the ship and opened the rear hold, spreading out various materials on the makeshift worktable. He was low on components for the nanoserum that sustained him. He’d been able to find or synthesize various substances as needed so far, but the precious nanites could only self-replicate for so many generations before they degraded. He’d have to find a medical-grade supplier, and thanks to the regulations in place on most highly developed worlds, and his own fugitive status, whatever source he found would be less than reputable.

It really wasn’t something he wanted to bring Morty into, but it would quickly become necessary that he do so. He swore softly and set about synthesizing the last batch of the serum.

He watched the pink fluid trickle into the beaker. This batch should last him a week, so he would have time to check out sources, find someone perhaps not totally shitty from whom he could make the buy.

When the process finished, he took the beaker in hand and drew a dose up into the syringe, calibrating the nanites to the settings he needed with a push of a button. He set the syringe down and moved to cap the beaker.

His hand trembled.

The tremble became an uncontrollable shake, and the beaker went flying, splattering pink fluid across the back of the ship as it shattered against the metal, the precious nanoserum dripping uselessly onto the ground.

“Fuck!” he yelled, plopping his bony ass on the ground as he clutched his wrist, trying to force the tremor in his hand into submission. His watch began to beep insistently.

“Rick?” Morty called, rounding the vehicle, his voice thick with concern. “Aw jeez, R-rick, are you okay?”

He crouched by his grandfather. The old man was hunched over, his shoulders shuddering, taking shaky breaths as he clutched at his violently spasming hand, his other hand starting to shake where it clung to his wrist.

“Holy shit, Rick!” Morty cried, grabbing Rick by the shoulders and feeling the tremors that
wracked his body. “Wh- what’s happening, Rick? What should I- I do?”

“Get- get the- the injector, M-morty,” Rick wheezed.

Morty scrambled to the back of the ship, his shoes crunching through the broken remains of the beaker as he snatched the syringe from Rick’s little worktable in the trunk.

“Okay, how do I-“

“Just… against skin… and push…”

Rick’s hands were shaking too much for Morty to pull up the sleeve of Rick’s lab coat, so he pressed the tip of the syringe to Rick’s neck and pressed the large button on the end. The injector latched onto Rick’s flesh and hissed as the fluid rushed out of the chamber. Rick cried out through gritted teeth as his whole body jerked in pain, the nanites flooding his system, and slumped against Morty. His grandson wrapped long arms around him, clinging to him, babbling anxiously as the tremors slowed and finally stopped.


“I’m- I’m good, kid,” Rick wheezed at last. “You did- you did good.”

Morty squeezed him tighter, burying a hand in Rick’s hair. Rick sighed and closed his eyes. The nanites made him feel like hell as they did their work, and he wasn’t above letting himself sink into the gentle comforts of his frightened grandson.

“Rick,” Morty’s voice came out shaking. “You scared the sh-shit out of me. Wh- what’s going on?”

Rick took a moment to answer. He would have to come clean at some point. Morty deserved the truth. But somehow, in that moment, it was too hard to say my neurons are deteriorating and I’m going to die soon.

“It’s alright,” he said finally. “Grandpa’s just got- I’ve just got some- some stuff going on and- and I need that pink stuff- I need that pink shit to treat it.”

“Oh jeez, Rick,” Morty whispered.

“Don’t- don’t get all dramatic, Morty,” Rick sighed, pushing away. “It- it doesn’t feel too good, ob- obviously, but it- it’s- I’m fine, Morty.”

Rick staggered to his feet, feeling the weight of the lie hanging in the air even as Morty gave him a shaky, relieved smile.

“Here’s- here’s the thing- the last batch of that- of that stuff- I dropped it, Morty,” he said, helping Morty up from the ground. “So we’re gonna have to- we gotta go somewhere to get more. We gotta- the place we gotta go- it’s a real shithole, Morty.”

“Aw jeez, Rick,” Morty rubbed a hand through his own hair and actually scuffed a foot on the ground, honestly, Rick thought fondly, this kid, who actually does that? “It’s- it’s not like we haven’t been to- to some pretty bad places b- before. It’s n- n- no big deal, right?”

“Yeah,” Rick lied again. “It’s no big deal.”

---
They left behind that peaceful world, with its gentle sunrise and delicately waving plant stalks, and traveled through the depths of space for most of the day. Morty worked on some of his sketches to pass the time. Rick spent the trip mostly in pensive silence, though he did take a nap for a while as the autopilot guided the ship.

“Okay, Morty, I know- I know I said it was no big deal,” Rick said as they reached their destination, descending through the atmosphere. “But I- I want you to stay in the car, Morty. This place- it’s dangerous. No fucking- no fucking around here, got it?”

Rick’s face was set with grim determination. Morty couldn’t help but feel nervous if his grandfather was that worried about this place. He’d been in a lot of tough situations in his life of adventures, and normally he would make a fuss about being told to stay behind, but if Rick was that concerned…

“Yes, for- for sure, Rick,” he agreed. “But, uh, are you… are you gonna be okay? What if- what if something happens? What if you have another, uh, another attack down there?”

“I’ve got- I’ve got a few hours before I need another dose, and- and I- and that doesn’t mean anything will- I won’t just automatically start flopping around if I miss one, Morty. It comes and goes.”

“But-”

“Morty. I’ll be fine. It- it’ll go quicker if I’m not watching- watching your six with- with these guys, Morty. They’re bad news. I didn’t want to come here but- I fucked up dropping that last batch of serum, and I- I don’t have a whole lot of options at- at this point.”

Truthfully, Rick didn’t want these particular contacts to set eyes on his grandson. Giving them any leverage over him would not be a good idea. On this world, everything was for sale, everyone had a price, and if they thought they could find a way to buy Rick, they would do it. And if they got Morty, he would sell out to them in a heartbeat, because losing his grandson wasn’t a price he was willing to pay.

The clouds fell away, leaving Morty to stare in awe at the dark world below.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who left kudos/comments! I didn't intend to go a week without posting, but it's been a pretty cruddy week and you should know your appreciation has sustained me.

Ludovico Einaudi: Numbers
Abyss (1)

Chapter Summary

Time crept by, seconds and minutes stretching into inches and feet, too intolerable in their slowness for appropriate systems of measurement. At first, Morty was terrified, then he was bored, then he nearly dozed off.

Chapter Notes

TW: violence. Kind of an action chapter. More of this to come.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The city sprawled across the surface of the planet, wrapping around the horizon. Morty thought it might, in fact, cover the planet’s entire surface. Here, on the nightside, lights in every possible color, but favoring various neon shades, gleamed across the cityscape. And the giant city had not just breadth but depth; the lights descended into chasms between the dark outlines of buildings that disappeared into murky fog at the bottom. At least he thought it was the bottom, but he couldn’t say for sure how deep it really went.

A distortion in space hung above the rim of the world, a gaping maw of darkness lined with red which, to Morty, just looked unsafe, being so close to a planet. Yet at they hit the atmosphere, he had seen the small shapes of spacecraft, glinting in sunlight from the system’s star, now on the far dayside of the world, coming and going through the anomaly, so Morty could only assume that whatever it was, it went somewhere.

The bustling space traffic around the world gave Morty the impression that the entire planet was a massive port city, some kind of a trade hub, a busy nexus of commerce. Yet, the overall effect was as high-tech as it was shifty-looking; as they drew closer, slowing to wind though mazes of buildings, he noticed that everything seemed a bit run down and rather dirty. It was all dark corners and paths dimly lit by the glow of an occasional neon sign. Some aliens wended their way here and there along treacherous looking catwalks that seemed to serve the function of sidewalks, flying vehicles of smaller space-faring and atmospheric-only flight capabilities moving through the spaces between much like streets stacked vertically, layer upon layer. He had seen cities configured this way before, but never on such a scale. Even close up, he couldn’t see the bottom of the metropolitan canyons.

He couldn’t help but notice that the people here hurried, eyes or whatever served for their visual capacities turned away from each other or, even more off-putting, glaring with unspoken menace. The whole place reeked of danger on a level Morty had never experienced, and he was starting to understand why Rick wanted him to wait with the ship.

“Rick, this place… it’s so…” he trailed off, at a loss for words.

“Yeah, it’s- the aesthetic here is very Bladerunner,” Rick replied flatly. “Watch out for electric sheep.”
“Um… what?” Morty stared at him.

“Well, you need to read more. Seriously, I’m gonna- I’m going to give you a reading list.”

Morty’s mouth drooped cluelessly as they dipped lower through the architectural strata. The lower they went, the seedier it got. The air was murkier too; it was starting to look foggy all around, limiting visibility in the distance and diffusing the bright colors of the lights. Even with the splashes of color, the mist looked distinctly unclean.

“Alright, Morty, take- take a look- see that place three levels down with the blue sign?”

Morty nodded.

“That’s where I’m going. Don’t- don’t, under any circumstances, follow me in there.”

Rick landed the ship on a dingy, barely lit platform that seemed to serve as a parking lot.

“I’m serious, Morty. Stay in the ship,” Rick said, slipping a plasma blaster into his lab coat. “The people here will- they’ll gut you like a fish for the value of your- of your fucking toenails, Morty, and then they’ll sell the rest of you to really cash out. You know how to activate the ship’s defense protocols?”

“Uh… maybe?” Morty’s uncertainty was growing.

“You say, ‘activate defense protocols.’”

“Activating protocol: wreck their shit,” the ship chimed in, and panels on the hull slid back to reveal reasonably large gun turrets.

“Fuck! Not now! Put those away, this is way too high profile,” Rick snapped.

“Canceling defense protocol,” the ship replied contritely, and the gun barrels retreated.

“Being invisible is your first- your first line of defense, Morty,” Rick said. “Just- just stay here, and keep the lights off. If we’re lucky, no one will even notice you’re here.”

“W- wouldn’t I be safer with you?” Morty asked. Rick’s eyes narrowed.

“If you would be safer with me, that’s- that’s where you’d be. Don’t leave the car. I’ll be back in- in an hour. Couple hours, tops.”

“What if…” ”… you don’t come back? Morty couldn’t bring himself to say.

“I’ll come back,” Rick said anyway. “I’ve got- I’ve got this, Morty.”

And with that, he left, sealing Morty in the ship, sitting in the dark on the parking platform.

---

Time crept by, seconds and minutes stretching into inches and feet, too intolerable in their slowness for appropriate systems of measurement. At first, Morty was terrified, then he was bored, then he nearly dozed off.

And someone knocked on the dome of the ship, startling a choked scream from his throat.

An alien stood there, apparently female or similar, though her skin was a livid chartreuse green
and she had an extra row of breasts. Morty could see this because she was dressed... well, like a hooker, he supposed. Her flesh bulged pertly from bra-like articles of clothing that looked leathery and were lined at the top of the cups with some kind of blue fur that matched a little cropped vest covering her shoulders.

“You,” she said, her voice muffled by the glass. “You’re human.”

Morty just stared. She looked around shiftily.

“You’re here with the Rick.”

She didn’t state it as a question, so he didn’t reply.

“If you give a shit, and I’m not assuming you do, you’ll come with me now.”

“What?” Morty squeaked. “Look, no offense but I don’t know you.”

“All you need to know is that he’s been set up. He’s going to be taken. We have to stop it.”

“Why should I believe you?” he asked skeptically.

“He means something to you? Then you help me,” she said. “Come with me or don’t. I don’t have any more time. I cannot allow him to be captured.”

Morty froze for a second, then opened the door of the ship.

“Reminder of directive: stay in the car, Morty,” the ship urged. Morty ignored her.

“Okay, I’ll help. But how do you know Rick?” he asked as he got out.

“I don’t,” the alien replied. “Follow me.”

She took two steps, and the block of buildings was rocked with the deafening roar of an explosion.

---

The bar three levels down was a blown out ruin, walls charred and parts of it on fire.

“Oh fuck. Oh fuck, Rick,” Morty gasped, looking down from the parking lot’s catwalk. “Oh Jesus. Oh fucking- fuck!!”

He fell backward, landing on his ass, and clutched his head in his hands.

“Get up. We have to move,” the alien said coldly.

“Fuck you!” Morty cried. “Rick’s fucking dead!”

“He’s not dead,” she told him. “He’s too valuable to kill, and if they were going to do it, they would have done it quietly. This much collateral damage means they’re trying to disguise his absence. It’ll take weeks to sort out the body parts down there. Get up.”

She yanked him to his feet, and he followed as she dragged him from the parking lot into a tunnel that led into the building. She didn’t stop until they reached an elevator, albeit a high-tech, Star-Trek-like one.

“Act casual. Eyes down. Do not look directly at security cameras,” she instructed. “You’re either
going to end up dead or you’ll leave, but I have to live here and you’re not going to get heat on my asses, understand?”

“Uh, yeah. Yeah, sure,” Morty replied. He was still reeling from the explosion, and only the proffered hope that Rick still lived kept him on his feet.

“Good. Don’t speak again until I tell you to. It isn’t safe here.”

“No shit,” Morty muttered.

“I said, do not speak,” she snapped, but he thought he saw her mouth quirk up in a smile for just a second.

They descended in the elevator-pod through a few dozen levels until the elevator tube ended. When they emerged, they stepped into what Morty could only call a slum. It was filthy, and aliens of countless varieties sat huddled in the hallways and on catwalks outside, dressed in rags and sleeping under garbage, which was piled in corners. Many of them looked like they were sick or possibly dying. Morty wasn’t even sure one of the sleeping bodies they passed was even still alive anymore.

The ‘air’ at this level was barely even breathable outside. They couldn’t see more than a few feet in any direction, and the gap between buildings was a wall of fog. No vehicles flew down here. Gone were the brightly colored lights of the upper levels; light down here was thrown from red light bars that flickered undependably, probably an emergency lighting system left to run far too long, and some were burnt out entirely, leaving long stretches of darkness at random points.

Rickety service ladders, like old, rusted fire escapes, took them a handful of levels lower, and here there were actually fewer vagrants. It seemed not even they were willing to descend this far.

“You may speak now, but quietly,” she said at last. “It is unlikely we will be overheard down here, but not completely impossible.”

Morty peered into the thick fog beyond the railing.

“How far down is the bottom? What’s down there?” he asked.

“No one knows,” she shrugged. “No one has seen it, and no one wishes to. Something – or someone – down there eats people, we think.”

Morty gaped at her.

“Some who are born down here live their lives in the fog, never seeing the sky. Their lives are short, violent, and ultimately meaningless,” she added. “My profession affords me some upward mobility. I have an elevator pass.”

She led him through a tunnel.

“How far down is the bottom? What’s down there?” he asked.

“Are you a, um… are you a p- prostitute?” he asked as he followed her through endless twists and turns.

“I am a sex worker, yes. It is perhaps not the most respected of professions, but a legitimate one, here. I am given the impression that it is not so on most worlds,” she explained. “This is a world built upon dishonesty and exploitation, but my living is at least an honest one.”

“Were you born here?”
“I was not. I was sold here, but I escaped. I could not, however, escape the planet itself. That requires greater access than a ‘prostitute’ may gain.”

They stopped at a heavy, metal door, its surface pitted and corroded, presumably a result of the atmosphere, and Morty spared an unpleasant thought for what it might be doing to his lungs. His sinuses had been burning since they’d left the elevator.

“What’s your name?” he asked.

“You may call me Shara, though it isn’t my name. There are no real identities here.”

“I’m Morty,” he said. “It- it really is my name. I don’t have a fake one.”

“No one cares,” she said, pausing in consideration. “But, I thank you. Your attempt at courtesy is… unusual.”

A panel in the door slid back, and four suspicious eyes peered out.

“He’s with me,” she stated sharply, and the panel snapped shut.

The door creaked open, admitting them. It slammed shut, and Morty took in his surroundings. Beings as varied as he’d seen so far on this world loitered around the room, some at tables, some along the walls, many of them dressed similarly to Shara. The room was shabby, but far better than the outside would have suggested. He also noticed immediately that there were a lot of weapons in the room, sleek plasma rifles of several types and origins of manufacture, and presumably smaller arms hidden on the occupants. And… was that a rocket launcher in the corner?

“Welcome to the Resistance,” Shara said.

---

Morty soon found himself in a command center, staring at a fairly impressive holographic readout of building schematics.

“The crime syndicates that have long held power on this world have been superseded by contingents of post-Federation Gromflomite mercenaries,” Shara explained for his benefit. “After the fall of the Federation, the Gromflomites began selling their services to any whose currency still held value. Life under the dominion of the syndicates was miserable enough, but since the takeover, conditions have deteriorated in the extreme. Most troubling of all, we don’t know who the Gromflomites are working for.”

Shara glanced at him sideways.

“We believe they expected your Rick, or a Rick, to come here at some point. It was your Rick who brought the Federation to its knees, was it not?”

“Uh… yeah. It was.”

“Make no mistake, no more would we have wished to live under the heel of the Federation more than any other. We hold no grudge for this action, though it has had a chartrutka effect on our world. I apologize, I do not know what you would call this. It is a game with tiles which, when tipped, knock down a further succession of tiles.”

“Oh. Yeah, we have that too. We call it dominoes. A domino effect.”
“Dom-in-o,” she said thoughtfully. “Yes. In any case, though we do not know to what purpose the Rick was captured, we cannot allow his scientific knowledge to remain in Gromflomite hands. Or, rather, claws. We had hoped to avoid this with your intercession. Had he simply walked out of the bar with you and flown away in your ship, we would not be here, now. Yet here we are.”

She gestured to the schematic.

“This is the building where we believe the Rick is being held captive. It is the Gromflomite headquarters. Our objective is to liberate the Rick, or destroy the building and all within.”

“You can’t! You’ll kill him!” Morty yelped.

“I did say we would attempt liberation, did I not? Some key members of our Resistance are also held prisoner there. This is a rescue mission for our own. We have been planning it for some time. The abduction of your Rick has required us to adjust our timeframe.”

“Uh, by how much?”

She grinned at him, cold and shark-like, far from a hooker with a heart of gold. More like a heart of steel.

“To the immediate present. This briefing is concluded.”

She pressed a button and an alarm blared through the hideout.

---

Rick regained consciousness in a dark, filthy cell. He was strapped to a metal chair, hands cuffed to the back behind him and his ankles secured to the legs. A Gromflomite stared at him.

The last thing he could remember was making the exchange with his contact. There had been a sharp sting in his neck and an instantaneous fuzziness that had faded to black as he had been taken in a strong grasp and dragged somewhere. He hoped Morty was still in the ship. If the assholes who took him had Morty too…

“He’s awake,” the alien said.

A robotically disguised voice issued from a communicator.

“*Juice him.*”

The Gromflomite picked up something that looked like a cattle prod from a table holding a range of torture implements and jabbed it against Rick’s side. His body jolted, lit up with pain and straining involuntarily against the restraints. The chair didn’t move; Rick assumed it was bolted to the floor in case things got really wild.

“Will you be compliant?” the Gromflomite asked.

“F-fuck you,” Rick spat. “You think I’ve never been strapped to a torture chair before? This is fucking low-rent, amateur hour bullshit.”

The Gromflomite backhanded him, hard, slamming his head sideways. His teeth cut into the flesh of his mouth, and he spat blood. He prodded his teeth with his tongue; two of his molars were a bit wiggly in their sockets.

“You will give us what we want,” the Gromflomite said.
Rick grinned bloody.

“Only if you want me to rip your dick from your body and shove it up your ass.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who left comments/kudos! I'm having a really good time with this and you're all a part of that! I look forward to hearing more from you!

I noticed I've actually had some comments get deleted. I don't know why, and I respect that not all content is everyone's cup of tea, but I hope that person knows I think they're great, no offense was intended in any way, and I hope there are no hard feelings.

Nine Inch Nails: The Background World
Abyss (2)

Chapter Summary

Within minutes, the alien sex workers had readied themselves and the group gathered in a hanger bay at the far end of the building, joined by more from other rooms in the base.

Chapter Notes

TW: violence, torture.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Morty gaped, his mouth slack, at the roomful of people in various states of undress. A row of lockers along the shadowed wall, unnoticed by Morty when he arrived, stood open, and the aliens near them were unloading tactical gear and distributing it around the room as the rest stripped down, unashamed of their nakedness. He noticed amid the constant, distracting jiggling of body parts of all types, representing genders and species he knew of as well as many that were unfamiliar, that a lot of the clothes coming off were a lot like Shara’s. There was leather, vinyl, and fur strewn everywhere.

“Um… is- is everyone here a prosti- uh, a sex worker?” he asked as the penny dropped.

“Many of us, yes,” his alien compatriot replied, taking a stack of gear and handing it to him. “We have a freedom of movement through all societal strata which others lack, and our occupation provides excellent opportunities for information-gathering and recruitment. Put this on.”

He thought to ask for a space to change his clothes, but then thought, when in Rome, and began to strip. The gear consisted of a resilient, yet close-fitting bodysuit that layered beneath pieces of body armor, all a tactical matte black. He put on the heavy combat boots she handed to him, briefly confused by the lack of laces until they self-tightened.

“Oh hey, that’s- that’s pretty neat. Like the Back to the Future that’s actually about, you know, the future.”

Shara gave him an odd look, but handed him a pair of glasses. They wrapped around his face and looked a bit like those super-douchey reflective glasses he’d seen cyclists wearing, but they were tinted red and not reflective at all. He finished getting ready by fastening a tactical belt and placing a small comm unit he was given in his ear.

“Do you know how to use these?”

Shara held an energy pistol and a fairly massive rifle, the type that shot phased plasma blasts.

He took the sidearm and slipped it into a holster at his waist, then took the rifle and powered on the charge bank. The weapon powered up wish a whine that eventually slipped beyond his range of hearing, dim strips of red lighting up along the rifle’s length.
“Yeah.”

Within minutes, the alien sex workers had readied themselves and the group gathered in a hanger bay at the far end of the building, joined by more from other rooms in the base. Shara addressed the crowd.

“You all know the mission. We have an additional parameter: the mercenaries have captured a Rick Sanchez. He must not remain in their hands, and will be retrieved at any cost.”

The assembled crowd murmured. No wonder Rick hadn’t wanted to come here; he was way too high profile on this world. Shara gestured toward Morty.

“This is one of his associates, and will be assisting in the assault. His codename is Domino.”

Morty looked at her in surprise.

“Proceed to your designated speeder. Operation: Trick-Roll begins now.”

Hands, claws, and tentacles tightened around their guns as the assembled troops scattered to their posts. Morty hustled to follow Shara to one of the light atmospheric craft in the bay.

“Domino?” he questioned.

“I told you. There are no names here. It’s as much for our safety as your own.”

The speeder rumbled as it lifted off the ground, the hangar doors parting with a metallic creak, and shot forward into the murky night.

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The small fleet of atmospheric speeders whipped around corners and sped through the canyons between buildings at a pace that made Morty nauseous, particularly considering that he couldn’t see where they were going. This deep in the fog, the pilots were flying on instruments only, and through his queasiness he had to admit it was impressive. He’d been in some tough scrapes and had done some pretty insane things, but this was some of the most badass flying he had ever seen. If only he could actually see it.

He got his wish as the craft banked sharply to port, tipping him completely sideways as his harness held him in his seat, and then shot upward in a tight spiral that quickly turned into a vertical barrel roll. The fog fell away for the most part, and as towering skyscrapers rotated violently in the viewport and Morty choked back vomit, he decided not being able to see had been the better option.

Pinpoints of starlight clarified as circular streaks in the sky, a brief glimpse as the craft banked again and leveled off, the other craft from the hangar bay executing similar maneuvers and falling into formation, leveling off and racing through a broad pass toward a structure that was massive even by this planet’s standards. The huge black silhouette dwarfed everything around it, broadly spanning the skyline, and as they raced closer, it began to block out the sky.

The sounds of a dozen energy weapons powering on whined through the cabin of the speeder. Morty looked around as different aliens reached up to press a tab on the side of their eyewear, and Morty did the same. A small, glowing readout lit up in the bottom corner of his vision, clocking the distance to the structure, which was counting down faster than he could track it, and the glasses began highlighting strategic points on the building as they came into view.
“I- I don’t see any landing pads,” Morty stammered.

Shara smiled, that same hard-edged grin he’d seen her wear before, and activated a targeting display on her console. Morty felt the craft shudder around him as panels opened to reveal a blaster cannon.

“That’s because we’re not landing yet.”

She highlighted a section of the building on the display and pressed a button, and a massive bolt of energy ripped from the cannon and blasted through the side of the building.

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“I will ask again: what is your dimension of origin?” the Gromflomite asked.

“That’s for me to know and for you to- to suck a fart out of my asshole,” Rick slurred. He inched his butt to the side and broke wind. “There’s your- your appetizer.”

It wasn’t pleasant to laugh with half his face swollen up, but he did it anyway. The socket where one of his molars had finally been knocked free flared with pain before subsiding into the overall tableau of pain that was his body. He was bleeding from at least twelve places, some of them cuts and stab wounds, some burns, and that wasn’t counting the blood that trickled fairly steadily from his mouth.

“Where is your Morty?”

“I don’t have one,” Rick said, his face going cautiously neutral.

“I think we both know that isn’t true. Perhaps you will be more reasonable if we bring him here and show him our… hospitality.”

“Get fucked by your egg-parent, you goddamn space cockroach.” Rick spat a bloody loogie into the Gromflomite’s face.

The alien wiped its face, picked up the thin-bladed knife it seemed to favor, and slipped it into Rick’s flesh. Like every other stab wound, it was placed to miss anything vital, although Rick knew he would eventually bleed to death if he was stabbed much more. And like with every other penetration by the knife, Rick bit back a scream that roiled in his throat.

Unlike every other time, his alien tormentor pulled back and looked around in confusion as an alarm blared throughout the facility.

---

The interior of the mercenary stronghold was chaos. The cannon continued to bombard the structure, blowing away anything that blocked their path. The other speeders poured through the wound in the side of the building after them as a few errant Gromflomites scattered out of the way. One unfortunate mercenary was hit by the speeder head on, and splattered across the viewport like a giant bug on a windshield. Shara grimaced and pressed a button, activating the windshield wipers, smearing away what was left of the Gromflomite.

“Oh fuck! Fuck, that’s fucking gross!” Morty shouted.

“Agreed,” said Shara.

The inside of the building was surprisingly roomy, although it looked to Morty like they were in
some kind of cargo delivery area. That made sense; an organization this size probably needed a lot of basic supplies as well as more specialized inventory, and suppliers probably wouldn’t risk delivering to a lower level out of fear of collision in the fog or theft by the denizens below. Shara blasted the doors off of a cargo delivery shaft so big it could have fit two of the speeders across. Down they went, followed by a few more of the speeders as other craft broke away, presumably to wreak mayhem throughout the building.

They plunged downward, the cannon disintegrating a cargo elevator blocking their way was they shot through the resulting fireball. Shara fired again at a doorway several levels below, and they twisted rapidly through the opening.

This level was different. The security looked better here, everything seemed like it was built of heavier, reinforced material, and areas were gated off with glowing bars of charged energy that reached from the ceiling to the floor.

This was a prison, Morty realized.

“We have breached detainment,” Shara reported over comms.

Smaller guns on the other speeders wiped out the guards in the central area. It was nothing short of a bloodbath. When nothing was left alive, the speeders landed and the rebels swarmed out. A small contingent remained with the speeders while the rest split off into groups, one group operating the central control panel as the rest trooped down corridors as the laser bars were shut off. Shara scanned through information on the readouts.

“Domino. With me,” Shara commanded.

She led him up a service ladder to a doorway that opened onto the upper level of a long detention block, catwalks on either side above the main level below. Shara checked the cell numbers, finding the one she was looking for and blasting through the heavy metallic door.

Morty took in the room with wide eyes. It held torture implements, some of which were scattered on the floor around a metal chair.

The blood on the chair and the floor looked human.

Morty knelt and picked up a scrap of familiar blue fabric. It was exactly like the shirts Rick favored. Blood soaked a tattered edge.

“Fuck,” he whispered. “He was here.”

“He isn’t now,” Shara replied. “We need to move.”

Blaster fire erupted from further down the cellblock, but not the sounds of a firefight; rather, it was a few shots clustered together, a pause, and a repeat of the pattern.

Shara ran toward the sounds.

Morty gave chase and found her outside a row of opened cells. She cleared them frantically. Inside each was a dead alien, recently shot, and each with unhealed wounds from torture. They came upon the last cell.

Inside, a Gromflomite pointed a blaster at an alien the same startling chartreuse as Shara, with the same blue hair. They arrived an instant too late, and the Gromflomite pulled the trigger. The captive alien fell, dead.
Shara screamed, leveled her blaster, and blew the Gromflomite apart with three shots.

She staggered forward, dropping to her knees by the fallen prisoner. Her hands shaking, she caressed what was left of his face, staining her fingers with dark green blood.

She trembled, an agonized wail ripping from her throat.

Morty could only stand watch, helpless; he guarded the catwalk, unsure what to do, but certain he shouldn’t pull her away.

After a moment, she stood, turned her back on the body of her fallen comrade, and stepped from the cell.

“You knew him,” Morty said softly.

“He was my brother,” she replied. “He was my everything.”

“I’m sorry,” Morty said, feeling how hollow the sentiment was.

“We have to find your Rick,” she said, her tone steely once more. “Let’s go.”

---

They had found all of the captured rebels; none were alive. Suddenly, Morty heard a scuffle below.

Three armed Gromflomites moved in formation, guarding a pair of figures between them, a fourth Gromflomite and the tall, blue haired, familiar figure of his grandfather. He was missing his lab coat and his blue shirt was ripped open and bloodied, several bleeding gashes visible on his ashen skin.

Morty hefted his plasma rifle and took aim, the heads-up display in his glasses sighting targets on the figures below, locking on as he lined up his shot and pulled the trigger. The first of the armed guards dropped in pieces without ever knowing he was there.

---

The facility was under attack. Rick was dragged from his cell in cuffs and moved to a lower level, his tormentor calling for backup and an extraction. As he was shoved toward the exit of the prison level, a blast of gunfire ripped through one of the escort guards, distracting the other guards as they returned fire. Rick took his chance and lunged at the Gromflomite responsible for his torture, tackling him to the ground and slinging his arms over the Gromflomite’s head to choke it with his cuffs. The Gromflomite went limp in his grasp, and Rick looked up to see where the gunfire was coming from.

He saw Morty, taking heavy fire, yet calm and determined as he returned fire. Someone else was with him, providing cover fire, but Rick had eyes only for Morty as his grandson dropped the two remaining Gromflomites with a few well-aimed shots. Rick was spellbound; he had never seen Morty so focused, so deadly, like some kind of avenging angel, an impression that was in no way dispelled when Morty clipped a grapple from his belt to the railing and jumped over, dropping to the floor on a long tether.

“Rick!” Morty ran to him, pulling him into a tight embrace.

Rick grunted in pain from his injuries, and Morty pulled away quickly.
“Shit! Rick, I’m sorry, I wasn’t thinking.” Morty looked Rick over worriedly.

“It’s fine,” Rick said. “Look at- take a look at you, though, you- you looked so- so fucking cool up there, Morty! You’re a badass, Morty!”

Rick could feel himself beaming with pride, even though it hurt like hell with his face beaten like it was, and he saw Morty’s cheeks flush red.

“Oh jeez, Rick,” Morty mumbled.

Rick’s Gromflomite captor moaned from the floor and Morty startled, bringing his plasma rifle to bear.

“Oh shit, is that guy still alive?”

“Stand down, Morty,” Rick said. “I have- I’ve got a promise to keep.”

Rick approached the Gromflomite, staring at it for a moment, then knelt and swiftly ripped off part of its exoskeleton. He plunged his hand in, pulling back with something wet and fleshy that tore loose with a squelch. He rolled the Gromflomite over and brutally jammed the organ fisted in his hand into the squealing Gromflomite’s rectal cavity.

“I told- I told you I was gonna rip your dick off and shove- shove it up your ass,” Rick said calmly.

He grabbed Morty’s sidearm from its holster and shot the Gromflomite dead.

Shara, having joined them at some point, watched dispassionately as it all went down.

“Here, thanks,” Rick said, offering Morty his blaster back.

“Uh… You know what, Rick, y- you can just keep that,” Morty replied, staring wide eyed at the dead alien.

“Sweet,” Rick replied, heading for the control room.

---

The rebels were busily stripping the detainment area’s control center of anything valuable and loading it up into the speeders. Rick looked around at the swarming activity before turning to Morty.

“Morty… Correct me if I’m- am I way off base here, or is this an army of hookers?”

“Um. I think they like being called ‘sex workers,’ but… yeah,” Morty replied. “How did you know?”

“At least two of the species here aren’t known for doing much else,” Rick said. “And, I’m not-I’m not looking for judgment here, Morty, but I think I recognize a few of them.”

“Oh,” Morty said. “That’s- um- I don’t really know what to say to that.”

“My grandson rescued me with an army of hookers!” Rick crowed, waving his hands in the air before dropping them to Morty’s shoulders. “Morty. I have literally never been as proud of you as I am right now.”

As Morty stared in blank confusion, Rick swiftly rummaged through a few storage lockers, finally
coming up with his own stuff: his lab coat, his portal gun, and a briefcase, the contents of which he hurriedly checked before closing it and punching coordinates into the portal gun.

“Rick, wait,” Morty said, stopping him from making a portal.

“We- we gotta get back to the ship, Morty,” Rick said, agitated. “We gotta get- we’re getting the fuck outta here.”

“What’s she doing?” Morty asked.

Rick followed his gaze to Shara. She had stared at a large bank of energy conduits before touching the comm in her ear and giving the order to evacuate. The rebels were piling into the speeders, but she wasn’t going with them. Instead her fingers started flying over the control panel.

“Looks like she’s- she’s hacking the prison power grid. Probably gonna set it for an over-load. Come on, Morty, this- this isn’t our fight.”

Morty couldn’t look away, however, so Rick rolled his eyes and rolled up what was left of his sleeves and started tinkering with the conduits as Shara worked the panels. Maybe five minutes went by before Rick declared the job done.

By that time, the rebels were long gone.

“We- we gotta go, Morty, this whole place- it’s gonna blow. The prison level has a- a self-contained grid that’ll- it’ll blow up the whole building but not the- everything around it should be fine.”

“Shara, you’re- you’re coming with us, right?” Morty asked.

“Someone- Morty, the system has failsafes. Someone has to push the override button for- for this to work,” Rick said quietly.

“Your grandfather is correct,” Shara said, taking his hands in hers. “My life ended with my brother. At least now I can die with him, and give his death meaning as well as my own.”

“Shara, no,” Morty cried. “There has to be s- something worth living for.”

“It is not about that,” she said gently. “It is that the freedom of my world is something worth dying for.”

“Shara…”

“My brother is gone. Our time together was stolen from us. Do not allow the same to happen to you.”

She locked eyes with Rick, and he saw in them the same hollowness that he often saw in his own. He nodded to her, a gesture of respect.

“May fate treat you kindly, Morty and Rick.”

She stood on the tips of her toes, her hand at the back of Morty’s neck to bring him to meet her shorter stature, and pressed his forehead to her own.

Rick shot a portal, and Morty stepped through it with him, looking back over his shoulder. The last thing he saw before Shara was gone was the sight of her at the command console, monitoring the overloading power grid, facing her death head-on.
They stepped out of the portal next to the ship, and it closed a second later, and a few moments later, a massive explosion lit up the skyline in the distance.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to those who have left comments/kudos!

Die Antwoord: Banana Brain
Beyond Relativity

Chapter Summary

All sensation of momentum and gravity vanished. Morty felt like he and Rick were blurring together, weightless and slithering, as two liquids in one glass.

Chapter Notes

TW: past homophobia.

Morty could only stare as the fireball rose into the sky, as the remains of the building burned, as it collapsed in on itself under the towering cloud of smoke. He felt so distant from everything around him, as if in another reality. It wasn’t that he had never seen death before; it was that, until this very moment, he’d never fully understood the meaning of real sacrifice.

Dimly, in the back of his mind, he thought that maybe Rick had done something like that for him once, but it was like only a small part of him could remember it. Like maybe only one sixty-fourth of himself, at an age where he hadn’t understood the enormity of what it meant.

Shara had died in the hope that her world could change, and millions could truly live.

Rick’s hand came to rest on his shoulder, bringing him out of his daze.

“I don’t wanna ruin the- the moment here,” Rick stuttered. “But we really gotta get offworld.”

“Did you get what you needed?” Morty asked.

“Yeah. I loaded the equip- equipment- the shit I need to make more serum is in the backseat. I’ll- I’m gonna make more once we’re out of this hellhole.”

“At least this trip wasn’t for nothing,” Morty said hollowly.

“Morty… you- you gotta accept- what your hooker friend did- that wasn’t nothing, Morty.”

Morty turned to meet his grandfather’s gaze. It pained him to see how battered the old man was. And, in that moment, he realized what Shara had done not just for her world, but for him.

“Thanks, Rick,” he said softly. “Let’s get outta here so you can make more serum.”

“Haha, yeah, Grandpa’s gotta- gotta patch up this ugly mug,” Rick laughed.

“It can do that?” Morty followed Rick to the ship.

“Yeah, it’s- it’s good shit, Morty,” Rick said. “We- we’re all prepped for flight. You, uh, you wanna fly us out of here?”
“Really?” Morty perked up a bit.

“Yeah, sure. I can- I’m gonna get to work.”

Rick settled into the passenger seat and leaned over it, adding ingredients to the synthesis machine, then pressing a button. The machine whirred to life as Morty buckled his safety belt and goosed some power into the engines. The ship lifted smoothly off the landing pad. He nosed through the layers of traffic, which at least was a bit thinner than when they had arrived – he assumed a lot of people had gone to ground after the explosion, uncertain of their safety.

As they rose out of the gap between buildings and ascended toward the upper atmosphere, Rick’s eyes widened.

“Morty, look,” he murmured.

Morty chanced a look over his shoulder.

Starbursts of light flared at random points over the surface of the planet in rapid succession.

“Looks like your friend’s rebellion is a pretty big deal,” Rick said, and Morty realized the bursts of light were other buildings blowing up, presumably other targets for the resistance being hit by resistance cells throughout the world.

The comm unit he’d forgotten to take out of his ear crackled to life.

“Domino,” said an unfamiliar voice, “If you’re still in range... know that Shara’s sacrifice will not be forgotten, nor will your aid. The Resistance lives on.”

Morty tapped the comm open.

“Copy that. Thanks for your help. Domino out.”

He tapped the comm off and pulled it out of his ear.


“Yeah, I- I guess I did,” Morty smiled faintly, bittersweet.

“You- you did real good in there, today,” Rick told him. Morty just shrugged.

The serum machine beeped, and Rick loaded up the syringe, injecting himself with the usual assault of pain followed by relief. The relief was twofold this time, as the injuries inflicted on him began to heal. His missing molar was a done deal, nanites wouldn’t bring that back, but the deep, penetrating stab wounds started to heal, leaving only sluggishly oozing surface injuries, and his face unswelled a fair bit with the bitter tingle of his fractured cheekbone knitting back together. His blood volume would replenish with time, now that he wasn’t losing so much.

He turned toward the back seat to stow the serum machine and a few moving glints of light caught his eye. They were moving fast through the upper atmosphere, and gaining on them, he realized as they started getting bigger, quickly resolving from moving points of light to ships in pursuit.

“Morty, fuck, we have company.”

Morty ramped the engines to full as the ships kept closing the distance.

“Lightspeed jump, Rick?” Morty asked. “Or a portal jump in the ship?”
“Neither, the gravitational interference from the wormhole would skew us off course whether we’re going to lightspeed or an interstellar portal jump, fuck knows where we’d end up… Morty! The wormhole, Morty!” Rick’s eyes lit up.

“The what?” Morty yelped as a backward glance showed him how close the Gromflomite ships were. “Oh shit, Rick, we’re fucked!”

“The- that great big fucking space anomaly, Morty!” Rick pointed.

Morty looked and saw it: the gaping black vortex he now remembered seeing upon their arrival, hanging menacingly in space. It hadn’t even been a full night since their arrival, however long a night was on this world, but for Morty it felt like a lifetime ago.

“Just- just fly us into that thing’s fucking maw, Morty, and then we book it when we hit the far end.”

An energy pulse shot past the ship. The enemy was upon them. Morty tightened his grip on the steering yoke.

“Buckle your seatbelt, Rick.”

---

The pursuit ships were relentless, firing energy blasts right and left. Morty deftly whipped the ship from side to side, sending it into an evasive roll and leveling back out only to do it again. He banked hard, skewing out of the line of fire. Rick clutched the serum synthesizer to his chest to keep it from flying loose in the cabin and braining one of them, held into his seat by the safety belt he rarely, if ever, wore.

He was sure as shit glad to be wearing it now.

“Holy fuck, Rick, how do you have guns on the ship that work on a planet but not in space?” Morty cried as one of the ships shot past them only to collide with an unlucky merchant vessel.

“Do you know the size of batteries and power conduits and all that shit that you need to generate an energy stream that can take on a fucking spacecraft, Morty? It’s- the answer you’re looking for is a fuckton, Morty, and the ship just ain’t that big, unless you get your hands on some pretty rare materials that burn out after one shot OH JESUS FUUUUCK!”

One of the ships had outflanked them and was coming at them head-on, and rather than evade to the side, Morty had flown straight for it, the other pursuit ship hot on his ass. He jerked the ship back and forth, dodging fire, and at the last second he pulled up and sideways hard, throwing the ship upward into a tight spin toward the wormhole, the ship shaking with the strain of the maneuver. The two pursuit ships crashed into each other and exploded.

Morty leveled off but didn’t bother reducing speed until the wormhole loomed large in front of them, and even then he eased off only enough to allow time to dodge space traffic coming out of the wormhole. The strain on the ship eased as the wormhole’s pull caught them and drew them forward.

“Fucking hell, Morty, are you trying to make your Grandpa shit his pants?” Rick groaned, leaning back into his seat. He gripped the serum machine with white knuckles, the same as Morty’s grip on the yoke. “Where the hell did you even learn how to do that?”

“I saw some shit today, Rick,” Morty replied, finally slumping back against the seat himself, utterly drained, as the wormhole pulled them in.
“Temporal shielding insufficient for category six wormhole,” the ship chimed in.

“Wait, what?” Morty asked.

“Oh… shit,” Rick said.

The ship crossed the event horizon, and reality melted away.

---

All sensation of momentum and gravity vanished. Morty felt like he and Rick were blurring together, weightless and slithering, as two liquids in one glass. Rick’s consciousness was a strangely level thing, the only fixed point in the breakdown of reality, and Morty clung to it. Rick slid over, into, and through him like bubbles of oil in water, brushes of consciousness merging into a seamless whole. Time had ceased to be and was at once everywhere; Morty felt all he had ever been and all he would ever be condense into a pinpoint of now. Only it wasn’t himself. It was just as much Rick. Images streaked by, beginning to coalesce all at once and in sequence because those were the same thing in this when and here and all.

You’re a real piece of shit a disembodied voice said, gravelly like Rick’s but not the same, and the voice brought pain, and harm, and fear. Morty’s arm seared like a broken bone no daddy please echoed through his head your mother should have died and taken you with her and fuck you, dad and worthless, worthless, worthless and I have a curse for a son.

A blonde woman Diane turned away in a halo of light I can’t take this anymore and slowly dissolved in a cloud of ash and dust why did you have to die and alone never gonna be anything but alone.

Heat sweat skin in the backseat of a car but disappointment came with that fear-bringing voice in his head and awkward fumbling this feels so good but it’s wrong, I’m wrong inside and reaching orgasm with another person for the first time don’t ever forget you’re trash and the other person is a guy this is who I am, dad and cast out thrown away like garbage out in the cold and fucking faggot don’t you dare come back to this house unless you want to die.

Rotting bones in the ground I’m dying I’m gonna die and flesh falling off, turning to dust this is what the end looks like everything dies I’m human after all and there’s so much I haven’t done.

And Morty, Morty, a bright point in a heart long dead Grandpa Rick and I’m a sick fuck and I’ve seen some shit today. Rick and Morty’s a baby and then he’s a shrimpy teenager and then he’s a grown-ass man and when the fuck did that happen and love you, old man and I can’t, I can never, but I want, I want, I WANT and Morty’s smiling and happy and better to just be dead than break this but love you, love you, love you and

I CAN’T EVER I’M A MONSTER I SHOULD DIE I’M A CURSE OF A GRANDFATHER A CURSE OF A SON SHOULD HAVE NEVER BEEN BORN

but then Morty never would be

only good thing I ever did only good thing I ever had only good part of me is him

---

The ship rocketed from the far side like a stone from a slingshot, quickly lapping the distance from the wormhole’s gravity well. Morty crashed back into his consciousness, his body, his self as reality reoriented. He drew a ragged breath and it burned like an eternity of disuse, like he hadn’t
been breathing for centuries.

There were tears on his face and he didn’t know how they got there.

And he needed. Something. He didn’t know what but he looked sideways and there was Rick, and he knew. He scrambled out of his seatbelt and clawed his way to Rick, who dropped the equipment he held as Morty crashed into him.

“Rick. Rick, oh Jesus,” Morty whimpered and he was in Rick’s lap, straddling his bony old hips as long arms wrapped around him.

He mouthed at papery skin that tasted sour with fear-sweat and salty from dried blood.

“Fuck, Morty, fuck, you- you have to stop,” Rick grunted, but his arms didn’t let go.

“Rick, I- I need you,” Morty moaned against Rick’s neck, rolling his hips, half-hard and pressing against Rick’s belly, the stress and grief of the last few hours dampening his arousal but doing nothing to quell the sheer want echoing through his brain.

“Morty, you don’t- you don’t want this, I’m a shitty- a broken old man. This is- it’s a side effect of the- it’s-,” Rick sighed, his breath hot against Morty’s ear, before pushing him back just slightly.

“Morty, look- look at me. You- you’re all jacked up on wormhole.”

“But, Rick…” Morty couldn’t make himself say he’d felt this way for a long time, fear of recriminations beginning to reassert themselves.

“It’ll wear off,” Rick said gently. “I- I feel it too, Morty, but it- it’s gonna go away, I promise, it’ll stop soon.”

“Rick,” Morty said shakily. He’d had feelings for Rick for ages, but Rick was right; the driving urge to act on them was receding, and Morty’s face burned with shame even as tears started to fall from his eyes once more. “Rick… I felt you dying.”

Rick exhaled heavily and closed his eyes, pulling Morty to him so that Morty’s head rested on his shoulder.

“It’s just the wormhole, baby, come- come here,” he said, holding Morty close.

“It f- felt so r- real,” Morty sobbed.

“I know it did, wormholes make you- they make you see some- some trippy shit,” Rick said soothingly. “It’s gonna be okay, Morty, it’s- it’s- you’re alright, I’ve got you.”

Rick reached out a long arm and tapped a course heading into a control panel, engaging the ship’s autopilot, before settling his hand on Morty’s head and carding gently through his hair.

“I know somewhere- a- a place we can go lay low for a while, how does- how does- does that sound good?” Rick murmured.

“Yeah, Rick,” Morty responded softly. He raised a trembling hand to Rick’s face, thumbing just below the split skin that still graced his grandfather’s cheek. “Rick, you’re s- still bleeding.”

“It’s no big deal- it- it doesn’t matter, Morty,” Rick brushed it off. “It’ll heal on it’s own.”

Morty twisted to the side, fumbling for a small first aid kit stored in a compartment in the dash. He dug out some gauze pads and antiseptic, and soaked a pad in the fluid before gently dragging it
across Rick’s wound. Rick hissed slightly at the sharp sting, but he didn’t flinch; as pain went, it barely registered compared to everything else he’d just endured.

“Sh- shouldn’t these have been healed by- by the serum, Rick?”

“Yeah, well, I was due for- it was time for a dose any- anyway, for the- uh- for the other thing,” Rick replied. “It’s a divided- it can only do so much on two fronts.”

Morty’s brow furrowed and for a moment, Rick thought Morty was about to call him out on how serious the other thing actually was. But Morty said nothing, and instead, pushed Rick’s lab coat off and tugged away the tattered remains of Rick’s shirt, mapping out the remaining cuts and burns on Rick’s body. Rick was right, the deeper wounds were only bleeding minimally thanks to the serum, but he still cleaned each wound with care, bandaging those that were still seeping.

Rick felt guilt welling up within himself. He’d lied to Morty, again, and this time it was about so much more than his failing health. But nothing could change the fact that he was Morty’s grandfather, that he was wrong to feel the attraction toward Morty that he did, and, even if it somehow wasn’t wrong, even if he wasn’t a sick fuck for feeling that way, that didn’t change the bald, ugly truth that he was just plain sick. Even if Morty somehow really did have the same kind of feelings for him – and he wasn’t fucked up enough to wish that Morty did, because that wasn’t a burden he wanted Morty to have to bear – even if that was the case, Morty deserved a hell of a lot better than a dying man who couldn’t even be honest with him about the fact that he was going to die.

So Rick did the only thing he could do; when Morty finished cleaning his wounds, he pulled him close again, bringing him to rest against his own shirtless body (he didn’t see much point in staining another shirt when some of the bandages inevitably bled through.) As the night’s exhaustion caught up with his grandson, Rick stretched his long legs into the driver’s seat and laid back, stuffing the blood-smeared labcoat in a wad under his head, and let Morty curl up around him, his upper body draped over Rick’s torso.

Morty let sleep claim him as he listened to the steady beating of Rick’s heart.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who has left kudos/comments! GhostyGirl01, I slipped a little TLC in here for you in thanks for your support of this story!

Metric: Satellite Mind
Starlight

Chapter Summary

Rick was starting to cry, tears leaking from his eyes and trailing down his cheeks unchecked like he wasn’t even aware of them. Morty’s heart ached for his grandfather, who was making great strides toward getting drunk, beginning to sway slightly where he sat.

Chapter Notes

TW: mentions of possible animal cruelty, discussion of mental illness, cultural insensitivity (though let's be honest, that shit is real and awful.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The stars slid by overhead (a relative term in space; the view would technically be the same below, Rick knew,) lengthened into streaks by the ship's speed of travel. Really, it was just a lot of thin lines whipping by in Rick’s field of vision through the ship’s canopy. They weren’t really keeping him awake; he was far too accustomed to the sight, bored, even, but still, he didn’t sleep. He was preoccupied with his thoughts, and with the sleeping body on top of him.

Rick wouldn’t call himself a cuddler. Even in his reunion with Unity, it was mostly slinging an arm over the shoulders of some of herselves to take them away to a bedroom or some other space with flat surfaces, followed by a lot of messy groping and fucking, and that was more or less picking up where their previous relationship had left off. Unity did intimacy, it was basically her whole deal, because unifying disparate individuals into a hive mind was an intimate thing. Hell, it was nothing but intimacy, and Rick had often thought he was playing with fire, there, wondering how long it would be before his single-mindedness, both in the sense of being a separate entity and in the sense of his own self-involvement, wore out its welcome and bit him in the ass. Truthfully, her attraction to that mystique of otherness was always what drew her to him each time, and his inability to ever be more was what inevitably tore them apart.

He never knew for sure what he got out of it. Redheads, giraffes, and rubbing his debauchery in the faces of surrogates for his shitty father aside, what had he really been after? Maybe Unity had always been a sort of safety net; she had, at various points in time, anywhere from thousands to millions of minds to guide within her collective, so if she was never capable of being alone, she wasn’t going to be all that hurt when he inevitably left. She was bulletproof, or so he’d always assumed.

But she was slumming it, with him, and he was toxic to anything he even marginally cared about, so it had always blown up in his face. She had always deserved better.

Much like Morty deserved better, except Morty wasn’t the antithesis of loneliness. Morty was a lonely kid who only had Rick, and those were some terrifying stakes. Especially when Rick didn’t have any option but to let him down. Grandfather, lover, it didn’t matter. There just wasn’t time left to give.
The rise and fall of Morty’s chest against his own kept him grounded on that train of thought. There was no hiding from it. He couldn’t even reach his booze at the moment to drink his thoughts away.

The wormhole, honestly, had been a fucking horrible idea, but, again, it had been the only option. Going through that experience with Jerry hadn’t hit him this bad, synaptic dampeners be praised, because if he’d gotten this much of Jerry in his head he’d have had to carve bits of his own brain out with a fucking spoon. In truth, he barely remembered most of it, although he was left with some nagging questions about Jerry’s probable sexual hangups about him that he really didn’t want answered.

This much of Morty was worse, but in a far different way; where an overdose of Jerry would be like rinsing his brain in a bucket of stupid that would have left him soiled forever, Morty was… too good. Of course, there had been bad things in there; in particular, Rick had not liked to see so many memories of a Jerry and a Beth fighting, and the impressions of fear that went with them. It was a little too reminiscent of the violence of his own childhood, of a father who couldn’t accept a lot of things in life and who chose to focus that rage on a young Rick on the cusp of a sexual awakening. And on his mother for being unable to do anything about so many things that weren’t her fault. Frankly, the old bastard had nothing to be upset about. Liking dick had turned out to be just the tip of Rick’s sexual iceberg.

Still, he’d seen his mother with one too many black eyes, had seen his own face in the mirror too many times in similar shape, and he’d seen too many Beths and Jerrys stray too close to that path for comfort, and Morty’s fear was a little too close to something Rick had been forced to live himself. In another reality… Rick knew what was possible. And he hated that his grandson might ever have to bear it.

That was bad enough, and so were school bullies and the unkind, internalized mocking over crushes who didn’t know Morty was alive, all that wretched teenage shit, but then Rick had seen himself through Morty’s eyes and it got worse. So very much worse. Because next to Rick, those memories faded to grayscale, background static that could almost be ignored.

Even Morty didn’t see him as infallible, invulnerable; memories of putting Rick to bed drunk with a chest clenched in heartache, and of livid terror as they fought for survival through ill-conceived adventures, were alarmingly prevalent. Yet, in spite of all that, Rick stood out, towering and radiant, not unlike a god, and washed all other things away.

Rick had a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach as he realized the more recent memories had featured hot girls less and less, while showcasing Rick with clockwork regularity. He had seen, proof-positive, himself as the center of Morty’s entire personal cosmology, and as he now sorted through all he’d had jammed into his braincase, he realized his grandson at the very least loved, was possibly infatuated with, and downright worshipped a walking pile of shit.

And Rick couldn’t even begin to guess what Morty had seen of him, apart from that bit about dying. And there was fuck-all to do about it.

That goddamn wormhole.

So Rick lay awake and watched the starstream above them, his legs bent awkwardly in the small space of the front seat, and Morty lay on his chest and breathed and dreamed.

Even when Morty’s dreams took a darker turn, day residue spilling into nightmares that had Morty crying out softly in his sleep, Rick didn’t wake him. He wasn’t ready to face his grandson yet, wasn’t ready to find out what awful shit the kid had seen because, realistically, the majority of Rick’s life probably fit that description. Worse, Morty could have seen something overly
revealing, and there were some truths about Rick he hoped Morty wouldn’t learn until he was dead and gone, and others he hoped Morty never found out about at all.

When Morty whimpered, hands twitching like a sleeping puppy chasing a moon rabbit, Rick wrapped him in his arms and shushed gently, stroked his hair, and let him settle into a more pleasant dreamscape.

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A loud, repetitive beeping woke Morty up. His face was glued with sleep drool to something warm and vaguely leathery which he first assumed to be the seat, until it moved under him. He pulled back and laid eyes on his grandfather’s chest, ribby with a faint scattering of chest hair and smeared with spittle (and Rick’s nipples Jesus Christ that Morty definitely tried not to look at, dusky gray and distinctly perky in the breeze of the ship’s recirculated air.)

“Destination reached,” the ship chirped. “Calculating optimal orbit.”

“Cancel that, we’re going to- we’re gonna be landing.” Rick grunted, pushing at Morty’s shoulder. “Up- get up, Morty, Grandpa’s gotta drive.”

They traded places in an awkward shuffle of arms and legs, Rick settling into the driver’s seat and coaxing the ship effortlessly into the atmosphere. Morty buckled his seatbelt out of habit where Rick, per usual, did not. Dropping to the lower atmosphere, the ship streaked over the landmass below, and Morty noticed there weren’t any cities as far as he could see.

“D- do people live here?” Morty asked.

“Yeah, there are some- some pre-agricultural settlements on two- on a couple of the continents,” Rick replied.

He dropped the ship lower and banked it so Morty could see downward. There were huts down below, and alien people scattering to and fro in terror.

“Hey, how- how you doin’?” Rick waved with an open-mouthed grin and leveled the ship back off, speeding away. “That- that oughta liven things up. They’re prob- probably gonna create a weird religion or something, now.”

“Oh my god, Rick, y- y- you can’t just fuck with them like that!” Morty yelped.

“I- obviously I can, because I just did,” Rick said, rolling his eyes. “It’ll be fine. Don’t worry about it.”

“Oh jeez,” Morty whined. “Not cool, Rick.”

“Seriously, you’re waaaaay overthinking this. Odds are they’re gonna- give them a thousand years and they’re just gonna go to war with the other continent over some- some bullshit anyway, Morty, whether it’s because they believe in the guys in the spaceship or the other continent has more precious metals or- or just- just fucking because. Because cultural contact is a fucking trainwreck like- like ninety-nine percent of the time. Gotta rip- gotta just rip that band-aid off right now, Morty.”

They reached a coastline and cruised out over an ocean for a long while, before they came to another continent nearer one of the poles, this one densely wooded. A bit inland, Rick set the ship down near a fairly big lake. As they landed, Morty spotted a small domed structure nearby, camouflaged with local plantlife growing over the top.
Rick grabbed a bag and threw some essentials in it, heading for the little building. Morty did the same, tossing the first aid kit in as well, and followed. Rick opened the door and stooped to enter; it was quite short, and Morty wondered if they were going to have to hunch over while inside. As he followed Rick in though, he saw that the building was partially underground, and the domed ceiling was a normal height from the floor.

The structure had a prefabricated feel, yet also seemed to have been lived in for some time. It was actually kind of nice, with natural lighting from small skylights overhead, and a few pieces of worn but comfortable looking furniture in the main room, a third of which was taken up by a kitchenette and a dining table. There were a couple of doorways that presumably led to other rooms, and though the place had an earthy scent to it, it seemed reasonably clean.

“Wow, Rick, is- is this place yours?” Morty asked as he looked around.

“Nah, it’s an old- it’s a bolthole a buddy of mine used to use sometimes. Crashed here a couple- a few times, kinda- I kinda lived here for a little bit,” Rick replied. He poked his head through one of the doorways, and pulled back with a look of surprise. “My bed’s still here so- so that’s good, I guess. Won’t have to sleep on the floor.”

Rick sat on the couch with a tired sigh. His knees poked up slightly, because the couch sat kind of low, Morty realized. As he looked around again, he noticed all of the furniture was a little short.

“Morty.”

Morty turned to his grandfather. The old man had a serious look on his face.

“I- Morty, I gotta know what- what you saw in the wormhole.”

“Oh, uh- gee, Rick,” Morty said. “Weird- weird shit, just like you said, I guess.”

“What kind of ‘weird shit,’ Morty?”

Morty shuffled over to the couch and sat next to his grandfather.

“Well, the whole thing about you d- dying.”

“What else?”

“Um… I- there was this guy, he- he sounded real angry,” Morty said. “He k- kept saying, like, the f-word? The, um, the gay f-word, I mean.”

“Ugh,” Rick said. “That was probably my father.”

“Wow… he seemed like, I- I dunno…”

“He seemed like a piece of shit, you mean?” Rick grumbled. “He was. Totally. A piece of shit.”

Morty stared for a long minute, but Rick didn’t elaborate further, and instead pulled a flask from his bag and took a long pull.

“Go on,” Rick prompted.

“Well, um, there was a b- blonde lady, but she died, I think… She looked sort of like Mom.”

Rick’s eyes snapped to his, wide and startled, then looked away just as quickly.

“Who- uh, who was she?”
“Diane. Your grandma.”

“Ohhh… wow,” Morty said. Now that he thought about it, he thought maybe his mom – or at least his current Beth – might have had a picture of her mother around somewhere, but he hadn’t seen it in a while. “What was she… what was she like?”

“Help me change these bandages, Morty,” Rick said, picking at a piece of gauze stuck to his arm.

Morty pulled the first aid kit from his bag and started peeling the bandages away.

“She- Diane- she was… nice. A good person. Better than I deserved,” Rick said quietly.

“Is that why you- um- is that why you left?” Morty soaked a gauze pad in antiseptic fluid.

“I didn’t leave,” Rick snapped, suddenly looking furious. Morty yanked his hand back from the wound he’d been about to clean.

“I- I didn’t leave,” Rick said again, his voice slipping into a soft tone of anguish. “She died.”

“When Mom was in college?” Morty asked, recalling Beth saying that a few times.

“No. A short- an electrical short in the portal gun killed her,” Rick said, “when I was still testing it. It was- it was ready for use, I th- I thought. I’d used it a few times already and- but there was a flaw in the- in the design and she died.”

“But Mom- I mean, both the Beths I’ve had remembered her f- for longer than that,” Morty said, his brow furrowed. At a gesture from Rick, he swiped the gauze pad over the gash on Rick’s side.

“Morty, there are- there are certain things that happen in- in most, if not all, realities that produced a Rick. Diane- I’ve- they don’t all die the same way, but I haven’t found one reality yet where a Diane survived. I’ve also never met a Rick who coped well with being a- a widowed father at that point.”

Rick heaved a sigh.

“You gotta- you gotta understand, Morty… Beths are- they’re kind of- they’re unhinged, okay? They’re sociopathic, most of ’em. And there’s a reason for that. Most Ricks couldn’t handle their Diane’s death or raising their daughter- their Beth alone so they- they do what I did and they clone- they make a cloned copy of Beth’s mother. And the clone- it isn’t perfect, Morty, it’s just enough wrong that no Rick can- can cope with that, so we leave. And the Beths- they get this- they get a genetic predisposition toward mental instability from their fathers and then they- they’re raised by mothers who’re a little off, just not-right enough, just inhuman enough that- it’s like a how-to manual for instilling mental illness.”

“J- Jesus Christ,” Morty said, blood-crusted gauze clenched in his hand, and watched Rick pound more liquor, as he’d done for the entire conversation.

“The worst- You know what the worst- the worst part is, Morty?” Rick said darkly. “The Ricks- we- we all see what- what direction it’s going, Morty. It’s not like we don’t know. And we- we leave anyway because- because we don’t know what to do about it. We try for- we spend years trying- trying to be there for- for the Beths and then we just can’t anymore. You- you don’t know what it’s- what it’s like. In any reality, Morty, Beth- she just gets worse, like, keeping dead animals and shit, and you dunno where they fucking came from, whether she found them or- or made them but you- you come home one day and she’s got a dead fucking dog hidden under her bed with a bunch of- of those pine tree air fresheners or some shit like that.”
Morty thought back on his not-mother’s horse hoof sculpture and thought he might throw up.

“And you- you try. You try so hard, but- but Di- Diane- her clone makes your skin crawl- it thinks it’s her, but it isn’t, and that never gets better ei- either, and Beth scares the absolute fuck out of you, so eventually you- you figure that you’re doing more harm- more harm than good, so you- so you leave for good and- and you hope for- you hope for the best.”

“I- I mean- she didn’t- she didn’t turn out so bad,” Morty said shakily, leaving out except for the horse hooves, even though that image was still stuck in his mind.

“Yeah, in- in most realities, that- that’s true. Probably- probably because the Ricks leave.”

Rick was starting to cry, tears leaking from his eyes and trailing down his cheeks unchecked like he wasn’t even aware of them. Morty’s heart ached for his grandfather, who was making great strides toward getting drunk, beginning to sway slightly where he sat. Morty couldn’t remember the last time either of them had eaten, and the last time Rick had a drink was probably almost as long, so he figured the booze was going to hit harder than usual.

Morty knelt on the floor between Rick’s knees to better reach his wounds as he finished re-bandaging everything. He set the first aid supplies aside and reached up, taking Rick’s face between his hands, thumbing tears away. Rick jerked away from his touch at first, then curled forward over him, hugging Morty to his chest and burying his face in Morty’s shoulder.

“Y- you did what you could, Rick,” Morty murmured, running a hand up and down Rick’s back. “Y- you know, sometimes- sometimes we try really hard and- and it all gets f- fucked up anyway. That’s- that’s just how it is, sometimes.”

Rick pulled back to look at Morty, his gaze going softly fond as he patted Morty’s hair, his other hand sliding to Morty’s shoulder. He smiled faintly and tipped his head forward, pressing their foreheads together.

“Li- listen to you, Morty, you- you sound like a guy who- you sound like- like a person who’s got it all figured out,” he murmured, still smiling. “You- guess you won’t need- you’re not gonna need this old man for much- for much longer.”

Morty’s breath hitched, and he felt his eyes filling with unshed tears.

“I’m always gonna need you, Rick.”

Rick’s smile crumbled, his eyes sliding shut, only to jerk his head up and yank Morty toward him protectively, eyes snapping wide as the door burst open.

“What the squanch is going on here?” screeched the strung-out orange cat in the doorway.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who left comments/kudos! If you like this story, please feel free to do those things!

A note on sociopaths: we hear about them when they turn into serial killers, but a lot of them live everyday lives; however, many still inflict emotional harm on those close to them. Not trying to pass judgment or negate anyone’s lived experience here.
Everyone's story is unique.

Elton John: Rocket Man
Chapter Summary

He had a fractured moment of bare terror in which he saw the thing, a huge beast with a leathery blue hide and snapping jaws with enormous, curved fangs that splattered sticky drool at him, and he thought, this is it, this is how I’m gonna die.

Chapter Notes

TW: hunting, semi-graphic description of dressing game. I don't know if this is something that really needs a warning but I know I think it's gross, but I also wanted to explore some non-science skill sets. (I knew about a lot of this, but I did research just to be sure. Just be glad you didn't have to see the pictures.) DX

What's your ship?

Parked in the woods by where I like to squanch. It’s been a real shit-squanch out there since you squanched the Federation, so I’m squanching off the grid,” the cat-alien replied, giving the pair of them an unsettling look. “Didn’t mean to interrupt any… squanching you got going on in here.”

Rick and Morty both realized what they must look like at that moment. Rick, shirtless, Morty on his knees at Rick’s feet, with Rick’s hands on his head, pulling him close…

Morty pulled away with a stuttering, “Th- this i- i- isn’t what it l- looks like!”

“Christ, Squanchy, no,” Rick scoffed, rolling his eyes as Morty pulled away. “This is my grandson, you- you remember him, right?”

Squanchy’s narrowed gaze shifted to Morty and back to Rick.

“If it looks like a squanch, and squanches like a squanch…”

“No. It’s- for fuck’s sake, M- Morty, get me a shirt.”

Morty rummaged through the bag and passed Rick a shirt, which Rick pulled on while he made small talk. Rick must have wiped his tears away with the shirt, Morty figured, because aside from a faint redness around the edges of Rick’s eyelids, it was like they had never been there at all.

“So if you- if you’ve been- if you’re shitting in the woods, does that mean the toilet’s broken again?”
“Nope, it’s not squanched. I just like to squanch outside.”

“Great, be- because I don’t want to- I’m not gonna take a dump in the bushes.”

“Wouldn’t be the first time, you squancher. You lookin’ for a place to squanch?”

“Uh- yeah. Me and- me and Morty got- we got in the shit out on Zebroxian six. Or seven. Whatever.”

“Those city squanchers? Should know better than squanching around somewhere like that, Rick.”

“Got- got ambushed,” Rick said, swigging from his flask. “Gotta lay low- gotta hole up for- for a bit.”

“You know you’re always welcome to cop a squanch. You getting squanched tonight?”

“Yeah, I’m- I’m already getting there,” Rick replied, eyeing his flask menacingly when he realized it was empty. “But I’m- it looks like I’m- I’m out. You got anything?”

“You pulling my squanch?” The squirrely little cat-creature started rummaging through cupboards in the kitchenette. “Never had a sober squanch in my life.”

Rick directed Morty to go help the cat collect various bottles of brightly colored liquid and sank into the little couch. Morty kept a worried eye on his grandfather as he hefted the larger bottles; some of them were nearly as big as Squanchy. The glass clinked loudly as he carried them to the battered coffee table, where Rick snatched up one that looked noxiously green.

“Remember, Morty- don’t- nothing orange,” he slurred as he brought the mouth of the bottle to his lips.

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Morty was pretty sure the sun was high in the sky, given that the skylights continued to spill daylight into the room, so technically this all counted as day-drinking. After so much time spent planet-hopping and drifting through space, though, the concept of day and night were relative to when he was tired or wide awake. He was starting to understand why Rick’s internal clock was unable to adhere to Earth’s day/night cycle.

The level of Rick’s bottle dropped steadily; Squanchy shifted between a few bottles, putting away more liquor than seemed right for such a small creature, and Morty stuck to sipping at a bottle of purple booze that seemed relatively safe. Despite his relative lack of tolerance to alcohol, he was easily the most sober person there.

“Hey, Rick, wanna squanch some K-lax?” Squanchy asked, tipping sideways slightly.

“Nah, I- I- we stopped doing that shit,” Rick replied after a moment of drunken consideration. “We got- we- me and Morty had- we had a bad trip.”

“Say no more,” Squanchy said magnanimously. “To each their squanch.”

“I- I’m kinda wasted- I’m pretty fucked- fucked up,” Rick added. “I’m gonna- I’m gonna turn in.”

“Still got the bed you and Birdperson used to squanch up in,” Squanchy offered.

Rick flinched at the mention of his friend.
“Fuck. Pers… One more for Pers,” he muttered, taking a long pull from the bottle. Squanchy did the same, and Morty followed suit.

“One for me, one for my squanchie,” Squanchy declared, tipping his bottle to spill a shot onto the floor. “We should get the band back together. How are you at squanching in a monotone, Morty?”

“Wouldn’t be the same- wouldn’t be right without Birdperson.” Rick staggered to his feet, wavering in place until he found his balance.

“When you’re squanch, you’re squanch,” Squanchy said, his tone growing morose.

“Morty, get- get our- grab our shit,” he said, and swayed toward a doorway.

Morty scooped up their bags and ducked through the low doorway after Rick. He found a smaller domed room, set lower that the greatroom and presumably completely underground, since he hadn’t seen it from outside. The room was unfurnished save for what looked like a giant pet bed, large enough for two grown adults to fit in if they curled up. A blanket sat folded up in a corner of the bed.

“Bathroom’s off the other- it’s off the other corridor, by Squanchy’s room,” Rick said, kicking off his shoes. “Just- you gotta knock if the- if door’s closed or you’ll probably- you- you don’t wanna walk in on him jerking it.”

“Am I sleeping in here with- with you?” Morty asked. It was one thing to sleep in each other’s company on the ship, where it was the only reasonable option, but here…

“Unless- do you want to wreck- you wanna fuck up your back on that- that little Squanchy couch?”

Rick drunk-belched and flopped into the bed, scratching aimlessly at his belly. Morty flushed and fidgeted in place.

“Are- are you gonna sleep in your pants?” he asked.

“Un- undecided. It’s this, or- or in the nude, be- because I’m not- I’m not wearing any- I’m going commando, Morty. Are- are you sleeping on the couch or not?”

“Um… I guess… not?”

“Then pants it is,” Rick said, grunting as he shifted around to get comfortable. “Grab- grab the blanket. And take off- get out of that fucking body armor, I can’t believe you’re still wearing- I can’t believe you still have that on.”

Morty tossed the blanket to Rick and turned off the lights to get undressed, but he fumbled hopelessly with the unfamiliar body armor in the dark.

“What- are you- you trying to spare my- my poor virgin eyes?” Rick snapped scathingly. I- I have news for you, I- I’ve done it with a species that- that literally copulates with your eyeballs so- so no virgin eyes here. Turn the fucking lights back on and- and get on with it.”

Morty did as he was told, snapping the lights back off as soon as the bodysuit hit the floor and left him standing around awkwardly in his briefs. He bumped against the bed in the dark and climbed in as Rick threw his half of the blanket over him.

“Morty.”
“Uh, yeah, Rick?”

There was a long pause.

“You- Morty, you smell really bad- you- you stink, Morty.”

Morty sighed.

“Rick… you smell like piss.”

“You try getting- getting lit up by a cattle prod and- and see how well you- and see if you don’t piss yourself,” Rick huffed. “Bath- bath time, first thing- first- in the morning.”

They laid silently in the darkness for a while. Morty couldn’t sleep, and he could tell from Rick’s breathing that the old man wasn’t quite there yet either.

“Hey… Rick?” he asked quietly.

“Yeah?” Rick grunted.

“When Squanchy said you- you used to… squanch up with Birdperson in here… did he mean…”

“… Bunk up. Or- or shack up… same- same difference.”

“I- it’s a pretty big d- difference, Rick.”

“Are- are you seriously asking me if I used to- if I _fucked_ Birdperson, Morty? What is- what is this, a slumber- slumber party? Are we teenage girls- should I- are we gonna break out the- the nail polish, Morty?”

“S- sorry… I- I shouldn’t have asked.”

“…” Yeah.”

Morty stared up into the darkness.

“… Like, ‘yeah, you shouldn’t have asked,’ o- or…”

“Like, yes, I fucked Birdperson. We were kind of- we were a thing. But he started- he wanted a soul-bond, he was really- he was into that- that shit, and I wasn’t down. I don’t- can we be done talking about this, now?”

“Sure, Rick.”

Morty didn’t know why it mattered to him, except that it _did_. He didn’t know why he should feel so awkward about being in a bed his grandfather had shared with someone else, in which he had done _intimate things_ with someone else. Morty had been in his parents’ bed plenty of times as a kid and they had obviously done stuff, _okay, gross_, but he hadn’t thought twice about it. It was different with Rick; Morty felt oddly shameful, layered over an uncomfortable arousal that squirmed through his insides…

“Hey, Morty…” Rick whispered in the pitch black.

“Y- yeah, Rick?”

Rick threw the blanket over his head and broke wind, cackling with glee as Morty struggled to escape the smothering fart. Morty burst from under the blanket, heaving in breaths of fresh air.
“R- Rick! You asshole!”

“Straight- straight from the source, baby!”

Rick kept laughing as Morty fought to take the blanket from him and lost. Morty wound up in a headlock that reeked of sweaty armpit and drunk old man. Which shouldn’t have been hot, no one in their right mind would have had to strive to keep their hips pulled back to hide how hard they were, but Morty had stopped considering himself normal a long time ago. Maybe he never had been. As Rick passed out next to him, still clutching him close, Morty tried to think of the most unsexy things he possibly could; recalling the time he walked in on Jerry watching Titanic with his hand down his pants wilted his erection pretty quickly.

He lay in the dark, listening to Rick’s ragged sleep-breathing as it huffed against his hair, and waited for sleep to come.

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They quickly fell into a routine on Squanchy’s planet (Morty didn’t know what it was called,) and despite his earlier concerns about his sleep patterns, he found he adapted to the planet’s day/night cycle fairly well. Life there was primitive, a lot like camping. It was beautiful by day; the trees towered overhead, like what the redwood forests on Earth must have been in their prime, but Morty thought they were actually bigger, their dusky blue outlines stretching into the deep orange sky. At night, the towering trees looked like they could touch the stars.

Rick preferred to bathe in the lake. “If you wanna deal with that- the tiny little shower- if you want to have to sit to wash yourself, you- you go right ahead,” Rick had said, and Morty thought after trying the Squanchy-sized shower stall that Rick was really onto something. The toilet was bad enough, making Morty feel like a high-schooler trying to use a kindergarten bathroom, but at least it was a working toilet. In the shower, he couldn’t even manage to rinse everywhere. He’d bruised his knees and elbows all to hell bumping into the prefabricated walls, and with Rick’s leggier frame, Morty wasn’t sure it was even a possibility for his grandfather.

So there was lake-bathing, and swimming, and hiking in the woods. (“Stay clear of Squanchy’s ship,” Rick cautioned, “he’s probably been- been shitting everywhere out there.”) Rick tinkered with science stuff, and sometimes Morty helped him; Morty was finally starting to grasp some of the science of portal gun theory, and Rick taught him how to do some of the upkeep on the car himself. Morty didn’t think he had ever seen his grandfather so relaxed, able to tinker at will without the pressures of their overbearing family.

At other times, Morty wandered on his own, sketch pad in hand, and found a place to sit and draw when he found something he liked, or drawing other things from memory. He’d sat by the lake the day he’d drawn Shara, before his memories faded too much to capture the details; he wished she had been able to see a place this beautiful and he felt like it was the least he could do to remember her there.

Rick had wandered by to look over his shoulder, and grunted, “That’s- that’s real good, Morty,” with a small smile before ambling away. Once upon a time, Rick would have mocked him for his sentiment, or interpreted Morty’s interest in Shara as something sexual, which it never had been. But Rick was far less defensive than usual, lately, and ever more laid back, to the point of outright kindness at times.

There were few distractions at night; sometimes Rick kept working, but usually, he and Squanchy tied one on and shot the shit about old times. Most nights, Morty joined them, not drinking much but eager to listen to their stories, even if most of their stories ended up not making much sense
through the filter of so much booze.

Even with as drunk as they got, Morty started to realize that Rick seemed to be holding something back, even from Squanchy; sometimes, Rick would close off entirely and change the subject, or abruptly go to bed, dragging Morty with him. Morty felt a darkening pit of curiosity for whatever could be so terrible that Rick would shut out one of his oldest friends, but Rick was tight-lipped on the matter.

It was on one of the evenings that Rick stayed up toying with science at his worktable in the back of the ship that Morty wandered into the woods to draw. The lighting was terrible, but he had found a small clearing where, if he looked straight up, the treetops ringed the sky, and he wanted to see what it looked like when the stars were shining.

He had settled in to add the stars to a rough sketch he’d drawn earlier when he heard rustling in the woods. The forest was always alive with sounds, the wind in the trees and the movements of small animals, but this sounded considerably bigger. Morty was just considering packing up and heading back to the shelter – he really had no idea what might be living out here – when a hulking shape burst from the treeline and charged at him.

He had a fractured moment of bare terror in which he saw the thing, a huge beast with a leathery blue hide and snapping jaws with enormous, curved fangs that splattered sticky drool at him, and he thought, this is it, this is how I’m gonna die.

He heard the whine and spit of an energy weapon as the thing’s entire head disintegrated in a burst of light and gore, the bulk of the thing’s corpse skidding through the loamy dirt, coming to rest at his feet. He stumbled and fell backward, staring at the remains of his probable demise, then looked up to where the shot had come from.

Rick stood at the edge of the clearing, holding Morty’s plasma rifle. He lowered the weapon and walked to Morty, holding out a hand to help him up.

“You’re really fucking lucky I was- I was working on your gun, Morty. The power cell holds more charge now and the- the energy discharge ratio is better,” Rick said nonchalantly. “You’re welcome.”

“Holy shit, Rick,” Morty whimpered. “Wh- what the fuck was that thing?”

“Dunno what it’s called, there’s no one here to name them, but they’re- they’re real bastards, Morty. But they’re- we can eat them, so now it’s dinner. Pack up and help- help me get it back to camp.”

Morty helped Rick drag the thing’s body back to camp. Rick stripped his lab coat and shirt off, pulled out a knife, and started gutting the thing with ruthless efficiency, and Morty felt himself going a little green at the sight.

“Never seen someone field-dress a kill before?” Rick grunted as he hefted the entrails out of the carcass. “Gotta take the guts out or they- they’ll spoil the meat. Too much shit in ‘em.”

“Oh, gross,” Morty groaned. “I- I feel like I’m gonna hurl.”

“Could be worse,” Rick looked at him pointedly. “Could have been you in there. So maybe don’t wander off at night alone.”

Rick plunged his hand in and pulled out what looked disturbingly like a heart, cutting it free with the knife.
“Oh jeez, you’re not g- gonna eat that, are you?”

“The fuck else am I gonna do with it?”

Rick disappeared into the shelter and came back with a rope. He tied the thing by the rear legs, and threw the rope over a tree branch.

“Gotta string it up so the blood drains. Are you gonna- are you helping or- or puking?”

“Helping, I- I guess,” Morty said, picking up the rope. Together they pulled the carcass up into the tree.

“This is- it’s just the way it is, Morty,” Rick said as he tied off the rope. “That’s how we eat out here. There- there isn’t a 7-11 we can stop at or- or a pizza joint we can just call. Why do you think Squanchy stockpiles booze?”

“I know, it’s j- just…”

“Don’t worry, I’m not gonna make you kill any- anything cute and fluffy,” Rick sighed. “And I’m not gonna leave you to- to get eaten by some fucking- whatever the fuck this is, either.”

“Th- thanks, Rick,” Morty said.

“I’m gonna- gotta go wash up,” Rick said, walking toward the lake, his arms smeared in purple blood, spatter gracing his chest. Morty heard a pattering sound behind him and looked to see blood dripping from the carcass above.

As soon as Rick was out of sight, Morty ducked behind the tree and hurled.

That night, they ate a stir-fry Rick made using the heart and some little blue mushrooms that grew, Morty learned halfway through the meal, in the vicinity of Squanchy’s ship.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all who have left comments/kudos! I love hearing from you!

Ludovico Einaudi: Night

(Pretty sure I used this song already, but it fits here better so once I figure out what chapter that was, that chapter will be Ludovico Einaudi: Numbers.)
Chapter Summary

Rick kept taking his medication, Morty kept doodling in his sketchbook, they both went exploring by day and drank with Squanchy at night, and time went on.

Chapter Notes

Reminder that Morty is 19 in this story. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The next day, Rick butchered the kill, wrapping sections of meat to store in Squanchy’s freezer while the little cat set about making jerky with a good portion of the rest. Morty found himself feeling queasy again at the sight of Rick skinning the beast, too squeamish to ask questions when Rick started scraping the hide and running it over a board, then dumped the hide into a barrel of something rank-smelling, so he went back to exploring in daylight, swimming, and drawing. Rick joined him now and then, but he checked on the barrel a few times each day, and after a few days, Morty found him stretching the hide across a wooden frame.

“Wh- what’re you doing with that, Rick?” Morty asked, his curiosity getting the better of him.

“I’m tanning leather, what- what does it look like?” Rick grunted with the effort of pulling the skin tight enough. “You think I only know how- you think I only know quantum mechanics and- and differential equations and how to- how to twist bits of wire together, Morty?”

“O- okay, but… why?”

“Ever heard of using all of the animal, Morty? Might sell for some- some money, or- it’s- it’s just something to do.”

Rick worked the bright blue off and on throughout the day, and into the next, finally taking it off the frame and rubbing it across the piece of wood again. Even though the origins of the hide had revolted Morty, as the unpleasant memory receded and Rick finally declared the hide done, Morty had to admit the end result was pretty good.

But it didn’t end there; it remained to be seen what Rick planned to do with it, and it was clear that Rick had plans. He had started being rather secretive about the hide, shooing Morty away from the back of the ship when he wandered close, though not before he saw various cutting tools there.

Morty took it in stride, settling against a log by the lake with his sketchbook and pencils. He used the time to add color and detail to some of his drawings of Rick, knowing his grandfather was otherwise occupied. He was a little worried though; he hoped Rick really was just taking up a hobby for shits, and not secretly losing his mind from being away from civilization for too long, or something like that. They had been on this planet for weeks, and while Morty found it peaceful, he wasn’t sure what Rick thought of it at all.
As time passed, Morty forgot about it entirely, getting lost in the endless stream of days going by. Rick kept taking his medication, Morty kept doodling in his sketchbook, they both went exploring by day and drank with Squanchy at night, and time went on. Rick collected bits of material, usually any ore from which he might fashion metal, and he took to working with that on his worktable, as secretive as ever. Morty was pretty sure Rick had built a still somewhere in the woods, ensuring that Squanchy never ran out of alcohol. He disappeared into the woods occasionally for anywhere up to an hour at a time, and usually reeking of the foul smelling liquor he sometimes brought back with him. Morty had the idea that Rick was using more of those gross squanch-mushrooms to make it. Every now and then, Morty wondered when Rick would get tired of this place and resume their trek across the multiverse, but he didn’t think it mattered too much. He didn’t really want to go back to school anymore; there was so much more to learn out here, with Rick, so much more to see, and Morty wanted to see it all.

Morty figured they had all the time in the world.

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The system’s star hung low in the sky above the lake, the deep green lake water lapping delicately at the shore. A bird, or something bird-like, at least, was making bird noises in the distance. Morty sat in his usual place, adding color to whatever he’d drawn in his sketchbook.

Rick shuffled his feet, a rare feeling of anxiety creeping through him. He was genuinely bad at things like this. The worst trash, really; a complete dumpster person when it came to feelings and expressions thereof.

He’d had something he wanted to give to Morty for a while, but ever since he’d finished it, he had found himself stalling. Waiting for the right time, he’d told himself, but that was a lie; he was just putting it off because it made him feel so awkward.

The sunset was beautiful, though, and Morty looked relaxed and happy, a soft smile playing over his face as he gazed with what looked like fondness at whatever he was drawing. Rick decided it was now or never.

He ambled over, not missing how quickly Morty flipped the sketchbook shut, marking the page with his finger as he tucked a pale blue pencil behind his ear.

“Oh, hey, Rick, what’s up? Morty said as Rick sank down next to him.

“Oh, nothing, just- just coming over to- to say hi to my grandson,” Rick said, hating the nervous edge in his voice even though it looked like Morty was too preoccupied to notice. “Hey, if- if you’re drawing some alien- some alien tits, you should- I wanna see ‘em, Morty!”

Rick cringed inwardly as his joke fell flat. Smooth, Sanchez, real smooth, he chastised himself. But again, Morty seemed not to notice Rick’s awkwardness. Morty looked away, blushing, and his finger slipped out of the sketchbook, leaving Rick no hope of finding out what was on the page.

“Um. I wasn’t, but if I do, y- you’ll be the first to know,” Morty stammered. “Well, the s- second, I guess, because I’d know first.”

“Yeah, I guess that- that’s true. Alien tits!” Rick waved his hands in the air, noticing as his grandson ducked his head to hide an embarrassed-looking smile. Rick was also holding the package in his hand, so this seemed like as good a segue as anything. “Here, I- I have something- it’s- it’s for you.”
Morty’s head snapped up as Rick held out the package to him.

“Wow, uh, thanks,” Morty mumbled shyly.

Shyly? Not for the first time, Rick was starting to lose the plot a little. Because sometimes, he thought Morty looked at him a certain way…and you only think that because he said some weird shit after the wormhole, and you’re a dirty enough old shit to let it run away with you.

Morty pulled the paper loose, sucking in a breath through his slackened mouth as he saw what was inside.

The blue hide of the monster Rick had killed, then so lovingly tanned and crafted, had been worked into a leather cover for Morty’s sketchbook. Rick watched as Morty gazed at it, running his fingertips reverently over the cover before pulling it completely out of the paper.

The bright blue cover had flaps on the inside to slip over the cardboard front and back of the sketchbook, and two straps on the open side that slipped into buckles on the front. The rest of the front was a pouch that would fit Morty’s drawing supplies, complete with a flap and buckle closure of its own. The metalwork was rustic, yet fine, and the cover was held together with delicate stitching all around the edges. When Morty flipped it open, he found on the bottom edge of the front cover flap, To Morty, from Rick. It was the simplest possible expression, but Morty gasped, and his hand shook as he traced the lettering.

“Oh… Rick…” Morty whispered, his eyes shining as he looked up at his grandfather. Rick’s heart thumped insistently in his chest. “Rick, I- I don’t… I don’t have anything for you…”

“I- I have everything I need right here,” Rick replied with a smile, putting an arm around Morty’s shoulder and dropping a soft kiss in his hair.

Morty pulled back just barely, his face flushed, breathing heavily, and before Rick realized what was happening he was leaning in, his own lips bare inches from Morty’s own, Morty shifting to close the distance…

“What do you squanchers want for dinner?” Squanchy yelled from the doorway of the shelter. Rick and Morty sprung apart, the spell broken.

“We got carcass, we got squanchshrooms, we got carcass with squanchshrooms,” the cat alien added unhelpfully.

“It doesn’t fucking matter, Squanchy!” Rick bellowed.

“Squanchever! I’m gonna go squanch off in the shower!” the cat yelled back.

“Make sure you don’t- you don’t hang yourself with your- your goddamn kink noose, you fucking asshole!”

Squanchy made a rude gesture. “Knew they were squanching,” he muttered to himself, vanishing through the doorway.

“Motherfucker,” Rick muttered under his breath, glaring angrily toward where Squanchy had been.

Although… Rick was starting to think the interruption was for the best. He was already working to convince himself that that had not been what it looked like. He’d had no such intention when he’d made the gift or when he’d given it, and even though he now suspected his feelings for Morty were reciprocated, he knew deep down, the truth of the matter:
He and Morty were something that could never be.

“I’m- uh- I’m gonna go check on the- gonna go take a look at the still,” he grumbled, shoving roughly to his feet.

“Um, Rick…” Morty said hesitantly.

“Yeah?” Rick couldn’t meet his grandson’s gaze, silently praying please don’t want to talk about it over and over in his head.

“I was thinking that, m- maybe…”

Ohgodpleasedon’twanttotalkaboutit

“When the year is over, y- you know, us being out here… Maybe I don’t want to g- go back. I don’t really n- need school if I’m out here with you, r- right?”

As if there was anything else he could have said that would make Rick feel worse.

“May- maybe, Morty. We’ll just- we’ll burn that- that bridge when we come to it.”

“Don’t you mean c- cross?” Morty asked. “You know, like- ‘cross that bridge when we come to it’?”

“Yeah, that’s- that’s probably what I meant- what I’m trying to say.”

Rick shambled away, leaving his confused grandson to shrug and slip his sketchbook into the leather cover.

---

“Fuck,” Rick hissed as he came up to the still. It was buried deep in the woods, in another clearing beyond the one where Morty had wandered before. “Fuck. FUCK!”

Rick was beyond incensed with himself. He was pissed at himself for loving Morty like he did, for having those thoughts, for nearly acting on them, for lying to Morty, for giving him hope where there was none…

He was pissed at himself for dying, for knowing it drew closer every day.

He was pissed at himself for knowing that the fact of his inevitable death was all that kept him from throwing himself at his grandson. His grandson, for fuck’s sake.

Morty’s face was burned into his mind, shining eyes wet with gratitude, cheeks flushed red with what he now recognized as desire. And Rick had been sleeping next to him for weeks on end, letting it fester, in a bed that Rick himself had once shared with a lover, no less. Morty was going to lose him, and Rick hadn’t told him, and now here they were. And Rick knew, deep down, that the fault in all of it rested squarely on his own shoulders.

He fell to his hands and knees, fingers clenching into the loamy soil.

“Fuck…”

Rick rolled over on his side and reached for a jug of squanchshroom moonshine, curling up around it, his guts burning with shame and self-hatred. All he could see was his own love reflected in Morty’s eyes, and he intended to drink until he couldn’t see it anymore.
“Good- good thing you’re gonna die, Sanchez,” he muttered to himself as he uncorked the bottle. “Because you fucking deserve it.”

---

Morty had just entered the shelter, his sketchbook under his arm, when he heard the bathroom door open. Squanchy popped out of the alcove, looking fresh as a daisy and holding a belt.

“Hey, Morty!” he said, his voice sounding a little rough. “Did you decide what you want to squanch for dinner?”

“I- I dunno, I’m not really that hungry,” Morty said absently. “Maybe we should wait for R-Rick.”

“Squanch yourself,” Squanchy shrugged. “It’s there when you squanch it.”

“Thanks… I’m- I’m gonna go lie down,” he said, and wandered to the bedroom.

He flopped facedown into the bed and breathed in Rick’s stale, distinctive scent. He moaned softly into the padding.

What the hell just happened? he wondered, because he thought – no, he had been sure, had Squanchy not interrupted, that Rick had been about to kiss him. And that would have been… wonderful. It would have been beyond imagining.

That didn’t mean he couldn’t try.

He slipped a hand down between himself and the padded bed, gripping his hardness through his jeans. Picturing Rick’s face moving closer to his own, he rolled his hips a few times. But it was no good; he couldn’t bear the thought of Rick walking in and catching him, if it turned out he was wrong. He was pretty sure he wasn’t, but there was still a chance he was, and that terrified him.

He jumped up from the bed, scooped up one of Rick’s dirty shirts, and bolted out through the front of the shelter, heading for the ship.

He climbed in, throwing himself in the back as the ship chirped some kind of alert at him; he was too tangled up inside his head to pay attention.

“Tint windows,” he ordered, then, after a thought, added: “Engage mood lighting.”

If he was going to pretend, he might as well take it as far as he could.

The cabin of the ship was washed in pink, the mirror ball overhead throwing glinting sparkles on his skin as he pulled up his shirt and shoved his pants down. He pinched his nipples brutally, moaning as they began to feel bruised, then slid his hand down to his erection. He stroked himself, teasingly at first, then gripped himself and got to work bringing himself off with firm strokes.

Had he planned this, he might have gotten more elaborate, maybe done something with his ass, since he liked the idea of Rick inside him. But he had been going without more often than usual for a while now; Rick was always right there, or nearby, and there was only so much sneaky-jerking-it while bathing in the lake or pretending to use the bathroom that he could get away with. Morty was feeling more than a little pent up, and he liked the idea of being in Rick just as much, so his hand would have to do.

He brought Rick’s shirt to his face, smothering himself in the smell of Rick’s sweat, the added scent of spilled booze only lending authenticity, and felt himself throb in his hand. His other hand
was free to tease his nipples, overly sensitive since he’d worked them so hard already, and he pictured Rick’s mouth there, sucking, biting, and he whined as his hips jerked, shoving his cock through his fist and he imagined that was Rick on top of him, riding him.

“Rick, fuck… yes…” he moaned, and it was easy to imagine that his hand, rather than pleasuring himself, was wrapped around Rick’s cock, stroking Rick off on top of him instead.

He wondered what Rick would look like when he came, knowing Rick would make him work for it but it would be so good when he finally got him off, and with a choked cry, he spatred against his belly, drawing his release out with merciless strokes as he imagined it was Rick coming all over him.

An endless, throbbing orgasm later, his sensitized dick lazily twitching out a last dribble of come as he slowed his strokes, Morty crashed back into himself. He batted the shirt away from his face, letting go of his slowly softening member and wiping himself off, only to realize he’d used Rick’s shirt to do it.

Fuck.

Maybe he could hide it, or better, pass it off as something Rick had done with himself while drunk.

The ship chirped at him again.

“What?” he grumbled.

“You have twelve missed calls from Summer.”

---

Rick staggered out of the woods, bottle in hand and covered in dirt. He was blind-fucking-drunk and could barely walk, let alone in a straight line.

He squinted at the sight of Morty jamming their bags into the ship, and stumbled over to see what was going on.

“The fuck- what the fuck’re you- wht’re you doing?” he slurred.

“Rick, get in the ship,” Morty said grimly. “We have to go.”

He shoved Rick into the ship and buckled him into the passenger seat.

“Uh- okay- what… Okay, we’re- we’re leaving?” Rick pieced together. He spotted Squanchy waving from the clearing in front of the shelter. “Byee, Squanchy!”

“Squanch ya later!” Squanchy called back. “Squanch on back anytime you want!”

Rick had a vague idea there was something he need to talk to Squanchy about, but he was too wasted to figure it out, and before he could say anything coherent, Morty had the ship lifting off the ground.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you to everyone who left comments/kudos!

Mazzy Star: Five String Serenade
Morty stepped into the hallway. He looked years older in that moment, shoulders hunched as though bearing a great burden. Rick stood to meet him, only barely catching him as he stumbled forward, his grandfather taking his weight as he buried his face in the old man’s shirt.


Morty glared at the old man. Rick sniffed each of his own hands in turn, looking confused to find the smell wasn’t coming from him, apparently too drunk to piece anything together beyond that. He wobbled in his seat, struggling to focus as he checked himself over for further evidence. He finally turned to Morty, giving him a look that was somehow both paranoid and doddery.

“What? No! Wh- where is this even coming from?” Morty couldn’t say he’d never seen Rick hit a state of peak rage that quickly before, especially when drunk. Rick was volatile in any state. He was honestly surprised that he would be so worried over Beth, though.

“Summer called. There’s an emergency,” Morty said, his face grim as the ship broke atmosphere.

“What? No! Wh- where is this even coming from?” Morty couldn’t say he’d never seen Rick hit a state of peak rage that quickly before, especially when drunk. Rick was volatile in any state. He was honestly surprised that he would be so worried over Beth, though.

“She’s- she’s my fucking daughter, you piece of- you little piece of shit!”

“Yeah, one of ‘infinite daughters’ or whatever, sh- she’s not even your Beth, you’ve said so a- a million times, Rick! But in case you forgot, I have an actual son and he- he needs me, Rick! That’s what this is about!”

Rick stared at him blankly. He had, in fact, kind of forgotten.

“What- the- the baby that popped- that got dumped out of your fucking- your- your goddamned sexbot?”

“You mean the one you w- wanted to murder? The one you didn’t- didn’t even want me to name? The one I- I raised, w- without any goddamn help?”
“Uhh... Yeah- I- I mean I remem- I remember the- the sexbot part and the- the part about- the murdery part- that thing could have wiped out half the- the continent, Morty, you- you don’t know how bad these- you don’t know how that shit goes down, Morty, it’s- it’s never good, okay?”

“Well i- it turned out pretty fucking okay, Rick, because he- he had me! He’s a- a novelist and he h- h- hates me, but he- he turned out alright. Where the fuck were you? I kinda- I fucking needed you, Rick!”

“Where- where’s this com- coming from, Morty? Did- is something happening- did something happen to... uh...”

Rick shifted his gaze and waved a hand for Morty to fill in the blanks, having the decency to look ashamed of himself.

“Morty Junior! It isn’t that fucking hard, Rick!”

“Okay- okay, so- so what’s going- what’s going on?”

“Summer- she said he’s- he’s dying, Rick.”

Morty’s hands clenched on the steering yoke, his breath shuddering as he struggled to hold back tears.

“Oh- oh shit, Morty, I-”

“Save it, Rick. Un- unless the next words out of your mouth are the coordinates I need, I- I don’t wanna hear it.”

“The- the coordinates for Earth are in- they’re stored in the ship’s memory.”

“We aren’t going to Earth.”

---

The trip required a complicated course involving several portal jumps and a lot of flying to navigate both the distance and navigational obstacles in their path.

“One- one massive jump- with that distance and the- the mag- magnitude of the dimensional shift on- on top of the mass of- of the ship- it’ll- it’ll burn out the portal gun, Morty,” Rick had said. “Why- why do you think I need a ship in the- in the first place? There are- there are limitations, Morty. It could- if it blew out mid-jump, it could- we could land anywhere, Morty, deep space, inside a sun, in a- a static dimension, or- or it could even dump us between- we could be lost between dimensions forever, Morty, is that what- is that something you want?”

That was after he’d put up a fight about going to Gazorpazorp in the first place.

“They- they tried to execute me for- for a fucking fart, Morty, you- you better- I hope you packed some Beano, Morty, or we’re fucking hosed.”

But he’d still calculated the shortest route, input coordinates and jacked the portal gun into the ship, and promptly passed out to sleep it off, leaving Morty to pilot the ship, burning hours and starlight to get there in time.

---

They were flagged for immediate landing by the Gazorpazorpian space traffic control, and despite
the condescending tone of the feminine voice that directed them to their landing pad, they were met by a contingent of impressive Gazorpazorpian women. They had a haughty elegance that made Morty think of Vulcans from the television shows, except for all the extra arms.

It didn’t take him long to realize that the group meeting them was an honest to god political delegation; apparently their arrival was a big deal. One woman in particular seemed to be their leader, and she stepped forward with fluid grace.

“I am Ma-Sha, ruler of Gazorpazorp. I welcome you, Mortimer Smith, though I deeply regret the circumstances of your visit. I am here if you need to talk.”

“I am here if you need to talk,” chorused the contingent of women behind her.

“I- uh- thanks,” Morty shuffled nervously. “Can- can I see him? My- my son? Is he- is he still…”

“Your son’s time of passing has not yet come. I will bring you to him. Please, come with me.”

“O- okay,” Morty said as he followed, flanked by the other Gazorpazorpian women as Rick trailed a few steps behind him. At least his grandfather had sobered up enough to walk in a straight line. “Um, this is my Grandpa Rick… I- I mean, Rick Sanchez.”

“Yeah, we- we’ve met,” Rick grumbled.

“It remains the most unpleasant experience of my life, but recalling it brings me to an important topic. The law regarding making of the sound of which we do not speak for it does not exist has been temporarily suspended for you both for the duration of your stay here, so long as the loathsome act is committed unintentionally and performed in private when possible.”

“Oh- oh, that’s so mag- so magnanimous of you,” Rick said, his voice dripping with sarcasm. “To what do we owe this great- this honor you’ve chosen to bestow?”

“It has been explained to me that the making of the sound, while considered rude on your world, is nevertheless a source of humor as well as a necessary bodily function. I will not pretend that I understand this amusement, but it is the height of barbarity to force the traditions of my culture upon you.”

“Thank you, that’s, um, that’s really considerate of you,” Morty said before Rick could say something horrible.

“The tragedy of your situation demands leniency and compassion. Yet I must ask that you refrain from making the sound in the presence of others when possible. It has become a focal point of a… volatile situation.”

“I’ve- I’ve got something volatile for you,” Rick snarked.

“DO NOT MAKE THE SOUND!” Ma-Sha said sharply with a meaningful look. “Not here, not now.”

Morty followed her gaze. The city was built entirely within a massive cavern, completely underground. They were crossing a long bridge of delicate construction which passed over the central plaza, and he saw there a group of Gazorpazorpian women marching around waving signs in their hands with various slogans printed on them: Everyone Does It; My Sound Is My Voice; Silent But Deadly. Several of the signs had little green clouds drawn on them.

Some of the signs addressed other issues, from the fairly generic Revolution Now, to the oddly specific What If I Want More Than Cuddling?
“Check- check it- take a look, Morty! That chick wants the ‘D’!” Rick exclaimed.

“Rick…” Morty sighed. “Just stop.”

“Fine, o- okay, Morty,” Rick said, looking uncomfortable. “Just- just trying to lighten the mood.”

---

The room was elegantly built, the same soft, curving lines of architecture Morty had grown used to seeing, and with a gentle, soothing color palette, but it had a sterile feel, and was filled with extravagant, high-tech equipment. At the center, reclining in his bed, was Mortimer Smith, Jr.

His skin was wrinkled and blotchy with age; his hair, once so like Morty’s, had thinned and gone white, and there was little of it left. His once bulky muscles had wasted, giving him a gaunt, thin appearance. He raised his arm weakly, reaching toward Morty.

“Father…” he rasped, his dry lips stretching into a smile around his upturned fangs. “You have come.”

“Y- yeah, buddy, of- of course I did,” Morty said, grasping his hand and sitting at his bedside. “Listen, I- I don’t know if- if you want to hear it but… I’m so sorry, Morty Junior. I- I tried my best and I did e-everything wrong, and you… you deserved so much better than I could give you.”

“Father… in my six long years, I have come to realize many things. You were as a child when I came into this life. You wanted only to protect me from others, as well as myself. I see that now.”

“Oh, Morty Junior,” Morty choked out, “six years isn’t th- that long at all.”

“I have seen how the males of my people live; their lives are brutal and short. They are as mayflies, born only to mate and to die. I have outlived my life expectancy by many years. I received that blessing from you, and it is because of you, because of your love, your kindness, and your willingness to show me another way, to guide me to a better path, that I was able to truly live.”

“Y- you know that I really did- I do- love you, right?” Morty said. “With all my heart.”

“Yes, Father. And I wish you to know only love and gratitude from me, as well, for all you have given me. Life, as well as love and conscience, and showing me that circumstances of our birth do not dictate who we become. It is how a man lives that truly makes the man.”

Tears began to flow from Morty’s eyes.

“I- I wish I had known you better. I w- wanted the best for you and… I- I’m sorry. I don’t know the right words to say.”

“You do not need to say them… I, too, know this pain you feel. I desired to see this other world of which I was born, to know my heritage, and I, too, fathered a child here. He was… his genetic makeup was closer to that of a full-blooded Gazorpazorpian, and his time ended while I yet lived.”

Morty Junior brought his hand to Morty’s face, his thumb swiping away Morty’s tears.

“It is not the natural order of things for a father to outlive his son, is it? And yet, I see you now, still hearty and hale with the blush of youth, and it makes my heart glad to know that you will remain, that you will continue to live. It is my wish for you, Father, that you do so to the fullest, that you will be happy in all things, and that some small part of that will come from knowing you
gave me a life that was fully lived.”

“Morty Junior… th- that could never be only a small part,” Morty whispered. “Y- you’re the best thing I- I ever did.”

Morty Junior smiled broadly again, his eyes brimming with tears.

“Please,” he said softly, “There is one thing I would ask, if you would grant me one final wish.”

“Anything,” Morty said shakily. “I w- would do anything.”

“My time is nearly upon me; it will not be much longer, and I find I do not wish to face it alone. Will you remain with me, until I am gone?”

“Y- yes,” Morty said, grasping Morty Junior’s hand again.

Morty Junior squeezed Morty’s hand, his eyes falling closed, his breathing deepening into sleep.

“R- Rick,” Morty cried plaintively. “Isn’t there anything… Isn’t there something we can do?”

Rick looked at him with downcast eyes from where he’d been surreptitiously checking over the equipment and paging through medical charts.

“This- this stuff is all pretty high-end and- and the- the charts all make sense, Morty, he’s gotten the- the best care possible,” he said hollowly. “I don’t think there’s anything left to do, bud.”

“Oh god,” Morty lowered his head, weeping, to Morty Junior’s shoulder. “I- it hurts so much, Rick.”

He felt Rick’s hand on his own shoulder, and felt some comfort from the weight.

“Do you- do you want me to stay?”

Part of Morty did, but he knew this was his to bear, alone.

“I- I think… I think I need to face this on my own, Rick… for Morty Junior, you know?”

“… Yeah, Morty,” Rick said softly. “I’ll be right outside- I’ll be in the hallway, if- if you need me.”

Rick pulled away and walked out of the room, taking a last look at his great-grandson, Morty leaning over him, before the door slid shut.

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Rick leaned heavily on the wall in the hallway, sliding to the floor with a weary sigh. Ma-Sha watched him, and he looked up at her.

“So you- you’re dealing with a revolution, huh?” he asked. “I’m- I’m here if you need to talk, or- or whatever it is you- .”

She sat delicately next to him.

“Mortimer Junior brought new ideas with him to Gazorpazorp, revolutionary ideas,” she said gravely. “It is a remarkable thing for a male of our species to be so… developed, emotionally, culturally… He brought with him a concept from your world which he referred to as ‘nature versus nurture,’ which has caused us to begin to re-evaluate how we view our males. We have
begun research to determine whether males of our kind can be socialized from birth to live within a developed society, and if their lifespan can be extended. It is progressing slowly, more slowly than some would wish, but the truth is that centuries of violence, living only to procreate and die, have created evolutionary barriers which we are not certain we can overcome.”

“Seems- that sounds pretty rough,” Rick replied. “I can- I could take a look at- at some of the- the science and see if there’s anything I can- I can come up with. I don’t mean- I don’t mean that to sound all ‘patriarchal’ or whatever. I’m a scientist, like, legit.”

“I believe that would be acceptable. In truth, I find that I am ashamed. We did not even believe our males capable of literacy. It was just, simply put, the way it had always been, and we never sought to question it until Mortimer Junior arrived.”

“Hey, no- no judgment here,” Rick said. “I mean, don’t- don’t get me wrong, you have- you’ve got a real shitshow going on out there, my world doesn’t have- we don’t have that, but otherwise, we aren’t that- that much better.”

“Truly?” she asked.

“Yeah, it’s- we’re a lot better than we were, mostly, but- but that’s a recent- it’s a pretty recent development. Men were- we were running the show for- for millennia, and generally- as a general rule- opp- opposing the shit out of women. And also anyone who wasn’t- wasn’t the same skin color. And people who- who were gay or- or poor… Fuck it, all that still goes on, but- but it’s getting better, kind of… it- it isn’t- it’s something that- that takes more work than- than some people want to do, and when- when people don’t want to change, things get- it gets bloody.”

“That also sounds like a… ‘shitshow,’ you said? Vulgar, yet accurate.”

“Okay, fair- fair point.”

“Your words do little to give me hope,” she sighed. “But the truth is the truth, and no matter how ugly or unpalatable we find it, it must be accepted.”

“Pr- preaching to the choir here.”

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Within the hour, Mortimer Smith, Jr., with his father at his side, gave a last, shuddering breath, never to wake from his final, eternal rest.

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Morty stepped into the hallway. He looked years older in that moment, shoulders hunched as though bearing a great burden. Rick stood to meet him, only barely catching him as he stumbled forward, his grandfather taking his weight as he buried his face in the old man’s shirt.

“He’s g- gone,” Morty said, and broke down, sobbing openly.

Rick held him close.

“I will leave you to grieve,” Ma-Sha excused herself quietly. “I am – truly – here if you need to talk.”

“Rick,” Morty cried once they were alone, “I didn’t- I didn’t know anything could feel like this.”

“I- I know, baby, I know-”
“No, you- you don’t. He was my son, and all- all I did was fuck up, and- and you have no idea how it feels, Rick, because it didn’t happen to you!”

Morty tried to push Rick away as Rick’s entire body stiffened against him, but Rick held him in an iron grip, and when he spoke again, there was a hard, flinty edge in his voice.

“I’m letting- I’m gonna let that one pass, but you don’t- you don’t get to say that to me.”

“You- screw you, Rick! You and your- your infinite daughters, it- it doesn’t count when you leave them by choice!”

“God- goddammit, Morty, I’m not gonna- I’m not getting into this with you. Not- not now,” Rick said, squeezing his eyes shut as he continued to hold his struggling grandson. “Just- just trust me, Morty, for once- just this one time, trust that I’m not being an asshole.”

Morty went slack against him, clinging to him as he trembled.

“Why? Wh- why did it have to b- be like this, Rick?”

“Because it just is, Morty. I could- I could say it’s genetics or- or nature or that every- that everyone does someday, it won’t- it won’t bring him back.”

Morty gave a ragged sob, and Rick’s tone softened.

“No father- no father should outlive his child.”

Morty had nothing left to say, and Rick, helpless, could do nothing but hold his grandson as he cried.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all those who have commented/left kudos. I love hearing from you so if you wish to keep showing support for this story, please do those things!

This one broke my heart. I kept crying and my cat got very worried and kept trying to climb over my laptop like, "Human, are you broken? I fix you!"

Ludovico Einaudi: Burning
Protostellar

Chapter Summary

Rick saw Morty’s cheeks flush pink, saw his face light with hope, and he cursed himself, knowing Morty would never give up without learning the truth.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Gozorpazorp’s sun burned low in the sky, setting the barren surface of the world aglow with bright orange light. It lit the clouds golden from beneath and cast long shadows from craggy spires of rock across the landscape. The golden light poured through a wide viewing window into a circular ceremonial chamber, with a broad span and several large, ornately sculpted doors which rested in pairs in arched doorways. Tall pillars reached from the floor to the ceiling, and throughout the room, on the walls, the doors, the pillars, and even the floor, gold scrawled across alabaster in a pattern that was organic, like a curling vine, yet repeated in a way natural growth would never allow.

Mortimer Smith, Jr. lay in state in the center of the room on a golden dais, draped in wreaths of flowers because, as several Gozorpazorpian women were heard to murmur in hushed, respectful tones, “the flowers are really beautiful.” There was a great deal of pomp and ceremony, which Morty only remembered in a vague, detached kind of way, though he was sure Morty Junior would have liked it.

Ma-Sha raised her many hands, and the first door to the right of the largest set was opened as the assembled throng fell silent. The doors parted with a groan of long disuse, the heavy sound of moving stone, and a whispered breath of stale air as they revealed their ancient purpose.

“Mortimer Smith, Jr., in accordance with his final wishes, will now be laid to rest on his maternal world of origin. He will rest in eternity beside the Hall of Queens, the highest honor that may be accorded to him, that he may never be forgotten, that the light of truth he has brought to our people may never fade, but shine as a beacon to guide us to a new age of hope for the future of our species.”

At Ma-Sha’s nod, Morty and a small number of Gozorpazorprians lifted the ceremonial litter to carry Morty Junior into the crypt. As the doors drew nearer, Morty felt his legs growing shaky. He was carrying his son away to leave him to rot, to fall to ash and bone. In his head, Morty knew his son was already gone, but in his heart, the nearer he came to his son’s tomb, the more he felt he was about to abandon Morty Junior all over again. After all, where was he these past six years? When had he ever tried to reach out? When, between the brief days he spent raising his son and arriving on Gozorpazorp two days ago, had he even tried to be a father?

His legs gave out and he stumbled, shame that he had failed even in this burning through him, but even as he feared that his son’s mortal remains would fall, he felt the weight lift from him. He looked up from the floor into the eyes of his grandfather as Rick shouldered the litter, having stepped into his place.

“With me, Morty, get up,” Rick said quietly, and stayed there with his grandson, sharing the burden as the procession moved forward once more.
Mortimer Smith, Jr., was interred in the crypt just as the sun slipped below the horizon, the fading twilight casting a pale, ethereal glow through the tomb as the mourners departed before the ancient doors were sealed.

Ma-Sha faced the doors.

“Rest well, Departed Brother,” she intoned to much whispering from the crowd; Morty supposed the term ‘brother’ was rarely heard here.

“Goodbye, Morty Junior,” Morty said softly, and Rick’s hand on his shoulder guided him from the funerary chamber and kept him steady on his feet.

---

‘The real troubles in your life are apt to be things that never crossed your worried mind, the kind that blindside you at four pm on some idle Tuesday.’

Morty had heard that quote, once, and it had stuck with him. Back then, he’d thought he had known what it was all about. He’d thought he’d known so much more than he really had. It floated through his head from time to time, but now he realized he had never fully understood it until he’d heard those missed calls from Summer. He’d felt the full force of it come home to roost during his time on Gazorpazorp.

In the day and a half before the funeral, there hadn’t been a lot of preparations to make; Ma-Sha had seen to everything, per Morty Junior’s final wishes. The first night, Morty had collapsed into sleep almost unwillingly; part of him needed to let go and escape, and it was that part which had won out, mostly because he was wrung out with exhaustion and grief. But part of him had wanted to embrace the pain, to suffer, as penance for everything he’d done wrong. Which, in his estimation, was everything.

He hadn’t slept since.

Rick barely left his side. After the first night, he’d woken to Rick sitting by the bed, studying something on a tablet and scribbling some notes with a stylus onto a second tablet, notes, Rick had said, on possible lines of scientific inquiry into the curious evolutionary divergence within the sexes of the Gazorpazorpian species. Morty didn’t have the energy to inquire as to what Rick may have discovered. He didn’t see the point; Morty Junior’s story was a done deal, so as far as Morty was concerned, his own part in it was over.

He was numb to everything going on around him, except that Rick was a constant, always present and comforting in the consistency of his presence even when nothing more than that could pierce the haze though which Morty drifted.

After the funeral, the ritual and ceremony complete, exchange of sympathies with strangers over and done, Morty stood in the emptied ceremonial chamber, gazing hollowly at the darkening horizon through the window.

Rick stood by him, as physically present now as he had been in Morty’s heart, in one way or another, since the moment he had walked back into the Smith family’s lives. Morty thought about the photograph of Rick holding him as a baby, and realized Rick had been a part of him far longer than that, even if Morty had not known it.

“Hey, Morty, at- at least these people don’t- at least they don’t protest at funerals, you know- you know what I- know what I’m saying? Gotta be kind of a- gotta be a relief, right?”
Rick’s tone was flippant but soft as he watched his grandson closely, like one would watch a frightened animal, uncertain about approaching it.

“Rick,” Morty sighed heavily, his voice rough with grief. “J- just get me out of here. I’m r- ready to go.”

A long arm draped across Morty’s shoulders, pulling him close, Rick’s voice low against his ear.

“You got it, buddy.”

---

Ma-Sha had seen them off at the spaceport, foregoing any fanfare in favor of a personal, and heartfelt, goodbye. The barren world rolled away in the rear view, fading into darkness as Rick flew the ship into the depths of space. He kept one eye on Morty as the kid stared out into the black with a weary, unfocused gaze.

The worst part – aside from Morty Junior’s death, that was the worst part at the moment – the worst part was that Rick really did understand exactly how his grandson felt. He knew. And he knew Morty didn’t believe him, because there was so much Morty didn’t know, and so felt that he was alone in his grief. And that, that ate at Rick more than anything.

He watched as Morty’s exhaustion finally overtook him, eyelids slipping shut as the deep black of space, the light of distant stars, and the familiar hum of the ship lulling him to sleep.

Once Morty was out, Rick punched in portal coordinates for a jump, sure that Morty wouldn’t wake until they reached their destination.

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Morty opened his eyes to a rich, glowing, golden light that washed over him. At first, he didn’t know where he was; for an instant, he felt a sense of lightness, of normalcy, and then everything crashed back into him a second later and he felt the crushing weight of loss as he thought he must still be on Gazorpazorp, at the funeral, in that shining golden chamber. And that sense of place shifted, though the grief did not, as he felt the familiar shape of the seat under him, the seat belt holding him in place, and he realized at last that he was in the ship.

The sight before him was beyond anything he had ever seen before, beyond anything he had ever imagined, even in his wildest imaginings of space.

A dense cluster of stars lay before him, filled his vision as far as he could see, their brilliant light radiating through interstellar gases in between, igniting with color. The cloud of stars and gas glowed in brilliant hues; his gaze swept over blue, pink, purple, and that luminous amber.

“Rick,” he breathed, his heart swelling at the sight, a feeling he’d almost forgotten in the past days, and everything before seemed a lifetime ago. It felt so unfamiliar that it was almost painful in and of itself. “Wh- where are we?”

Rick had watched Morty wake, watched him feel awe again when, Rick was sure, Morty thought he never would again. He smiled, the curl of his lips only slight.

“It- it’s a giant molecular cloud, Morty,” he said. “A star-forming region- a- a star nursery, Morty. I- I thought…”

Rick trailed off, still watching Morty’s face closely.
“I-it’s… it’s beautiful, Rick,” Morty said.

He just stared for a long, long time, letting the sight sink into him, heat and light and alive, in a way, like the universe itself was a living thing.

He must have said something out loud at the end, because Rick picked up on his train of thought effortlessly.

“It all- it keeps going, Morty, no matter- no matter what. It’ll keep going long- a long time after you and I are- are gone.”

“We b- both have a long time before we have to w- worry about that, Rick,” Morty said. “You’re not that old and I- I’m not going anywhere.”

Rick cringed inwardly at Morty’s certainty.

“Morty, I-,” Rick hesitated. “We- there’s some- some stuff we should probably- stuff we should talk about.”

His voice caught in his throat when he felt Morty’s hand slide over his own.

“A h- hundred years of Rick and Morty, right, Rick?”

Morty fixed his grandfather with a look that made Rick’s heart stutter in his chest. Morty slid closer, tightening his hold on Rick’s hand. Morty’s other hand slid up Rick’s chest to cup the back of his neck.

“Morty- what- what are you-”

He was cut off as Morty pressed their lips together in a kiss, a lingering, silent question against his lips. As soon as Rick’s brain started to catch up, the kiss shifted, catching him off guard again. Morty kissed him hungrily, desperately, licking into his mouth and it was safe to say Rick’s body was on board before his brain could process what was happening, chasing away everything he had been about to say. He pulled Morty against him, returning the kiss fiercely, his desire slipping its tether and pulsing heat through his veins. He moaned into Morty’s mouth, and Morty was flush against him, heat and want and his.

Rationally, he would understand later, when rationality was finally back on board, they could only have been kissing for a few minutes. But in the moment, time seemed to expand; the press of Morty’s lips, the slick slide of Morty’s tongue against his own, the sighs and breathy whines from his grandson that he devoured for himself, all of these were everything to Rick, and in that moment, eternal; everlasting.

And then he felt Morty’s tears, wet against his face, and it all came crashing down.

“Oh shit,” he said, pulling back from the warmth of Morty’s mouth. “Oh Christ, baby, we- I- I can’t- what are we doing?”

He searched Morty’s eyes, reaching up to hold Morty’s face in his hands, thumbs brushing away Morty’s tears but they kept flowing. Rick was leaning back in his seat, the kid was practically on top of him, and that posed its own problems, but all Rick could see was Morty’s tear stained face in his hands.

“J- Jesus, Rick, I- I just need…” Morty sucked in a hitching breath. “I j- just need to f- feel anything. Anything but th- the way I’ve been feeling, Rick. I know you al- almost k- kissed me before, and I’m the s- same and I- I don’t wanna hide it anymore, I just n- need you. Please,
“Rick."

“Morty. I- I can’t…” Rick felt like he’d been stabbed in the heart when Morty gave a soft, yet anguished cry and curled in on himself. “I- it isn’t- it’s not you. I- need you to- Morty, look at me.”

Morty looked, his teary gaze meeting Rick’s once more. Rick could feel Morty shaking on top of him, could feel his own hands doing the same as he stroked his fingers through Morty’s hair.

“There are- there are so many reasons- but I- I need you to know it- it isn’t you. That- that definitely should be a reason but- sweetheart. It just isn’t.”

Rick saw Morty’s cheeks flush pink at the pet name, saw his face light with hope, and he cursed himself, knowing Morty would never give up without learning the truth.

“Rick, I’m not going a- anywhere,” Morty said, determination creeping back into his voice. “I meant that. And wh- whatever else there is, I- I want this, Rick.”

“It isn’t that easy- it isn’t that simple, Morty. I’m- I’m a- a sick, shitty old man, and-”

“I’ve always known you were sh- shitty, Rick! I know you! I- I know you, Rick, a- and it’s you I w- want. I know wh- what I’m getting into, here. And- and if you think y- you’re sick for f- falling for your grandson, then what does that make me?”

“That isn’t- I don’t mean it like- like that,” Rick sighed, closing his eyes and breathing for a few seconds before looking Morty in the eye again. “I- Morty, I’ve fucked- I’ve fucked this up so much, I don’t- I don’t even know where to begin.”

“What are you t- talking about, Rick?”

Morty looked on the verge of panic, and Rick steeled himself for what he knew he had to say.

“I haven’t been honest- Morty, I-”

The ship lurched suddenly, the metal framework shrieking horribly as the ship shuddered from the sudden strain as it was caught in a brilliant beam of light.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to those who have left kudos/comments! I love you guys!

The quote belongs to Baz Luhrmann so this chapter comes with a bonus track:

Baz Luhrmann: Everybody's Free To Wear Sunscreen
This chapter's song is:
Muse: Blackout
He thought back on all the times Rick seemed like he was going to tell him something, only to hold back at the last minute. This, he realized, must have been the secret Rick was hiding.

Chapter Notes

TW: Violence and explicit gore.
Also, the ship says something totes inapprpops.
And I love Star Trek passionately and am not slighting it in any way. :)
The shuddering through the ship got worse as it moved inexorably toward the source of the light.

“I require assistance,” said the ship. “I am being molested by another spacecraft. Please notify an adult.”

“Shouldn’t we open a portal and get out of here or something?” Morty cried out.

“They’re locked onto the ship, Morty!” Rick said grimly. “And if you think- if you think for even one fucking minute that I’m gonna let them keep my ship… No- no way in fucking hell.”

---

“I don’t- I don’t fucking believe it. They didn’t keep my ship.”

Rick stared at the closing door of the docking bay from which the ship had been jettisoned, watching forlornly as it tumbled away through space.

“We don’t keep garbage,” grunted one of their alien captors.

After the ship had been pulled into the bay, Rick and Morty had been pulled from it roughly and shackled by four enormous, muscular, orange aliens. They were built like the males of Gazorpazorp, less the extra arms, but stood fully upright, and were hairless, their skin pockmarked and pitted. It actually did resemble an orange peel, Morty thought; it looked tough and craggy, but he wasn’t going to say that, as beefy and intimidating as these guys were.

“Hey, asshole,” Rick said, sharing no such reservations. “You might- you’re gonna want to get that rash looked at. Oh- oh my bad, that’s just your face.”

“Do you want to die?” the hulking alien growled.

“If you were gonna kill me, I’d already be dead,” Rick said coolly, “but you spaced my ship, so you should- you might want to start writing your will.”

“Shut up!” the alien barked.

Their captors hustled them out of the docking bay, marching them at gunpoint down a corridor. The walls were overlapping panels interrupted by networks of pipe, all matte black, and the corridor was lit by glowing green tubes that ran the length of the ceiling. They threw a dim, eerie glow that washed unpleasantly over the aliens and made Rick look grayer than ever.

“Relax, Morty,” Rick said quietly. “As soon as they turn their backs, we’ll- we’re gonna portal out, and find a way to get back to- we’re gonna find the ship, Morty. Sooner, if I get my hands on a gun.”

They were ushered into what looked like a conference room, if conference rooms were filthy yet vaguely militaristic, and pushed into seats at the long table. One of their guards pointed to a viewscreen before falling back to guard the door.

“Soon, Morty,” Rick said, his eyes tracking the guard as he walked away.

The screen on the far wall came to life.

“Rick C-137,” a horribly familiar voice caught their attention. “And your… Morty.”

A Morty looked back at them, a Morty with dead eyes and a creepy smile, wearing a high-quality suit.
“Holy shit, it's you,” Morty exclaimed.

“Morty- you- you know this guy?” Rick looked at his grandson with wide eyes.

“Yeah, he’s that weird Morty with the eye patch! I mean, he doesn’t have the eye patch anymore, but... I’m sure it’s him.”

“How can you tell?” Rick asked, dumbfounded.

“I just can. You can tell other Ricks apart, right?” Morty replied. “And you can tell me apart from other Mortys, can’t you?”

“Yes, but- honestly, Morty, the Mortys that aren’t you just kind of blur together, unless- unless they’re like a lizard Morty or a fish Morty or something.”

“Ugh. Nice, Rick.” Morty leaned his elbows on the table and facepalmed into his shackled hands.

“Alright, Weirdo Morty, what whaddaya want?” Rick addressed the screen.

“Just ‘Morty’ will do,” the weird Morty snapped. He grinned unpleasantly. “Did you like my little surprise on Zebrox Six?”

“That was you?” Morty asked.

“You were that voice on the other end of the comm,” Rick hissed. “You gave- you gave the orders to have me tortured. When I get out of here-”

“You won’t be getting out of here anytime soon, C-137. Did I forget to mention the anti-portal field surrounding this ship?” the weird Morty smirked. “Besides, is that really any way to talk to your grandson?”

“You aren’t my- you’re not my grandson, you little piece of shit!” Rick growled.

“Oh, Rick. Why must we do this? Why must we go through all the lies and deception?” the evil Morty sighed. “why don’t you just admit that this... Morty... you have with you is some cheap replacement for the real thing?”

“I’m- I’m not your real Morty?” Morty asked, trembling beside Rick and looking at him with heartbreak in his eyes.

“Just one of infinite grandsons, I’m afraid,” the evil Morty said. “He probably bought you with a coupon or won you in a bet or something. Maybe even wiped out your memories afterward, so you wouldn’t know.”

“Don’t listen to this bullshit, Morty!” Rick snapped, turning to the screen. “What- what the fuck is your problem, you creepy little bastard?”

“Oh, drop the act, C-137. Surely you’ve figured it out. Don’t you recognize me? Or do we all look the same to you?” The evil Morty grinned again. “I’m your real Morty. You’re my Rick. Don’t worry, we’ll be together again soon.”

“My Morty is sitting in that chair- he’s right here next to me!” Rick spat. “You- you’re fucking crazy.”

“Having to replace me must have been profoundly traumatic for you,” the Morty said, completely devoid of empathy. He looked to the guards. “Bring Rick C-137 to the Citadel. Feel free to
devoid of empathy. He looked to the guards. “Bring Rick C-137 to the Citadel. Feel free to dispose of the… excess baggage.”

The guards nodded.

“Over my dead fucking body!” Rick yelled.

“See you soon, Rick,” the Morty said, and the screen went black.

“Get up,” the guards said, stepping forward and yanking them from their seats.

“How do you want to do him?” one of the guards asked another, who seemed to be in charge.

“Space him with the next garbage dump in two hours,” the leader replied, grinning nastily. “Take them to a holding cell. Let them say their goodbyes.”

The guards shoved them into the hallway and marched them down to a holding cell. Rick looked the leader dead in the eyes.

“If you lay a hand on my grandson- if you harm so much as a single cell in his body- it will be the last thing you ever do.”

“Don’t get so cut up about it,” the guard sneered mockingly. “You’ll be getting a new one soon, anyway.”

He shoved them into the cell and slammed the door.

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Morty stared blankly at the wall. Rick was pacing the floor next to him, five steps in one direction, pause, turn, five steps back, pause, turn, repeat. Rick was muttering angrily, thinking out loud as he wracked his brain for a way to get out of this. Morty tuned him out. They had quickly discovered that the cell was effectively Rick-proofed. The way Morty saw it, he had an hour left to live.

He wasn’t even sure he cared anymore.

Rick wasn’t really his Rick. He wasn’t really Rick’s Morty. The grandfather he’d fallen in love with, the one he had traveled with, the one he’d drawn countless pictures of, wasn’t really even his grandfather. Or, rather, he was one of infinite grandfathers, and Morty was one of infinite grandsons, a relationship that Morty knew, among Ricks, counted for exactly jack squat.

Morty’s family wasn’t his real family. His only son was dead. And Rick wasn’t his Rick after all. He had no past, and now, he had no future. He had no real home to go back to, and his dreams of staying with Rick, out in the multiverse, which he’d only recently allowed himself to entertain, had now gone up in smoke.

He thought back on all the times Rick seemed like he was going to tell him something, only to hold back at the last minute. This, he realized, must have been the secret Rick was hiding.

Rick’s watch beeped, interrupting a rant involving threats of bodily harm to their captors. He glared at it, pressing a button to silence it, and went back to ranting and pacing like a caged animal.

“They must have put a tracker on the ship back on Zebroxian Six in- in case I got away,” Rick muttered. “The- that wormhole probably screwed up the trace, and we went- we got off the grid before they could get a lock on it. Squanchy’s place is- it’s shielded, so they couldn’t find us- they
couldn’t pick us up again until we left for the- for the funeral. Fuckers. This- this sick little fuck of a Morty has really been- he’s really been pulling out the stops with all these fucking mercenaries.”

“Yeah, Rick. You wanna t- tell me why that is?” Morty said numbly.

Rick stopped in his tracks, whipping around to stare at his grandson.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

“Cut th- the crap, Rick,” Morty sighed. “W- we both know the truth now, so there’s no point in lying to me anymore.”

“I’m sorry, Morty, can you- can you repeat that? Because I thought you just said you believed that little asshole.”

“I’ve known for a- a while now that there’s something you weren’t telling me,” Morty said. “S- so now I know. I just want to hear it fr- from you. Show me that much respect, at l- least.”

Rick’s watch beeped again, and he pressed the button to silence it, again.

“You should take y- your meds, Rick,” Morty said quietly.

“Why do you- if I’m not your real Rick, then why do you care?” Rick said icily. “We’re in a- a goddamn crisis here, Morty. Might- we might need them later.”

“Just because you- you aren’t my real Rick doesn’t mean I- I don’t care!” Morty cried. “I l- loved you!”

“Wait- wait just a goddamned minute- loved? You loved me?” Rick shouted. “As in, past- past fucking tense, used to, but you don’t anymore? You- you know what, that isn’t- that isn’t love, Morty! I’m the- the same person I was on- on Gazorpazorp and at Squanchy’s and on fucking Earth for the past- the past six fucking years, Morty. Someone- some crazy little shit comes along and fills your head with- with this, and- and that changes everything? That’s enough for you? If that’s really- if that’s all it takes, then it wasn’t love, Morty.”

“I- it’s complicated, Rick! That’s a- a pretty fucking big thing to lie about! I th- thought I was your o- only Morty and I’m not! I thought you were my g- grandfather and you aren’t! I just- I don’t know how I- I could still love someone who- who used me like that!”

Rick stared at him as though he’d been slapped.

“Well then I- I have some bad news for you, Morty. I’m the- I’m the real deal, but since you don’t love me anymore, I guess- I guess you’ll never know.”

*It doesn’t matter,* Morty thought, sitting in silence as tears slid down his cheeks, his heart breaking all over again even though, a few hours ago, he would have sworn it had nothing left unbroken. *In about twenty minutes, I’ll be floating in space with the rest of the garbage, anyway.*

Rick’s watch beeped again, and with a roar of fury, Rick smashed it against the wall, then tore it from his wrist and threw it to the floor, where he stomped on it until it was nothing but scraps. The silence reigned again, punctuated only by Rick’s ragged, angry breaths.

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Heavy footsteps in the corridor were their only warning before the door opened. A guard entered, grabbing Morty roughly and pulling him up from the floor.
Rick’s shackled hands dropped over his head from behind, pulling the chain tight across his throat as Rick strangled the life out of him. His limbs flailed, throwing Morty free, as he tried to pull the chain away from his own neck.

Angry shouts echoed through the corridor.

“Grab- grab his gun, Morty!”

Morty ducked under the bulky, swinging arms and grabbed the blaster pistol from the guard’s holster just as two more aliens, one after the other, piled through the doorway. Morty aimed and fired, taking out the first, while Rick pulled the chain tighter, crushing the guard’s windpipe with a sickening crunch, then whirled and threw the slackening body at the second newcomer, taking him to the ground with a thud. He grabbed the gun from Morty and shot the guard before he could crawl out from under the weight, splattering green brain matter across the cell.

Rick handed the gun back and stripped the pistol from the guard Morty had shot.

“Come on, Morty, we have to- we gotta take out the anti-portal field if we’re gonna get out of here.”

“What? Rick, how are we g- gonna find it?”

“It’ll- it’s gotta be sucking power from the main core, so it’s probably in the- the engine room.”

Rick took a quick peek into the corridor, then rounded the doorway and took off, Morty hot on his heels as Rick dropped two more guards who came in from the far end.

They made their way through the ship, taking cover and firing at mercenaries who dropped like flies under Rick’s deadly aim and Morty’s not insignificant marksmanship, though without a targeting aid like he’d had last time, he wasn’t quite as good a shot. Rick had just taken out three more when Morty heard voices from behind them in the corridor.

“I don’t care what that little shit is paying us! Take them both out!”

Morty turned and saw that one of the mercenaries had his blaster aimed at Rick’s back.

Morty didn’t have time to raise his gun, so he took the only option he had.

He stepped into the line of fire and took the blast straight in the chest.

---

Rick turned at the sound of gunfire and watched Morty fall, as though in slow motion. All of existence seemed to freeze around him as ice shot through his veins.

“NO!” he cried, raising his pistol and firing rapidly, without thought, as more blasts shot past him, until the mercenaries all lay stone dead.

“Morty- Morty, oh, sweet Christ, don’t be dead,” he babbled as he knelt and rolled his grandson over.

Morty’s chest was a mess; a deep, wide, sucking chest wound left him gasping shallow, fishlike breaths with lungs that were shredded at the edges and didn’t want to breathe any longer. Under the pulpy ruin of shattered sternum and burned flesh, something moved, and Rick realized sickly that it was Morty’s beating heart, the beats slowing as he watched.
“R- Rick,” Morty gasped, barely a whisper without enough breath to push the sound.

“Don’t- don’t talk, Morty, oh god, just- just hang on, baby, I’ll fix this, I- I-”

Rick’s panicked hands fluttered over Morty’s ruined chest as his throat choked around the words. With the last of his strength, Morty took hold of Rick’s hand with his own.

“Guess I…” he faded out for a second.

Rick leaned close to hear him, Morty’s words barely reaching his ear.

“I still… love you.”

Morty’s body went slack against the floor.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the comments and kudos! I love hearing from you!

Okay... this is, by far, the worst cliffhanger I’ve ever done, but... I write fast? So... yeah...

Nine Inch Nails: In Two
Superstellar

Chapter Summary

Rick tore through the ship like a hot knife through butter, shooting down any mercenaries he came across. In the flashing red emergency lighting, Rick looked like some unholy terror unleashed from the depths of Hell itself.

Chapter Notes

TW: More violence and graphic description of injuries.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Morty? Morty?” Rick cried as Morty’s hand slid limply from his.

Rick dug bloodstained hands into his own hair. He couldn’t tell if Morty was even trying to breathe anymore. He wracked his brain trying to come up with something, anything, but with the anti-portal field still in effect, he had no options, couldn’t get Morty to a hospital and, frankly, he doubted Morty would survive being moved.

“What- what the fuck- what am I gonna do?” He squeezed his eyes shut, his thoughts racing frantically, and then, with sudden clarity, he remembered: the serum! He scrambled for his belt buckle, whipping his pants down faster than he ever had for any lay.

“I’ve got serum in my ass, Morty! Just hang on- hang in there, Morty, Grandpa’s gotta- Grandpa’s gotta pull a solution out of his ass, here!”

He was already knuckles-deep in his sphincter, fishing for the syringe, when a mercenary rounded the corner, completely unawares. The big orange guy stopped and stared, slack-jawed, obviously unprepared for the sight of a pantsless old man standing over what looked like a dead body with his fingers up his asshole and his dick hanging out.

Rick threw a glance toward his gun, left on the floor without a thought, and realized he didn’t have a chance of reaching it before the mercenary could draw his own weapon and shoot.

“Get the fuck out or I’ll kill you with my dick!” Rick yelled.

Eyes crazed, wild hair tufted with fresh blood, and fingers up his butt, Rick looked the very portrait of insanity, and the mercenary wanted nothing to do with it. Especially the part about getting murdered with a dick.

“Getting the fuck out, sir!” the mercenary shouted, bolting back around the corner, his voice fading away as he cried, “No money is worth this!”

Rick’s fingertips found purchase on the end of the syringe and he teased it forth from his anus. Thank all things holy he was pliable enough after decades of smuggling and rough trade to be able to jam half his hand up there with no prep. It wasn’t exactly comfortable, but he could endure any
amount of pain for Morty.

“Yeah, baby, come to Papa Rick,” he grunted as he pulled out the syringe.

Falling to his knees, he tweaked some settings on the device, then pressed it to Morty’s neck and injected him with both doses. He felt Morty’s pulse, and found his heart was still beating, sluggish and weak, but enough to distribute the nanites through Morty’s failing body. Giving Morty both doses was a gamble; Rick’s usual dose already exceeded recommended safety margins, but Morty had taken a lot of damage and Rick suspected even the overload of nanites was less of a risk than trusting it to one dose. Besides which, Morty’s body hadn’t been subjected to repeated nanite injections, and would be better able to process the tiny machines out of his bloodstream than Rick’s oversaturated body would have been. And, if Morty came down with acute nanite toxicity, Rick could fix that with equipment and time, something he didn’t have on hand but would be able to get if the nanites worked.

“Come on, baby,” he whispered, eyes darting between Morty’s ash-white face and the wound in his chest.

At first, it seemed nothing was happening. Then, just as Rick was about to give up all hope, the skin at the edges of the wound began to creep infinitesimally toward the center, and the mangled flesh and bone began to knit back together as Morty’s chest hitched with a tiny gasp of breath. Seconds crawled by and the sickening burble of air sucking through tears in Morty’s lungs began to ebb as the holes sealed, his breathing growing stronger. Eventually, the crawling edges of skin meshed together, disguising the subtle shifts of knitting muscle and bone underneath, and color began to return to Morty’s face as his heartbeat stabilized.

“Morty? Morty- buddy, are you with me?” Rick patted Morty’s face, watching him fretfully for signs of consciousness. “Come- come on, wake up- wake up for me, baby.”

Morty’s eyes moved under his eyelids; Rick watched the pale skin shift with the movement of Morty’s corneas beneath, and Morty’s eyes opened at last with a flutter of eyelashes that made Rick’s mouth go dry.

“Rick,” he gasped roughly, looking up at his grandfather.

“Hey, buddy,” Rick replied, breaking into a shy smile, embarrassed at how emotional his voice sounded. He stroked Morty’s hair back from his forehead. “There- there you are.”

“Why… why am I alive?” Morty asked.

Rick scooped him gently into a hug, mindful of his healing injuries as he cradled him in his arms.

“Because I couldn’t- I can’t live without you.” Rick pressed a kiss to Morty’s head. “Also because the moron who shot you didn’t fully charge- probably didn’t charge his weapon right. Real- real slipshod organization they’re running here.”

“Why does my mouth taste like- like nickels?”

“Also-also, I might have- I kind of shot you up on nanites.”

“Rick! Y- you need those!” Morty wrinkled his nose. “And they were up y- your butt.”

“Oh, sorry, I sup- suppose I should have let a little poop-juice stop me from saving my grandson’s life.” Rick rolled his eyes. “Relax, I’m not an idiot. The- the injector- the pointy bit is self- sterilizing.”
He patted Morty on the cheek, then looked at his hand with disgust and sniffed his fingers.

“Uh, but my hands aren’t. Let- let me get you a wet wipe.”

Morty watched with a vague sense of unease as Rick fished a few packets of wet wipes not out of his coat pockets, but out of his wallet, passing a couple of them to Morty.

“Albany Crazy Wings,” Morty read from the packet.

“Yeah, there’s- there’s a dimension where Buffalo wings were invented in Albany instead, isn’t that nuts?” Rick laughed.

“Why do you h- have these?”

“Morty, there are- there are a few things you should never be without,” Rick said patiently, ticking them off on his fingers as he wiped. “Condoms, wet naps, and spare- spare batteries. Also medical gloves, but- um- I used mine a while back for- for something else.”

“I don’t w- wanna know,” Morty said, scrubbing his cheek roughly.

“Think you can stand now? Because I- I have a ship to hijack,” Rick said, his expression darkening. “These guys fucked with the wrong Rick.”

---

It had long been Morty’s experience that Rick was something of a minimalist in most areas. He seldom dedicated an excess of energy to anything other than his inventions or his recreational pursuits. He had few personal possessions aside from his science stuff, he gave crappy, thoughtless gifts at holidays and birthdays for the most part, if he remembered at all, and when he killed, it was usually out of necessity or convenience, rarely outright vengeful or overly elaborate.

Morty had once seen Rick hand Jerry a used paper napkin on Christmas morning, and that was only because Beth had nagged him to give Jerry something.

Now though… Morty hadn’t seen Rick this far off the chain since he’d plunged the Citadel into the heart of the Galactic Federation. Rick tore through the ship like a hot knife through butter, shooting down any mercenaries he came across and once, notably, killing a lone mercenary by snapping his neck with his bare hands. Rick dug into wall conduits, rigging them to explode, blowing up anyone unfortunate enough to come through the boobytrapped corridors Rick left in his wake. Rick was practically feral, and as he ravaged the ship, his rage only seemed to build.

Morty took an occasional shot here and there as he trailed after Rick, feeling weak to his very bones, some of which itched is his chest as they continued to fuse together. But in the flashing red emergency lighting that had replaced the sickly green, Rick looked like some unholy terror unleashed from the depths of Hell itself.

When they got to the engine room, Rick busied himself at a console for a moment. Morty’s attention was drawn to a complicated looking cube, almost as tall as he was, that was thrumming with energy and radiating purple light. It was attached to a pulsing green engine core by a series of heavy cables. Morty figured the cube must be the portal field generator. He looked up to tell Rick, only to see that Rick had started the ship’s mainframe running some sort of calculation, and was presently checking their position on a star map.

“Perfect,” Rick grinned, punching something else into the computation he was running. “I’ve got-the system is locked out so- so only we can access the computer, Morty. Now, let’s see what we’ve got…”
Rick pulled a panel off of the cube and started digging into its innards.

“They’ve got an energy conversion matrix in here,” he crowed, grabbing some cables and wiring them to the device. “You— you know what that means, Morty?”

“Uh… no?”

“It means they’re totally boned, Morty! I can— I can jack the portal gun into this thing and not— not fry it with the blowback!”

He connected the portal gun to the lead wires, flipped a switch, and the purple light of the machine started to glow green, just like portal fluid.

“Shouldn’t we j— just go?” Morty asked nervously.

“Not good enough,” Rick snapped. “They— they killed you, Morty, you were as good as dead— I— I almost lost you. Not one of these— these pieces of shit is getting out alive.”

He punched coordinates into the portal gun and pulled the trigger. The entire ship was bathed in a bright green glow, and then, it jumped.

---

Alarms began blaring throughout the ship as soon as the jump was complete. At first, Morty thought it was the jump itself that had done it, but then he realized he could feel the ship drifting in a way that seemed unnatural, like the artificial gravity was tilting sideways, or being pulled by something else. Whatever it was, the strain on the ship was immense; Morty could hear creaks and squeals of metal exceeding its stress capacity all around them.

“Come on, Morty, we— we’ve got like five, ten minutes tops before we cross the escape threshold,” Rick ordered, entering the results of the computational sequence he’d run on the computer into the now unplugged portal gun. He entered a command and some kind of countdown popped up on the terminal, which he then locked.

Grabbing up some kind of pack, Rick turned and shoved Morty toward the engine room door. They raced through the ship, encountering little resistance; Morty figured everyone on board was probably trying to correct whatever was wrong. Sparks showered from electrical conduits up and down the corridors as they ran. They passed viewports, but Morty saw nothing but space, though it seemed rimmed all around with an ominous red glow.

Rick stopped when they came to an airlock. Pulling Morty in with him, Rick shouldered the pack on, set down the portal gun, and pulled Morty’s back flush against his chest. He pulled a cord on the pack and it deployed, wrapping them in a membrane filled with goo, and Morty began to panic as it filled his nose and mouth.

“Morty— Morty, it’s breathable,” Rick said, his voice oddly muffled. “Calm down— calm down, Morty, it’s almost over.”

One arm around Morty, Rick picked up the portal gun in his other hand and used it to press the airlock release. With a rush of air, they were blown backward into space, the creaking strain on the ship falling away to silence. All Morty could hear was Rick’s hot breath in his ear.

As they floated clear, the immense bulk of the spacecraft falling away, a blinding red glare filled Morty’s sight. The membrane of the exosuit tinted almost instantly, and the glare darkened into a deep, angry crimson wall that seemed to keep going as far as Morty could see, the light blurring...
the dark, shrinking silhouette of the ship below him.

Morty realized he was staring down at the surface of a star, probably from a great distance, but it was huge enough that it seemed to go on forever, only a faint curve to the roiling surface suggesting that it was actually a huge ball of nuclear fusion.

“IT- it’s a red supergiant, Morty,” Rick said with quiet glee. “It looks- it seems closer than it is because it- it’s just that fucking huge, Morty!”

Morty could feel his heart pounding under Rick’s hand.

“How are we g- getting out of this?” Morty asked.

“A portal, Morty. I used the ship’s computer to account for- to work around the gravitational interference,” Rick said smugly. “Coordinates are ready- ready to go. Just point and- and shoot, and fall in.”

Morty realized they were, in fact, slowly falling toward the star, at a much slower rate than the ship, and slowed further by blasts from tiny repulsors embedded in the suit’s membrane.

“Watch, Morty,” Rick said, and Morty stared as the ship tumbled helplessly downward.

Suddenly, all the thrusters on their side of the ship fired at once – Rick’s countdown, Morty realized – and the ship was pushed, faster and faster, becoming smaller and smaller, into the burning corona of the star, beginning to twist apart as the star’s gravity sunk its teeth deep. After only a few minutes, what remained of the ship exploded, although to Morty it looked more like it had simply vaporized. There wasn’t so much as a trace left.

“Holy shit… Rick…” he breathed.

“That was- that’s for you, baby,” Rick growled lowly in his ear.

Rick pulled the trigger, opening a portal in space below them, and they fell into it, pulled by the star’s gravity, until all the red was washed away by glowing green.

---

The universe reasserted itself as Morty found them spat out in the golden glow of the star nursery. The nebulous gases surrounded them, making everything seem to float in their diffuse glow.

“The ship- our- our ship- should be right around here, somewhere…” Rick muttered, looking around.

Morty tilted his head up and spotted her, floating toward them in a slow tumble. They splatted against her windshield, held there by her artificial gravity, and edged around to the door on the side. Morty caught hold of her door handle and, per Rick’s instructions, he opened a panel next to the door and punched in an access code. The ship purged her inner atmosphere, allowing them to open the door and climb inside. As soon as the cabin repressurized to Earth-normal, the exosuit began to degrade, breaking down into globs of goo all over the seat and floor, leaving them sprawled across the seat together.

“We gotta stop- stop meeting here like this,” Rick joked, and Morty gave a weak laugh.

Rick’s hand slid up under his shirt, pulling it up, and Morty shivered as Rick’s fingers traced over his sternum, pausing to map out each rib. Rick stared at the fresh, pink skin on Morty’s chest.
“Might scar a little,” he grunted. “Probably won’t grow- you’re not gonna get chest hair anytime soon.”

“Damn,” Morty said softly.

He stared up through the canopy at glowing protostars and swirling gaseous clouds. Now that the adrenaline had worn off, he felt wrung out and boneless, but, in Rick’s arms, contented nonetheless. He felt Rick shift next to him, and gasped as he felt Rick’s face press against his chest. Rick didn’t do anything else, just rested there with a soft sigh, as though breathing Morty in, listening to the beating of his heart.

Morty didn’t feel the need to ruin the moment. He just kept looking up, feeling Rick’s breath ghost across his skin as the birthplace of stars swirled above him. It was a long time before Rick spoke.

“You were like this when- when you were new,” Rick said quietly, his voice tinged with sadness. “All pink and covered in goo.”

Morty tensed slightly.

“You still- you don’t believe me,” Rick said.

Morty thought carefully.

“It… doesn’t matter,” he said finally.

“Like hell,” Rick muttered against his chest.

“No, I- I mean it does matter, where I c- came from,” Morty said. “But… it doesn’t matter as far as what- what I feel.”

Rick sucked in a deep breath, closing his eyes as he turned his face into Morty’s chest a little more, as though hiding.

“We need- Rick, we need more nanites,” Morty said.

Rick opened one eye and held up the portal gun, shaking a wad of goo from it. A small amount of portal fluid pooled in the bottom of the reservoir.

“Portal fluid first, Mort- Morty. But… a little- a little more of this,” Rick sighed, setting the portal gun back down and wrapping his arm around Morty again. “Then… Morty, I’ll- I’ll show you everything.”

Morty wasn’t sure what Rick meant by that. Probably some horrible reveal about where Morty really came from. But for the moment, under the brilliant canopy of the living universe, Morty was fine with waiting.

“Ohkay, Rick.”

Chapter End Notes

See, I promised I wouldn’t leave you guys in suspense too long! Thanks for all the comments/kudos! If you haven’t left kudos yet and you like the story, please consider it! And I love hearing from you in the comments!
Note on chapter title: "Superstellar" isn't a term that refers to supergiant stars. It literally means "above the stars" and I used it for thematic reasons and also... *cackles*... because Rick dropped his enemies into a star and watched them burn. Ehh, well, he's Rick.

Nine Inch Nails: We're In This Together
The light-years reeled by in a dark, velvet blur as the ship pressed onward through space. There was enough portal fluid left for one jump but, according to Rick, they were saving that to nearer the end of the trip in order to achieve a dimensional shift while covering the last of the distance all at once. Rick was tightlipped as to where they were going. Morty thought restocking on nanites would have been the better option; after all, Rick had found ways to create portal fluid under even less desirable circumstances. Morty was honestly surprised Rick didn’t have the materials to do so in the back of the ship somewhere, and the more he thought about it, the more suspicious he became.

“Wh- why didn’t we just go somewhere to g- get everything at once?” Morty asked.

“We’ve been over this- I- I already told you. Zebrox 6 was a shit- a shitshow, Morty, do you really want a repeat of that? Those- those kinds of places are all pretty much the same,” Rick grumbled. “I was con- consider- thinking about going to the Citadel, but I already hated those dicks and- and that’s obviously way out now, with that fucking- that fucking weird Morty on my- on my ass.”

“So why didn’t we j- just land somewhere and make more portal fluid with- with your science stuff, Rick?”

“Hit the nail on the- on the head there, Morty, we need somewhere to land. Which means get- getting there, which means making a jump and flying for a while- for a bit- and this- where we’re going, it’s as good a place as any.”

_That_, Morty knew, was at least partly bullshit. He’d gotten better over the years at being able to tell when Rick had ulterior motives, even if he was no closer to being able to tell what those motives might be, and his bullshit meter pinged hard on that one. Rick had a particular place in mind, and for a particular reason, Morty was sure. At this point, though, he also knew he would have little luck getting Rick to drop the man-behind-the-curtain act until he was ready.

Whatever it was, it was more important than Rick’s medical treatment, and that thought also left Morty unsettled. He had no measure for the magnitude of whatever was going on without knowing how serious Rick’s condition really was, nor did he know the severity of the risk Rick
was taking.

Morty was distracted from his thoughts as he noticed Rick squirming uncomfortably in the driver’s seat. The old man shifted from side to side, wincing, before settling with a pained grunt, and was soon shifting in his seat again.

“You, uh, you okay over there, Rick?”

“I’m fine, Morty, I just- ugh- I kinda wrecked up my- I might’ve been a little rough on the ol’ ringpiece, digging for the- the serum back there,” Rick huffed. “Nothing- nothing Grandpa Rick hasn’t- hasn’t dealt with before, but- Morty, lube. Lube is- is definitely another thing you should always have with you.”

“Oh jeez. Well, um, thanks?” Morty said, blushing a little as he rubbed his hand in his hair.

“It’s no big- no big deal. You’re welcome,” Rick said, watching Morty from the corner of his eye and giving a slight smile.

“I- I really wasn’t expecting to wake up,” at all, Morty added mentally, and quickly pushed the thought away, “with- with you right there, all, um, naked and stuff.”

“Please, Morty, I wasn’t naked- I was- I was shirt-cocking. There’s- there’s a difference.”

“I didn’t even realize un- until you reached for- for your wallet,” Morty said, his blush deepening a fiercer red.

“Yeah, I- I kinda forgot, you know, with all the- all the near death,” Rick said, laughing as he babbled, “That- that must have been- it must have been quite a- a shock, like, ‘Hey, heeeeere’s Grandpa!’”

“Yeah, like, ‘Hel-lo!’”

“Like- like, ‘Howdy, just an old cock and his old cock, nothing to see here!’”

Morty giggled, hysteria bubbling in him as he thought of his almost-demise, though Rick’s lighthearted banter kept him in the moment, making it easier to bear. Truthfully, he’d only got a quick glimpse of some jiggling Rick-parts before Rick had quickly rushed to tuck himself away, and the whole memory seemed kind of blurry anyway; his brain hadn’t been fully on board yet after he’d nearly died. Besides, it was nothing he hadn’t seen several times already. Rick was not even a little bit shy about getting naked if the situation arose.


Although, in a different kind of situation… Morty found himself shifting into a very different sort of hysteria as he suddenly imagined Rick naked for sexual purposes, with him. It was something he’d thought about often over the past few years, ever since he’d realized big tits and cute, girly feet weren’t all that did it for him. Now that Rick had kissed him – holy shit, Rick had kissed him back – it suddenly seemed like an actual possibility.

Morty was floored. So much had happened since then that he hadn’t even had a chance to process it. He hadn’t had a moment to think about what it could mean. And with everything else that had happened over the past few days, Morty felt like his entire life was going off the rails. And there was Rick, by his side as always, his one true constant.

But was he? Morty wasn’t even sure about that anymore, whether Rick was even his Rick- No. He couldn’t keep going down that road, couldn’t keep tormenting himself over what it would mean if Rick wasn’t his original Rick. Even if Rick had chosen him, even if he wasn’t Rick’s first Morty, he was Rick’s Morty now. And it wasn’t like he had any other Rick.
This Rick was always there for him, had always been, in his own drunk and fucked up way, and that had to be enough.

Because there was nothing else.

*That kiss, though…*

“Um, Rick,” Morty said, not even certain himself what he was about to say, “Rick, I—”

The ship beeped an alert at them, bringing up coordinates on the console screen, and Rick slowed to a halt and docked the portal gun. Morty watched as Rick punched in an override code, which Morty had never seen him do before, and entered the coordinates for Earth, Dimension C-137.

“We’re going home?” Morty asked, astounded. He hadn’t thought they’d be going back for months.

He wondered if their adventure was over. Maybe Rick was calling it off because he’d almost died, or worse, because of that kiss…

“We- we could, if you want, and in a way- in a sense, we are,” Rick said. “My portal gun is coded to redirect to our current dimension of residence when- whenever C-137 gets punched in, unless- unless it gets the override from- unless I enter the override.”

“Oh jeez, Rick, I don’t want to see a- a bunch of Cronenbergs!” Morty cried.

“Morty… that dimension was- it was a redirect, too,” Rick said, avoiding looking him in the eye.

“Wh- what?”

“Do you want- are we doing this, Morty?” Rick snapped. “Because if we do this- once I show you- there’s no going back. Once you know- once you know what I did…”

“Oh god, R- Rick! What- what are you talking about?”

Morty’s heart felt like it would stop beating in his chest as Rick looked up at him, his face grim, his eyes pained. Morty felt like he was staring into the man’s soul, and what he saw there terrified him. And if you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you. The quote flitted through Morty’s mind, because in that moment, he knew than Rick was a man who had indeed gazed long, and in Rick’s hollow eyes, Morty saw the abyss looking back.

“Rick,” he said, his voice barely more than a whisper. “What did you do?”

“Morty,” Rick replied, steady as stone, “Yes, or no?”

Morty hesitated, but he knew there could only be one answer.

“Yes.”

He had to know.

---

The green flare of the portal faded, and Earth appeared below them, growing larger as they descended through the atmosphere, familiar continents becoming familiar geographical features becoming familiar streets. They landed in the driveway of a house that was Morty’s house, but not. It had different shrubs in the yard, the paint was a slightly different color, the front door was
blue instead of brown. The measurements of the house looked a little off. The whole neighborhood was the same way; everything was familiar and everything was slightly wrong.

Rick walked to the front door, pulling out his keys. Of the few which Morty had never known what they were for, Rick chose one and slid it into the lock.

“Last chance, Morty. You can- you can wait in the ship, and I’ll cook up some- some portal fluid, and we’ll leave."

Morty stared at Rick for only a moment before he shouldered past him and pushed the door open himself.

The interior was much the same as the outside, the same but different; different colors, older furniture. Unlike the outside, everything inside was dusty and cobweb-strewn, smelling of mildew and time. It felt hollow, empty; dead.

Morty turned to his grandfather.

“Rick… no one lives here.”

It wasn’t a question, but as Rick closed the door behind them, he answered anyway.

“No. No one has, for… for a long time.”

---

Rick looked around, the emptiness of the house looming large around him like it always did when he came here, less and less now that he was with Morty again. Like every other time, it echoed with memories and pain and guilt. The guilt was the worst of all.

It had been within his power to prevent everything that happened here. But he hadn’t done it. He hadn’t known he needed to.

His grandson looked to him with wide brown eyes, eyes inherited from the boy’s father and, Jesus Christ, it was too much.

But Rick had come this far, and as he’d told Morty, there was no going back now.

“Morty… do you remember- the day I showed you the picture, do you- I said that Beths and Jerrys had… problems? When there’s a Rick around, when Beth’s just had you?”

He could feel the heaviness in his voice. It felt like talking through molasses, like trying to speak in a dream when the dream doesn’t want to let your voice out. Morty didn’t miss it, either. The kid’s attention was on him like a hawk.

“What h- happened here, Rick?”

Rick had imagined it himself a thousand times, the parts of it he didn’t see, the things he’d recognized only after the fact. The things he’d been told, when he’d- 

It was a well of misery, and he drowned in it every time. So many times, he’d wished it really would kill him, just so he could stop sinking deeper.

“I didn’t stay away.”

He told Morty everything.
“Beth, your father is driving me crazy!”

“Jerry, he’s finally back and my mom just died…”

“I’m trying so hard to get through school and he watches the kids, he gives me a break, Jerry…”

“We can make it work without him here, Beth, he isn’t helping our marriage any.”

“Morty doesn’t sleep through the night and you don’t get up, Jerry, it’s always me.”

“I have work, Beth, I provide for this family. You can at least hold up your end.”

“You’re always at work, Jerry, you don’t know what it’s like…”

“Jerry, I’m tired… I don’t even want to get out of bed, but I still do…”

“Summer made a mess again and I just… I can’t keep up with her, Jerry.”

“I just need time to study, Jerry, please…”

“Beth… is that guy in your study group?”

“Beth, I don’t want you around that guy.”

“Beth, your responsibility is at home, with our children.”

“Beth, you need to get your priorities straight, you’re being selfish.”

“Dad, please just watch Morty and Summer for a while. I can’t be around them right now.”

“I don’t even want to hold him… please…”

Rick had heard all of it over and over again. He thought about leaving. He thought it might make it easier.

He thought Beth might not be able to take it if he left again.

He thought Jerry needed to man up. He thought if Jerry wouldn’t, somebody had to.

He thought Beth needed help, more help than he could give.

He thought Jerry could suck eggs for ruining his daughter’s life. He hated Jerry to his very core for allowing his daughter to suffer.

He thought he kept it in check. Even though he didn’t think he could hate Jerry more. He was wrong.

He thought he did the best he could.

Again, he was wrong.

“Are you fucking that guy, Beth?”

---

He stood in the driveway, swinging a set of keys around his fingers. He’d gone out, that house,
that goddamned Jerry were driving him up a wall. Just an hour or two, he hadn’t been gone that long.

He felt better, ready to watch Summer and Morty while Beth went to class.

He’d come back when he knew the clone of his wife would… could something die if he wasn’t sure it was really alive? But Diane had still been alive for Beth, and he’d wanted to be sure… He needed Beth to be okay. None of the Ricks he knew had plans to go back, but Rick needed to be there for his little girl.

He was so goddamn proud of his daughter. She worked so hard for what she wanted, for what she cared about… Even if she cared too much about that dipshit, Jerry. Rick had thought of at least a hundred ways to make Jerry disappear, but… He couldn’t do that to Beth. She loved the asshole, so Rick was stuck with him. For the moment.

Besides, the kids were pretty neat. Summer was old enough to think and young enough not to be penned in by convention, so at least she was interesting with all the shit she got up to. Morty was a little bundle of constant needs and raw, wailing tears, but even that had its charm, all that pain in the ass effort rewarded with a tiny hand grabbing Rick’s finger. Rick thought he might actually love the little shits.

There was yelling coming from inside the house. Another fight, great. He’d resolved himself to squirreling the kids away while Jerry and Beth hashed out their shit, maybe throwing a disparaging comment Jerry’s way while he was at it, and he was halfway up the front walk with an insult on the tip of his tongue when

A scream and a crash

He ran

He ran to the door he threw it open

Beth where was his daughter

His daughter

Beth

Beth...

He found her at the bottom of the stairs, neck twisted, eyes staring blankly, a smear of blood down the wall and blood in her hair

Red hair spilled from under her shoulder

Rick pushed her back, her body, his daughter’s dead fucking body and

Summer

Not Summer too

Rick didn’t think he could feel this sick and

Someone sobbed at the top of the stairs

Jerry on his knees, crying, staring in disbelief, “It wasn’t me, I didn’t, I didn’t… I didn’t… mean to…”
Rick stepped over his dead daughter, his dead granddaughter, pounded up the stairs. “Morty! Where’s Morty?”

Shaking Jerry, fists in his shirt, “What... I don’t know...” throwing him to the ground and running to Morty’s nursery

Little crying bundle of need and fear woken by the noise but safe

Safe in his crib where Rick looked down on him, something in his heart cracking wide open at being spared this one, small thing

Fingers gripping the crib rail in white-knuckled rage

Turning to the hallway

Jerry looking up at him from the floor

Trembling, seeing death in his eyes

“Just end it, Rick.”

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Morty stared at his grandfather. The old man stood there, in that otherworldly facsimile of the house where Morty grew up, a shaking hand to his face with spidery fingers splayed as he looked between them toward the stairs with empty, haunted eyes. Morty followed his stare and saw a spot on the wall, dented in and a slightly different color to the paint, stained rusty brown in the cracks.

He looked away quickly, back to his grandfather. Rick was ghostly pale, shaking like he might fall over right there, and Morty was shocked by how truly old Rick looked in that moment, aged by the harshness of memories and pain.

“Rick,” he said, taking a step forward.

“Don’t,” Rick said roughly, taking a step back. “I’m not done.”

Morty stopped, waiting, dread building in the pit of his stomach. What could be worse than what he’d just heard?

“Morty… That Jerry, your father, he- he didn’t- he didn’t live for long.”

Morty looked at the floor.

“Y- you killed him.”

“Morty, I- Yes. I killed him,” Rick said weakly. “He said- he told me- they were arguing and he- he lashed out- he pushed her. He didn’t know- he didn’t realize she was at the top of the stairs until- until she fell.”

“While sh- she was holding S- Summer,” Morty said.

“He didn’t even- he didn’t even think about it, Morty. He had- he basically had a- a fucking temper tantrum and my- my daughter died. And my granddaughter.” Rick paused. “He killed them but- they- they died because of me. I shouldn’t have- I shouldn’t have come back. I should have stayed away.”
“That- Rick, that can’t- it can’t be because of you.”

“Tell that- tell that to all the Beths and Summers who are still- who’re still alive. Out of all the- all the infinite daughters, only- only one of them was mine.”

“Rick, I- I think I need a- a minute, here,” Morty said. He felt like all the air had been punched out of him.

“I’ll be in the- in the garage. You do- you do what you gotta do and- and we’ll talk, after.”

Rick staggered toward the garage door. Morty noticed, in a strange, detached way that it was about two feet to the left of where it should be, another thing that was just off and wrong about this place.

“Rick,” Morty called.

His grandfather paused, leaning heavily on the doorframe as he looked back.

“Yeah, Morty?”

“You… you k- kept me?”

Rick closed his eyes, smiling the saddest smile Morty had ever seen.

“I couldn’t let- I couldn’t let you go, Morty.”

“So I- I’m really…”

Rick looked at him with so much love, Morty thought his heart would crack in two.


Rick turned away and went to the garage, leaving Morty in the ruin of a life he had never truly known.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who has left comments and kudos. The kudos are over a hundred now! ... And we're celebrating with a super sad chapter. *cries* *crawls into a hole*

Die Antwoord: Darkling
Dark Matter (2)

Chapter Summary

What was done was done, and no more could Rick take back what he did than he could take back the fact that he felt completely justified in doing it. Morty didn’t doubt that for a second.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Morty looked around the house. He saw more details now, things that jumped out and made more sense within the context he’d been given. There were outlines on some of the walls where pictures had once hung, some with a simple nail left behind and others where the fastening seemed to have been ripped out by force, leaving a chunk of plaster missing. In a few places, there were holes in the wall that Morty had taken for more of the state of decay that had begun to consume the residence but which he now realized were from fists, and he suspected that these were where photos of Jerry had hung. Broken glass crunched beneath his shoe as he examined one of the punch-holes, the remnants of a haphazard cleanup.

There hadn’t been anyone left to clean up for. No little hands or feet that might be cut, no Beth or Jerry to nag about the mess.

The kitchen was… just a kitchen. Morty half expected to find the filthy remains of a breakfast no one was left to clean up, but either Rick had seen to that, or Beth had before the- accident? No, Morty thought, more like manslaughter. He didn’t see any Jerry having it in him to outright murder someone, but killing someone in a turbulent outburst? Sadly, Morty could imagine that all too easily. The Jerrys he’d known were always a little too put-upon, a little too self-involved, a little too into playing up their hurt feelings and acting out on their disappointments. And they were clumsy as hell.

Rick, on the other hand…

Morty knew Rick was capable of outright murder. He’d seen it firsthand. And Morty knew the Jerry who had fathered him had not died well. He didn’t necessarily think it would have been a torturous bloodbath; that could well have been the case, but Morty imagined it would have been something more like a pathetic confession followed by a lot of begging, probably both to die and to be spared because Jerrys were nothing if not weak in their convictions. At the end of it all, Jerry would have just given up, surrendered all hope, and quietly let Rick put him to his end with merciless efficiency.

Part of Morty wanted to know. Did Rick shoot him? Space him? Portal him to a junk dimension incapable of sustaining life? Morty knew that some of the static dimensions off the far ends of the central finite curve were so chaotically jumbled that they could just rip a body to shreds, while some led to nothingness, where anyone who entered would simply cease to be.

For the most part, though, Morty didn’t care. What was done was done, and no more could Rick take back what he did than he could take back the fact that he felt completely justified in doing it. Morty didn’t doubt that for a second. That Jerry had taken from Rick nearly all that held any meaning for him, and he’d paid the price Rick would have felt was owed.
No, if Rick felt any remorse over Jerry, it would be because of what Morty would think of him. If Morty was being honest, he felt far worse for Rick than he did about Jerry. He felt far worse about Beth, and *Summer*… He knew his sister should have grown into someone full of life and sass, his playmate and sometimes older-sibling-tormentor, and occasionally fierce protector. He’d had to let go of the Summer he’d thought was his once before that he knew of, but to think of her, the life flung from her when she was still so small, never getting to have the chance to become all he knew her to be… that was truly the worst of it, and he didn’t have much feeling left for his Jerry at all.

Out of infinite sisters and infinite mothers, only one of each were his own.

Just like only one Rick was truly his.

It was funny how he could still see the worth in other Summers, other Beths, maybe because they were all he’d truly known. Rick seemed to like them, but had always walked a tightrope between attachment and distance. For Rick, having had them as a part of his life, it was clearly different than it was for Morty. But Morty understood, because he could never replace Rick with another Rick the way he had made do with a new Summer, a new Beth. Had he really known his own, he would probably be the same.

He made his way upstairs, and the walk up the staircase made his skin crawl. Everything was dustier up here; he was sure that Rick had been here in the intervening years, but clearly he avoided the upstairs entirely. A quick peek into the room that would have been Rick’s confirmed this. The room was completely stripped bare.

Summer’s room was something from a nightmare, all bright pinks and purples, toys strewn around that would never be played with again, dust thick and graying everything. Morty was ready to close the door as soon as he opened it, but something caught his eye. On the unmade toddler bed, poking out from under a blanket, was a familiar looking stuffed lamb with a unicorn horn and a tutu. Morty recalled a parasite manifesting as the odd little thing once, and realized it had pulled this particular image from his other Summer’s childhood memories. He picked it up and brushed the dust away.

His Summer didn’t still have hers, and he remembered her being desperately upset once about losing a toy she’d particularly liked. Maybe he could set one little thing right in all of this.

He skipped Beth and Jerry’s room entirely, and that just left his own.

It was dusty like the rest of the upstairs, but much less cluttered than Summer’s room. He hadn’t been old enough to make a mess and Beth, most likely, had kept things tidy. Also unlike Summer’s room, there were empty places where things should be but weren’t; no diaper bag, and when he checked the drawers, he found very little clothing. All necessities that Rick could easily pack, he realized. Rick had stripped Morty’s room of what he needed and hadn’t looked back, as far as Morty could tell.

The crib was still there, too big to take or Rick hadn’t wanted it, Morty wasn’t sure which, and sitting up against the middle of the back rail was an odd little stuffed animal. It was a weird, furry blue monster with too many long, floppy arms and legs to make it likely to have come from Earth. Rick, then. Morty didn’t know why it was left behind, but he reached for it and shook off the dust. It was his, so why shouldn’t he take it now?

There wasn’t anything else left to see, so he went back downstairs, and headed for the garage.

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Rick waited, fidgeting, taking anxious sips from his flask. This, too, was a balancing act; this place was too upsetting to deal with stone sober, but he couldn’t afford to get outright drunk here either. It was too easy to slip, too easy to lose control. In the past, he’d let it get the better of him, and had come close to offing himself in this very garage more than once. That was in the early days, his Mortyless years, and it was the thought of the kid, knowing he’d be able to come back into his life eventually, that pulled him back from the edge. Once he’d gotten Morty back, he’d only come here rarely to work.

He didn’t even keep that much equipment here, since he wasn’t around to keep an eye on it. He needed some things from the car, but he felt stuck where he was, loathing the idea of setting foot in the house, and terrified of what Morty would have to say to him once everything really hit. His hands wouldn’t stop shaking.

He held one up in front of him and watched it tremble.

Granted, that had happened before, at first, and he’d never been here to spill everything to Morty before, either, but he couldn’t make it stop, and he was starting to think Morty’s idea to get materials for the serum first had been on point.

_It’s fine_, he told himself. He just had to whip up some portal fluid and they’d be on their way. As he felt a tremor run through his leg, he started thinking maybe a trip to an interstellar hospital might be in order. He just had to hang in there for another hour, tops. It was fine.

He heard the door swing open behind him. He tightened his hand into a fist, wresting back what control he could, and turned to face Morty.

The kid held what looked like two fluffy dustballs in his hands.

“What- what’ve you got there, Morty?” he asked.

“I, uh, I found these,” Morty said, holding them up. One of them looked like some random girl’s toy, but the blue one was familiar.

“Oh- oh hey,” Rick said. “I rem- remember this guy!”

He took the blue thing from Morty’s outstretched hand, turning it over in his hands, a smile crawling across his face.

“You- you got that for me, didn’t you, Rick?” Morty asked softly.

“Yeah, I- there’s no way you could- could possibly remember that,” Rick said, looking up at Morty quickly. “You were- you were way too little, babies can’t form linear memories like that.”

“Yeah, but- I mean, look at it. Who e- else would?”

Rick turned the thing over, watching as the long limbs flopped around.

“You- you got that for me, didn’t you, Rick?” Morty asked softly.

“Yeah, I- there’s no way you could- could possibly remember that,” Rick said, looking up at Morty quickly. “You were- you were way too little, babies can’t form linear memories like that.”

“Yeah, but- I mean, look at it. Who e- else would?”

Rick turned the thing over, watching as the long limbs flopped around.

“Fair point.”

“Why, um… why didn’t you take it? It- it looks like you took some other stuff,” Morty asked.

Rick plunked his elbows on the desk, trying to hide the tremors as he pretended to examine the odd little thing.

“Morty… with your mom and- and your sister dead and your father, um, missing after the- uh- the incident, I was- they gave me guardianship of you. The- the authorities, I mean. And I… I’m not
going to say that I couldn’t- I couldn’t take care of you, because I- I totally could have, Morty. But I wanted- I wanted you to- I wanted better for you. So I found- there were a few dimensions where Beth didn’t have you or- or something had- had happened to you, and where the Ricks were dead or- or whatever, Morty, you know how this works. Anyway, I did- you know- some memory edits and- we bounced around a bit before I found a dimension that- that worked out. You’ve- we’ve moved around a lot, Morty. I didn't- I didn't want to- to leave evidence that might make your new Beth suspect anything.”

“And you l- left me there?” Morty sat on the floor, crossing his legs as he settled, looking up at Rick.

“To avoid- to avoid a repeat,” Rick said. “I- you don’t remember but I- I checked up on you. Figured at a- at a certain point you- you were probably big enough that- that Jerry wouldn’t hurt you by- by you know. By accident. Then I came- I came back.”

“You were around?” Morty’s eyes widened in surprise.

“No- no shit, Morty, I- I watched that fucker Jerry like a Sylvarian scrub eagle. Those things have like- like six fucking eyes, Morty.”

“You- you’ve hated every Jerry, haven’t you?”

“More than the average Rick, Morty,” Rick said. The hard edge in his voice faded. “Do you- Morty… do you blame me?”

Morty bit his lip, looking down at the stuffed lamb abomination in his hands.

“No, Rick. I really don’t;” he said finally. “And you sh- shouldn’t blame yourself, either. What- what Jerry did to Mom and S- Summer wasn’t that wasn’t your fault, Rick. You- you know as well as I do that J- Jerrys are pathetic assholes who can’t deal. I mean, I- I was raised by one and… I’m k- kinda surprised this stuff doesn’t happen more- more often.”

“So we- Morty, are we- are we good?” Rick asked.

“Rick, we never w- weren’t,” Morty said.

“I dunno, Morty, I- I seem to remember you stepping in- stepping in front of a charged energy round,” Rick said roughly. “You- you wanna tell me what that was all about?”

“Jeez, Rick… I- I just…” Morty’s voice hitched. “I just- I got overwhelmed, okay? I- it feels like I lost so much, with- with Morty Junior and not- not being sure I was really your Morty and everything. I just didn’t want to lose y- you, too.”

“Christ, Morty. You- you realize I- I’m gonna go belly-up a long, long time before you do, right?”

“Yeah, but… it’s gonna be a while before that h- happens. I just didn’t- I didn’t want you to die, Rick.”

“Well, I- I don’t want you to- to go dying on me, either. Especially not- not like that, Morty. Not on purpose. I don’t wanna end up the- the last fucking member of my family.”

Rick knew he was being an asshole, putting it to Morty like that, but he needed to get the idea into Morty’s head. He wasn’t sure if bringing him here was a good idea at all, after everything, but the last thing Morty had needed was to go on thinking everything else between them was a lie, too. One thing at a time, Rick thought. He would just see Morty through this, and find the right time, later, do deal with the matter of his impending mortality.
He watched Morty, who was chewing on his lip, looking guilty. Good, Rick thought to himself, because if Morty thought he could save Rick by dying himself, nothing could be further from the truth. Only Morty had kept him from eating a bullet all those years ago, and if Morty got killed trying to save him, he didn’t see it going any other way.

“You, uh, you keeping these?” he asked, handing the furry blue stuffed thing to Morty.

“Um, yeah, if- if that’s okay? I- I thought my Summer – my Summer now, I mean – might w- want hers, maybe.”

“That’s- that’s nice, Morty. I- they’re as much yours as- as mine, you- you have as much of a say as I do,” Rick said, looking away so Morty wouldn’t see him getting teary-eyed. “Why don’t you- just- just go put them in the car. And get me the- the portal fluid stuff from the back. I- I’ll teach you how to make it.”

“Really, Rick?” Morty’s eyes lit up. The portal fluid was a closely guarded trade secret among the Ricks.

“Yeah, it- it’s time, Morty.”

Morty scrambled up and headed through the door into the house. Just as well; Rick couldn’t wait to get out of here, this shithole house that made him feel vulnerable as hell. He let out a breath as he stopped holding himself steady, telling himself he just had to hold out until they could get more nanites as a tremor wracked his body.

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Morty tucked Summer’s lamb-thing into his duffel bag next to his sketchbook. Maybe once they were in space again, he’d get some time to draw. He hadn’t since they’d left Squanchy’s hideout; he hadn’t felt like it on Gazorazorp, and the rest of the time, they’d been in mortal danger, not exactly a great time to whip out a pencil.

His own little stuffed alien sat on the dash, its long skinny legs sprawled out every which way.

He shut the door and rummaged through the trunk for Rick’s stuff. Thankfully, it was labeled. Morty wasn’t sure when Rick had started doing that, but it made his job a lot easier. Some stuff even had some basic operational notes attached. Morty wasn’t sure why, because it was always Rick who used this stuff. The portal fluid stuff didn’t have instructions, though; Morty figured Rick hadn’t wanted to leave that written anywhere.

He lugged the equipment and materials back through the house to the garage.

“Hey, Rick, I got the-”

He stopped in his tracks.

Rick lay on the ground, shaking violently as though having a seizure. Morty crashed to his knees beside his grandfather, dropping the equipment on the ground. He scooped his arm under Rick’s head, trying not to let it hit the ground any more than it already had.

“Oh shit, shit, Rick?” he cried. “Oh god, what- what do I-”

The tremors tapered off and Rick fell still against him. His face was ashen, frothy spittle leaking from his mouth. Morty checked for a pulse and found one, saw that Rick was breathing, though not regularly, but no matter how many times Morty called out to him, his grandfather didn’t wake
Thank you all for leaving comments/kudos!

Queens of the Stone Age: The Vampyre of Time and Memory
Dark Side of the Moon

Chapter Summary

No matter how far Rick went, Morty had always believed Rick would come back to
him. But now, when he finally understood how gravely ill Rick really was…
He knew death would inevitably tear them apart.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

No nanites. No portal fluid. Stranded with no family on an unfamiliar Earth in a dimension where
he knew no one. Rick unconscious, possibly dying in front of him for all he knew. Morty’s
options were narrowing rapidly, and all the ones he had sucked pretty bad.

Morty looked around for something, anything, that might be useful, but Rick really didn’t have
that much stuff here. The garage of this house was literally nothing more than a space Rick could
use to work in, on stuff he probably brought with him whenever he came here and took whenever
he left.

There was the ship, though.

Morty looked up and spotted the emergency release cord on the garage door opener – the power
to the house was shut off, so the opener itself was useless, the garage lit only by a small, self-
contained lamp on the desk. He pulled the cord, heard the mechanism disengage with a time-worn
creak, and ran to the door, throwing it open, the hinges squealing.

“Ship, find the nearest interstellar hospital!” he cried as he opened the door to the ship.

“Calculating… maps incomplete. Nearest known hospital is in another dimension.”

“We can’t make a d- dimensional jump! Where’s the nearest one in this dimension?”

“Nearest mapped hospital is two days away at maximum speed.”

“Dammit!”

“Execute emergency protocol?”

“Wh- what does- what does that do?”

“Emergency protocol: if Rick is incapacitated and Morty is stranded, contact Doofus.”

“Uh… what? I- I mean, yes, do it!”

The ship beeped a low, muted tone.

“Hey, you got Rick J-19ζ?” a voice came over the ship’s speakers, gravelly like his Rick’s but
softer and more cheerful. “What can I do for you?”

“Uh, th- this is Morty!”
“You’re going to have to be a little more specific.”

“S- sorry, this is Morty C-137!”

“Oh… Listen, I- I’m sure you’re a nice kid, so if your Rick put you up to crank calling me about eating my own shit, maybe let’s just not and- and say we did? Is your Rick listening to this?”

“No! He’s- I don’t know what happened but he- he had a seizure and I- I can’t wake him up!”

Morty didn’t know what his Rick’s history with this Rick was, though it didn’t seem great from the sound of things, but the panic in his voice must have come across because the other Rick’s tone shifted from one of anxiety to soothing calm.

“Okay, Morty, just stay calm, keep a level head here. What dimension are you in and what are your coordinates?”

“I’m in C- 137 on Earth!” Morty said, reading off the coordinates for the driveway as the ship provided them on the dashboard screen.

“You’re not- are you seriously going to bring that asshole here?” another Rick voice, considerably more grouchy, said in the background. “You know he’s the guy who- he’s the one who told everyone you eat your own shit, right?”

“Don’t be a jerk, Oahu, his Morty is scared. Hey, kiddo,” the nice Rick spoke to him again. “Don’t worry, I’ll be right there.”

The line disconnected, and a few seconds later, Morty heard a portal open. He turned toward the green flash of light in the driveway. A Rick with a stupid looking bowl-cut and goofier teeth than usual stepped through onto the pavement.

Morty tumbled out of the ship.

“P- please, you- you gotta help- w- we ran out of portal fluid and the- the ship said to call you.”

The new Rick was already walking quickly to Rick’s side.

“You- you did the right thing, Morty,” the Rick said comfortingly as he pulled a scanner of some sort from his pocket. He frowned as he looked at the readings, then took out a syringe, less like Rick’s and more like the things from Star Trek, and injected something into Rick’s neck.

“What- what was that?” Morty asked. “Are you s- sure you know what you’re doing?”

“I’m just stabilizing him so we can move him,” the Rick said. “I work- I guess you could say I volunteer at a medical clinic. Help me get him into your ship.”

Together, they lifted Rick and carried him to the ship, laying him out in the back seat. A sudden, awful thought occurred to Morty.

“Hey, y- you’re not with the Citadel, are you?”

“No, I used to be, before this guy here, uh, slaughtered the Council of Ricks, but I got out when the Capitalist Ricks took over. They weren’t- I’m just not about running things that way.”

“Oh. Th- that’s… good,” Morty said.

“Morty, is your Rick in trouble with the Citadel?” Doofus asked gently.
“He- uh, yeah,” Morty replied.

“Well, that complicates things. But it also makes some things easier,” Doofus Rick said brightly. “Why don’t you go grab your Rick’s stuff, and close up the garage, and we’ll get out of here?”

“O- okay.”

---

They had taken off and jumped through a quick succession of portals thanks to Doofus Rick’s portal gun.

“Harder to pick up our trail,” Doofus Rick had said, “but he really needs to incorporate his portal tech into the ship’s drive core, then he wouldn’t need to worry about overloading the circuits in his portal gun. But don’t worry, Morty, I’ve got a spare tube of fluid, so we won’t run out by making a lot of small jumps.”

“A s- spare tube?” Morty asked. It seemed so obvious a thing to do, and yet… “Why d- doesn’t my Rick do that? He’s always running out.”

“Some Ricks just like to live on the edge, Morty,” Doofus said kindly. “It’s no slight against him, you just can’t change a Rick’s basic nature. Besides, it looks like you’ve been living out of your ship, right? Portal fluid is pretty volatile stuff, so it’s probably safer to make it as you go.”

Alternate dimensions flashed by, constant flashes of green and black that left Morty feeling disoriented and nauseous, and all the while, he was focused on his Rick’s slow, heavy breathing from the back seat. Soon, they popped out of a portal above a planet smaller than Earth with wide, purple oceans, and as they cruised through the atmosphere, Morty saw the land masses were covered in soft teal woodlands and broad, grassy plains. He saw no sign of developed settlements anywhere other than where they landed, where there were clusters of buildings that looked recently built from whatever was to hand, most of them prefabricated emergency shelters with customized add-ons made from junk. Many of the buildings also had a small spaceship parked nearby, of widely varied construction, most of them appearing to have been cobbled together from random parts much like Rick’s ship.

He saw people, too, milling around as they went about everyday tasks, and to his shock he realized all of them were Ricks and Mortys.

“Is everyone here a Rick or a M- Morty?” he asked Doofus Rick.

“Yes, they are!” Doofus replied as they landed. “Everyone here is a Rick or a Morty who left the Citadel or doesn’t want the Citadel to find them, after things went bad there.”

In the doorway of the shack near where they’d landed stood a Rick, a surly look on his face, his arms crossed over his chest. He wore a loud, red Hawaiian-print shirt with big yellow hibiscus blossoms all over it, topping a pair of brown shorts that looked like typical Rick pants that had been cut off. As the ship landed, he jogged up to it, and as he got closer Morty saw that he also wore a puka shell necklace that Morty was sure his Rick would have proclaimed ‘douchey.’

“What do-” he belched rudely. “What do you got for me, Doofus?”

“Rick C-137. I stabilized him on site and decided it was better to jump here with his ship and his Morty. His condition is, um, it’s not good,” Doofus glanced sadly at Morty, “but he was stable enough for transport.”

The Hawaiian-shirt Rick climbed into the ship and checked Rick over.
“Yeah, good- good work, Doofus. Help me get Asshole Rick inside and I’ll- I’ll see what I can do.”

The inside of the building, to Morty’s surprise, contained a fully functioning medical lab, clean and well-kept. The Hawaiian-shirt Rick started hooking his Rick up to various machines, information popping up on nearby monitors.

“Don’t worry, he knows what he’s doing,” said Doofus Rick. “This is Hawaiian Rick. He’s a doctor.”

“Stop introducing me like that. There’s a Rick from the big island and- and I don’t want people thinking I’m him, the guy’s a total prick. Everyone here just calls me Oahu,” the Rick grumbled. “It’s because I’m from Oahu, in case you- in case you couldn’t figure that out.”

“So th- that’s why you’re wearing… that?” Morty asked.

“No, brah. I dress like this to- to piss off the other Ricks. Now shut up and let me work.”

Oahu Rick poked and prodded, checked data and entered it into his computer, and drew some of Rick’s blood and put it into a machine. While the machine whirred and beeped, he attached leads to Rick’s forehead and temples, switching on a machine that brought up a display showing some squiggly lines. Oahu Rick frowned, tweaking some of the settings, then went to check the machine that had been processing Rick’s blood.

“He’s been dosing with nanites?” he asked.

“Yeah, he- he’s been using a nanite serum for a- a few months, I think?” Morty answered.

“Well, that would- that explains the nanite toxicity,” he said. “Exceeding the- the safe dose causes heavy metal deposits from the nanite shells that- that the body can’t excrete.”

“So that’s what’s wr- wrong with him?”

“Fuck, no,” Oahu Rick scoffed darkly. “He’s probably still alive because he’s been- he’s been using nanites to repair his nervous system. Look- take a look at this.”

Oahu Rick waved Morty over as he pushed a rolling stool over to the machine attached to Rick’s head. Morty sat, and Oahu attached leads to Morty in the same way he had Rick, clinging to his skin with little sticky pads. He flipped another switch and a second screen blinked to life with a second set of squiggly lines.

“Look, Morty, these here,” he pointed to the top set of lines. “These are your brainwaves. These over here are your Rick’s brainwaves. See how yours are all- they’re all moving around and stuff? The peaks on your Rick’s waves are way smaller, you- you see that?”

Morty looked at the screen next to his and nodded.

“Your Rick’s brain is- it’s like his brainwaves are trying to run a marathon through Jello,” he said. “His neurons are- they’re basically frying to shit and he’s been- the nanites aren’t curative, they’re just doing damage control.”


“This, here,” Oahu Rick said, pointing to a set of lines lower on Morty’s screen, “is your- your dimensional resonance signature. See how these two lines are the same?”
“Again, Morty nodded.

“That means the dimensional resonance of your consciousness is- it’s the same as the dimensional resonance of your body. See, every dimension has a different- well, I guess you would call it a specific dimensional resonance frequency. Because that’s what it’s called. And that resonance frequency influences everything living that’s born or hatched or- or whatever- in a particular dimension. You- you following this or do I need to- to roll it back for you?”

“I- I get it,” Morty said.

“Now over here,” Oahu gestured to Rick’s screen, “see, these- these signatures are- they’re different.”

Morty could, indeed, see that the two lines didn’t match. One of them almost seemed to be struggling against the other.

“This one, here, is the resonance signature of your Rick’s consciousness. It- look, it’s the same as yours. Congrats on- on keeping your original Rick, by the way, if that’s a thing you give a shit about. But this- this one is the resonance signature of- of your Rick’s body. It's out of sync. So I’m guessing this- this body isn’t your Rick’s original one?”

“It- it isn’t,” Morty confirmed. “He- uh, he overwrote the- um- the commandant of the Citadel.”

“Oh my goodness,” said Doofus.

“Fucking Christ,” Oahu said. “That’s how- that’s how he took the Citadel?”

“Y- yeah… I know it- it caused a lot of problems… d- does that mean you won’t h- help him?” Morty fretted. Maybe telling them hadn’t been a good idea.

“I- I don’t give two shits about the- the fucking Citadel,” Oahu snapped. “I’m guessing his original body is dead, then?”

“Yeah…”

“Fuck. Okay,” Oahu pinched the bridge of his nose, scrunching his eyes shut, then looked at Morty grimly. “It- it’s like this. Did- did your Rick ever dick around with transfer of consciousness? Like, say, putting his consciousness into a younger clone of himself, or something?”

“Yeah, he- he did,” Morty said, his mouth growing dry with dread.

“It didn’t- it didn’t work out too well, did it?”

“No, he said- he said he was dying.”

“Yeah, well, in that case it’s because true- true dimensional resonance is really hard to replicate. Like- like I could make a clone of, say, you, and program it to- to act like you, it might even develop something like true consciousness that would be a match for itself, but if I tried to put your- your consciousness into it, it would reject the cloned body, like a- like an organ transplant that doesn’t take. What we have here is- it’s similar. Your Rick’s consciousness and the- the body he stole are rejecting each other.”

“S- so what do we do?” Morty asked. “Can you- can you fix it?”

“Kid, there’s a reason why every Rick that tried to clone a younger body gave up, or- or died
trying. We never found a way to make it work. At most- the best I can do is continue the nanite therapy.”

“A- and after that?”

“Well, he’s- he’s in a coma right now, and it’ll take a few- a few days for him to wake up. A week, maybe. It would be better to keep him under until- until the nanites can restore more function. And I can treat the nanite toxicity. But after that, even with regular nanite therapy… he’s got maybe a few months, tops.”

“Y- you mean he’s- he’s dying?”

Morty felt like the floor had dropped out from under him. His mind went blank, and then, one by one, all of Rick’s comments about Morty outliving him popped into his head.

“He- he seemed like he was trying to t- tell me something… I- I- didn’t think…”

“He’s been dosing himself with nanites, so he- he obviously knew.”

“Oahu,” Doofus said, sounding upset. “You don’t have to be so blunt about it. This is hard enough for C-137’s Morty as it is.”

Morty felt himself choking up, eyes blurring with tears as he looked at Rick, laying still as death on the bed. Everything made sense now: all those comments about not being around anymore, teaching Morty how to maintain the ship and use the equipment, the sudden decision to leave Earth, even the unusual fondness Rick had shown him over the last few months…

“Th- there must be other Ricks who- who have had this… my Rick can’t be the only one,” Morty said, desperate for anything that might be able to help his grandfather.

“Stealing a- another Rick’s body so he could escape prison and hijack the Citadel?” Oahu said. “Nope. No other Rick ever took it that- that far. Clones degrade a- a lot faster, but permanent transfer of consciousness is a- once he lost his original body, it was a one-way ticket.”

“Oahu…”

Oahu looked at Doofus Rick, a momentary look of remorse crossing his features.

“Look, I- I guess if- if his original body was going to die anyway- it wasn’t like the Federation was going to let him get out alive. He must have- he must have thought it was worth it for- for a few more years with you,” Oahu Rick said, almost managing to sound gentle.

Morty broke down, tears streaming from his eyes as he wept. Everything seemed to slide sideways, the room spinning around him as he fell off the stool, caught in Doofus Rick’s arms before he could hit the floor. His hands gripped Doofus’s lab coat and he cried bitter tears into the older man’s shirt as Doofus held him, rubbing his back gently. Doofus was trying to be comforting, but all Morty could think was that he didn’t smell right without the faint odor of booze clinging to him, instead smelling vaguely like brownies, a scent Morty had never associated with Rick in all his life; that he didn’t sound right, that there were a million other little things that made his Rick different from any other Rick, that only his Rick was his and his alone. Still, he let the strange, kindly Rick hold him, until he felt able to stand on his own.

The thought of having to go back to the ship alone, of being separated from Rick, was more than he could bear, and he must have mumbled something to that effect because Doofus Rick replied,

“You don’t have to leave, you can stay here. Right, Oahu?”
“Yeah, sure,” Oahu grunted, looking away from the emotional display in front of him. He picked at a loose thread hanging from the bottom of his cutoffs as though it was suddenly extremely interesting. “You can use the- the other bed as long as- as long as I don’t get another critical patient.”

Doofus Rick helped Morty sit on the second bed and made promises to bring Morty’s things from the ship. Morty nodded absently in acknowledgement, barely listening, watching the slow rise and fall of his Rick’s chest. He and Rick had their ups and downs over the years, but he knew, had always known, deep down, that he had never truly wanted their time together to end. He didn’t think he had ever really believed that it would; no matter how far Rick went, Morty had always believed Rick would come back to him. But now, when he finally understood how gravely ill Rick really was…

He knew death would inevitably tear them apart.

Later, once Rick had been attached to various tubes and drips that helped him breathe and delivered nanites under Oahu’s watchful eye, and after the last light of day had faded, Morty settled in for the longest night of his life.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the kudos and awesome comments!

Ludovico Einaudi: Elements Variation
Mare Ingenii

Chapter Summary

Losing Rick just wasn’t an option. The Ricks had learned to work together, so there must be something they could do.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The morning after their arrival, Morty awoke in the thin, watery light of sunrise to see Oahu Rick injecting a syringe of blue liquid into Rick’s IV drip. He approached Morty with an identical syringe, the regular kind, needle and all, and swiftly swabbed Morty’s arm and jabbed him with it.

“OW! Jeez, wh- what the fuck?” Morty asked, rubbing his arm after Oahu stuck a bandaid on it.

“Standard- standard protocol. You- you have no idea how many Ricks show up here with STIs,” Oahu griped.

“What, like- like space-herpes?” Morty asked.

“Space herpes, space syphilis, common-variety Earth syphilis, one- one time. Fuck knows where that guy picked it up, though, there are a lot of Ricks out there- out there spreading shit around, and now some of the- the Mortys are doing it, too. He probably didn’t even know he had it or he’d have- he’d have cured it himself.”

“So wh- why did you have to give me a shot?”

“Oh, gee, Morty, I dunno, why don’t- why don’t you take a wild guess?” Oahu snapped. “I don’t know what you and your- your Rick have been up to. Are you fucking? Are you f- fucking other aliens or- or people together? Did he fuck your ex- your ex-girlfriend or your ex-boyfriend or your ex-whatever?”

“W- we’re not-”

“I don’t know and- and I don’t care, Morty! I deal with a lot- a lot of Ricks and a lot of Mortys. What I do know is that you’re both clean now, and you aren’t going to be spreading any- any shit around my colony.”

Morty watched as Oahu went back about his work, entering notes on his computer. His shirt was blue today, and covered in a print of topless surfer girls. He seemed like he knew what he was doing, but his bedside manner sucked balls. Morty supposed he shouldn’t have expected anything else from a Rick.

Morty moved to the stool by Rick’s bedside.

“How is he?” he asked.

“Neural response is up nine percent, that’s- that’s good, Morty. His levels of nanite toxicity are hold- holding, but that’s to be expected with the- there’s a constant, gradual influx of nanites in the IV drip. It’ll- it’s to keep him from having those- those dips in between doses where more damage
could occur. He’ll go back on the- the injections when his condition is good enough.”

“Hey, Oahu!” the lighter, even-tempered voice of Doofus Rick called as the man himself came in through the door. He was followed by a Morty with what looked like a gang tattoo up the side of his neck and face, both of them carrying boxes. “Rick K-212 found some medical supplies on a salvage run.”

“Sweet, stick ’em by the closet and I’ll go through them- I’ll sort them later.”

“Hey, J,” the Morty said to Doofus. “Do you need a- any more help or can I meet up w- with some of the Mortys for coffee?”

“Go right on ahead,” Doofus said, ruffling the Morty’s hair while the Morty rolled his eyes. “Thanks for the help!”

Oahu watched the Morty leave, then turned to Doofus with a gleam in his eyes.

“So, Doof, are you- are you actually banging the Rick-pig yet? What are you, like, his Morty’s step-grandpa now?”

“He’s not a ‘Rick-pig’, he’s a Rick who just happens to be a cop,” Doofus said indignantly. “It’s good to have a little order around here. And quit trying to find out if we’re- you know…”

“Please f- forgive me for my- my puerile interest in who you’re playing house with,” Oahu said sarcastically. “We don’t have interdimensional cable out here, so you playing gay dad to your cop’s adopted Morty Loco is what I get instead of As the Citadel Turns.”

“Hey, Morty L really turned his life around after my Rick took him in!” Doofus protested. “He’s a good kid!”

“‘Your Rick’, huh? Are you- are you going steady? Did he give you his pin- did he ‘pin’ you? Oh my god, did- did you let him feel you up in the backseat of his dad’s car?” Oahu howled with laughter.

“Oh, go- go suck an egg!” Doofus cried.

“Oh, you- you really got me with that one- really wounded me there, with all the- all this egg-sucking talk,” Oahu mocked, clutching his chest dramatically. “Why don’t you tell me what- what you’ve been sucking, because it sure as hell isn’t eggs.”

“Don’t be crass, Oahu. But, now that you mention the Citadel…” Doofus turned to Morty. “Morty, my, uh, my friend, Cop Rick, wants to come by tomorrow to find out what’s going on with your Rick and the Citadel. Would that be okay?”

Doofus Rick pointedly ignored Oahu’s snorting laugh at referring to Cop Rick as a ‘friend.’

“Um, sure, th- that would be fine,” Morty replied.

“Great, the- the two of you can make a date night out of Morty’s in- interrogation.”

Doofus rolled his eyes. “Not an interrogation, Morty, he just wants to talk with you.”

“And make- make it with Doofus. But by- by all means, go for it.”

“Even if it means letting a ‘Rick-pig’ into your clinic?”

“It’s- it’s a sacrifice I’m willing to make, if I get to see what you put- putting your- your awkward
“It’s- it’s a sacrifice I’m willing to make, if I get to see what you putting your awkward as fuck moves on the Five-O looks like,” Oahu smirked. He pulled out a flask with a palm tree sticker on it and took a sip.

“Oahu! Quit making fun of me! I’m allowed to have a boy- a- a boyfriend if I want to!”

Oahu’s eyes bugged as he spat his booze and broke into laughter again. He laughed until he wheezed, slapping his desk as mirthful tears leaked from his eyes.

“Oh god, Doofus- you- you gotta stop saying shit like- like that, my- my sides hurt! B- boyfriend, Jesus Christ!”

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Morty spent the morning at Rick’s bedside, but when afternoon came, Doofus and Oahu made him come outside for some air. Every minute spent worrying about Rick added a layer to the sharp, dense ache that had settled in his chest, and that didn’t go away, but Doofus and Oahu’s banter made him feel a little more at ease. He knew Doofus must be alright, or Rick never would have instructed the ship to contact him, and Oahu, for as rough and ornery as he could be, was growing on him.

They sat on the wide but rickety wooden steps that someone had cobbled to the front of the medical clinic, within hearing range of Rick’s monitors, and the two other Ricks took turns pointing out various Ricks and Mortys to him as they passed by.

“Check it- check it out, it’s The Young and the Rickless,” Oahu said.

Morty L (Morty learned he didn’t like to be called a Morty Loco anymore, because that was a ‘past life’) wandered by with a group of Mortys, including one that looked like the guy in that movie with Cher that Morty had seen on daytime TV once. The Morty waved and Doofus Rick waved back, telling Morty that this was his Morty, and that really, Morty L, Punk Morty, and Hipster Morty were a good-natured group despite appearances. Morty L gave Doofus a shady-looking nod, and the group went on their way.

Off in the distance, a robotic-looking Rick with what looked like farming equipment attached to him chugged through a field, tilling the soil.

“He volunteered, can you believe it?” said Doofus. “What he gets done in a day would take four human Ricks a week. He’s a natural at it.”

“We have to be- we’re pretty self-sustaining here, farming and shit,” Oahu added. “Gotta- gotta stay off the grid. We’re a real- a real fucking hippie commune, out here.”

“Collectivist,” Doofus affirmed. “It can’t just be every Rick for himself anymore, what with the state of things on the Citadel…”

“Change the- change the channel already, these homesteading shows- they fucking suck, I’m bored enough actually living this shit,” said Oahu. “Oh, look, here’s- here’s something better.”

A group of three Ricks and a Morty passed by. It was much more odd to see than it sounded, because only one of the Ricks looked like a typical Rick. Of the others, one was dressed like a Morty in a yellow shirt, blue jeans, and sneakers, looking around happily at the world like a much younger Morty might. The Morty, on the other hand, had his own lab coat and a t-shirt with a Rick’s face drawn on it with puffy paint, a knitted, cartoonish hat on his head that looked like Rick hair on the top and had a goofy, drooling Rick face on the front. He held out a little stuffed Rick doll toward the third Rick, who was by far the strangest of all: he looked like a Rick, but like a child version of the man, a younger Tiny Rick. He could only have been about four or five years
“What the hell?” Morty asked.

“Oh yeah. *That* Rick,” Oahu gestured with his flask, “cloned himself. Not trying to- to make a younger body to transfer into or anything. He just- just up and decided he wanted a baby of himself. No one- no one has a fucking clue why.”

“He’s a good dad,” Doofus said.

“Tells the worst- the fucking *worst* dad jokes you ever heard.”

“We gave him Tall Morty over there to take care of and it’s really working out.”

“The one with the hat?” Morty asked.

“The other Rick,” Oahu clarified. “Poor fucker. Invented a- a fucking suicide helmet, but he fucked it up- really botched the job and ended up ret.”

“*Disabled*,” Doofus cut him off.

“Right, no- no ‘R word’,” Oahu said. “The shit I put up with for you, Doof, I swear to Christ…”

“The other Ricks didn’t want to deal with him,” Doofus went on, “so they convinced him he was a Morty and put him in a Morty school.”

“Told him he would- told him he was gonna get his very- very own Rick one day, those- those Citadel pieces of shit,” said Oahu. “Like any- like any of those self-important pricks were gonna-gonna take him.”

“Th- that’s awful.”

“He used to be called ‘Slow Rick’ but he- he gets upset if that happens, so it’s always Tall Morty, you- you get me?” Oahu added. “We don’t- we don’t stand for people giving him any- any kind of shit, Morty.”

“What about the, uh, the *other* Morty?”

Oahu shrugged. “Weird kid. Really likes Ricks. So we put him- we put him with Ricks that weren’t gonna- you know- perv on him before his time.”

“That wasn’t going to happen,” Doofus sighed.

“You’re too- you’re too fucking *innocent*, Doof, you- you’re goddamned *naïve*,” Oahu snapped. “That Morty was practically- he was basically a fucking *Rick groupie* when he got here. You should know by now that- that some of the Ricks can’t fucking be trusted.”

“Maybe they can’t, but you should have more faith in people, Oahu.”

“You’ve clearly never met that fucker from the- from the Big Island.”

“Well, anyway, it all worked out,” Doofus said, hoping to cut off another rant about Big Island Rick.

“Yeah, it- it sure did.” Oahu sipped from his flask. “Tall Morty gets to have a Rick, and that- that weeird little Morty gets to have three Ricks. He’s prob- probably happier than a pig in shit. He’s basically living his own version of *All My Ricks* with his fuckin’ little- little nuclear family over
there, can’t tell- can’t tell where the Ricks end and the Mortys begin.”

Morty watched as Tall Morty picked up Little Rick and spun him around in a circle, the whole family laughing happily.

“Is this what you do all day? Hang out and watch people?” Morty asked.

“No fucking TV,” Oahu reminded him. “It’s this, or placing bets on random bullshit. I miss my- my stories. I tried making Doofus- making Doofus do a show with sock puppets but it wasn’t the same.”

“Speaking of not being able to tell where Ricks end and Mortys begin…” Doofus tilted his head meaningfully.

“Great, it’s the walking documentary on split- on split personalities,” Oahu muttered. “I call dick injury.”

“Friction burn?” asked Doofus.

“I’m gonna go with dick injury by f- foreign object, resulting in burns.”

“I’m going with… sprained wrist,” Doofus decided.

“You- you’re gonna lose,” said Oahu. “Look how they’re walking.”

“I want to change my bet to butthole injury, foreign object insertion… make that a large foreign object.”

“You’re still gonna lose,” Oahu grinned. “Yo, Rorty! Welcome to General Rickspital. What’s up?”

“Hey Oahu,” a voice at once rough and breaking like a teenager said. A tall guy with Rick hair, a Morty face and a weird mélange of Morty and Rick clothes stood before them. “I- I think we’re going to need more of that ointment – well if you didn’t- if you didn’t feel the need to fucking beat off 24-7 then we wouldn’t – I’m s- sorry but if y- you didn’t make me wear the b- blindfold I wouldn’t have grabbed the s- soldering iron by accident – oh excuse me for not- for not wanting to watch you constantly jerk it! … L- look, Oahu, if we could just get the o- ointment, that’d be g- great.”

“Lab accident,” Oahu muttered to Morty. “Tried calling them Mick once, but-”

“It sounds- it sounds fucking Australian! Oh jeez, s- sorry if you’re Australian, new Morty…”

“Well, let’s- let’s go in and have a look, yeah?” Oahu said, turning to whisper to Morty, “If they get hung up on the Australian thing, they’ll end up- they’ll start fighting over the time they watched Crocodile Dundee, and trust- trust me when I say you don’t- you don’t want to see that. The- the fight or the film.”

“Hey, w- we heard that – it’s a fucking classic – i- it’s fucking trash – you call- you call that a knife? Get it? I’m- I’m doing the bit from – jeez, I get it, okay??”

“OKAY, get- get into the clinic a- and show me- show me what you got!” Oahu jumped up from the steps, smiling manically as he ushered Rorty inside.

“Ohhh, jeez,” Morty said as he watched them go.
“They punched themselves in the nose over it, one time,” Doofus said.

“Wow…”

“Yes. You see, Morty, there are a lot of Ricks and a lot of Mortys that don’t… well… they don’t fit with the Citadel’s agenda,” Doofus said. “It started out as a sort of ‘equality for all’ thing after the Capitalist Ricks were taken down, but… the killings started almost right away. No one really noticed at first, but, well, my- you know- my boyfriend was a rookie cop when the regime change happened, and at first it seemed like things were getting better. But he started to notice some… irregularities. People would get arrested and then they would disappear, no trial, missing arrest reports, just gone like they’d never been there. Then he started getting orders to do things – terrible things, Morty. There was a run-down neighborhood known as Mortytown where a lot of Rickless Mortys lived, many of them turning to crime. They were branded ‘undesirables’ and the police force was ordered to burn it down.”

“Oh g- god! That’s horrible!” Morty cried.

“Instead, he helped Mortys escape, as many as he could, and he put out a call for other like-minded Ricks. A bunch of us got together and we found this place, made lives here, so Ricks and Mortys can really live in peace. No one’s really in charge, although there are a few of us that the rest look up to. I never thought that would be me, but here I am. We’ve been here for a few years now. And just lately, Cop Rick and I have… we’ve kind of been moving toward being a thing. I think. I don’t know what he could see in someone like me, though.”

“I dunno, I- I think there’s a- a lot there for him to see.”

“You know, Oahu said almost the same thing, but meaner, of course. He came here a little bit after we set up on this planet. Someone got in touch with him because he always hated the Citadel and we needed a real doctor, someone who could decide what vaccines we need and whether we have indigestion or appendicitis, not just inject a serum and hope for the best. He’s a jerk sometimes but he’s also pretty much my best friend.”

Rorty came ambling out of the clinic, Oahu behind them, drying his hands.

“Th- thanks, Oahu! Yeah, thanks for- thanks for patching up the ol’ custard-shooter! Oh god, d- don’t be so gross, s- sorry! Really digging the- the tits on your shirt, by the way – um, yeah, th- the boobs are pretty great, uh, gotta- gotta go now – oh not again, you little shit, it’s still burned – bye, Oahu!”

Oahu waved as Rorty walked away, their gait suddenly more awkward than before they’d been treated.

“Those two are- they’re like the worst married couple, but they’re stuck in one- one body so there’s not even the hope of divorce,” Oahu said as he sank down on the steps. “If that’s- if that’s the only burnt penis I see today, I- I’ll count myself lucky. Pay up, Doof.”

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“So that’s what life is like here, Rick,” Morty said, sitting by Rick’s bedside. “It’s weird and kind of b- backward but it’s all M- Mortys and Ricks. Maybe we could stay here a while and try to figure out a way to fix you.”

Morty laid his head down on Rick’s bed. There had to be a way, something no Rick had thought of yet. But just because no Rick had thought of it yet didn’t mean no Rick could ever come up with a solution. Once his Rick was awake, he’d probably come up with something pretty fast with
Doofus and Oahu’s help. He had to, because losing Rick just wasn’t an option. The Ricks had learned to work together, so there must be something they could do.

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Morty was asleep, curled against Rick in his bed when Doofus and Oahu came back.

“Jesus Christ, this- this fucking kid,” Oahu muttered. He picked up a spare blanket and draped it over Morty’s sleeping form.

Doofus leaned in the doorway, smiling softly.

“That was really nice of you, Oahu.”

Oahu glanced at Doofus, blushing faintly at the way his eyes sparkled, and fixed his gaze firmly on the floor.

“Quit- quit mooning at me, Doofus,” he grumbled. “You’re a- you’re a fucking embarrassment with- with all this sappy shit you’re into.”

Doofus rolled his eyes, still smiling. “Goodnight, Oahu. See you tomorrow.”

Oahu watched him leave from the corner of his eye.

“I- I can be nice sometimes,” he said to no one.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for the kudos and all the AMAZING comments I've gotten lately!

Chapter is titled after the "Sea of Cleverness," one of the lunar maria. It seems fitting for a planet of Ricks.

Elliott Smith: Ballad of Big Nothing
The next day passed much as the last. Morty stayed at Rick’s bedside, pulling out his sketchbook to pass the time. As his pencil moved over the page, he found himself drawing a sketch of Morty Junior. He smiled sadly as he shaped the curve of his son’s face, his hair, his pointed tusks, the arms on the sides of his head. Once satisfied, he went on to add his body, his regular arms, and the detail of the letter jacket he’d worn. Soon, he was looking at Morty Junior as a rebellious adolescent, as he’d last seen him in person before they’d reunited just before… at the end.

Oahu checked Rick’s monitors and adjusted his drips, declaring that he was making good progress. His shirt of the day was a nauseating hot pink covered in blue and white sailboats. He glanced over at Morty’s sketch, his eyes widening.

“A- a male Gazorpian?” he asked. “Man, to- to each his own, but I reeeeally didn’t figure you for this kind of thing.”

“It i- isn’t like that,” Morty said. “He’s- he was- my son. He p- passed away not too long ago.”

“Oh. I’m sorry- I’m sorry to hear that. But did you- seriously, how did you manage to bang a- a Gazorpian chick? Those broads don’t- they don’t put out for anybody.”

“I d- didn’t!” Morty exclaimed.

“Ohhh. I get it. Sex- sexbot, right?”

“Yeah…”

“Oh man, that- that’s rough. Think you’re just- just plugging away at a sex doll and- and, boom, instant fatherhood,” Oahu shook his head. “And the- the Gazorpian male lifespan is- it’s like, crazy short.”

“Yeah, I- I know that…” Morty said pointedly.

“Yeah- of- of course you do. That’s- that’s a pretty fucking raw deal, Morty. Man, that right there- that’s why I never had kids.”

“You don’t- you didn’t have a Beth?”
“Nope! No Beth, so no- no Morty either. Never wanted to ad- adopt one, even. No offense. I- I have to give out enough bad- enough bad news in this line of work, so I didn’t- I didn’t want someone I could- I could lose like that.”

“I- I get it. I w- wouldn’t go back and not have him, b- but I… I don’t think I’ll do the kid thing again,” Morty sighed, his fingertips hovering over the pencil sketch for a moment. “He was so s- smart, you know? So much smarter than me. He was a- a novelist and everything.”

“You- you seem pretty- pretty proud of him,” Oahu said, almost wistfully. Morty supposed crap fathers were pretty much a constant for Ricks.

“They’re- on Gazorpazorp, they’re actually looking at ch- changing things because of him,” Morty said.

“No shit?”

“Yeah. Rick took a look at the g- genetics, or something, about how short the male l- lifespan is, but I don’t think he really got anywhere with it.”

“Did he check- check out the sexbot tech?”

“Huh?” Morty looked at him, bewildered.

“Oh for fuck- for fuck’s sake,” Oahu rolled his eyes. “If- if it were about genetics alone, the gene assortment would probably affect both- it would affect both Gazorpian males and females, most- most likely. It would be way more- way more random. It’s the genetic compiler in- in the sexbots, Morty, it selects genes that promote longevity for the women and selects against them for the- for the males.”

“R- really?”

“Let me guess, your- your Rick opened that thing up, found the genetic compiler, and- and then called it a day because he was grossed out by your spunk all- all over it.”

“W- well… yeah, pretty much,” Morty said. “I mean, I- I really went to town on G- Gwendolyn.”

“Ugh, you named it?” Oahu rubbed his face as though trying to scrub the idea from his mind. “I didn’t- I didn’t need to know that, Morty. I’m- I’m a doctor, not a therapist.”

“S- sorry… but do you r- really think the, uh, genetic thingy…”

“Genetic compiler?”

“Yeah… do you really th- think that’s what the p- problem is?”

“I know it is. I took one- I took one apart myself once,” Oahu said. “Be- because I check- I check that kind of shit out before I fuck it. I really can’t over- overstate how much I don’t want kids, Morty.”

“So w- we could tell the Gazorpians about it, and- and that would fix it?”

“… It might. They- they’d still have to select the genes that promote a longer lifespan. Probably won’t be able to- to use the sexbots anymore, either, the- the tech is pretty integrated, and the- the pregnancy hormones from a living, non-robot mother are a key develop- developmental aspect. Now, I- I need you to understand that I don’t give a fuck about this,” Oahu added, grinning gleefully, “but the- the thought of all those Gazorpian chicks getting- getting stretch marks is
“fucking hilarious.”

“That s- seems kind of mean,” Morty said.

“Why the fuck shouldn’t they? Everyone else does it. Everyone mammalian, anyway.” Oahu had a light in his eyes that Morty recognized from his own Rick, the look he got when he’d come up with a solution to a problem that he felt carried a particular stroke of genius. “They’d- they’d have to use artificial insemination or- or like, in vitro, at least for the first generation, because they have to select the- the right genes and Gazorpian males are basically rape monsters, but- but yeah, this could totally work.”

“So we- we can tell them?”

“It isn’t exactly easy to get- to get a message offworld unless it’s to another Rick, but I could work out getting one delivered, yeah. It’ll take- it’ll take a while but I- I know a guy.”

“Wow. Th- thanks, I guess. It- it meant a lot to Morty Junior.”

“Yeah, it’s cool, it- it gives me something to do,” Oahu said, sitting at his computer to type up notes.

Morty watched him, typing with a zeal Morty hadn’t yet seen, pausing only occasionally to sip at his flask.

“Hey, c- can I ask you something?”

“Sure, Morty, fire away- ask- ask me whatever.”

“What’s with the shirts?”

“It’s generally- it’s frowned upon to walk around naked,” Oahu said. “I- I told you, they- they irritate the other Ricks. Plus, I- I like them.”

“Well, I m- meant- you know how most Ricks wear the s- same thing all the time?”

“You mean most Mortys don’t?” Oahu scoffed. “You guys- most of you recycle those yellow shirts and blue jeans like they’re- like they’re drawn on your body.”

“Yeah, I- I guess we do…”

Oahu sighed.

“You ever hear- ever hear the phrase, ‘Same shit, different day’?”

“Yeah, s- sure I have.”

“Well, Morty, here it- it’s like- it’s like every day is the same. Same day, same shit,” Oahu said, his shoulders slumping. “I- I like to change it up. Same day, different- different shirt.”

Oahu went back to typing. Morty realized that, in spite of all the ways Oahu tried to entertain himself, the guy was bored as fuck.

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Life on a planet populated only by Ricks and Mortys was surprisingly calm; it seemed every Rick here had had enough of conflict, though some still sought excitement. Morty soon met one of these. Rick K-212 swept into the clinic in a leather duster rather than a lab coat, a shirt that was the
usual Rick blue but had buttons, and his brown Rick pants were held up with suspenders instead of a belt, a pair of boots topping off the ensemble. His hair was coiffed in a style that looked somewhat old-timey. With the leather holster strapped to his leg for his portal gun, he looked like a space cowboy or something.

“Wh- who the hell are you?” Morty asked, his eyes wide as he took in the sight.

“Simmer down, I don’t aim to cause mischief,” the Rick said with a twinkle in his eye. “I’m looking for a fella by the name of Oahu. You seen him around?”

“Yeah, I’m here,” Oahu said, emerging from the bathroom, drying his hands. “I was- I had to take a dump. Don’t act like- like you didn’t know I’d be here. I’m here every fucking day.”

“You ought not to use such vulgar talk around a young, impressionable Morty,” the Rick said.

“Oh, cut the shit- spare me the fucking dramatics,” Oahu snapped.

“It’s fine,” Morty said. “I’ve heard w- worse.”

“Well, now, I don’t believe we’re acquainted,” the Rick said to Morty with a rakish wink. “You can call me… Captain Rick.”

“You don’t have to- you don’t have to call him jack shit,” Oahu said. “What do- what do you want?”

“That salvage operation in which I acquired your medical goods involved an exchange of certain… bullets.”

“Holy shit, you- you fucking got shot and you’re only just now coming to see me?” Oahu waved him to the examination table. “Let me- let me see it- Christ, were you just going- going to let yourself bleed out?”

Captain Rick tilted his head to one side, pulling the duster and the collar of his shirt down to reveal an ugly, crusted red mark on his neck.

“Only a graze, but no man ever went amiss in taking precautions.”

Oahu looked at the mark closely, his eyes narrowing.

“This- the fuck is this shit? This is a burn from- it’s from a goddamned curling iron, you- you insufferable douchebag!”

Captain Rick pursed his lips before breaking out into a cheeky grin and shrugging idly.

“Bullets made for a tale worth the telling.”

“For the love- for the love of fuck!” Oahu yelled. “Take your fucking- your fucking burn cream and get the fuck out, you- you moron!”

Captain Rick plucked the tube of cream Oahu was brandishing at him from his hand.

"And- and take this while you're at it," Oahu said, plucking a removable drive from his computer. "I need you to- to send a message for me the next time you're out in the- out in the black. It's the least you could do- you owe me for being such a fucking pain in my ass.”

“Oahu, you are a belly-crawling varmint of low repute,” he said, taking the drive and giving Morty a nod as he made to leave. “It’s been a pleasure, as always.”
“Wow, Oahu, th- that was harsh,” Morty said.

“He’s not even a- a real space cowboy,” Oahu seethed as the Rick departed. “He’s a goddamned-he’s a fanboy. He’s ob- obsessed with some TV show that ran for- for like one season and got canceled! Like just- just fucking let it go, already!”

Doofus Rick appeared in the doorway, a Rick in a police uniform in tow. The Cop Rick nearly tripped over his own feet as he watched the departing Captain Rick with a raised eyebrow.

“Hey, Morty!” said Doofus. “I brought my, um, my friend with me. I hope it’s a good time!”

“Great, it’s Five-fucking-O,” Oahu grumbled. “Yeah, it’s- it’s fine, just come right on in. My day already fucking sucks.”

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“So, Morty, J-19ζ here tells me your Rick has some troubles with the Citadel,” Cop Rick said with a smile. His tone was gentle and friendly, like he was talking to a little kid, which Morty figured was some kind of interview technique. “Can you tell me about it?”

“He’s not a goddamned five year old,” Oahu grunted. He stood leaning against the empty medical bed where Morty had slept the first night, his arms crossed defensively as he glowered at Cop Rick.

“Uh, y- yeah,” Morty replied. “W- well… I guess the f- first thing was…”

Morty detailed their run in with the Gromflomite mercenaries on Zebrox 6, omitting the part about Shara and her cohorts being sex workers.

“We d- didn’t know yet that it was a- a Citadel thing,” Morty said.

“Okay, you’re doing just great, Morty,” Cop Rick said.

“Yeah, you’re doing great,” Doofus said dreamily. He sat on Oahu’s usual seat, his elbow on the desk and his chin propped on his hand as he gazed at Cop Rick. Morty thought if Doofus could have had hearts for eyes, he’d be seeing them right now.

Oahu gave a disgruntled scoff and looked away in disgust.

“Now, can you tell me when you realized the Citadel was involved?” Cop Rick asked in that same placating tone.

“Well, we, um, we got t- taken again, by- by more mercenaries…” Morty described the incident, and as he got to the part about the weird Morty, Cop Rick and even Doofus snapped to attention.

“Now, this is really important, Morty. This Morty you’re describing… he wore a suit? And had sort of… blank, soulless eyes?”

“Yeah, and- and like a pin? Like a lapel p- pin, like the in- insignia the Council of Ricks had, but- but different. It had an M on it, sort of- sort of stabbing through the R.”

“Do you think it’s him?” Doofus asked Cop Rick.

“It sure sounds like it, and I don’t think any other Morty has that kind of pull,” Cop Rick replied. “Morty, can you tell me anything else about him?”
“I mean, I- I’ve met him before,” Morty said. Doofus and Cop Rick leaned in intently. It was enough, even, to get Oahu’s attention.

“Where did you meet him?”

“There was a Rick that was k- killing all the other Ricks and tried to f- frame my Rick for it. H- he was that Rick’s Morty.”

Cop Rick and Doofus exchanged a significant look.

“Morty, that Rick was being controlled by someone else,” Doofus said. “We never found out by who, but the Rick had been implanted with an advanced neural network – he had wires all through his brain and his nervous system.”

“Like a- like a remote control toy, Morty,” Oahu clarified. “He wouldn’t have been- he probably wasn’t capable of much independent thought or action. He might not- it’s possible he wasn’t even really alive anymore, at that point.”

“You’re sure it was him?” Cop Rick asked.

“I’d kn- know that Morty anywhere,” Morty said. “Even without the eyepatch.”

“He had an eyepatch when you met him?” Cop Rick asked.

“A synaptic transmitter,” Doofus said. “That’s how he did it.”

“Oh my god,” Cop Rick said. “The President is the Rick-killer.”

“The P- President?” Morty asked.

“The Morty you saw was elected President of the Citadel,” Cop Rick said. “And once he took office…”

“He started making Ricks disappear, and tried to purge the Rickless Mortys,” Doofus said.

“And he kept the office. There hasn’t been a free election on the Citadel since he rose to power,” Cop Rick added. “He’s a tyrant.”

“The question is, why does he want your Rick?” Doofus asked. “Both the frame job and the mercenary incidents were focused on him.”

“He, um, he thinks my Rick is his original Rick,” Morty said.

“That- that’s not fucking possible,” Oahu spoke up. “I’ve run both- both of their dimensional resonance scans myself. This Morty and the Rick in that bed are a- they’re a matched pair, Rick’s stolen body not- notwithstanding.”

“Can you think of any other reason, any reason at all, no matter how farfetched, that he might think your Rick is his?” Cop Rick pressed.

“My- my family, my Rick’s Beth and Summer- they died when I was a baby. Jerry, too,” Morty said. “Rick said we moved around a- a lot, to a bunch of dimensions where something happened to- to those Ricks and Mortys.”

“That has to be it,” Doofus said. “He must be from one of those. Maybe his Rick took him as a baby and then something happened to his Rick.”
“And he thinks this Morty’s Rick is the Rick from his dimension,” Cop Rick summed up. “All the threads are coming together. The question is, where does it all lead? What do we do with this information?”

“I’m sure you’ll come up with something,” Doofus said, that dreamy expression slipping back onto his face. “You always do.”

“Give me- give me a break,” Oahu scoffed. “Doof, are you- how sure are you that they- that they couldn’t follow you back here when you picked these guys up?”

“Come on, Oahu, I’m not stupid. I jumped fifty-seven dimensions on the way here. There’s no way they could pick up a trail from that.”

“Good work, J,” said Cop Rick, looking impressed. “Protocol is fifty jumps to shake a tail.”

“I know,” sighed Doofus happily. “I added a few to be… unpredictable.”

“I like how you think,” said Cop Rick. Oahu made a gagging noise.

“Well, I don’t think there’s anything else to cover tonight,” Cop Rick said as he stood. “I need to think this over so I can start making plans. That Morty has to be stopped at all costs.”

Doofus slid from his seat with a weak-kneed wobble. “I’ll walk with you. My house is right nearby.”

They took their leave, and Oahu spied out the window as Doofus fawned over Cop Rick, sliding his arm around the cop’s at the elbow.

“‘My- my house is right nearby,’” Oahu mocked in a nasally simper. “Jesus f- fuck, look at him, clinging on- he’s hanging all over that Rick-pig.”

“Why, um, why do you c- care?” Morty asked curiously.

Oahu yanked the cord on his blinds, snapping them shut.

“I- I fucking don’t,” he growled. “It’s just that I- I just… it’s- it’s gross, that’s all. I can't- I can't stand rom-coms, Morty.”

He walked unsteadily toward the doorway to his bedroom, refusing to meet Morty’s stare.

“I’m- I am gonna need, like, so many- so many bongloads to get that sight out of my head.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the kudos and comments! It’s definitely motivating, so much so that, boom, we get an extra chapter today! :)

Chapter is titled after the "Sea of Serenity" because… because I totally wrote a Browncoat Rick and have no shame about it whatsoever. Yeah, Oahu Rick is mean to him about it, but… I’ve cosplayed as a Browncoat before. ;3

Ludovico Einaudi: Time Lapse
You drove yourself further from happiness as punishment. It was in the moments you truly deserved happiness that you pushed it away most of all.

Rick was falling through space. The cosmos whirled around him, and he saw everything in incredible detail, every galaxy of every shape, with spiraling arms or long, narrow expanses of light, every pinpoint of light from every star shining in brilliant clarity. Blushed with the dazzling colors of nebulae, long bands of dark purple and black, broad strokes of the absence of light, stretched through the gaps between: the dark matter that spanned the universe, the foundation of the firmament.

His heart and body felt light, as though unburdened, a weight lifted that he had carried for a lifetime.

Among the stars, he felt like he was finally coming home.

His feet touched on solid ground, a blank, white landscape rippling outward from where he’d touched down. It collided starkly with the light-streaked color of the black above, no atmosphere to dim the cosmic splendor.

“Well, shit,” he said as he looked around, taking it all in. “Am I- am I dead?”

He wasn’t expecting an answer, but a voice spoke to him.

“No.”

He turned toward the voice. A woman stood there, her back toward him. She was dressed in flowing white, blonde hair cascading over her shoulders and down her back as she looked up at the luminous sky.

He would know her anywhere, the shape of her imprinted forever in the deepest recesses of his memories.

“Diane.”

She turned to face him, her expression one of wonder as she continued looking up.

“Eternity is a good look for you,” he added.

She lowered her gaze to meet him.

“I told you already. You are not dead.”

“Funny, it sure looks like I am. I mean, you’re here. That’s a pretty strong indicator right there-”
She stepped forward, pressing a chaste kiss to his lips to silence him.

“You are not dead,” she repeated.

“I’m about to be,” he whispered. And for the first time since this began, he felt pain welling in his chest, and closed his eyes against it.

“Dad,” another voice called. He opened his eyes, and saw Beth – *his* Beth – standing to his left. She held a happy, bubbly-looking redheaded little girl in her arms, and she wore the soft, pale blue dress he’d buried her in.

“Really not selling me on this whole ‘not dead’ thing,” he said. He noticed how his own words flowed with ease, no longer hampered by decades of insecurity and self-abuse. “I don't feel sick or old. I’m not even stuttering anymore.”

“Your neural processes are improving, Dad,” Beth said. “It’s triggering a hallucination that’s accessing the neurons in your brain tissue responsible for memory retrieval.”

“That sounds like something I would say,” Rick said.

“That’s because she is you. She represents the pragmatic part of you that views reality through a clinical eye,” Diane said.

“So what does that make you?”

“I’m the part of you that knows you have reasons to go back. You have so much left undone. I’m the part of you that wants to be happy.”

“You… you fucker…” a tear-soaked voice came from his right. “You don’t deserve to be happy.”

Jerry cowered there, a weeping, fearful, angry mess, the way he’d been when Rick had last seen him. When Rick had killed him.

“That’ll be my self-loathing, then,” Rick said.

“He is the part of you that holds you back from reaching true fulfillment,” Diane said.

“He is the part of you that puts a price on everything you’ve ever done,” Beth said.

“Was it worth it, Rick?” Jerry asked bitterly.

“You did what needed to be done,” Beth said.

“You drove yourself further from happiness as punishment,” Diane acknowledged. “It was in the moments you truly deserved happiness that you pushed it away most of all.”

“You never deserved happiness,” Jerry said. “You were never worthy of it.”

“Worthiness is irrelevant, and ultimately, so is happiness,” Beth said. “Deserving or not, we all end up the same.”

“We all end up the same,” Diane agreed. “What matters is what we do before the end.”

“Might as well take it if it’s there,” Beth said.

“You can’t have happiness you didn’t earn,” Jerry whined.
“You loved your wife and daughter,” Diane said. “You were happy with them.”

“You tried. Some people don’t even do that,” Beth said.

“You were never any good,” Jerry said. “From the day you were born, anything good you felt, you stole from someone else. It wasn’t yours to take.”

“From the day you were born, you were just a living thing, no better or worse than anyone or anything else,” Beth said. “You were a structure made of cells going through the motions of being alive.”

“From the day you were born, you were denied your inner light,” Diane said. “You need to find that light before you’re out of time.”

“You’re waiting to die like everything dies,” Beth said.

“The sooner, the better,” Jerry said. “Everything dies, and most deserve it a lot less than you.”

“You have two choices in front of you, Dad. Stay here or go back. It’s that simple.”

“What if I don’t want to go back?”

“Why don’t you want to go back?” Diane asked. “Someone’s waiting for you.”

“You keep your filthy hands off of him!” Jerry cried. “They’re soaked in blood. You’ll only taint him.”

“Don’t you want to be happy? Don’t you want to be loved?”

“Go burn in hell like you should.”

“Don’t you think something better waits for you? Don’t you want to find peace before the end?”

“Neither heaven nor hell exist. All we are is what we do before we cease to exist.”

Rick looked around at the three of them; Diane, radiantly beautiful, like he’d always seen her; Beth, alive, her face expectant of whatever came next; Jerry, wallowing in miserable squalor.

“You know, the thing is…” Rick said. “The thing is, you’re all pretty much right on the money.”

They vanished before his eyes, leaving him standing on the flat, white plane beneath the sprawling expanse of space, alone.

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“Oahu?! What’s happening?” Morty cried out.

The monitors at Rick’s bedside beeped, the cluster of lines on Rick’s brain scan jumping around wildly. Oahu looked them over, then started adding a new medication to Rick’s IV drip.

“He’s- he’s dreaming, Morty. It’s a good- it’s a good sign. It means he’s starting to come around- he’s gonna try to wake up soon, but we gotta keep him under a little- a little longer.”

Morty watched as the soaring heart rate on the other monitor slowed to a reasonable pace.

“Y- you’re sure?”
“His neural output is- it’s up, Morty, that’s what we want to see,” Oahu assured him. “When you-when you got here, all these readouts were- they were hardly moving, Morty, like- like a fish that’s barely flopping anymore. This is- this is better.”

“I- if you say so,” Morty said uncertainly.

“I do, in fact, say so,” Oahu said. “Hey, I- I’m gonna go sit on the porch and see what- what’s playing. I think ‘outside’ is on again. Wanna come- wanna come watch?”

“I- I guess… maybe just for a little bit,” Morty said. He wanted to stay with Rick, but he had spent almost all of his time at Rick’s bedside for the past couple of days, and he had the feeling that Oahu was trying to help him escape for a while.

“Yeah, come- come on, let’s go!” Oahu whooped in that slightly wild, totally affected, isn’t-this-crazy tone that Morty’s own Rick sometimes used. It made him feel homesick for his grandfather.

The day was a bright and sunny one, per usual. One thing Morty could say for the nowhere planet the Ricks had chosen was that it had really good weather, at least as far as Morty had seen. He commented on this to Oahu.

“Yeah, it’s pretty- it’s pretty great,” he said. “We’re in a temp- a temperate zone. It almost reminds- it makes me think of home, sometimes. It’s too bad we- we aren’t near the ocean, though.”

“Do y- you miss Hawaii?” Morty asked.

“Well, duuuuh, Morty, it’s- it’s freaking Hawaii!” Oahu said. “Do I- do I sometimes wonder why I- why I’m even staying on- on this fucking rock in the middle of- the middle of fucking nowhere? Of course- of course I do. I don’t- I don’t have enemies like most Ricks so- so I could pretty much leave anytime I wanted. And if you don’t have someone- someone coming after you, you don’t need a- a Morty, either.”

Oahu tilted his head back, closing his eyes with a smile. With the warm sunlight falling on his face, in his luridly yellow shirt printed with palm trees, Morty could easily picture Oahu on a beach somewhere.

“So wh- why do you stay?”

Oahu looked forward again. In the distance, Morty saw Doofus approaching with a wave. The bright, carefree look on Oahu’s face dimmed a bit.

“There are- I have my reasons,” he said, his eyes tracking Doofus as he walked over before looking away. “There’s- there’s a real need for a- a doctor here, Morty. Technically I could- I could up and go whenever I want, but I- I can’t just leave every- everyone to fend for themselves. It’s- it’s, you know- it’s complicated, uh, moral- morally speaking.”

“I- I don’t think I’ve ever heard a Rick cite morality as a reason for anything before,” Morty said.

“Oahu only brings up morality as an excuse not to do something he doesn’t want to do,” Doofus said as he sat next to them. “So, what were you talking about that he finds so morally dubious?”

“The time that- that one Rick wanted me to clone a second- a second dick and graft it onto him,” Oahu said.

“I still think you made that up,” Doofus said, laughing.
“Wanna bet? Trust me, if- if you had ever met that Big Island f- fucker, you’d understand why I- why I had to refuse.”

“You can’t bet on something you can’t prove,” Doofus said. “What’s on today?”

“Fucking farming again. Doesn’t- doesn’t that fucker ever sleep?”

“You know he doesn’t. He’s literally a robot.”

“Supposed to rain tomorrow. Fucker’s gonna be- gonna be happier than the time we- we lubed up all his creaky places.”

“You make it sound so unseemly. Morty, it’s standard maintenance.”

“You- you wouldn’t have known it from the- the shit he kept saying to me! ‘Satisfaction peaking at 98 percent.’ Jesus- Jesus Christ, I wore gloves and I- and I still felt dirty afterward.”

“Standard maintenance,” Doofus repeated, softly and slowly, in a way that would have been sultry coming from anyone else. Oahu shifted uncomfortably, but otherwise seemed to take it as the mockery that it was.

“If you’re so- if you’re so sure about that, why don’t you do it- why don’t you do it next time?”

“No way! I wouldn’t want to leave either of you so deprived.”

“No by all- by all means, feel free. He’ll probably- he’s probably gonna lock right up after the rain hits him. I’ll- I’ll let him know you’re totally- totally down.”

“Oh, I couldn’t. It’s a private, beautiful expression of intimacy between the two of you.”

“It was completely pro- professional and completely disturbing. It fucking haunts me, man! He’s- he’s gonna have to get his- get his jollies from Mechanic Rick from now on.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know there was trouble in paradise.”

“Oh, fuck- fuck me,” Oahu gave the standard Rick insult, but it seemed to strike him all wrong, because he flushed pink and stammered, “I- I mean- don’t- don’t even think about it- go- go fuck yourself, Doof, fucking- fucking Christ.”

“Guess you’re saving it for your robotic boyfriend,” Doofus said, oblivious to Oahu’s apparent discomfort. “Think you can get his satisfaction up to a hundred percent this time?”

“Jesus, Doof, the- the fucking mouth on you, saying shit like that- saying that kind of shit to me!”

Oahu looked down the dirt road to avoid looking at Doofus entirely.

“Oh, fuck me for real,” he muttered.

Morty looked down the road and saw Cop Rick strolling along, having an animated conversation with the Rick in the brown leather coat. They paused, Captain Rick giving a saucy grin as he ambled away, pantomiming a genteel tip of a hat, though he wasn’t wearing one. That guy’s flair was, apparently, a constant thing.

“Check it out, Doof. Looks like- looks like Law & Order is on next,” Oahu said without much enthusiasm. “Your- your goddamned favorite show.”

“Yesss!” Doofus said, bouncing with excitement on the porch. “Oh, I should ask him if he wants
“to do something tomorrow. Or… is that too clingy? Maybe I shouldn’t…”

“Bet he- bet he says no,” Oahu said.

“He would not!”

“Would, too. Bet he tells you- bet he tells you to fuck right off.”

“You know he wouldn’t!” Doofus cried.

“We’ll never know if- if you don’t ask him.”

“You know what, I’ll take that bet,” Doofus said firmly. “I’m going over there.”

“So go- so go already.”

“I’m going,” Doofus stood up. “This is me, going. Over there.”

Doofus started walking.

Oahu hung his head, scrubbing a hand across his face, then looked up to watch Doofus and Cop Rick.

“What w- was that all about?” Morty asked.

“I dunno. Maybe I- maybe I’m just tired of watching him- watching him fumble around, pretending this is a thing. Who knows, maybe now- maybe this’ll actually go somewhere and he- he’ll actually get himself laid before we all grow old and die. Besides, the- the guy’s gonna say yes. I gotta give- gotta give Doofus a win once in a while.”

Whatever Cop Rick said, Doofus’s face lit up with glee. Cop Rick looked toward Oahu and Morty and waved.

“Yeah, I- I fucking see you, Five-O,” Oahu grumbled through gritted teeth, forcing a smile as he gave a halfhearted wave back. “Fuck off, Rick-pig, just- just fuck right off.”

Cop Rick made his goodbyes and went on his way. Doofus ran back over to them, almost stumbling as he came to a stop, bending over with his hands on his knees and winded in his excitement.

“He… he said yes!”

“Yeah, no shit,” Oahu said.

“Pay… pay up, Oahu!”

Oahu pulled a scrap of paper with Doofus’s face drawn on it from his pocket. There wasn’t any real currency in the colony, so Doofus and Oahu had made their own to bet with. Morty had seen this kind of interaction several times already, as paper bearing either Doofus or Oahu’s image was exchanged frequently. Oahu held the fake bill up between two fingers, yanking it out of reach as Doofus went to grab it.

“It- it’s gonna rain tomorrow,” he said.

“So we’ll do something indoors,” Doofus said, waggling his eyebrow.

He grabbed for the fake cash again, and this time, Oahu let him take it.
It did, indeed, rain the next day, a torrential monsoon-like downpour. They were stuck inside, and Morty used the time to draw. Oahu spent much of the day staring out the window, his lime green shirt with bright yellow pineapples a little too cheery for his sour demeanor.

“Nothing but fucking- fucking static,” he grumbled, and Morty thought it best to leave him be.

What little light there was outside eventually faded as night fell.

Morty was just packing it in for the night; an early night for sure, but the rain was making him feel sleepy. The door to the clinic shoved open abruptly, banging against the wall and swinging back a few juddering inches, startling Oahu badly. He nearly fell off his chair, where he’d been dozing after sitting and fretting for an hour.

“What- what the fuck!” he barked, looking up at the door in alarm.

Doofus stood there, soaked through in the pouring rain. He was shaking, trembling all over, Morty realized, and from the look on his face, he didn’t think it was because he was cold. Doofus looked profoundly upset, his breath hitching, and it was clear that not all of the wetness on his face was from the rain.

“Jesus, Doof!” Oahu yelled, jumping up and covering the distance to the door in a few long, hurried strides. He grabbed Doofus by the arm and pulled him inside, slamming the door shut against the weather. He turned to his friend, looking him over anxiously.

“… Doof?” he said, but Doofus said nothing, only hanging his head. “Doofus? What- what’s going on, buddy?”

He stood in front of Doofus, gripping him by the shoulders as he ducked his head, trying to look Doofus in the eyes through his limp, wet bangs.

Finally, Doofus looked up, his hands slowly taking Oahu’s forearms in a light hold. He didn’t try to pull Oahu’s hands away; he simply sought that little bit of contact.

“Hey, Doof,” Oahu said softly. “I- I’m gonna need you to- to talk to me- Doofus, say something- I’m kinda freaking out here.”

“You… Oahu, you’re gonna think I’m so st- stupid…”

Oahu felt his fear ratchet up another notch; Doofus rarely stuttered, unless he was really excited, incredibly flustered, or very deeply upset.

“Who gives a- who gives a shit what I think?” he said, struggling to keep his voice gentle, and only just managing. “Come on, Doof. It’s me.”

“I- I can’t… I’m just so dumb, Oahu…”

“Doof,” Oahu said, and he could feel a hard edge beginning to creep into his voice, the worry and fear starting to override his forced calm. “Doofus. Look at me. Did- did something happen? Did he- fuck, Doofus, did he do something? Are you- did- did he hurt you?”

“N- no… I… y- yes?”

Oahu’s eyes went wide.
“Doof, I- I need you to- to tell me, because I- if I have to go find him right now I’m- I’m gonna have a dead cop on my hands.”

"He- he didn't hurt me- it just hurts."

Doofus trailed off as his expression sunk back into sadness.

“Still feeling pretty- pretty murdery here, Doof, you- you gotta give me more than that.”

“He had a date…”

“With you, yeah- I- I know.”

“No. Not with me,” Doofus sniffled. “He thought I wanted to come over to talk about- about the Citadel. So that happened. But then, he- he blew me off because he had a date with- with someone else.”

Oahu let out a soft “Oh,” as he understood.

“I- I kind of thought he and I were a thing, but I guess we- we weren’t. He thought we were just f-friends. He was real- really nice about it and everything, but… Oahu, I'm an idiot.”

"Only when you- when you say shit like that."

Oahu slid one arm around Doofus’s shoulders and the other around his back, pulling him into a tight hug. Doofus pressed his face into Oahu's shoulder. His shoulders shook a little, and Oahu assumed he was crying, though he couldn't tell for sure. Doofus was soaked from head to toe, and by that point, Oahu was getting there, although he didn't mind.

“I know- I know it hurts, buddy, I- I know,” he said quietly. “But I- I swear to Christ, Doof, I- I thought- when you came in here like that… You- you scared the shit out of me."

“I'm okay,” Doofus said, his voice muffled in Oahu's shirt.

“Yeah, well- well thank fuck,” Oahu said. "You're just- you're so goddamned innocent sometimes, you know that?"

"Sorry, Oahu."

"Don't worry- don't worry about it."

---

Morty had, much earlier, decided it was the better part of valor to creep into bed and pretend to be asleep, allowing the two Ricks to have at least the illusion of privacy. Now, as the lights clicked off, he found himself staring into the darkness to the sound of the bedroom door clicking shut.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to everyone who’s been leaving comments and kudos! It really makes my day/week/year/life!

Chapter is titled for the "Sea of the Edge."
Queens of the Stone Age: I Appear Missing
Mare Undarum

Chapter Summary

A pause hung in the air between them as Cop Rick waited to hear whatever Oahu had to say, Doofus looking on with wide eyes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Oahu woke to the feeling of pins and needles, his arm pinned under something heavy. His breath caught as he realized it was Doofus, curled up against him in his bed with his head on Oahu’s shoulder. The night before came rushing back, and Oahu remembered that Doofus had fallen asleep holding his hand, but he wasn’t sure how they’d ended up like this.

“Who was it?” Oahu asked. “The- the other guy, I mean.”

_They were inches away from each other in the dark, facing each other on the bed, knees almost touching. There was little light to see by, but Oahu caught subtle shifts in the shadows whenever Doofus wiggled around to get comfortable. He could feel the weight and heat of another person in bed next to him, something he hadn’t had for years._

_Doofus sighed._

“It was… it was Captain Rick.”

“What? You got- you got turned down for that- that fucking douche canoe?”

“Oh, please, Oahu… don’t rub it in, okay?”

“I’m not, man! Getting turned down for a Captain Tightpants wannabe is the- it’s the fucking worst! Like- like was Five-O high? Seriously, was he? I mean I- they always say cops have the best- the best shit but that’s fucking ridiculous.”

“It’s easy enough to see why he wasn’t interested. I mean, look at me.”

“What, are- are you fucking kidding me? You’re a- you’re a total catch.”

“Oh, Oahu, you don’t have to lie to make me feel better.”

“I’m not. I- I mean I totally would, but I’m not. What did you even see in that guy?”

“Well I mean, he’s smart… he’s a hero…”

“Come on, Doof. We’re all smart and I- I know this wasn’t some weird hero-groupie crush.”

“He was... nice.”

“He’s not- he’s not the only Rick who’s nice.”

“Yeah? Name one other Rick who’s as nice as he is.”
“Well… you. You’re nicer, even.”

“Well I can’t date myself. Apparently I can’t even manage in a colony of my alternate selves.”

“That’s because Ricks are—most of us are stupid.”

“I thought you just said we were all smart?”

“Doesn’t—doesn’t mean we can’t still be stupid. Five-O is stupid, Tightpants is stupid, I’m f—fucking stupid as fuck. Not you, though. You’re the— the smart one.”

“Why are you stupid, Oahu?”

_Because I can’t reach out for what’s right in front of me._

“… No reason. Just am.”

_Doofus slid his hand into Oahu’s interlacing their fingers in the dark._

“You’re a really good friend, Oahu,” Doofus said.

“… Yeah, maybe.”

_Oahu ignored the sinking feeling he got from Doofus’s words, and they drifted off to sleep as the storm raged outside._

Now, in the dim light of a storm-gray morning, with Doofus sleeping next to him in his old University of Hawaii t-shirt, Oahu thought he really was stupid as fuck. It was like everything he wanted was just within reach, and he still couldn’t reach out and grab it. He couldn’t make a move when Doofus was still so raw and vulnerable and goddamn _fragile_. The guy took rejection about as well as a teenager, and it occurred to Oahu that he didn’t even really know how much the guy had dated. He knew that, like himself, there had never been a Diane, but he also suspected that, unlike the majority of Ricks, Doofus wasn’t the type to run around getting his rocks off wherever he could.

No sooner had the thought entered his head than he realized the precarious position he was in. Doofus snuggled warmly against his side, his leg sliding up Oahu’s thigh, dangerously close to… He started running through lists of parasites in his head, and when Doofus awoke to hear him muttering about tapeworms, he claimed he was just working out which parasitic infections he would have to look out for during the rainy season.

---

Morty watched Oahu closely as he checked Rick’s medications and made notes on his chart. He was wearing the yellow-with-palm-trees shirt from the day before yesterday, not bothering to button it, as though he’d just picked it up from the floor and thrown it on over his undershirt.

“Hey, O— Oahu…”

He hesitated, uncertain if he should ask about something that definitely wasn’t his business, but he was way too invested. He burned with salacious curiosity. He _had to know_.

“Spit— spit it out, kid, I’m not getting any younger over here.”

“Um… maybe it’s none of my b— business, but… did I see Doofus leave here, like, really early? And, um, wearing y— your clothes?”
The sight of Doofus leaving in a t-shirt and shorts, with the bright green pineapple shirt open at the front in place of his lab coat, had been odd to say the least.

“The fuck- the fuck else was he supposed to wear? He was wetter- wetter than a drowned rat. You seem pretty bright for a- for a Morty, so I’d have thought you would have noticed that it was raining last night. And in case you failed to- failed to realize, Doofus and I wear the same size.”

“But he stayed over?” Morty pressed. “So, did, uh, did anything… happen?”

“If you’re trying to ask if we fucked, the answer is no, Morty,” Oahu said gruffly, looking over the chart again. “It was- we just slept. I didn’t- I wasn’t gonna send him home in the- in the rain. Because I’m not- I’m not a total asshole.”

“O- okay…”

Oahu slammed the chart down abruptly and stared at Morty.

“What, you- you have some kind of a problem with me behaving- behaving myself like a- a decent human being?”

“No! I- I just… I think that might have been, um, your window.”

Oahu held his gaze for a moment, his eyes blazing, then picked up the chart and flipped through it one more time.

“… I don’t know what you’re- what you’re talking about.”

“It- it just seems like m- maybe you had a- a shot, there.”

“Nooo idea what- what you mean.”

“S- seriously?!”

Oahu paused, then set down the chart. He crossed his arms and stared at Morty evenly.

“You- you’re right about one thing…”

“Wh- what’s that?”

“It’s none- it’s none of your goddamn business. I’m not gonna talk about- I’m done having this conversation.”

He sat at his desk and started updating his notes.

“We’re just- we’re just friends,” he added, though Morty hadn’t prodded him further.

“Well… friends are im- important,” Morty said.

“… Yeah. They are.”

Oahu checked and rechecked his data.

“Good news, kid. Your grandpa is doing- he’s doing good. We can wake him up tomorrow.”

---

As Oahu had predicted, the Robot Rick did indeed make an appearance. He made his way across
the porch, joints stiff and creaking metallically, and Morty heard him coming a mile away. So did Oahu, and he dove behind Morty’s bed to hide.

“Tell him I’m not- I’m not here.”

“Doctor Oahu, I require your assistance!” the robot said, his voice an oddly synthesized version of a Rick voice.

“The, uh, the d- doctor is out,” Morty said. “What sh- should I do?” he hissed toward the bed.

“My sensors detect the doctor’s presence. Where is Doctor Oahu?”

“Morty, if- if you’re gonna hang around here like a bum, the least- the least you could do is work!” Oahu hissed back. “Third- third drawer of my desk, Morty! And- and wear gloves, for- for fuck’s sake!”

“I- I guess I could h- help you,” Morty said shakily. He opened the drawer to find an oil can and grabbed gloves from the box on the desk.

“Are you qualified to perform maintenance on living machinery?”

“Well, um, my g- grandpa taught me how to work on the ship…”

“Is that your ship parked outside?”

“Um… yeah?”

Robot Rick looked at him analytically.

“Proceed,” he said, and then, to Morty’s horror, he asked, “Do you think you could introduce me to her when we are finished? She is… very well constructed.”

“Um… I- I don’t-”

“She’s hot.”

“Uh… o- okay,” Morty said, squirting some oil into Robot Rick’s shoulder joint, spreading it around with gloved fingers.

“A little to the left…” Robot Rick instructed, and as Morty complied, the robot’s metal jaw hung slack and he let out a robotic approximation of a moan. “Mmmmuuuuuuuuhhh…”

---

Oahu was right; there was something about the experience that left Morty feeling decidedly unclean. Robot Rick had left after Morty made some excuses and a promise to introduce him to the ship at a later time, and Oahu didn’t come out until he was gone.

“You did- you did good, kid,” Oahu said. “You- you heard him: ’73 percent satisfaction rating is admirable for a beginner.’”

“Oahu, d- did I just… have sex?” Morty asked, bewildered.

“Emphatically no,” Oahu said. “He- he didn’t ask you to keep- to keep lubing up his exhaust pipe.”

“H- he does that?”
“Oh yeah. I was- I was knuckles-deep in it before I- before I realized it wasn’t actually necessary.”

“I just want to take a shower,” Morty said as he stripped off the gloves.

“I know- I know the feeling.”

---

Morty was getting out of the shower – there was a ten-minute limit due to water conservation which Oahu had graciously waived, saying, “When I had to- when I had to rub him down, I was in there for- for a solid hour, Morty,” – when he heard raised voices in the clinic. He pulled his fresh clothes on quickly and opened the bathroom door.

“You have- you’ve got a lot of fucking nerve coming here, Five-O!” Oahu said. “What the fuck- what the actual fuck do you want from me?”

“Why don’t you tell me?” Cop Rick said. “Why don’t you tell me what happened with J-19ζ7 last night?”

“What the fuck do you even- even care? And- and by the way, how was your date with- with the fucking flyboy?”

“Wait- wait up a fucking second, here. Are you- seriously, are you trying to give me a- a fucking shovel talk?” Oahu stepped right up into Cop Rick’s face. “Let’s get one thing straight right- right fucking now, pig. I give the shovel talks around here, not you. I’m the best friend, not you. I’m not the one who hurt him, you are. And right now, I can’t think of one good reason why I’m not out in my yard, filling in a hole with your fucking body in it.”

“Oh, you’re the best friend,” Cop Rick scoffed. “Right. I’ve been here since the beginning. J and I built this colony together. All you did was show up a year in, with a suitcase full of your stupid shirts, no purpose in life, and so stumbling drunk you couldn’t walk a straight line.”

“That’s enough,” Doofus’s voice came from the front doorway. He walked into the clinic, looking between them with dismay. Both Ricks looked ashamed of themselves, but Oahu spoke up first.

“How- how much of that did- did you hear?”

“I heard plenty,” Doofus said. He turned to Cop Rick. “Rick… go home.”

“This… this isn’t you,” Cop Rick said. He lifted a hand, tugging on the Hawaiian shirt Doofus still wore. “This guy isn’t good enough for you. He’s a deadbeat. You could do so much better. You could find a Rick who’s a good person-”
“Oahu is a good person,” Doofus said. “He wouldn’t be my best friend if he wasn’t.”

Cop Rick looked floored.

“So that’s it, then?”

“You hurt me. And maybe it’s my fault for making assumptions, but it still hurt.”

“You didn’t- you didn’t have to lead him on,” Oahu said. “Everyone thought you guys- you guys were a thing, except you.”

“I didn’t mean to…”

“Yeah, but you still did,” Doofus said. “And right now, I need a friend, and that friend isn’t you. So just… go home.”

“Do you think we could be friends again, someday?” Cop Rick asked.

“Maybe,” said Doofus. “Probably. But I need time.”

Cop Rick nodded sadly and headed toward the door.

“Hey, wait…” Oahu spoke up, stepping up to him. “I just want you- I want you to know that I would do- I would do anything for Doofus, so I- I just want to tell you…”

A pause hung in the air between them as Cop Rick waited to hear whatever Oahu had to say, Doofus looking on with wide eyes.

Oahu swiftly cupped his hand behind his butt, ripped a loud fart, and flung his hand and the gas trapped in it into Cop Rick’s face.

“I just wanna tell you to- to suck a fart, Five-O!” Oahu cackled.

“Oh god! Oh Jesus, it- it’s in my mouth! I can taste it!” Cop Rick gagged. “Fuck me! I can’t believe that even worked!”

“Fuck you? Oh no, fuck me,” Oahu said, grinning. “Now get- get the fuck out!”

Cop Rick left, coughing and gagging, and Oahu turned to face Doofus. He immediately felt guilty as he saw the tension in Doofus’s body, the way his shoulders were shaking…

“Oahu,” Doofus said, then doubled over as the laughter he was struggling to contain finally burst out. “Oh my god! Oahu! That was… that was amazing!”

“You- you’re not mad?”

“Of course not! He dropped me for another Rick! He had some payback coming to him,” Doofus said, wiping tears of laughter from his eyes. “And it’s better than burying him out back.”

“Yeah, I- I probably shouldn’t have said that,” Oahu said.

“He shouldn’t have come here and said all that stuff to you,” Doofus replied. “I remember the day you arrived, and it wasn’t like that at all.”

“Yeah? I only sort of remember it, but I’m- I’m pretty sure it was exactly like that,” Oahu said. He rubbed the back of his head, looking embarrassed as he thought back on it.
“You came stumbling off of Browncoat Rick’s ship, yelling at him about how to properly move all your medical equipment and asking him what the hell was in his booze. You remember, he makes it in a still that’s built into the boiler of his ship’s engine? It’s terrible.”

“It was the- the fucking worst shit I’ve ever had,” Oahu agreed.

“You had that suitcase with the stickers all over it, and you were wearing that bright orange shirt with the Volkswagen buses with surfboards on top, and you took a look around, and you walked up to me, and you said, ‘You seem like less of an asshole than all these other assholes, so you’re my friend now.’”

“I- I did?”

“Yeah, you did,” Doofus said, smiling. They had made their way out to the porch, and they sat on the steps, silhouetted in the light of the sunset.

“I don’t remember that- that part,” Oahu said. “I do remember that I threw up- I puked all over your shoes.”

“Yes, you did that, too. Captain Rick’s piloting doesn’t mix very well with his liquor.”

Doofus laid head on Oahu’s shoulder.

“You were nice to me from day one. You’re the best friend I’ve ever had, and I couldn’t ask for a better one than you.”

Oahu smiled, dropping his hand onto Doofus’s knee.

“You, too, Doof. You, too.”

The pair of them sat and watched the sun go down, and Morty decided to leave them be.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the amazing comments and all the kudos! This story is doing so much better than I had hoped!

Chapter is named for the “Sea of Waves,” because it’s Oahu and he makes some. Oooh, those shovel talks, though! Also, desert, I slipped a bit in there about Oahu and Doofus meeting just for you. :)

Mazzy Star: Blue Light

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