### Constant Knot

**by** [JaymesParker](#)

#### Summary

The teenager stood at the corner of Abraham and Lawrence Streets, a dark blue, hooded sweater pulled up over his head, shielding his face from direct view. It did wonders to conceal the black eye he was sporting too, at least until it was too late for anyone to notice it. A frustrating 36 hours after being released from the McLean Juvenile Detention Centre three hours away, Stiles was back on the street again to do the very thing he’d been thrown in for.

Or the one where Stiles life is pretty shitty, gets worse when he meets Peter the dirty cop, and Derek saves the day.

#### Notes

My brain space is kind of a scary venue, but finally, finally, it produced a fully developed
Teen Wolf AU that even included Sterek and this is the product. I've tagged everything currently applicable or foreseeable applicable that isn't a spoiler but additional tags will come as they are needed.

The title of this story has *nothing* to do with adding to the giant repertoire of knotting puns out there, it's from the beautiful, and ever appropriate City and Colour song of the same name.

See the end of the work for more notes.
36 Hours

The lanky teenager stood at the corner of Abraham and Lawrence Streets, a dark blue, hooded sweater pulled up over his head, shielding his face from direct view. It did wonders to conceal the black eye he was sporting too, at least until it was too late for anyone to notice it. A frustrating 36 hours after being released from the McLean Juvenile Detention Centre three hours away, Stiles was back on the street again to do the very thing he’d been thrown in for.

Thirty-six hours ago, he had sat in an uncomfortable orange chair directly in front of a window with the bright sunlight streaming in on him. His right eye was bruised a truly impressive myriad of black and purple– a remnant from the night before– *fucking Jackson*– and it ached behind his eyeball like brain freeze the longer he was forced to sit in the sun.

“Alright…uh…um…” the CPS worker was looking down at her copy of the paperwork, frowning. “Stiles,” the teenager supplied, exasperated and absolutely fed up with the day. “Everyone just calls me Stiles.”

“Oh, okay,” she replied, looking incredibly relieved not to have to translate the jumble of letters on the paper into actual syllables. Stiles watched as the brunette service worker shuffled the papers in her hands. She gave off the jumbled professor vibe– kind of cute, not very organized. She looked up, plastered on a smile. Her name tag read ‘Jennifer Blake’.

“Okay Stiles, we’re ready to go,” she announced. “You’ll probably be happy to hear that we’ve found a group home with room for you near Beacon Hills– only an hour and a half away.”

“Yay,” the teen deadpanned, twirling one long finger in the air in mock enthusiasm. The CPS worker didn’t seem to notice it was his middle finger. He had already been given his lecture about the conditions of his release, that he was on probation, and that meant he would be living in a group home, that he would have to enroll in high school again, follow a curfew, quit getting on his knees for strangers. And already Stiles was planning the various ways to violate each and every one of the conditions of his release. He had a three hour car-ride to plan and perfect all the details of his various methods of escape– he’d think of something concrete by the day’s end.

The group home was an unassuming grey-brick house on a quiet court in a middle class suburb. From the outside, it looked like nothing special, like a normal family could have lived there.

“Well, I’m just going to come in with you, make sure you get settled,” Jennifer stated as Stiles undid his seatbelt and got out of the car. She stumbled a bit on her heel as they walked to the door and his hand shot out to grab her elbow, the last thing he needed was someone to accuse him of pushing her. His stores were getting low, he needed to get back out there again, his dad was counting on him.

Stiles played the part of the apathetic teenager well as one of the group home’s social workers showed him around the house, pointing out the bathrooms, kitchen, laundry room, explaining the responsibilities for all of the housemates in keeping the place functional and ‘productive for everyone’.

“And for fun, we even have an X-box,” he said enthusiastically. Stiles couldn’t help but notice that it was enclosed in a plastic box that was bolted to the chipped table it sat on. “We keep the controllers locked in the cabinet just to make sure that everyone gets a chance to play. We’ve had a few
incidents were residents have accidentally mistaken them for their own belongings and sold or traded them.” Stiles couldn’t hold back the snort of derision. Maybe getting out would be easier than he thought if all the home’s employees were such gullible schmucks.

Stiles followed the group home employee and the CPS worker up the stairs. He was starting to get antsy. He needed to call Lydia—had promised her the last time he called that as soon as he could, he’d let her know where he was, what his plans were to get back. She may have been keeping an eye on his affairs for him, but it was clear he’d asked her a big favor and at one point, he’d have to do one for her in return.

“… and I guess that brings us to your room,” the group home employee finally announced, opening a door to reveal a room with a bunk bed on the left and a single bed on the right which was occupied by a hulking black teenager, reading a book.

“Boyd, this is your new roommate uh…”

“Stiles,” the teen in the doorway supplied. The dark teen sitting on the bed—Boyd—made no indication that he had heard any of the exchange, save for the briefest glance up and one sentence.

“Top bunk’s taken, you get the bottom.”

“Where is Isaac?” the social worker asked, “I haven’t seen him today.”

Boyd shrugged.

“Well, make yourself at home,” he said to Stiles, “Dinner is at six o’clock— you’re off the hook for duties for the next couple of days, but we’ll fit you in the schedule come Monday or Tuesday.”

“Sure,” Stiles replied, “Sounds good.” He took a few steps into the small room, dumped his backpack on the lower bunk of the bed before following it down. The CPS worker—Jennifer— said some sort of final goodbye, which Stiles barely acknowledged and then the door closed. Boyd said nothing, and Stiles preferred it that way. He had to come up with a game plan.

That game plan ended up involving waking up in the dead of night, sneaking out to window, and immediately finding the seedy area of town, a guy who didn’t care about his black eye, or his general underagedness, and a nice, semi-private place to do business— the public bathrooms at a nearby beach. When Stiles climbed back into the window two hours later, the elusive roommate Isaac still wasn’t there, and Boyd was awake, sitting up in bed in the darkness when Stiles turned around, one leg still hanging out the window. For one, heart-stopping moment, he thought for sure he was going to fall out of the open window behind him, but the sudden smack to the head from the half closed window brought him back to equilibrium and his senses.

“Christ on a cracker, you scared the shit outta me,” he cursed in a whisper.

“No, I covered for you,” Boyd corrected, voice low. “When they did their check, I told them you were in the bathroom, having a moment to yourself— bad night.”

“Thanks man,” Stiles breathed in relief, righting himself and pulling the window shut.

“We’ve all got our secrets,” Boyd replied with a shrug, turned over and went back to sleep. Stiles stripped down to his boxers and t-shirt before going to brush his teeth. Having dick breath was not a good way to keep a secret.
Part B of the plan couldn’t happen until the next day at dinner, but it happened easily enough. Stiles excused himself from the table with a simple mumbled “bathroom” leaving his plate still half full of food– the one good thing about the foster home. He went upstairs and he did go to the bathroom– where he had already stashed his backpack in the linen closet, making his exit out the bathroom window simple, and practically undetectable.

It wasn’t until he settled into a seat near the back of the bus that for the first time in over a day, Stiles let himself start to relax. In Beacon Hills, he knew what was waiting for him, what to expect. Even if it had been a few months since he’d been there. Stiles had kept in touch with his friend Lydia Martin– a housekeeper at the Comfort Plus Motel on the edge of town, who had been there at least as long as Stiles had been turning tricks. She had gone to the same high school as he did, but like him, had dropped out. She never talked about why. No matter what her back story was, it didn’t matter. He trusted her, she’d been the one to keep an eye on his affairs when he’d been in stuck in juvie. She was his one phone call, the emergency number he put on forms simply because he had nobody else that was capable of helping him, and therefore, she would have to be the first stop he made when he got back into Beacon Hills. He’d left her a voicemail telling her he was on a bus and could only hope she’d got it.

The bus ride was smooth and relatively uninterrupted, stopping only once along the way before pulling into Beacon Hills’ bus terminal. Stiles woke from the light doze he’d fallen into, the rough upholstery of the back of the seat, rubbing warmly across his cheek as the bus pulled to a jerky stop.

“Last stop. Beacon Hills bus terminal. Please exit the vehicle. Do not forget any luggage stored in the overhead compartment. This bus will not return to the departure point,” the fuzzy voice of the driver sounded over the static of the PA. Stiles stretched, groaning softly at the relief in his muscles as his legs and arms spread out into the space around him. He stooped to grab his backpack up from the floor between his feet before pulling the hood of his sweater back over his head. Sticking to the plan.

The driver was watching the passengers as they left the bus and as Stiles approached, he noticed the aging man wince as he noticed the teen’s bruised face. The steep steps down to the ground jarred Stiles’ stiff limbs until he hit the pavement. His eyes scanned the platform for the beat up telephone booth that he knew was there. When he shoved his way past the graffiti-mangled doors, he discovered that the telephone book was a completely mangled mess that would better serve as toilet paper. Good thing he knew the number by heart.

The five stuck when Stiles’ finger pressed down on it but the call seemed to go through anyway.

“Hello?” Lydia’s voice was clear as a bell on the other end.

“Hey Lyds, I’m back in Beacon Hills,” the teenager greeted. There was a snort on the other end.

“Too ya long enough.”

“I got out…” the teen glanced down at his wristwatch, “30 hours ago and they sent me straight to a group home. No, escorted me straight to a group home. I had to escape adult supervision once to go out and get money for the bus and again to actually get on said bus. I think you can give me a break.”

“So where are you then?” Stiles could practically picture the red head’s lips– soft and plush, probably painted that coral-pinky colour she preferred, close to the receiver, snapping into the phone.

“The bus station, you want me to meet you at the motel?”
“No, I can come get you, I need to get the Jeep back to you anyway,” Lydia replied with a sigh. “I’m sure my boss will be happy to see that monstrosity disappear from the lot.”

“Why’d you have it there?”

“Pfft, a couple of months ago I got a ticket for leaving it parked at the preserve like you told me to do. Guess if there is nobody sleeping in it they don’t allow overnight parking,” she jabbed.

Stiles groaned, pinching the space at the bridge of his nose.

“How much is the ticket for?” He mentally tabulated what was in his account. It was getting dangerously low thanks to the extra time he’d had tacked onto his sentence for fighting. He had to get back to work again. His dad was counting on him and he didn’t even have enough for this month’s bills. He could feel the choking knot rise in his throat—an oncoming panic attack.

“I paid it, don’t worry about it,” Lydia replied tersely, “It was my fault anyway.”

“Lydia…” Stiles began to protest.

“Zip it,” she snapped. The usual sass. “I’m just going to put something a bit more appropriate on. Be there in fifteen or twenty minutes.”

“Or you could just come now. I’m sure nobody will mind what you’re wearing, least of all me,” Stiles flirted shamelessly. He knew it would never happen anyway. But he’d spent the last 6 months pretty much celibate, he at least deserved the right to dream big once in awhile.

“See you in thirty minutes,” Lydia replied brightly before hanging up.

“Shit,” Stiles cursed but the word was broken up with a laugh. He cradled the receiver before stepping out of the booth. There was absolutely no way of knowing if Lydia was serious or not. He was just going to have to wait it out.

Stiles glanced up and down the platform. It was late and the bus depot was closed until morning. He’d taken the last bus in apparently. The handful of people who had been on the bus had scattered to the far reaches of the parking lot and beyond. Under the light of one of the parking lot lamps, Stiles watched a couple embrace. The guy looked tired, judging by his sloped shoulders. The couple got into the car together, the distance sounds of their chatter indistinguishable from where Stiles stood against the brick wall of the station. A cab pulled up and picked up the last remaining bus passenger from the end of the platform, then, all was silent.

Stiles needlessly glanced down at his watch again. Going to the hospital was going to have to wait, at least until tomorrow, as unbearable as that was. The only thing that had kept Stiles in line the last few months was the knowledge that his dad needed him. He didn’t have a choice but to keep his head down and do what needed to be done. It was a fine balance. He was never going back there.

To do so would be the end of him, the end of his dad.

He had been on the verge of getting out of all of this. He’d had enough saved to be able to take enough time to figure something out, get a real job, do something. Then he’d gotten picked up by a cop and his life had gone to utter shit for months. If it hadn’t been for Lydia… he didn’t want to think about what would have happened. And now, now he was right back at the start. He was right back where his scared, fifteen-year-old self had been almost two years ago. Now though, he knew the way of the world; that just as you thought you could see down the other side of the mountain, someone was waiting to kick you back down again and you had to be ready to kick them back.

A sleek, black sedan pulled into the parking lot, just shy of being in full illumination of one of the
lot’s lights. It idled there for a few minutes and Stiles stared. He vaguely recognized the car, and it didn’t set off any warning bells, so he didn’t bother moving from his place on the bench. That is, until the window of the driver’s door rolled down a few inches, and a hand emerged, beckoning him over. Stiles was well-versed in that signal. He glanced down at his watch– 25 minutes at most until Lydia got there. He sighed and stood up, stuffing his hands into his pockets. There was probably time.

The shuffle across the parking lot made his stomach churn just slightly. For some reason it felt like his first time all over again. The weight in his stomach got heavier and heavier as he approached the car. A luxury model, though subtle, not a showy sign of affluence. The window rolled down a bit further as the teen approached. Inside, the car was shadowy but for the bright white glow of the instrument panel.

“Open for business?” the voice inside the car asked. Stiles felt the tension leave his muscles. He nodded, the window rolled down the rest of the way, revealing the familiar face of Alan, one of his previously semi-regular clients.

“Yeah,” Stiles replied softly. Alan’s head bobbed slightly to the side– a gesture to the passenger side door. He frowned.

“What happened to your face?”

“Lover’s quarrel,” Stiles snarked, before ducking around the back of the car.

“My friend is picking me up in 20 minutes– if you think that’s enough time, than I’m more than happy to be of service,” Stiles said conversationally as he slid into the passenger seat, the smooth leather making his movements appear smoother than they actually were. “Otherwise, we can meet up later if you want.”

Crisp bills, placed by smooth, dark fingers on the dashboard, in the exact amount as many times before, gave him the only answer he needed.

“You can not be serious.”

Stiles stepped out of the car, reached down and pulled his backpack out after him. Alan mouthed a goodbye and Stiles gave him a quick, three finger salute before turning around to face Lydia. Her diminutive form stood dwarfed even more extremely next to his faded Jeep, partially obscured by the black sedan between them. Stiles glanced down at his watch as the black car slowly pulled away. Figures she was five minutes early.

As usual, Lydia looked impeccable. She would have looked impeccable in a bathrobe and worn out bunny slippers with curlers in her hair, but that wasn’t her style. Instead she stood in blue jeans, a vivid green top and gold flip-flops, her full lips painted the signature coral she always wore. Stiles trudged the paces between them, reaching into his pocket and pulled out two of the bills from his pocket. When he reached Lydia’s hand he reached down and stuffed the paper into her lose fist.

“For the parking ticket,” he muttered. “Now where are my keys?”

Lydia stared down at the bills in her hand for a moment before huffing out a breath.

“In the ignition,” she replied. Stiles reached forward and opened the passenger door.

“Thank you,” he replied with a finality that said ‘we’re not going to talk about what just happened’.
The Jeep roared to life when he twisted the keys.

“We’re going to Ruby’s before you go off to live in the woods like a crazy hobo again,” the red-head announced as she reached across herself and buckled in. Stiles felt the violent urge to bash his head against the steering wheel, but he held back, figuring one black eye was going to be enough to deter enough potential clientele until it healed.

“Fine, but you’re buying me curly fries,” he replied before taking off towards the exit.

Lydia put her feet up on the dash as they drove.

“Nice shoes,” Stiles quipped. He was used to seeing her tiny feet in no less than three inch heels.

“You try driving this beast in heels and tell me how that goes,” Lydia snapped back. Stiles smirked at the image of his hairy legs stuffed into Jimmy Choos.

“Thanks Lyd,” he replied somberly, “For everything.” She gave a quick nod of acknowledgement.

“So, are you going to tell me what happened to your face any time soon?” she asked. Straight to the point. Typical Lydia.

“Your lovely ex.”

Lydia pursed her lips.

Jackson was a shithead rich kid who had landed himself in juvie for his third drinking and driving charge in less than a year. Finally his parents hadn’t been able to buy him out of serving time and he’d ended up in the same multi-security facility as Stiles. Just his fucking luck, considering Stiles had been the one to give him the mirror image of the same shiner a year ago when Jackson had grabbed Lydia a little too harshly after they had broken up and made some pretty despicable comments about being done ‘slumming it’ for the time being. Yeah, Stiles had snapped.

“Why?”

“Who the fuck knows?”

Of course, Stiles knew exactly why Jackson had done it. He didn’t want to be the bottom of the food chain. Stiles had been the one rung in the ladder between him and some of the correctional facility’s more seasoned offenders and Jackson knew it. Hell, Jackson had exploited that for all it was worth for the past seven months, using Stiles as the ultimate bargaining chip. So when, in desperation, he’d sucker Stiles in the shower three days before his release to provoke him, Stiles hadn’t hit back. He’d simply taken the punch and staggered from the room with a bloody nose and aching eye socket.

The gravel crunched under the Jeep’s tires as Stiles pulled into the all night diner’s parking lot. He killed the ignition and opened his door, lanky form pouring clumsily from the vehicle into the yellow light of the diner’s sign. He hadn’t hard curly fries for months.

Lydia cleared her throat from the passenger seat and Stiles was reminded that, now that he was back in town, Lydia’s days of going it alone were over. She was a lady and as long as she had someone around to treat her as such, she was going to use that to her advantage. He couldn’t be sure, but he had a feeling she had once been well-off. He didn’t ask questions, but little things tipped him off; the way she ate, small little debutante sized bites, her perfect posture… and her propensity of waiting for him to open doors wherever they went. Stiles scrambled around the back of the Jeep, yanked open the passenger door.

“M’lady,” he smirked, bowing slightly. Lydia slid from the passenger seat, using Stiles shoulder to
help ease her path down to the ground.

“Thanks,” she replied, when she smoothly landed on her feet, her smirk pulling in on her cheek to create the adorable dimples that had first caught Stiles’ attention. He couldn’t help himself, he swept down and kissed the tiny dent on her smooth skin.

“I do believe you owe me some curly fries.”

“Oh my gawd,” Stiles groaned, rubbing his stomach appreciatively.

“Are ya’ done?” Lydia replied from across the table, sounding completely bored. She toyed with the straw in her half-finished milkshake.

“Okay, okay, I’ll shut up,” he replied. “Down to business.”

“Good,” the redhead replied. She reached down to the plush bench of the booth and rifled through her purse, emerging with two envelopes, which she set on the table, careful to avoid the wreckage of napkins and damp drink rings littering the Formica’s surface. The tapped the first envelope.

“Your bank statements by month. I only put money in when it had to be there.” One perfectly polished fingernail pushed the envelope aside to better reveal the second. Lydia’s voice softened. “And receipts, from the hospital, proving that the account is up-to-date.”

“You’re a good friend,” Stiles replied, eyes tearing up despite himself. He mashed the back of one hand into his eyes.

“I know,” Lydia retorted, her voice fond. Both teenagers picked at their food for a few moments in silence.

“So what now?” Lydia asked. Stiles sniffed.

“You couldn’t guess?” he replied. “Back to the regularly scheduled program, until I can figure out something else.”

Abraham and Lawrence streets met at their respective corners with an abandoned grocery store at one corner and a semi-functioning gas station at the other. The area of town was a product of development gone wrong. When a factory that was supposed to employ hundreds of people failed to get off the ground three towns over, the west end of Beacon Hills just kind of… stopped happening. The grocery store was boarded up and left there, the only sign of what it was ever meant to be, the cart corals in the parking lot. The sign hadn’t even been put up yet though the colours gave away what chain it was supposed to have been. Across from the lot to the south end of Lawrence was a bus shelter. Originally there had been a route planned to connect the outlying areas to the city’s centre, and just like everything else, that project had hit the bricks too. Now it was the area of town where the men could pay for some play with their choice of plaything.

Stiles sat inside the bus shelter. Danny had just taken off in a sedate looking Buick and probably wouldn’t be back for a couple of hours. It had been a quick reunion, and Stiles’ friend had quickly welcomed him back by moving over a seat in the bus shelter– giving back first dibs. Stiles had been in this spot the longest, Danny second and with Stiles back he willingly handed back the crown of the King of Rent Boys. Now Stiles sat alone, fiddling with the wearing sleeve on his hoodie, waiting. His Jeep was parked several blocks away towards the back of a movie theatre parking lot
for safe keeping. Leaving it in the supermarket parking lot would be begging for it to be towed at the
least— a giant advertisement for cops to come pick him up at worst.

Stiles could practically feel the presence of the five or so other young men who loitered in the
parking lot behind the bus shelter. They watched him. Some of them knew him, some didn’t. The
ones who didn’t had dared to try and enter the shelter while Danny was there, only to be given a
pointed look by the Hawaiian looker before scurrying back to their posts in other, less desirable areas
of the block. Stiles didn’t know what was making them stay back now, he only hoped it would stay
that way. He needed the business.

A dark brown Taurus pulled up alongside the curb on the other side of the street. Stiles bristled. A
cop. A cop in an “unmarked” car. The teen glanced over his shoulder. Surely to god one of these
kids knew enough to either stay right the hell where he was, or take off. Stiles sagged against the bus
shelter in relief when nobody seemed to approach the car. He knew he could handle a cop. He was
good at using the whole ‘meeting a friend’ excuse to great effect and, when he needed to, he would
make a big fuss about calling Lydia and get a hold of her on her cellphone and use the code phrase
they had so that inevitably, when the officer asked to speak with her, she knew exactly what to say.

A streak of electric blue caught Stiles’ attention just over his right shoulder and before he could say
or do something, some stupid teenaged twit in electric blue hot pants had already crossed the street.
Never mind that he was violating the unspoken rule that seniority ruled. Stiles felt the urge both to
snort in derision, but also flinch with knowledge of what was about to happen. He watched the teen
lean over the car— lean, tanned, unbruised legs – he had to be either a recent run away or a middle
class kid with a mommy and daddy who would inevitably be there to bail him out.

“Amateur,” Stiles chose to mutter under his breath before getting up off the bench in the bus shelter
and beginning to walk away, the cop successfully distracted. Though it was disgusting, he was going
to have to hit up the bar and club district downtown and spend the night on his knees in an alleyway
instead of in the relative comfort of a car or motel room. As he walked, he could just hear the kid in
the blue shorts begging whatever officer had picked him up to have mercy on him.

_Not bloody likely._

Stiles’ dad had been the Sheriff at the time of his accident— no incident was a better word. “The
incident”, as in the incident where just about every person in the police station, holding cells
included, was massacred and left like a trail of bloody breadcrumbs throughout the police station.
There had been three survivors that night— two policemen out responding to a missing persons call,
and the Sheriff. He’d been found back in the holding cell area, apparently trying to free the trapped
drunks when he’d been attacked. But it wasn’t a normal attack, because where everyone else had
been torn to a bloody mess, the Sheriff had been left with a single scratch on the back of his neck.

In one night, Stiles had lost everything. The same night of the massacre at the police station, Stiles’
best friend Scott, had gone missing. In fact, Scott being gone, was the one thing that had saved the
other two officers’ lives. It had been Melissa McCall’s frantic phone call about her missing son that
had sent the two officers out of the station that night.

From there, everything was a complete blur for several months. Stiles really couldn’t blame Ms.
McCall when she went off the rails a bit, selling her house so that she could spend her days trying to
find her son, which of course, left Stiles utterly alone. The Sheriff was put in hospital and the doctors
couldn’t figure out what was wrong. He was on and off of life support so many times Stiles lost
count. Then came the bureaucratic bullshit; what the insurance would cover, what it wouldn’t. Talks
of pulling the plug on life support. Talk of moving the Sheriff to a special home so that he could live
out the rest of his days in comfort. And no talk, ever, of him getting better. Then came the question
of what to do with Stiles. But as usual, everyone was already several paces behind the teenager, he’d already thought ahead, emancipating himself before he could be put into the foster system. So that he could make the legal decisions regarding his dad. In the end, he found out that money talked, and as long as someone was paying the hospital bills, nobody really cared.

Now the Sheriff’s department was full of strangers Stiles didn’t know, hadn’t grown up with, and therefore they couldn’t care less what he did or who he was, which meant doing what he was doing was dangerous in ways it would never have been before. He was both grateful and terrified of that fact.

When Stiles reached the alley between Jungle and the misplaced bowling alley next door, he shook out his hands before taking a few steps into the darkness.

“Welcome home,” he muttered as his senses were immediately assailed with the smell of damp pavement and sex, the muffled vocals of men in the throes of passion and the dark, and suffocating dark closeness of the alley.
When Stiles woke up, his shoulders and neck faintly ached, but his face was warm from the late morning sun. He sat up slowly inside the back of the Jeep, careful not to smash his head off the low roof. He sighed, and stretched as much as he could in the small space, limbs akimbo. The preserve was beautiful and quiet this deep in at this time of day, the sun lazy in its pursuit of the ground, but there nonetheless. Since the bank all but took the house, Stiles had been living out of his Jeep. He’d found the safest place to go at night was the preserve at the edge of town. People never really strayed into the woods at night– there was an unsettling amount of animal attacks in recent years and despite animal control’s attempts to get the problem under control. On colder nights he’d simply blast the heat for a while before bundling under the collection of wool blankets he kept in the back of the car. It usually stayed fairly warm for a few hours. It was only on the coldest nights that Stiles was forced out of his Jeep and into the Hale house.

The Hale house was a burnt out shell in the preserve. Stiles had been ten when a fire had broken out in the basement inside, killing almost all the occupants of the house. He didn’t remember a whole lot of details– that had been around the time they had discovered his mom’s illness and he’d been too preoccupied spending time with her to pay much attention to anything in the world around him. It wasn’t until the after, when he saw the crime scene photos spread across the kitchen table, that’d he’d really come to know anything about the case. The fire was suspicious, and despite claims that it was electrically based, he knew his dad was looking into the potential of arson– artfully hidden arson. So Stiles avoided the house whenever possible, and only sought refuge in the basement, insulated by the earth, on the coldest nights of the year. People had died there. Someone had lost their family too. The place was owed some respect.

Stiles’ bladder was screaming with almost violent intensity for relief, so finally, groaning, he scrambled out of the back of the Jeep into the forest. Being in juvie had made him jumpy. He looked around with extra caution– it would be just his luck to get arrested for public urination or some shit like that. Luckily there wasn’t a single soul in sight, so Stiles stumbled a few feet to a tree, unzipped, and lay claim to his spot in the woods with an exaggerated moan. It had been awhile since he could pee in peace and it was glorious.

It wasn’t until the still sleepy teen’s fingers brushed against his pocket on their path to tucking him back into his jeans that he noticed something was off. He zipped up and backed away from the tree, reaching into his pocket…

Okay, so not that off. Stupid, but not that off. It had been well after two am when Stiles had finally killed the lights and parked deep in the preserve halfway between the Hale house and the ravine. Normally at the end of a night, he stashed his earnings in a beat up Ziploc bag in the space behind the glove compartment, but it would have been too dark. Still, usually he was good enough to remember putting the money even just in the compartment itself. He scrubbed a hand down his face in disbelief as he pulled the wad of bills from his pocket and headed back towards the faded vehicle, jerking the compartment open. He stopped when he saw them; two slightly scrunched bills, neatly placed on top of his dog-eared owners’ manual: The money he’d tried to pay Lydia back with for the parking ticket. The girl was incorrigible. He sighed. There was no way she was going to ever take that money from him, he might as well get over it now. He had a lot to do today anyway.

First stop was the free clinic for condoms. Stiles was down to three mint-flavored ones and none of the regular kind and there was no way he was rushing his visit with his dad just so that he could get to the clinic in time to let strange men spend the night fucking him in relative safety.
“Long time no see sweetie, I was worried about ya’,” Gloria, a familiar face at the free clinic greeted when she walked into the room. She was a beautiful black woman in her fifties, hair always an impeccable mass of curls or braids on top of her head. She’d done Stiles’ first test and almost every single one thereafter. Stiles sat on the crinkly paper of the doctor’s table trying not to move. He’d already stripped off his sweater and left it in a pile at his side. The urine test had been handed in at the desk in the usual orange-lidded container, sealed in a plastic bag.

“Yeah, I kinda dropped off the map for awhile,” Stiles replied.

“You get outta this line of work during that time?” the nurse asked as she wrapped the familiar constricting rubber band around his bicep, just above the elbow, tying tightly.

“Not by choice,” the teen replied candidly. She looked up; one eyebrow raised expressively, a question. *The* question. “I got picked up,” he explained.

“And now you’re back,” the nurse replied flatly. No judgments, just the swipe of an alcohol swab against his inner arm. While she waited for the liquid to dry she ripped open a bandage, left it laying neatly face up within reach.

“Face it, you missed my dimples and winning personality,” he replied with a crooked grin, pointedly looking away when she approached with the needle.

“And your backsass,” she replied as she gently pierced the skin. “And your ridiculous fear of needles.”

“I don’t have a fear of them, I just don’t like being poked with sharp objects,” the teen replied, his gaze fixed on one of the ceiling tiles in the corner of the room just above a medical poster of the various stages of fetal development.

“Here’s an idea, try getting out of the trade,” the nurse replied, drawing Stiles’ gaze back to her face. “Then you won’t have to come see *my* shining face and bask in the glory of *my* winning personality every few weeks.”

“I thought this was a safe space?” he replied warily, his brow turning downwards.

“Never said it wasn’t honey,” she replied, reaching over to the side to grab a cotton swab, pressing it into the crook of his elbow as she slowly withdrew the needle. “But nowhere in the literature does it say we won’t give free advice.”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. I already have a few pamphlets worth of free advice that have shown up on the hood of my Jeep on more than one occasion.”

“Yeah well, we flyer our parking lot frequently,” the nurse replied dismissively. She peeled the backing off the bandage with practiced ease.

“Yeah? What about the movie theatre? And the Save ‘n Suds?”

The nurse froze where she was pressing a cotton ball into his arm.

“Yeah, thought so,” he mumbled in reply. He wasn’t too mad. Everyone who worked at the clinic was nice, had their hearts in the right place. They all knew exactly what he was up to– how could they not when he showed up every couple of months for the usual battery of tests.
“Well, we’re all done here,” she replied. “We should have the results in two days. I take it you’ll call in or come in and check?”

“Yep” Stiles replied, popping the P as he slid off the table and put on his discarded hoodie. Gloria slapped an arm across his chest when he made a move for the door.

“Not so fast,” she tutted.

“Did you just soccer mom me?” Stiles asked incredulously, but the nurse didn’t seem to care. She discarded the various debris from the bandages as well as her gloves before opening one of the cabinets above the simple counter and sink along the right side of the room. Stiles watched her pull out two paper bags.

“The one with the x are the regular kind,” she explained, handing the dumbfounded teen the paper bags. He caught on and smirked, peeking inside the other bag.

“Finally got tired of me emptying out the fishbowl up front?”

“More like I got tired of you picking through it for the mint flavored ones all the time. What do you have against grape?” the nurse replied, reaching up to shut the cabinets before leaning back against the counter with her arms folded across her chest. “Most people like the grape.”

“It tastes like the jelly my mom used to buy when I was a kid for PB and J. Pardon me if I don’t want to be reminded of that when I am sucking someone’s cock for money.”

The nurse looked uncomfortable for once.

“Kiddo, I don’t care how often you have to come back here to sift through the rubbers as long as you keep playing safe.”

“Thanks,” Stiles muttered. In a severely fucked up way, it was nice to know someone cared.

Stiles sat on one of the benches outside Beacon Hills Memorial trying to keep the shaking out of his hands. Guilt rolled around in his stomach, heavy as lead. It had been enough to make up him puke up the four dollar breakfast he’d practically inhaled at a greasy spoon diner barely an hour ago. He hadn’t seen his dad in six full months, and the last visit had been with a CPS worker, hardly a visit at all. His gut twisted whenever he thought of tearfully telling his dad that he was going to be away for awhile and not to worry, both of them were going to be fine. He was never going to get caught again. Ever.

He took a deep breath, entered through the double doors of the hospital. He didn’t need to follow the signs to the long-term care ward. He knew the route off by heart– he’d spent the last ten years of his life wandering these halls. He knew that the vending machine in the cardiac lounge was broken and that if you put a buck in and hit A5, if would eat your dollar, but if you punched in D3, it would dispense two of the candy confections from the aging coils. He’d never bothered pointing that little trick out to anyone other than Scott.

When Stiles rounded the corner to his dad’s room, he took one, long, steadying breath, not sure whether he’d be walking into a man on life support, or merely one in a catatonic state– his Dad’s health seemed to unpredictably bounce between the two– then stepped through the slightly ajar door. The room was small, but filled with sunlight. There was a closet to one side, and a bathroom on the other– one that Stiles used only in a pinch since he’d been chewed out by a nurse for using it to shower before. Today the former Sheriff was set up in a wheelchair at the window, facing the
outside.

“Hi Dad,” Stiles greeted softly, shoving his hands into his pockets as he strolled into the room. He knew better than to expect any sort of reaction, but a small part of him still swelled with hope every time he visited, just waiting for the day that his dad would turn around and say ‘hi’ back. He was met with the usual silence, the sounds of heart monitors and sneakers squeaking on linoleum in the distance, the subtle whir of the IV in his dad’s hand pumping fluids in. He moved carefully around the foot of the bed and sat down across from his dad, silent.

It was strange to see someone who did nothing, day in and day out, who appeared to be frozen in time, age like any other person would. The hair around the Sheriff’s temples was greying more and more, the wrinkles around his eyes and mouth battling for prominence. Stiles couldn’t help but wonder how much he’d changed over the past few years. Especially the past two. Certain things were obvious; He’d stopped buzzing his hair down to nothing when he realized that it was fucking cold out from November to March and hats were too easily lost. He was a few inches taller, and knew that he probably no longer stood eye to eye with his dad– he probably looked down. Gone were any signs of baby-fat, replaced by lean, sinewy muscle brought on by the nature of his work for one reason or another, and not eating nearly enough.

Stiles began to talk.

“Listen,” he laughed nervously, brushed a hand over the back of his head. “I guess you don’t really have a choice do you?” The lopsided smile fell from the teen’s face quickly. “I know I have been away a long time, but I swear, I did everything I could to do to get back here as soon as I could. I just… I know it took longer than I told you.” Frustrated tears started to prickle the corners of his eyes. He had been so stupid and naïve for thinking that juvenile detention was nothing he couldn’t handle. God had he learned. He’d learned within the first week when someone stood guard outside the bathroom one morning and let three guys outside of their assigned shower time file into the grimy tiled room… where Stiles stood under the weak stream of lukewarm water, mechanically scrubbing away. He hadn’t even heard them, too focused on the fact that he’d slept in and almost missed his time.

The teen abruptly shifted, antsy, and jumped down from the side of the bed, crossing the small space to the chair in the corner that showed him the other side of his dad’s face. Settled again, he started talking to the vinyl floor.

“They gave me an extra month for fighting,” he confessed. “I know, I know, your son, causing trouble with his mouth again.”

‘Hey-hey, so I know I have a reputation, but you guys aren’t really my type. I’m more into the older crowd. Come back in a few years and I’d be happy to be of service…’

The three guys crowding him into the shower stall didn’t seem deterred by his ‘type’ at all.

Stiles sat back in the chair, drawing his knees up, resting his forearms across them.

“You have to give me credit…” his voice cracked and quieted. “I learned my lesson– sometimes I just need to shut up and keep my head down. I’ll never do something so stupid again. I was so irresponsible and I could have cost you everything–”
And that was it. Stiles dissolved into tears for a few long minutes, imagining what could have happened, before he managed to regain his composure enough to suck in a breath and scrub at his eyes with the backs of his hands. His skin was itchy from the salt.

“I got back last night,” he croaked. “Lydia— my friend— she’s been looking after everything for us. I’ll have to bring her by one day— she’s…” he paused trying to find the right words before settling for, “she’s something.” His dad stared out the window, no indication that he’d heard a word of his son’s breakdown. Several minutes of silence passed before Stiles unfolded himself enough to reach forward and cautiously brush his knuckles against his father’s hand, like he were delicate, made of a pile of ash, inclined to blow away at the slightest disturbance.

“I miss your hugs,” he whispered around the knot in his throat. “I miss you letting me look at case files I shouldn’t be, just so we could spend time together.” He dared to look up to his father’s face, try and get right in the path of his vacant expression. “I miss hearing you say you love me.” He hastily brushed away new tears with the sleeve of his hoodie.

“I really need you to wake up and tell me you love me,” he croaked.

The pavement was damp under his knees. He could feel the wet stain spreading across denim, like giant tears soaking into the joints. A hand in his hair reminded him of exactly where he was, what he was doing, and he lost focus, choking on the hard length of flesh ramming at the back of his throat. He lurched forward, clawing at the dark denim-clad knees of his trick, muttering out an apology. “That’s it, choke on my dick.”

Stiles rolled his eyes in the dark, sure he couldn’t be seen. All sentiment gone, he redoubled his efforts, employing his tried and true combination of suck and slide like the ill-fated expert he was. Within a handful of short thrusts later, the John’s fingers tightly meshed in Stiles’ hair, and he thrust into his mouth, particularly deep, wrenching another gag from the teen, who acutely felt his trick spill into the condom. He pulled back, breathless, the second the fingers tangled in his hair loosened enough for him to duck away.

“Good job baby,” the trick panted out, breathless as if he’d been the one on his knees getting face-fucked by a stranger. “God you know how to suck dick. Knew you would, those fucking lips…”

“Yeah, later,” Stiles replied, scrambling to his feet. He had his cash, guy had his orgasm, transaction done. He headed for the mouth of the alley. He was so done with that spot for the night. On this night, the usual crowd of horny thirty-somethings who wanted to prove they still had it by bedding a little twink, despite not getting any action inside the club, was particularly obnoxious and Stiles had had enough. At any given time, the club, and the alleyway beside it, could have any mix of pretentious thirty-somethings, drunken and heteroflexible frat-boys, or average club goers who just hadn’t ended the night on a lucky note. Tonight just seemed to be the night for the subtype douchebag as well.

It was time to head back to the usual late night spot by the bus shelter. The men who stopped there were generally a little older; Business men on their way home to their bachelor pads in neighboring towns— or their families— with a pit stop in a parking lot, or at a cheap motel along the way; Men who knew they were past their prime, or young business men who left the club scene to the weekends, and needed a fast, utilitarian fuck to get out the week’s frustrations. The business was more consistent, the same rotation of people, give or take the few strangers passing through. Stiles liked the bus stop Johns, sure the work usually took longer— they’d almost always end up at a parking lot a paranoid distance away, or at a skeevy motel— but most understood the fucking rules; no glove, no
love, nothing too rough and no demands to be called ‘Daddy’— ever. The one downside was that working the bus stop meant leaving the relative safety of the other teenaged prostitutes to do business.

But Stiles was smart. He never let anyone take him too far off the beaten path, never to a strange motel he didn’t know. Of course that meant that the owners of some of Beacon Hills and the surrounding areas’ motels didn’t take so kindly to his presence, but whatever, the room was always paid for and he never checked out more than an hour past checkout time… most of the time.

Stiles was just rounding the corner when Danny emerged from the passenger seat of an older green Subaru towards the back end of the darkened grocery. He waited until the other boy had seen his trick off before loudly cat-calling into the night. His friend whipped around, startled, and Stiles howled, bent double and laughing.

“Asshole,” the tanned teen muttered as Stiles approached. He’d always been the quiet one. He was sweet, smooth and charming, probably could have easily stolen most of Stiles’ business if he wanted, but he never made any move to do it. He reached out and pulled the paler teen into a hug.

“Sorry I didn’t get to talk to you much the other night, bills to pay,” he excused. Stiles nodded.

“Where are you holed up these days?” he replied. Danny gestured with the jerk of his chin.

“The old subway depot on Kent. Place has rats and roaches, but the roof is solid, and nobody ever really goes exploring except for teenagers. We hear ‘em further down the tunnel, closer to the entrance. They don’t seem to know about the great palace within.” Stiles smirked.

“So, now what about you? Word is that you got picked up or got out of the biz…” Danny trailed as the two walked lazily across the dark parking lot and to their usual spot, each of them scanning the streets for signs of potential customers.

“Same difference really,” Stiles replied wryly. He kicked at the ground, the echo of frustration. “I got picked up. They put me away for a few months to try and correct my errant ways.” The two boys smirked, knowing that sometimes in life, those in the position of power made things that were incredibly complex, seem easy.

“When did you get out?”

“Just over two days ago,” Stiles replied casually.

“Don’t they usually, have you know, probation, stuff like that? Halfway houses?” Danny said skeptically before realization dawned on him. It was actually comical to watch his jaw drop and his tongue stutter to a stop.

“I couldn’t stay,” Stiles replied by way of explanation. “I was barely there long enough for anyone to miss me. I had to get back here. Too long with no income.” They came to a stop just shy of the bus shelter.

“Aren’t you worried that they’ll come after you?” Stiles made a dismissive noise in the back of his throat.

“There are over two hundred and twenty-five thousand youths arrested in California every year. I’m pretty sure they’ve already moved on to the next one buddy.” At least, that was what Stiles hoped.
The two boys talked casually for the next fifteen minutes, until both caught sight of the silver Audi slowing as it pulled up to the curb on the opposite side of the street from the bus shelter. Danny looked at Stiles.

“I just got back from a date, you’re up if you want it,” he supplied. “And by the looks of that car— you want it.” Stiles eyes were on the vehicle as it slowed to a stop. He pushed off of the lightpost he’d come to lean against, was already walking over by the time the driver’s side tinted window rolled down a few inches.

“Later buddy,” he called over his shoulder.

“Be safe,” Danny replied with a small wave before taking a seat in the bus shelter.

“You need directions?” Stiles asked as he placed on hand on the roof of the car, cast his eyes down to the window. It was his patented way of assessing whether or not the job was safe— as in not a cop— or whether he should walk away, without giving himself away. It gave him time to look in the car for anything suspicious, look around for a marked car trying to stay out of sight. The window rolled down a few more inches.

The man in the driver’s seat looked to be in his thirties. His brown hair was slicked back away from his face revealing a jaw-line like a fine art sculpture. When the man turned ever-so-slightly towards the light of the street, Stiles could see an even layer of stubble— enough to look purposeful instead of ill-groomed. He had a few expressive age lines, but if anything, they added to his casual attractiveness. Stiles found his eyes tracing the line of the man’s white v-neck, to a well-defined chest and arms revealed by the sleeves pushed up to his elbows.

“One does not typically come to this area of town to ask the young men here for directions,” the Audi owner replied, lips pulling into a knowing smirk. His eyes flitted to the wound on Stiles’ face but he said nothing.

“Fair enough,” Stiles replied, lips quirking up into his signature smirk. He glanced around the neighborhood one more time. Behind him, and at the other corner, Danny was hopping into a beat-up looking station wagon and with the slam of a door he was gone, with no police on his tail. Stiles was alone with his potential John.

“What’s your name?” he asked, pushing the boundary just a bit. Too fast with a name and the smoothness usually belied a cop.

“Peter,” the man replied after a few beats, an amused smile spreading across his features. It crinkled the lines beside his eyes reassuringly. It was a natural enough sounding reply to get through this particular stage of the screening.

“Well, what can I do for you Peter?” Stiles replied, still very much conscious of keeping his lingo neutral, just in case.

“How about you get in the car and we can talk about everything you can do for me,” the man replied suggestively. He hadn’t asked for a name. Also a good sign— it meant there was nobody listening in on a wire that could run it for priors. One more test…

“I don’t make a habit of getting in strange men’s cars.” Stiles replied, playing hard to get.

“Please, I am not some stranger offering you candy,” the man retorted. “Though I am sure I can find something for you to suck on.”
“That a boy,” Stiles finally congratulated, rapping the top of the car with his knuckles, pulling back with an amused grin. It wasn’t every day that a client could use a line like that and not have it come out sounding completely pervy and cheesy. Though that may have had more to do with the effortless sense of confidence and appeal the guy oozed from every pore.

“Get in the car,” the man– Peter– purred with an amused smile. Stiles circled around the front, took one last look around the darkened street, and opened the passenger side door before sliding into the immaculate interior.

“So, what do you want?”

The reply came simply enough; “You.”

“Funny and original,” Stiles replied with a smirk, because how many times had heard that line? “That’s kind of obvious by now considering I’m you know, in your car.” He leaned closer in his seat, invading the other man’s space, “I need specifics,” he traced a finger down the steering wheel, over the man’s knuckles, before withdrawing. “Don’t be shy now.”

Peter’s smile, when returned, was positively wolfish.

“Right now I want to tear off all of your clothes and see if the rest of you is as covered in freckles and moles as that sweet face. After that I probably want to fuck that smart mouth of yours, then, compare it to your tight teenaged ass.”

Well, fuck. Usually tricks were either a) completely reluctant to say what they want, b) clinical as a mortician or c) drunk and demanding fuckwits. Peter had somehow managed to shred through all three categories and create a brand new one of his own; the elegant pervert. And it did something to Stiles, if only make him appreciate his new found trick’s special brand of wit.

Stiles kept his gaze fixed out the windshield of the motionless car, staring ahead at the abandoned lot.

“I have rules. You pay before you play. If you want to put anything in me, you put a condom on it first, I don’t care what it is. I don’t do groups. I don’t do restraints. I won’t call you ‘Daddy’.”

“Those are reasonably agreeable terms.” Stiles sharply turned his head, examining Peter more closely; His fancy watch– no rings on his fingers. The man stared back in equal measure.

“Put your money on the dashboard,” Stiles negotiated, words careful, deliberate, keeping eye-contact, voice quiet. He tracked the older man’s movements as he leaned across the seat, opened the glove compartment and retrieved a simple brown leather wallet. Nimble fingers pulled out several bills, shook them in the air for a moment, before setting them on the middle of the dash, slightly fanned for the younger man’s approval. A quick count revealed that there was more than double Stiles’ standard rate there, but Peter didn’t need to know that.

“You have a deal,” Stiles replied, reaching up to sweep the bills from the dash. He folded them, levered up his hips, and crammed the money into his jeans pocket. The whole time, Peter watched.

“I know a few spots where we can be alone,” Stiles began, already thinking about the abandoned housing development about a ten minute drive away. “The Court Street bridge is usually pretty quiet– unless someone beat us there…” Peter snorted.

“While I would love to think I could convince an esteemed officer of the law that you are my completely legal-aged date, I think he or she would be hard-pressed to believe me, especially if you and I were in the buff under a bridge,” he replied. “Do up your seat belt.” He put the car into gear.
“Well, uh, the motel six is that way,” Stiles gestured with his chin. Ever since Lydia had walked in on a trick once, he’d tried not to piss where he ate so to speak, but he did it went he had to. “And the Comfort—”

“I have a place in mind,” Peter supplied before signalling and pulling away from the curb. Stiles took one last look at the street. It wasn’t that late, but he had a feeling he’d be busy for pretty much the rest of the night. It didn’t matter though. With Peter paying him enough for three jobs over, he didn’t have to worry about getting out on the street, and hey, maybe he’d even get a reasonable sleep on a motel bed and a shower. Bonus.

Chapter End Notes

Wow, to say that I am completely overwhelmed by everyone’s support is an understatement. Thank you all so much for your comments, kudos and bookmarks.

tumblr [here](http://example.com)
Elegant Perverts

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains at the very least, extremely dubious consent, though I would call it non-con. You have been warned, but I am betting you expected it anyway.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

When Peter’s car smoothly pulled into the lot of the Comfort Plus, Stiles inwardly groaned. He just prayed Lydia wasn’t working that night. Peter carefully manoeuver into a parking spot towards the back corner of the U-shaped motel before killing the ignition.

“The room’s already taken care of,” he explained when Stiles didn’t move. He reached over and opened the glove compartment once again, producing a key hanging from a diamond-shaped, white plastic keychain with a fading gold, 216 emblazoned on it.

“So it’s like that huh?” Stiles quipped, “Not even going to take me out to dinner first.”

Peter gestured through the windshield at the vending machine directly in front of them next to the nice machine.

“By all means, partake in the gourmet cuisine this fine establishment has to offer,” the man returned with a sweeping gesture. Stiles snickered.

“I like your style sir,” he replied before undoing his seat belt. He leaned in close, “I may have to take you up on that offer… perhaps I’ll swing down here with some of your pocket change while you’re recovering from round one.” He drew back quickly and got out of the car, hopping up and shaking out his limbs. He knew exactly where every room in the place was—had probably fucked in about a quarter of them—and didn’t hesitate to take the flight of concrete stairs, two at a time, to the second level before realizing that the room was probably still locked. He turned and sat down at the top of the concrete steps just in time to see Peter round the corner and move towards him.

“My, you are eager,” the older man praised, voice low as he stalked up the stairs with nothing but his keys in hand. Stiles stood up to meet him at the top, followed him to the door of the room. This used to be the place where he had to steady himself, remind himself of what he was doing and why he was doing this, but he’d been doing it so long now, that mental preparedness seemed perfunctory, a show for himself that didn’t work. As Peter slid the key into the lock, Stiles moved in close, observing, with mild interest, that the doors had all been given a fresh coat of paint since the last time he’d been here.

“Says the man who told me he wanted to pound my tight, teenaged ass,” he breathed into Peter’s ear, close to him, but not actually touching, teasing him with his breath. The more riled up he got his clients before the clothes ever came off, the faster he was out of one cramped back seat and into another dingy motel room or semi-private public washroom. The man faltered with his keys for just a second before viciously twisting the handle and shoving the door open. Stiles barely contained his snicker and followed him in.

The rooms at the Comfort Plus were all variations of the same thing with mirror image layouts and different sized beds. This one had the bed off to the left with a couple of battered nightstands, and
across the room, just as expected, a dresser with a stone-aged television set on top of it. The yellowish lights of the room were already on, the drapes drawn closed, the bathroom door ajar to reveal a sea of white, the one sparkling beacon of cleanliness in a room of otherwise questionable hygiene. Stiles noticed a black duffle bag sitting beside the armchair by the bathroom door.

“You planned this,” he said, lips turning up into a cocky grin as he rounded on Peter as he closed the motel room door, locked it.

“Well I am always prepared,” he countered, “Though I never was a boy scout.” Stiles couldn’t help but notice that he was broader than he’d looked in the car, more powerful looking, so it shouldn’t have surprised him when he managed to close the space between them in two short strides. Before Stiles could retort Peter had reached out to grab the back of his neck and mash their mouths together. Stiles really had no choice but to relent in Peter’s vice grip, his lips parting when a probing tongue demanded entrance. Strictly speaking, Stiles usually avoided kissing customers, not out of some played out saving-himself-for-love trope, but because he found it uncomfortably intimate, strange to share. When both men parted they were left panting, Stiles lips and chin lightly abraded from the mash of stubble and teeth and tongues.

“Jesus,” he panted. Prying his hands off Peter’s shoulder and waist where they’d somehow come to rest. This time it was Peter’s turn to snicker– downright snicker.

“I knew that mouth would be perfect,” the man praised as the hand on Stiles’ neck traveled down his spine. When it reached the small of his back Stiles had to resist the urge to grind against the older man because hey, he could enjoy this once in a while. There was no denying that the man had a sophisticated kind of appeal. Which is why it was surprising when Peter leaned close and instructed lowly: “Now go shower while I decide what I want to do first; pound you so hard you can’t walk, or fuck that pretty face.” He punctuated the order by grabbing hold of one of Stiles’ denim clad ass cheeks and jerking him forward to show him exactly how eager he was.

“No wonder they didn’t let you into the boy scouts,” Stiles quipped when he was released, “You’ve got a dirty fucking mouth.” He turned, and for lack of anywhere else to sit, sat on the edge of the bed and tugged off his shoes and socks.

“Maybe I’ll show you how dirty,” Peter replied, coming to stand in front of the boy. He reached down and trailed a hand down Stiles’ spine from the nape of his neck before his fist gathered Stiles’ shirts in the middle of his back, giving them a tug. Stiles got the message, lifting his arms obediently to be stripped of the material, which was unceremoniously tossed aside, landing in one of the corners of the room, next to the dresser, “…if your good.” And God if that didn’t cause Stiles’ dick to start showing surprising signs of interest.

“Now who’s got the candy,” Stiles teased in return, running a hand across his stomach to tug the button free on his jeans and slowly slide the zipper down. And at that Peter positively growled giving Stiles a gentle shove to his shoulder, message perfectly clear: Lie back. Stiles closed his eyes when his back hit the mattress. It was definitely softer than the back of his Jeep.

“You are unbelievable. Whatever happened to the boy who didn’t get into cars with strangers?” Peter teased, grabbing the denim by Stiles’ ankles to tug the offending fabric off. He tossed the garment to the floor viciously as the teen got to his elbows.

“I hardly think we count as strangers anymore,” Stiles replied with a quirked eyebrow before sitting up and gently shoving Peter aside. He smoothly shucked his boxer briefs, then walked into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him. A few moments of fiddling with the taps, and one ominous shuddering sound from the pipes, and Stiles was surrounded by warm steam and gloriously hot water. He grimaced at the fact that this was his first shower in a couple of days but quickly shrugged...
it off, choking it up to being used to the daily showers at McLean. Only this time he was safe from harm—pretty much. Which is why he jumped a mile when the shower curtain jerked open, heart stopping before bounding forward at a hundred miles an hour. He lost his footing, slipped, caught only by one strong arm around his waist. Stiles bit back a scream, just barely.

“I didn’t mean to scare you,” Peter said surprisingly gentle, before using his other hand to remove his towel and climb over the edge of the tub, into the cloud of steam. He nuzzled in close to the juncture of Stiles neck and shoulder, rubbing a stubbled cheek there. “Are you alright?” Still non-verbal, Stiles nodded, his eyes scrunched tightly closed, every muscle tensed in fight position. Peter’s grip gradually softened but he stayed close, one hand reaching up to delicately trace down the length of the slighter man’s spine, stopping just shy of one round buttock.

“You have a beautiful body,” he murmured into the knot at the top of Stiles’ spine.

“Thanks,” the latter murmured in return, just thankful that the impending panic attack seemed to have subsided and Peter had enough sense to leave it alone.

“Where’s the soap?” the larger man asked gently.

“This place is classy,” Stiles quipped—though his voice came out hoarse. “Dispenser, on the wall, behind you,” he directed, thumb jerking over his shoulder. He felt Peter’s body pull away from him ever so slightly and when it returned he moved his left hand from where it had been softly resting on Stiles’ ass to connect with his right, wrapping around the teen loosely while he lathered his hands. When they returned it was to flatten the teen back against him and that’s when Stiles got the first tell-tale nudge of the older man’s boner. He pressed back into it, not forgetting for a second that this was a transaction, the sooner he got things going, the better. Peter seemed to be on board with that, but definitely not on board with letting the teen completely take charge. Soapy hands swept up to his shoulders, down his arms before wrapping around both wrists.

“Uhuhuh,” the larger man tutted, “I intend to take my time… enjoy myself.” He leaned down, inhaling deeply at the space just below Stiles’ right ear. And that was when Stiles reminded himself that his options when he left were either to return to the bus spot or alley, or call it a night and sleep in his Jeep… or he could spend the night here in a reasonably comfortable bed.

“Alright, alright,” Stiles acquiesced, tipping his head back onto the shoulder of the slightly taller man, “as you were.”

Peter seemed to take great pleasure in creating the largest mess possible, covering both of their bodies with enough soapy lather to clean a semi-truck while simultaneously sucking what promised to be absolutely appalling hickies into Stiles’ pale skin whenever Stiles managed to pry his lips away from his.

“You know, it has occurred to me that I don’t even have a name for you,” the older man pondered aloud as one soapy hand inched across a bony hip, fingertips brushing the thatch of soaking pubic hair. Stiles was mostly hard, which was… unusual. His body had lost interest a long time ago in most of his activities when it realized that they were about as routine as going to the bathroom and about as pleasant as going to the dentist. But tonight, for some reason, Stiles was buzzing with a low-level current of arousal. When one hand finally wrapped around his length, he moaned shamelessly, simultaneously trying to fuck into the fist that held him, and press back against the erection bobbing between him and the other man. When he got his bearings again he choked out an answer.

“Stiles… that’s what people call me,” he replied, voice gravely. He looked down at the hand stroking him, swallowed hard. This was not how things were supposed to be going. He attempted to twist in his transient lovers’ arms, only to be held firmly in place by an arm around his hip. Behind him, Peter
hummed.

“Interesting name for an interesting boy,” Peter commented, just as he cruelly removed his hand and stepped away leaving they keyed up teenager panting, arms braced in front of him on the tile wall. When Peter, and his devilish hands returned it was to connect lips with shoulder before issuing an order in a whisper.

“Bend forward.” Stiles’ heart hammered in his chest. He wasn’t scared per se, but he knew what the action was meant to do, and it made him nervous. Thick, soapy fingers probed at his entrance, pressing, massaging, but not penetrating. Against his neck, he felt Peter smile.

“Unless this is one of those instances where I need a condom?” When Stiles didn’t respond, the man applied the faintest pressure, “Mmm?”

“No, I– no, it’s fine. For now.” Stiles didn’t know what was happening to him. He shook his head trying to get a grip on himself, grabbed a tuft of hair at the back of his head and pulled. Focus. And as quickly as it was regained, it was broken when not one, but two, thick fingers pushed inside.

“Fuck,” the word punched out of him. He strained away from the intrusion, leaning heavily into his arms and resisting the cramping urge that had settled into the back of his thighs, demanding he reposition himself. It didn’t hurt so much as it was uncomfortable, thanks to the copious amount of soap on Peter’s fingers, but it was definitely not pleasurable. But he’d had over-eager clients before though, and they were nothing he couldn’t handle.

“What happened to starting with my mouth?” he panted, turning his head into Peter’s cheek. The fingers inside of him twisted, pressed searching out Stiles’ prostate, he assumed.

“You’re so tight,” Peter marveled, ignoring the question, the arm across Stiles’ abdomen loosening its grip just slightly, sliding lower, pressing into the space just above his dick. And Stiles inhaled sharply, because that actually hurt. He squirmed, pulling away farther, head against the tile, was just about to cry uncle when both soapy fingers slid out.

“I haven’t been doing this that long,” Stiles gasped the lie, mentally chiding himself for sounded so wrecked, so out of control. The hand pressing down on his stomach had moved, was wrapping around Stiles’ wilting length again.

“Hmmm,” Peter hummed, by the sounds of things, in approval. The same fingers brushed over Stiles’ opening again and he found himself trying to pull away.

“Relax, I’m just trying to make you feel good,” Peter chided, then pressed on long digit back in again, probing, exploring.

“Isn’t that my-y–” Stiles cut off with a groan when Peter’s finger hit its mark. He shuddered. “job?” A deep flush burned across his cheeks when Peter failed to respond again, contenting himself with biting bruising hickies into the curved slope of the younger man’s shoulders and stroking the teenager to full hardness.

“To make yourself feel good?” Peter finally asked. Stiles raised his head, and it felt as fogged as the steamy bathroom.

“What?”

Peter removed his hands from Stiles completely, in favor of grabbing slim hips and redirecting them both, out of the direct stream of water, against the side wall of the shower. The man looked positively
predatory, but his movements softened, his left arm reaching up to cradle Stiles’ chin, pull him in for a searing kiss before pulling back, hand tracing down one toned arm, playing across the wrist before directing bony fingers to his goal. Stiles got the message pretty clearly and wrapped his fingers around his own length. He could do a little mutual shower masturbation. He let his eyes close to have mast, tilted his head back, arched his back for show and watched for Peter’s reaction through the hooded slits of his eyelids. And he did react in kind, stroking himself with the same rhythm, letting out a light groan into the steamy air. Stiles let his eyes completely slip closed-- which is why he missed the man reaching down to aggressively pull slim hips up, away from the showers wall, knocking Stiles back as he pitched off balance for a few heart-stopping seconds. The man’s strength was surprising and Stiles found himself braced against the tiled wall, pinned slightly above his trick with his legs spread wide, semi-wrapped around Peter’s narrow waist with one large hand supporting him seemingly effortlessly by his ass.

Stiles felt like he was underwater, battling to get to the surface-- to control, lungs burning for air. He needed to refocus Peter’s attentions. He was so concentrated trying to make his hormone addled brain figure something out that he missed Peter reaching over to the soap dispenser beside them with his free hand. The only warning he had was the brush of fingers over his opening and then--

The sound Stiles made could only be described as a yelp when three fingers jammed inside of him. And that was the wake-up call his brain had apparently needed. Several things happened at once. He bucked hard at the man in front of him, tried to push him off with the hand that had previously been occupying itself with his dick and then swung clumsily with his left hand, half closed fist connecting with the side of Peter’s head with more shock value than strength. Both men pitched to the side, skidding on the slick bottom of the tub. Stiles’ shoulder smashed into the soap dispenser on the careen downward and he landed on his side in a heap at the bottom of the bathtub. Peter managed to half catch himself on the towel bar, controlling his fall to land on his knees, braced over Stiles. His gaze was murderous for a few telling seconds before it softened. Stiles didn’t even want to know how terrified his own expression was.

For several seconds, neither spoke, just lay heaving in the bottom of the tub. Stiles tilted his chin away from the stream of water, not wanting it in his eyes.

“I’m sorry for hitting you,” he apologized hollowly after a second. Because he needed the money that was in his jeans pocket. He needed to finish the job he’d been hired for.

“Are you hurt?” the voice was low, gentle even.

Despite the burning ache in his ass and the bruising one on his shoulder blade, Stiles replied: “Not really,” daring to look into the face of who he realized was a very unpredictable John. Above him, Peter looked unphased by the fall himself, he slowly leaned forward, pressed a kiss to Stiles’ forehead before sitting back and getting to his feet. He reached down and offered a hand to Stiles, who took a deep breath, grabbed hold and stood up. Before he even really had his bearings, he invaded the older man’s personal space. Time to make up for lost ground.

“Now, how about we rinse off and continue this somewhere that is less likely to cause head injury like, say, the bed?” he proposed, ducking his head to suck on the side of the slightly taller man’s neck. He could feel the low rumble of a growl before he heard it and took the opportunity to slip down the man’s body, dragging his lips lightly along the way, stopping just shy of his erection. Which until now, he hadn’t gotten a good look at. He was relieved to find that it wasn’t of terrifying child’s arm proportions, but it was still heavy in his hand when he reached out to give it a few smooth strokes, flushed deep red and uncut, slightly above average in proportions. He glanced up to see Peter staring down the length of his own body, expression lust-filled. Right where he wanted him.
“I know I look good down here,” Stiles continued, voice low, seductive, “You’ve been itching,” he slightly scratched through the hair on one muscular thigh, “to fuck my mouth since I dared to walk up to your pretentious fucking car.” Fingers, softly running through his hair. Stiles pushed his face forward, nuzzling in the thatch of dark hair, hand still stroking the erection beside his face, picking up pace.

“I bet you’re just barely holding back right now,” he teased, fully aware that he was playing with fire. He pulled back a bit, feeling Peter’s erection twitch in his hand. “You want so badly just to jam that thick cock in my throat, shut me up.”

“Now who has the filthy mouth?” Peter finally replied, his voice a growl. His hands grappled for Stiles’ shoulders, hauled him into a standing position like he was nothing. Stiles smirked. Bingo. He stepped back from Peter’s somewhat uncoordinated grip, gave himself a quick once over for any remaining, unrinsed soap, then ducked around the shower curtain at the other end of the tub. He grabbed a towel from the rack from the door and wrapped it around his waist.

“Clearly I do,” he called. “But come find out for yourself.”

Stiles chuckled from his spot lounging back on the mattress as he heard a couple of muttered curses before the water cut off. When Peter emerged from the bathroom he held the cheap motel towel in one hand, clearly conscious that there would be no way to get it around his waist and make it stay with the erection he was sporting.

“Thought you’d never join me,” Stiles jested, flicking the mint condom he’d retrieved from his jeans over his knuckles back and forth teasingly. At that, Peter tossed the towel to the floor in the bathroom doorway, crossed the room to the foot of the bed. He grabbed a hold of both of the scrawny teenager’s ankles and yanked him down the mattress, dropping his legs before circling the end of the bed to the nightstand, ripping it open to search for something inside.

“Turn around, head at the foot of the bed.”

Stiles took a deep breath before scrambling to reposition himself. He’d done this before, but it had been awhile. He focused on breathing for the few seconds he knew he would be able to inhale at leisure. As Peter circled the end of the bed again, Stiles ripped open the foil packet with his teeth.

“God, look at you,” the older man praised from his position at the foot of the bed. Fingers reached out the lightly trace across the moles on one pale cheek and Stiles, being the expert tease that he was, twisted his head just slightly, pulling Peter’s wayward thumb in between his lips. “You’re practically gagging for it already.” At that, Stiles locked eyes with his client and sucked, making a show of closing his eyes. After a groan of appreciation, Peter took the opportunity to reach out and take the open condom packet from Stiles’ loose grip, and pulled his hand away only when it was necessary to roll the latex onto his erection. He tossed the packet aside, leaned forward and hauled the teen by the underarms until his head hung off the edge of the bed.

The blood was starting to rush to Stiles’ head. Fingers traced over his throat, tracing the pale expanse, following it down until they fell away. Stiles drew in a few more ragged breaths, reached back with one hand to grab at one of Peter’s muscular thighs, urging him forward. He didn’t move. Instead he reached to his side for something, finding Stiles hand and pressing it in place.

“You’re such a good slut I know when I tell you that you’re going to fuck yourself on your fingers while I fuck your face, you’ll do it without question, won’t you?”
Stiles cast a glance down at the bottle of lube, then back up at Peter, nodded.

“Good boy, now open up.” Stiles did, gasping in one more breath of air before his mouth was filled with minted latex. Peter gave him a moment to adjust, eyes appraising, clearly pleased at what he saw beneath him. He drew back his hips slowly, pulled Stiles’ hair, changing the angle of his neck, thrust in hard. Stiles gagged violently as not just the tip of Peter’s erection, but a sizeable portion pressed past his gag reflex and into his throat. He jerked his head up to the side, trying to clear his airway, but Peter’s grip in his hair tightened. For a few seconds Stiles thought he wasn’t going to be able to hang on, then slowly, he drew in shallow breaths through his nose. Peter dared push further. Stiles left hand came up to stop him, but was quickly batted away. He shuddered, tilted his own head a bit more. His lungs were burning. Peter pressed further and he whimpered. Then fingers were tracing along his throat. Peter groaned.

“You should see yourself right now,” he panted. Then suddenly he pulled back.

“I thought I told you to finger yourself?”

Stiles gasped for air for a few seconds, utterly disoriented, dizzy from lack of oxygen before he managed to get enough signals firing. He popped the cap open on the lube and Peter thankfully stayed where he was, doing nothing more than watching and giving himself a few lazy strokes until Stiles lowered his hand between his legs. The teen traced his own entrance, which spasmed, gun shy from the pain inflicted earlier. A couple of steadying breaths later, and he’d pressed a finger inside, moaning theatrically— and it was on that open-mouthed moan that Peter shoved back in without warning, wrenching Stiles’ head back by the hair, creating a long, straight channel with his throat. The force was so deep, so sudden that Stiles reared up when he gagged, trying to simultaneously push Peter away and sit up. Peter grabbed his left wrist again.

“Keep doing that and I’m going to have to hold onto this,” he lectured. “You knew it was coming.” His voice softened. “Breathe through your nose.” A few more thrusts. “God, you have no idea how beautiful you look like this.”

The hand between Stiles’ legs had stilled. Breathing was more of a priority than anything else— at least for him. Not for Peter apparently, who leaned slightly forward, grabbed Stiles’ right wrist and pressed wrenching a muffled groan from both of them.

“Keep going,” Peter ordered gruffly. “You’re going to need to add a lot more fingers before you’re ready to get properly fucked.”

Stiles had forgotten about that, about the fact that he’d agreed to this and to having his ass reamed. Suddenly he was regretting his choice. Just breathing was an exhausting pursuit, especially when Peter began pressing his fingers along Stiles throat. At first the teen thought it was a sadistic way of making him gag, then he realized Peter was tracing the outline of his own dick.

They built up a clumsy rhythm, Stiles’ fingers never really hitting their mark, Peter consistently hitting his, harder and faster, panting and swearing, ordering Stiles to put more fingers in himself, to move them faster, harder, until on Stiles’ final violent gag, he shoved deep, grabbing the boys head with both hands and burying himself as far he would fit, so that the teen could do nothing but take it, feeling the pulse of the cock in his throat as it pumped it’s load into the reservoir of the condom. He kicked out, pushing at Peter’s thigh with his free hand, non-verbally begging to be set free. When Peter finally pulled away, Stiles’ hand and wrist were horribly cramped. His throat ached like he had strep throat. He was dizzy from hanging off the edge of the bed so long, from taking in so little air. He gasped in a breath, sat up quickly, fingers slipping lose as he collapsed on his side into a coughing fit. Once the coughing subsided enough, he pulled himself into a position leaned back against the headboard, waited for the black spots to clear from his vision.
“Well,” he panted, looking over his shoulder to where Peter was tossing the condom into the wastebasket, “did my ‘pretty mouth’ live up to your expectations?” His voice was completely hoarse, fucked out sounding.

The man’s response was to climb across the mattress, boxing Stiles against the headboard. He leaned in and claimed the younger man’s lips, gently this time.

“Exquisitely,” he praised, brushing his fingers through Stiles’ short cropped hair. “Now, I am going to wander down to this fine establishment’s glorious buffet and get some provisions.”

“Not like that you’re not,” Stiles teased, poking him in the chest. “You’ll get both of us arrested.”

Peter smirked as he pulled back and Stiles took the opportunity to appreciate the man’s ass as he crossed the room, fishing through the duffle bag on chair before pulling out a pair of black track pants.

“You sound like you need a drink,” he said as he turned around. Stiles snorted back a laugh, the movement making his throat faintly ache.

“Gee, I wonder why that would be?”

Peter smirked, strolled over to the bed where Stiles still sat, stretched out and nude, fingers still sticky from lube. He reached out and cradled the teenager’s chin, tipping his head up.

“I’m going to get you and I both something to drink,” he purred, “and when I come back, I want to see those long, perfect fingers stretching out your hole again because I never told you to stop.” It really was a gift, how Peter could hold such a placid expression, yet say the absolute filthiest things—at least Stiles’ dick seemed to think so.

“You are an unbelievable pervert,” Stiles retorted after a beat, but he slid down the mattress obediently nonetheless. He watched the man pull on the shirt he’d been wearing before and shuffle his feet near the door like he was stuffing his feet into shoes. Stiles couldn’t see.

“Get Gatorade,” he called, as Peter opened the door, his throat protesting at the use of his voice. “The blue kind!”

He settled back against the mattress, stared up at the ceiling, trying to think back to the days of stolen moments in his bedroom, clandestine orgasms. He fumbled for the lube, squirted more on his fingers before lowering them between his legs again. It took a few seconds to relax again before breaching his own entrance with two fingers. He didn’t jerk off anymore. There wasn’t a single fantasy that wasn’t untainted by the starkness of reality, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t give it the old college try. He changed angles, pressing in, seeking out the spot Peter had so easily found after his initial brutal exploration. He managed a brief, toe-curling graze, and that was it. He spread his legs wider, seeking out the same place again, hit it successfully and let out a groan of satisfaction.

When the door opened a few minutes later, Stiles could feel the sheen of sweat covering him. He opened his eyes where he laid, fingers exactly where Peter wanted them. He smirked, self-satisfied when Peter almost dropped the bottled drinks cradled in his arms and gripped his own length self-indulgently, giving it a fluid stroke.

“This what you wanted?” he breathed, chest heaving. “Wanted me to come so that I’d be nice and relaxed while you fuck me?” Peter, for once, seemed at a loss for words. “Or did you just want to wind me up? Fuck the orgasm out of me and keep going until I beg you to–”

“Stop,” Peter ordered suddenly. “If you’re going to come tonight it’s going to be on my dick.” Stiles
instantly let go of his length, withdrew his fingers and let out a low, teasing laugh. The older man practically jumped on top of him, tossing the bottles to the floor beside the bed. He pinned Stiles’ arms beside his head, but his hold was lose, playful.

“I take it you choose option number two,” Stiles said, leering. The man leaned down and kissed him savagely, a mash of teeth and tongues, pure unadulterated lust.

“You have until I find a condom to drink as much of that bottle of blue crap as you want before I plow you into the mattress.” Then Peter pulled away.

“Challenge accepted,” Stiles replied with a smirk. As soon as Peter pulled far enough away to allow it, Stiles leaned over the edge of the bed to retrieve the bottle of blue liquid.

He watched with amusement as Peter stripped off his shirt and retrieved the bottle of water from the floor, twisting the cap so viciously that the bottle itself crinkled in protest. Stiles sat back against the headboard, nursing his Gatorade, amused, until he found that it actually hurt a little to swallow.

“I hope you’re easier on my ass than you were on my throat,” he croaked, rubbing the skin of his neck. Peter’s response was to toss the emptied bottle of water aside theatrically, then practically rip his track pants off.

“Turn over,” he ordered. Stiles made a big show of capping the bottle of sports drink, setting it on the nightstand table, but he stayed where he was.

“I think you’re missing something, you said–”

His words were abruptly cut off by Peter grabbing him, once again by the ankles, and tossing him onto his stomach effortlessly. And just like that, alarm bells sirened in Stiles’ head. He pushed himself up, trying to get to his hands and knees to get off the bed. One forceful hand slammed him back down again.

“You’re such a goddamned tease,” Peter growled in his ear, body blanketed over Stiles back, erection grinding into his bare– and now lubricated– ass. “Next time, I should bring a gag, maybe your mouth won’t get you into so much trouble.” Stiles squeezed his eyes shut, heart rate skyrocketing. He shouldn’t have teased so much.

“There won’t be a next time if you don’t get a rubber big guy,” Stiles teased, trying to keep the mood light. Peter ground against him more persistently. And though he didn’t mean to, Stiles whimpered; the scared noise of someone who was, in spite of everything, still just a boy.

“Peter please,” he croaked and after a beat, the man pulled back. Stiles immediately rolled over, shakily pulling himself into a half-seated position. Peter wore the placating expression of someone trying to calm a lunatic or a wild animal.

“Calm down, I was only teasing back for once,” he replied. When Stiles said nothing, he reached out, wrapped one hand around a bony ankle, gently rubbing up and down the space between ankle and knee. “I promise, I wouldn’t do that. It’s incredibly dangerous and violating.” His other fist opened, revealing a familiar foil packet, which he leaned over and placed on the nightstand.

“Stiles lie down, I’m not going to hurt you,” he attempted to reassure. And Stiles wanted to believe him, he really did. But he couldn’t stop thinking about the pattern of the night thus far. Peter was rough, and he was bigger than him. Then again… there had been times where he could have used that force and didn’t... which is why Stiles found himself sinking back down to the mattress.

“That’s a good boy,” Peter praised softly, repositioning himself between Stiles knees. One broad
hand petted across the boy’s stomach. He glanced down, wary of the man’s motives even as he swept his flagging erection into a firm grip, stroked. He grabbed Stile’s right hand, still sticky with lube, directed it back between his own legs. Back to the regularly scheduled program. Stiles’ free hand scrambled for the lube without looking, eyes on Peter the entire time he went through the motions of slicking his fingers again. Satisfied, Peter backed off the bed, rummaging on the floor until he held up Stiles’ jeans, fished into the left front pocket.

“Mint, huh?”

Stiles stared, mouth slack before frowning.

“What?”

Peter didn’t reply, just clambered onto the bed again. Stiles brain didn’t catch up until Peter had torn open the packet with his teeth, pulled the thin ring of latex out.

“Wait what are you…” a firm hand gripped his erection so the other could roll the condom on. “Holy shit,” Stiles breathed, fingers freezing where they were, chest heaving, “Holy shit, you can’t be serious.” Peter shifted between his legs, knocking them further apart with his shoulders. Stiles’ entire body went rigid when lips kissed the inside of his thigh.

“Keep moving,” Peter ordered, one hand guiding Stiles’ wrist as the other grabbed his renewed erection. He leaned forward and Stiles kept his eyes open only long enough to watch spit slick lips wrap around the head of his cock.

“Holy shit,” he cursed again, eyes snapping shut, hips snapping up into warm, wet heat because if he had to look at that downright pornographic image for one more second, he’d be done. It didn’t matter that the latex usually slightly dulled the sensation. It had been so long since Stiles had been blown that the feel of Peter’s lips on him, even the hand pushing his hip was going to make him go off in no time. He brought the fingers of his free hand down to card through Peter’s hair, pressed the fingers on his other hand into himself with renewed enthusiasm. The room filled with filthy wet squelching and slurping sounds so loud that Stiles’ vaguely worried about the other motel’s occupants hearing. He was going to come. He was going to come soon.

So of course, Peter pulled off, away. Stiles pressed his fingers into himself harder, searching out that edge of pleasure that was so close.

“So close.” Peter ordered, voice calm. One hand came down to pull Stiles’ right away, pin it beside his head. Stiles in turn, groaned in frustration, hips bucking up into nothing.

“Peter I wanna come, let me come.” Apparently, he wasn’t above begging. Like really, actually begging. Peter chuckled, reached over to the nightstand for the condom he’d abandoned there earlier, made a show of tearing the packet open slowly, while stroking himself leisurely before he rolled the barrier on. Stiles’ heart was pounding, a heavy, slow rhythm in his chest. When Peter grabbed him under his knees and tugged, he went willingly enough, raising his legs, revealing his opening, practically begging to be fucked. Peter’s predatory smile spread across his face as he rubbed his erection down the cleft of Stiles’ ass, making the over-primed teen shudder.

“Goddamn it, fuck me–” Peter shoved forwards in one fluid motion, and Stiles felt split open. He gasped, unable to finish his sentence, make any words at all. And just as he was about to draw in a breath, the next thrust came, harder than the first. Hard enough to hurt. Peter leaned over the teen, drew out one more time, then pushed so deep, Stiles’ felt like the older man was trying to bury himself inside. He struggled backwards and one large hand pinned him in that same place on his stomach that he’d pressed before. Another deep jab in, this time with the added pressure from above.
Stiles gasped, shoved at the hand.

“Peter that hurts,” he said shakily. He could feel his body rapidly retreating from pleasure’s edge. Another punishing thrust, and still the pressure of that hand. Stiles’ struggled to reposition himself, but the man above him had almost inhuman strength.

“Peter,” he whimpered, raising one shaking hand to push his away. The hand snapped away to grab Stiles wrist and squeeze, guiding the limb down to the pillow. Hips snapped forward harder. Stiles flinched. This wasn’t arousing at all anymore. It was way beyond the mere fantasy that most Johns had about fucking him until he couldn’t walk. Peter was drilling into him with enough force and Stiles was in enough pain that it was becoming a legitimate concern.

“Peter stop,” he finally cried when the hand returned to his stomach and pain rocketed up his spine, and across his pelvis, electric, burning like a lightning strike. His hands flew up, clawing at muscular arms which rebuffed him like he was a ragdoll. Tears burned in the corner of Stiles’ eyes, clouding his vision. His sinuses clogged, as he became more and more distressed. He had to get up, getting out of this room, but every time he moved, every insignificant twist made the pain of Peter’s brutal dicking worse.

“Let me go,” he sobbed, chest heaving. “Fucking let me go.” Peter’s response was to pick up the pace, move harder, faster, and lock a hand over the panicking teen’s mouth and nose. Stiles kicked out, and felt the horrible, gut-wrenching pain in his rectum, stopped immediately. As a last resort he bit into the hand over his jaw and Peter— he looked right into Stiles’ terrified face— cocked his head as if the crying teenager beneath him was the most interesting sort of creature.

Before he passed out, Stiles could have sworn the man’s irises bled a surreal, chemical blue.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much for your support- the amount of feedback and love this fic has been getting still astounds me, I love you all!

Tumblr
Stiles woke up slowly, a steady, irritating sound in the back of his head pulling him to consciousness like a winch pulling a car from the mud. He opened his eyes, staring at bland beige paint and dull pink drapes. The motel. His eyes snapped to the nightstand where the alarm clock sat: 12:45 in the afternoon. Way past checkout.

“Shit,” he cursed, then made the mistake of trying to get up. The sharp pain that rocketed through him was enough to make him collapse against the mattress in misery, clutching his stomach, though the pain was really coming from somewhere deep inside, untouchable, unsoothable. He ground his teeth, panted in air. When the pain subsided enough that Stiles could actually think of something other than curling up and dying, he deciphered the obnoxious sound, as someone knocking on the motel room door.

“Just a minute,” he called shakily. The knocking stopped. Stiles took a deep, steadying breath, prepared himself to move. Just rolling onto his side from his back was enough to bring tears to his eyes. In the stillness that his agony brought, Stiles could hear a woman’s voice, ranting in Spanish– housekeeping, probably wanting in to clean the room, cursing their inconsiderate guest. He sucked in a breath, knowing he wouldn’t be able to sit up, and quickly rolled to his feet, almost going to his knees in pain at the process. He spotted his jeans on the floor by the foot of the bed and staggered over to them before he realized, there was no way he’d get them on fast enough to satisfy the maids standing outside the room. He settled for a discarded towel, wrapped it around his waist, and limped to the door, unlocking and opening it a crack with shaking hands, eyes cast at the ground.

“I’m sorry, I slept in, I’ll be out–”

“Stiles?”

His head jerked up at the sound of the familiar voice. Lydia turned to the maid tending the cart beside her who looked an amusing combination of confused and pissed off, and started speaking rapidly in Spanish. The woman nodded, grabbed the cart and pushed it to the next room. Stiles moved to close the door but Lydia jammed her foot in the space.

“Stiles open the door,” she hissed and he backed away, letting her duck inside. He staggered back a few steps to stand in the middle of the room, clutching the towel to his waist. He could feel his legs shaking. Lydia stared at him for a few seconds, and in any other situation, Stiles would have made some joke about her ‘sexy’ maid outfit– which actually was far from it on just about everyone on staff but her. Slowly, she raised a hand to her face dramatically, like a movie heroine before seeming to catch what she was doing, aborting the action halfway there before quickly crossing the room. Stiles actually flinched away from her.

“Oh my God Stiles,” she hissed, voice shaking. “What happened? Who did this?”
Stiles stared around the room. The only belongings in it anymore were his. There was no sign of Peter anywhere. The only things in the room were Stiles’ jeans on the floor at the foot of the bed, his t-shirt and hoodie a few feet away, his underwear, presumably where he’d discarded them in the bathroom and his half-drunk bottle of blue Gatorade on the bedside table.

“Lyd I’m sorry, I’ll get out, I–” he staggered towards his jeans, bent in a slow, jerking movement, like a toy running out of batteries, and straightened up. The movement made him feel like someone had jammed a metal rod up his ass and used it to lift him. He broke out in a cold sweat, chest heaving.

“Stiles stop,” Lydia ordered firmly, hands gently, but firmly pulling the denim from his grip to toss it to the bed. Her hands moved to his face, directing his gaze to her.


“I– he,” Stiles sucked in a breath. “We got carried away.”

“You let someone do this to you?” Lydia replied incredulously.

“It’s not the bad,” Stiles protested. He wasn’t sure whether he was saying it for his benefit or hers.

“If it wasn’t for the fact that you look like you would break down screaming if I did, I would drag you into the bathroom and show you exactly how bad you look,” Lydia snapped. “This is not getting carried away. This is abuse.”

“Lydia please stop,” Stiles protested. He could feel the blood draining out of his face, his fingers and toes felt cool. He needed to lie down, right now. He limped to the bed, stared down at the mattress that seemed too far away before crumpling forward to somehow land in the bed. He didn’t even care when the towel caught under his hip, untucking, almost exposing him. Lydia’s eyes couldn’t have burned more murderously if she tried.

“I get that you are worried about money, but I thought you said groups were too dangerous?” Lydia lectured, staring around the room.

“It wasn’t a group,” Stiles groaned. He panted a few breaths through his teeth. “It was just one…” Lydia narrowed her eyes.

“You’re telling me that one person did this?” she asked, as skeptical as she was angry.

Stiles nodded, eyes closed. He just wanted to pass out and sleep until the pain went away but he knew that wasn’t an option. The best he could do was get to his Jeep, somehow drive it to the preserve and curl up in the back for a few days in the woods, licking his wounds.

“Lyd, I don’t want to get you in trouble, and I know you have done a lot of favors for me lately, but it would be really nice if you could buy me enough time to get a shower,” he said, eyes still closed, voice wavering. He could feel the tackiness of leftover lube between his ass cheeks, the itch of dried tears on his cheeks.

“That’s your ridiculous way of telling me you aren’t going to talk about this, isn’t it?” she retorted, voice high, snapping. “You need to go tell–” Stiles eyes sprang open at that.

“Who? The cops Lyd?”

She snapped her jaw, which had been ready for some sort of smart retort, closed.
“Yeah, that’s right,” Stiles muttered. “Besides what would I tell them? That I was raped? I got paid for services rendered. He didn’t do anything to me that I didn’t agree to ahead of time.” Even if *I thought it was just a figure of speech.* Lydia stared at him for a long time, expression unreadable.

“I can buy you about twenty more minutes, forty if 220 is really disgusting, but I don’t think it is, Maria hasn’t come back to drag me over there yet.”

“Thank you,” Stiles replied softly, reaching out to squeeze her hand. “I’ll get out of here as soon as I’m done, I promise.”

Lydia nodded curtly before getting up.

“You need to starting thinking of a way out Stiles,” she lectured. “You can’t help your dad if you turn up dead in a ditch.” Stiles watched his friend walk out the door, knowing she was right, and knowing that, for the time being, there was nothing he could do.

Stiles lay alone staring at the bedside clock, trying to muster the strength to move again. He needed to get home– or his approximation of home as and as much as he hated to admit it, he needed something to control the incredible pain he was in. When he finally managed to pull himself to his feet, it was after almost five full minutes had passed. He stood on baby colt legs, and used the furniture in the room to support his wayward journey to the bathroom. Once there, he braved the first awful look at himself in the mirror.

His eyes of course, immediately went to the black shadow around his left eye. Though Peter had had nothing to do with it, it still made the rest of the situation appear that much worse. His neck and shoulders, even one of his collar bones were littered with deep red bruises from Peter’s ‘love bites’. Stiles reached up to prod at one, winced when he found that it was *exactly* like poking a bruise. He pulled back from the mirror, turned to play with the taps in the shower, and only then did he catch sight of the rest of the damage; the dark bruise forming on the back of his shoulder blade from falling in the shower, and worse, the dark smudges on his hips from Peter’s bruising grip. He could feel frustrated shaking start in his limbs. Most customers seemed to like to live in a world of fantasy where they were somehow corrupting Stiles’ innocence, or that they were in some way special and Stiles got down on his knees for them and only them. Stiles knew that deep down, most of them knew that this wasn’t the case, but that didn’t mean he could flaunt the fact. Peter had marked him up badly enough– not to mention whatever other damage he’d done– that Stiles knew the next few days were a write off for anything other than spending time with his dad and sleeping in his Jeep– which was the last thing he needed right now.

Under the stream of warm water, Stiles braced himself against the back wall of the shower, gingerly soaping himself– he was surprised there was any left in the dispenser– and shampooing his hair. When he was done, he felt like a wrung out rag. His check for damage was half-hearted. Really, he didn’t want to put *anything* in his ass when it hurt this much, let alone his own fingers, but if something was wrong back there he’d have to go to the clinic– and not just to check his test results. After a quick but not quick enough probe that made him feel like he was getting punched– only in the asshole– he drew his hand away. No blood, no tearing, thank God. He quickly washed his hands and shut off the water. He had all of about five minutes to get out of the room, he’d taken so long in the shower.

Stiles moved around the motel gingerly, but less shakily, knowing that, as far as he could tell, there had been no permanent damage done to his ass. He sat down on the chair in the corner to pull his
jeans and underwear on, resting as much weight as he could on his upper back and shoulders before checking the other thing he was afraid of. His fingers dipped into his front pocket, grazed a condom wrapper. He swallowed hard, heartbeat pounding until he felt it—the wad of bills he’d collected from Peter the night before, still safe and sound in his pocket. He let out a heaving breath he hadn’t even realized he was holding. He may have been ridden punishingly hard, but he’d still gotten paid for it. The relief was short-lived though, when his stupid brain started thinking.

Just because he had got paid, didn’t mean it wasn’t rape. He’d said no. He’d begged Peter to stop. But he’d also teased him, riled him up, even told Peter to fuck him. He hadn’t specified how he’d wanted to be fucked, hadn’t actually explicitly said that riding him until he couldn’t walk would hurt him, was something he didn’t want. He kept hearing his dad’s first ever, incredibly awkward sex talk with him when he was fourteen; “You don’t ever, ever have sex with a girl unless she clearly and enthusiastically consents. That means she says yes and she says it happily and sober, do you understand me son?” Never could the Sheriff have imagined that his son needed the other talk, the ‘if a situation is making you feel unsafe, get out’ talk.

“Enough,” the teen grumbled allowed. Enough of the pity party, it wasn’t going to do him any good. He never had to go near Peter again if he didn’t want to. He got to his feet, swiped his t-shirt from the floor and his hoodie. Normally he would have at least made an attempt to make the room look more presentable, knowing that Lydia was likely going to be involved in cleaning it, but he couldn’t take spending another moment in that room.

When he stepped out into the sunlight, Stiles couldn’t see any sign of the maids except for their cart two rooms down. He stared at the concrete steps for a minute, seriously contemplating bumming down the steps like a toddler. Instead he clung to the metal railing with a death grip, knuckles white until he reached the paved parking lot down below. Though he should have suspected it, for some reason, he felt a great sense of relief at the fact that the silver Audi was nowhere to be seen.

The twenty minute walk from the motel to the movie theatre took Stiles almost double the time and along the way, he started to worry about whether his Jeep would even be there; Leaving his baby anywhere overnight except the Walmart parking lot or the middle of the preserve tended to make him nervous. The Walmart was 24 hours, and therefore it was unlikely his Jeep would ever get noticed for parking too long, but it was away from anywhere Stiles ever did business, making it a completely inconvenient place to park despite the relative safety of doing so. The preserve was on the very edge of town, technically not even in town, making it impossible to leave his Jeep there. But Stiles liked that. The preserve was his space. It was peaceful, startling beautiful deep in the woods, especially at night with nobody around but the animals, and they didn’t bother him.

Much to his relief, when Stiles finally made it to the Walmart lot, his Jeep was exactly as he’d left it at the back of the lot. The sky had begun to turn, getting progressively darker, the wind picking up. A storm was definitely on the horizon, and Stiles wanted to get back to the preserve before it got too bad—off-roading through the woods was definitely manageable on a good day in his Jeep, but largely because he was practiced, knew all the routes. He didn’t want to have to manage them in the rain when he’d been out of Beacon Hills for so long. He let his fingers linger on the hood of the beloved vehicle as he passed. As much as he wanted to drive out into the middle of the preserve and sleep off the day right away, he knew he wouldn’t be able to without some serious pain management.

Stiles kept to the side as the double doors of the store swept open, afraid of being bumped by careless shoppers and their purchases. He stayed on the edge of the store, hugging close to the shelves, moving slowly, trying not to look, well, drunk. He headed for the pharmacy section in search of the
largest bottle of pain killers he could afford to buy for the aching pain in his back and rectum and
arnica gel to rub on the bruises. So naturally, it was just his luck when he stood in front of the display
of painkillers to find it wiped out of the big bottles of generic ibuprofen and all the smaller bottles of
the name brand that he could have made due with. Fuck his life. He did not have an extra six bucks
to spend on the name brand stuff.

“Is there something I can help you find?”

Stiles head snapped in the direction of the friendly voice, to see that it belonged to the young
pharmacist behind the counter. The pharmacist behind the counter that he had most definitely
sucked off a few times. The realization hit both of them at once, but Stiles walked towards the counter
anyway. It was always a delicate game when you ran into a trick in public; act too aloof and they get
offended, too warm and they get paranoid.

“Hey, yeah, actually,” Stiles gestured at his face, as it were the only thing wrong. He thought fast. “I
uh, tripped down a flight of concrete stairs, and this is definitely not the only damage. You’re out of
generic ibuprofen and all the small bottles of the name brand stuff, and I’m cheap so…”

The pharmacist looked relieved that Stiles was keeping the subject matter in safe territory, so relieved
that he seemed to buy the teen’s weak cover story with a sympathetic wince in return.

“We had a promo on the stuff and the stock boys haven’t been able to keep up I guess,” the
pharmacist replied, friendly– definitely the I know you know me, and thanks for being subtle– kind
of friendly. “Some lady came in, bought pretty much all of it. We have some back here– how many
do you need?”

Stiles really wanted to reply ‘all of it’.

“Uh, like fifteen or twenty extra strength ones should be good I guess,” he replied. He didn’t want to
have to explain why he wanted sixty.

“Sure thing, be right back,” the pharmacist replied, stepping around behind the prep counter. Stiles
could hear the rattle as he sorted and counted pills.

“So, how have you been?” the pharmacist surprised him by asking. “I mean– aside from the fall. I
haven’t seen you in awhile.”

“Uh good, pretty good,” the teenager replied with a nod, trying to keep his posture relaxed. He could
feel the cold sweat dripping down his back under his t-shirt.

“That’s good,” the pharmacist replied as he stepped out from around the counter. He set a white
paper bag on the counter beside the register. “Need anything else?”

“Oh uh,” Stiles scanned the immediate area for the arnica gel, thankfully found it a few steps away
next to the remaining painkillers on the shelf. The few steps back and forth were absolute agony as
he tried to look normal. He gave the small tube a shake, plunked it down on the counter next to the
bag.

He was thankful when the pharmacist needed to look at the screen as he punched in the code for the
ibuprofen. It gave Stiles I chance to reach into his pocket and carefully with draw his money, trying
to keep most of it concealed. When he drew his hand out of his pocket he only had a five and had to
go back in for more. The next time his hand emerged it was with what he thought was two bills, but
in actuality was a twenty and a piece of paper. That had definitely not been there the night before
when he’d stuffed the cash in his pocket. It was small, slightly curled, had been perfectly
incorporated in between the bills in his pocket. He slapped the twenty down on the counter to give himself the dexterity to flatten out the small piece of paper, which as it turned out, was a folded piece of motel stationery.

‘You certainly have a talent for pleasure, Stiles. Same room, next Thursday, ten o’clock. Don’t disappoint me.’

The message was written in elegant black handwriting and Stiles knew, even without the signature that without a doubt it was from Peter. His hand started to shake. There was no fucking way he was doing that. In fact, he’d make a point of being as far away from that motel that night as possible. Let some other unfortunate rent boy deal with his proclivities for pain. He was fucking done.

“Is something wrong?”

Stiles gaze jumped up from where it had been settled on his hand.

“Oh, no,” he replied, plastering on a grin. He vaguely waved the note. “Just found a number I never knew I had.” He stuffed it in his pocket, grabbed the small bag off the counter.

“Well, I hope you feel better,” the pharmacist replied, handing him his change. Was it Stiles or did he look a little disappointed?

“Yeah, will do, thanks,” Stiles replied, the note burning in his pocket. He turned too sharply away from the counter, bent nearly double, but recovered and moved on before the pharmacist could ask a single question more.

In the parking lot he yanked his keys from his pocket before he’d even reached his Jeep, dropped them on the ground when his hands shook too much. He fumbled with the door, dropped the bag he was carrying.

“Fucking motherfucker,” he practically sobbed, hoping nobody saw him because losing his shit because this was embarrassing. When he finally ripped the Jeep’s door open he violently tossed the plastic bag of first aid supplies vaguely into the passenger area. The sky was getting ominously dark, adding to his panic. He just wanted to get back to the preserve before the rain really came down, have his panic attack in peace. But first he needed to calm down. He couldn’t drive anywhere in the state he was in right now. He closed his eyes, took a few shallow breaths.

“Do what you have to do,” he muttered to himself, “there’s no use crying over it.”

He started the ignition and carefully composed himself; checked his mirrors, put his signal on, checked his blind spot, and started to drive. Fat raindrops didn’t start to hit his windshield until he was halfway to the preserve. It was a soothing sound really. He had to turn his headlights on as he bounced through the uneven forest floor, had to grit his teeth to keep from whimpering whenever a bump was particularly jostling. He brought his Jeep to a staggering halt in roughly the right area, so blinded by the rain he didn’t dare go any further out of fear that he’d drive down the embankment that he knew was somewhere near his usual spot. He killed the ignition and listened as the rain pounded down around him.

Twisting and contorting between the driver and passenger seats to get into the back almost wasn’t worth it– wouldn’t have been if it weren’t for the stash of pillows and sleeping bags that covered the truck-bed’s floor. Stiles groaned as he kicked off his shoes, clumsily yanked his jeans off and tossed everything to the side before burying himself in the warm interior of a sleeping bag before
remembering that he’d tossed the paper bag of medicine into the back seat somewhere. When he
found it, he was shaking from sitting up in such a strained position for so long. He ripped open the
bag so violently that he almost didn’t notice that not one, but two amber containers tumbled out. He
squinted for a moment, thinking he was seeing double before retrieving one of the containers from
the floor and staring at the table. The pharmacist had given him prescription strength Tylenols along
with the Advil. He was going to have to remember to be extra enthusiastic about offering his services
next time the opportunity arose.

After a brief battle with the caps of the bottles, he managed to dispense a safe amount of tablets into
his waiting palm and swallow them with a bit of water from a leftover water bottle kicking around.
He curled onto his side in the relative comfort of the sleeping bag, the flannel soft and warm against
his bare legs. The rain hammered against the roof of the Jeep and thunder roared in the distance,
wind whipping in its wake. The sound was almost soothing in its constancy, and eventually, the
teenager drifted.

When Stiles woke, it was pitch black, so much so that it was completely disorienting at first, then
slowly, the roof of the Jeep emerged from the darkness. It was still overcast, and the moon’s light
was only making its way into the woods in a diffuse glow through the cloudy sky. Stiles’ ass still
hurt, pain spiralling outward, keeping him coiled where he was. He turned his wrist slightly, reached
over and pressed the button to illuminate its face. It was just after ten o’clock– too late to go see his
dad, too late to do much of anything really, but his limbs were stiff and sore, like they usually were
when he’d spent too long in the back of the Jeep.

Stiles thought back to the days when he had been able to manage his over-abundance of energy with
something so simple as medication, but Adderall wasn’t the necessity he’d once thought it was, and
these days, his excessive energy got burned off in different ways; chiefly late night walks through the
woods when he got back from a night on the town, or woke up too early to actually declare himself
awake for the day.

Kicking free from the sleeping bag was miserable, but the cramping in his legs was driving him stir-
crazy. He wanted to run, knew he was nowhere near capable of it, so walking would have to do.
The night air was cool and crisp by the time Stiles set his feet on the forest floor. He twisted around
and swipe an extra shirt from the back of the Jeep, stripped off his hoodie and layered everything
back on again, then started to walk. The forest was peaceful, filled only with the typical sounds of
the night. Stiles had long since abandoned the childish notion that the preserve was full of people-
eating creatures that lurked in the dark. Yet he didn’t quite feel back at home yet– memories of juvie
stayed with him. He’d learned a lot of lessons– one of them being to always be aware of his
surroundings and it was making him jumpy. The other lesson he’d learned, ironically enough, was
not to back himself into a corner. Or he thought he’d learned it.

The perpetual ground cover of leaves crunched under Stiles feet as he walked, slowly, deliberately,
knowing he couldn’t afford a stumble over an obscured tree root. No form of entertainment besides a
radio on occasion meant that Stiles was often alone with his thoughts, constantly thinking– trying to
plan a way to patch together what was left of his life. Maybe make something out of it... which is
exactly where his thoughts drifted. He needed to rapidly replenish his stores, get enough money
together so that he would be able to pay the bills that the insurance wouldn’t pay, but also afford to
get his life together– maybe share an apartment with Lyds, work anywhere that would pay him
enough. Problem was, without even a high school diploma, nothing would ever pay him enough to
support himself and his dad. Then again, if he worked a normal job, he’d never have to worry about
putting himself in danger again, because he was absolutely useless to anyone if he ended up in juvie
again or dead.
As it was, he was going to be spending a lot of time on his back and on his knees this month… once he recovered enough to actually do anything. Tomorrow would definitely have to be an errand day. He’d stop by the clinic, go see his Dad. If he was lucky, he’d be in good enough shape to put his mouth to productive use the next night.

Fucking Peter. Never again. If he ever saw that asshole in his pretentious fucking car, not only would he walk to other way, he’d tell everyone else to stay away from the sadistic prick. It was common practice actually—everyone knew which John’s to avoid. Sometimes people would stupid enough that they had to see for themselves, but after awhile, rumor became common knowledge and the John’s that were too rough, too twisted, were forced to start looking elsewhere for ass. If Stiles had his way, Peter’s dick would touch nothing but his own fist ever again.

He found himself at the Hale house, the burned shell rising out of the darkness under the silver glow of the moon, haunted looking. It still gave him the creeps sometimes… especially nights like this, but he needed a rest. His back and ass were hurting again, a deep, bruising throb from inside him, working outwards. It was the type of pain that remained at a constant, moderate thrum, made Stiles feel irritated by its relentlessness, the lack of relief. He felt stupid for leaving his meager supply of medicine in the back of the Jeep. He stumbled up the front steps before half sitting, half collapsing into the side of the house, the cool, rotting wood the slightest of relief for the ache inside. He tipped his head back, let it fall against the side of the house, eyes closed.

Which is when he heard the cracking of wood.

His eyes shot open and his first, idiotic thought was ‘Did I just break the house with my head?’ which was hysterically followed by the realization that if he had, he was about to get squashed. Then he saw it– at the edge of the treeline, a dark shape, lurking behind the trees. The moon caught the eyes of the animal and Stiles squinted only to jerk back. It wasn’t… couldn’t be.

The wolf emerged from the treeline slowly, its teeth curling back in a snarl.

Stiles scrambled to his feet and did the only thing he could– he turned tail on his hands and knees, ripped open the front door of the house and slammed it shut again. Inside, the amount of light the moon had actually been emitting became more obvious. Stiles stumbled as he felt around in the darkness, heading for what had probably been the living room, determined to push the old couch that he knew was there in front of the door, because even if wolves had no opposable thumbs, he wasn’t sure the door would be able to hold up to one good lunge.

Outside a violent snarl ripped through the air. His limbs shook with urgency as he stumbled through the dark room, knee violently colliding with the arm of the couch. Ignoring the pain in his ass and lower back, he shoved at the sagging piece of furniture. There was a howl, more snarling and a thump that made Stiles heart grow cold, especially when, seconds later, it was followed by the shattering of glass. He wasted no time, didn’t even glance towards the front door again. Instead he bolted for the back door of the house and burst into the night.

He ran until his lungs burned, until the burning agony forced him to the ground just feet from his Jeep. Which was when he realized, the night was silent again.

“There are no wolves in California. There are no wolves in California…” he repeated the mantra as he got to his feet and stumbled for the side of his Jeep, jerking the passenger door open, slamming it shut so quickly behind him, he almost caught his foot. He collapsed into the back of the Jeep, left his shoes on.

It had to be a hallucination, something brought on by the prescription strength pain killers. That was it. After downing three or four pills, Stiles fell asleep, car keys in hand, waiting for the howl of a
Thanks so much for reading. 
[link to tumblr] for random (mostly) Teen-Wolfy goodness.
Stiles slammed the door of the Jeep closed and crossed the small parking lot, slowly, deliberately, glancing around to make sure he wasn’t garnering too much attention. He squinted as his eyes adjusted from the brightness outside to the dimmer light of the clinic. Behind the desk, was the familiar nurse; Kathleen.

“Stiles, how are you?” she greeted with a smile. A woman in her thirties or so, clearly pregnant, sat in the corner reading an outdated parenting magazine raised what looked to be a carefully etched eyebrow at him.

“I'm good Kay, just came in to see if my test results were in yet?”

“Sure thing,” the nurse replied, spinning in her chair to a file system behind her. She sifted through the folders for a few moments before withdrawing one and popping the file open. Strictly speaking, the results of the tests were supposed to be discussed with a doctor or one of the more senior nurses at the clinic. Stiles was relieved to note that apparently, they were still nice enough to bend the rules for him.

“Well Stiles, you will be happy to hear you are clean as whistle,” the nurse replied quietly, attempting to keep her voice down with the other patient not-so-subtly listening from the corner. Stiles breathed a sigh of relief. Sometimes he wondered if living in ignorance would be better than inflicting the torture of a wait on himself every few weeks.

“Thanks,” he replied courteously, “I’ll see ya’ in a month…” He was just about to head for the door when he leaned over to the fishbowl on table in the corner, reached in and grabbed a truly impressive amount of prophylaxis in one long-fingered hand. The woman reading the magazine gave him a disdainful look, he winked, and she turned back to her magazine, clearly uncomfortable. Served her right.

Once back in the parking lot, the teen let his gait slide back into the limp he'd adopted to stay comfortable for the past day. He didn’t know how he was going to manage the night.

He’d slept fitfully until he woke to a sunny day, the birds chirping almost as if the day before had never happened. For a few seconds, he had thought that maybe everything was a dream. Until he shifted and the scorpion that seemed to be living in his ass came to life, brutally striking at something tender in his insides. When he rolled to his side to pant through the paid, he’d noticed the dirt and grit on the palms of his hands, and suddenly remembered the wolves.

*There are no wolves in California.*

So much for that.

The idea of the wolves had stuck with Stiles as much as the pain did, only he couldn’t erase the
image of them from his head with pain medicine. What the fuck was going on? That wasn’t normal, and his inquisitive mind wasn’t willing to let it go. He knew he couldn’t have been seeing things, but rationally, he couldn’t have seen what he saw. But he had more immediate things to attend to. He filed the information away in his head, knowing full well it would come back out in the dead of night when he slept alone in the woods– or worse yet, got up to take a piss in the dark.

His Dad was sleeping when he got to the hospital, and he felt like a terrible person for the pang of disappointment that came from knowing he wouldn’t be able to sneak a nap in his dad’s bed. He took a seat in the visitor’s chair instead– well, more coiled himself awkwardly into it, settled his head against the side of it, watching his Dad’s sleeping form, the steady rise and fall of his chest. It helped him relax, ease into a sleep he hadn’t been able to get the night before.

Stiles jerked into wakefulness, hands already coiled into fists, ready to defend himself. It wasn’t until the foggy form of two hands held up in the universal sign for ‘I’m unarmed’ that he stopped himself from leaping from the seat. He blinked a few times before a girl about his age came into focus. She had dark hair the fell in soft waves just below her shoulders, fair skin–and was wearing a red and white striped apron– a candy-striper; volunteers who went around and watered the plants, sometimes read to patients. Stiles wasn’t surprised that he didn’t recognize her.

“You okay?” she asked, voice light, sweet.

“Yeah,” he rasped, “Sorry… just a little jumpy lately.” He scrubbed a hand down his face before extending it in greeting.

“I’m Stiles by the way, you’ll see me here a lot.”

“Allison,” she replied in kind, reaching forward for a quick handshake. “I volunteer here.” There were a few seconds of awkward silence before her gaze flitted to the former sheriff.

“He’s my dad,” Stiles explained quietly.

“The former Sheriff- the nurses told me,” she replied softly. “What, um…” she looked down at her feet, tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and glanced back up before starting again. “What happened to him?”

Stiles let a gust of breath move past his lips.

“Oh my God,” she replied hand rising to her mouth, “They– what could do something like that?”

Stiles shrugged. They had floated the idea of a wild animal, but with no tracks, it wasn’t likely. He’d stopped paying attention to the speculations really, becoming too focused on fighting the insurance company about his dad, consoling Melissa McCall when Scott disappeared. He really hadn’t let himself do anything but keep moving really. Hadn’t had a choice.
“Anyway… you’ll see me here a lot,” Stiles finally said, shifting the subject just slightly. “I come pretty much every day, spend as long as I can.”

“He’s lucky to have you,” Allison replied honestly. “What about your mom… or…?”

Stiles visibly winced.

“She died when I was nine,” he replied. The girl offered a sad smile of sympathy.

“My mom died last year,” she responded, “It’s just me and my dad too.” Stiles didn’t want to pry, he didn’t ask how she had died.

“Well… I better move onto the next room, Mrs. Hubbard likes being read to in the afternoons. I’ll see you around?”

“Yeah,” Stiles supplied. “It was nice to meet you.” She smiled and it was adorable really– all dimples and shyness. He couldn’t help but think of his buddy Scott– he would have liked her. He waited until Allison’s footsteps faded off in the distance.

“I’m sorry I feel apart last time I was here,” he said to his dad’s sleeping form. “I’m handling things now. It’s a lot better now that I am out.”

Stiles watched his dad’s sleeping face frown, almost like he knew his son was lying to him.

Stiles knew it was a terrible decision. Had known it from the second the guy pulled out the money and handed it to him. And he’d been dumb enough to nod, thinking he could handle it. He could not handle it, but it was too late. He was already bent over the back seat of the car on his hands and knees, gripping the edge of the seat while the guy behind him went through the motions of putting on a condom. It was a hurried interaction in the back of a black sedan under the Court Street bridge. Stiles still had the majority of his clothes on– his jeans and boxers were pushed down around his knees, his t-shirt rucked up enough that the guy could grab a hold of his hips if he wanted. The first press of the trick’s erection against his hole had him cringing away. This was going to hurt. This was going to hurt a lot. He was so fucking stupid for doing this. He needed to back out… but he couldn’t.

“Hold still,” the man behind him ordered with a low laugh. It wasn’t cruel, his voice stayed light, teasing. He had no idea that what he was about to do was going to be absolute torture. One hand wrapped around one skinny hip, pressing Stiles so that his other hip mashed into the back of the seat. He could feel his guts clenching. His arms were already shaking where they gripped the edge of the seat.

When the guy pressed forward, Stiles could barely choke his yelp of pain down to a whimper. His eyes snapped closed, his head twisted so that he could bury his face in the seat back beside him. It smelled like cigarettes and stale upholstery cleaner. The sharp pain gave way to a bruising, punishing ache and he knew right away that he’d put himself out of commission completely for at least a few days. It took all of his energy and concentration not to cry out or pass out. He couldn’t even add in the dub job of moans and pleas he normally included in his backseat encounters– he couldn’t be sure that what would come out of his mouth would come out as anything less than a gut-wrenching cry.

Luckily, the guy was so strung up he didn’t last long. After less than ten minutes, he came with a deep groan, draping himself over Stiles’ back, spent, panting into the crook of his neck. Stiles collapsed down onto his elbows, a sharp pain punching through him from rectum straight up his spine to settle as a dull ache between his shoulder blades.
“Okay sweet cheeks,” Stiles joked after a minute, “Time to get off the ride.” His voice sounded wavering and weak.

“Sorry,” the stranger murmured into his shoulder. Stiles’ braced himself for the inevitable— the feeling of the guy pulling out and when it happened, it felt like he was being turned inside out from his asshole, despite how gentle his trick was actually being.

“So where should I drop you off? Back at the bus stop?”

Stiles looked up from where he was braced against the side of the car, breathing rhythmically through his nose and mouth while he zipped up his jeans and buttoned them.

“Uhh… no, if you don’t mind, can you drop me off at Carter and Olsen?” he replied, trying to keep the strain out of his voice. It was the closest intersection to the movie theatre, where his Jeep was currently parked. It was relatively early in the night, but he couldn’t take anymore. He needed to rest, give himself a break. Not be so stupid for at least a couple of days.

“Yeah, sure,” the guy replied, straightening his clothes before opening the driver’s side door. “Hop in.”

Stiles normally tried to keep a conversation going on the way back to the bus stop. Flirting usually meant repeat business. This time, he didn’t have the energy, just leaned his head against the cool glass of the passenger side window, breathed.

“You okay?” the guy asked, glancing over. He was actually on the younger side, client wise. Light, sandy hair closely cropped almost military style, build compact but muscular. He was dressed casually, so Stiles didn’t think he was a business man. He assessed him as likely closeted gay, which may have been fair or not, but whatever, he wasn’t going to waste mental capacity worrying about political correctness right now. His faculties needed to be dedicated to other things.

“Mmm, yeah, I just tend to want a nap after a good fuck,” he replied, doing his best to sound lazy, sated. Luckily the guy seemed to buy it.

Stiles was relieved to find that the high school parking lot was completely empty. The town’s history of bizarre, unsolved murders and crimes was enough to deter anyone from taking the night security position at Beacon Hills Highschool and as a result, the property was only monitored by the occasional police patrol. Nonetheless, he parked the Jeep in a dark corner of the lot, semi-hidden in the shadow of a broken streetlamp and one of the school’s dumpsters.

Since being sent to McLean and returning, Stiles found that he was testing all of his old relationships, seeing if they still held. So far he hadn’t been let down— Lydia, Danny, the clinic staff were all the same people they’d been when he left. As he circled the side of the school, the empty field and bleachers came into view. He could remember being a hopeful little freshman, trying out for the lacrosse team with his best friend before everything went to shit. It was hard to believe that wasn’t actually all that long ago. Coach Finstock, as much as he could be kind of an asshole, had a soft spot for his students, one that showed up in unexpected ways. For Stiles, while he was in school, that had meant putting him on the team— if only to have him warm the bench for the season. When everything had started to happen with his dad, when Stiles had lost the house and started living out of his Jeep and missing school, the coach’s kindness had meant leaving the third window from the left at the back of the school— one that led to the boy’s locker room— unlocked so that Stiles could sneak in at
night after all the students and janitorial staff had gone home and shower.

Stiles kept close to the building, hoping the shadows would keep him mostly concealed. When he reached the third window, he gingerly bent down. He’d forgotten about this part— all the bending and slithering and twisting it took to wriggle through the small opening and drop down into the darkened locker room. The window gave with a smooth swing inward at Stiles’ gentle prod and he heaved a sigh of relief that he hadn’t gotten down on his hands and knees for nothing. He landed with a jolt that felt like it wasn’t cushioned at all through his sneakers, and the pain ricocheted through his lower half in an abstract pattern, bending him double for a few breathless seconds. Doing the math, he knew the drop couldn’t have been more than a foot and a half; He didn’t know what hurt more, his body or his pride.

After being away for so long he decided to be cautious, moving slowly through the dim locker room until he reached the door to the school hallway; It was locked, which was a good sign. A quick glance up and down the hallway revealed nothing more than the deep red glow of the exit sign at the end of the hallway. Stiles remembered his dad telling him that the best burglars got into a house undetected, sometimes even while people were home, moved quickly, and got out, and that was how they were successful— speed and stealth. So that was how Stiles planned to play it. He turned back to the dark locker room, eyes adjusted in the dark and stood in front of his old locker. It swung open with the usual squeal, and Stiles winced reflexively. It was empty, just like it had always been since he’d stopped going to school. He slowly stripped off his t-shirt, tossed it into the upper half of the locker where it landed towards the back of the shelf. His shoes came next, toed off and dropped in the bottom of the locker, followed by his pants and boxers, hung on the hooks under the shelf. Stiles shivered in the cool air, wincing as he walked across the ice-cold tile towards the showers.

The water took a couple of minutes to heat up— and while it did, Stiles looked around, remembering tired afternoons after Lacrosse practice spent running suicides, rinsing the sweat off with antiseptic smelling soap that made his skin itch. Now he was thankful for the coach’s sentimentality— and the school’s cheap soap. The water couldn’t really get to the heated point Stiles would have liked, but it was better than nothing at all. He stepped under the cascade, let it wash over his shoulders, sluice down his spine. He moaned despite himself, the sound echoing through the tiled room. The water felt good on his aching muscles, so good that Stiles stood under the stream until he felt the temperature begin to wane towards lukewarm. It made him want to go to sleep so much that he felt himself swaying. Enough. He cranked the tap closed.

Exhausted, Stiles shimmied out of the open window, clothes sticking to his damp skin— he’d forgotten about the whole, no towels but used towels thing, and rather than risking athletes foot in unmentionable places, he’d done a patch job with paper towel and less than perfect results. He reached behind him, pulling the window closed, paranoia forcing him to keep an eye on the dark field in front of him, looking for any sign of movement. The night was still, soundless except for a whisper of a breeze through the trees. Which is why when his eyes caught the blur of movement across the field, he jumped, plastering himself against the cool brick, squinting hard across the dark expanse of grass. There was nothing. For several seconds, Stiles just breathed, stared. There was another blur of movement on the treeline. The figure was large, black, slightly familiar…

Stiles bolted. It was completely the wrong thing to do, and he knew it but he did it anyway, feet slipping on the dewy grass, hands scrambling in the dirt. He’d just gotten to his feet when a low, menacing rumble sounded through the air. A growl. He fumbled in his pocket for his keys and he peeled around the side of the building, the relative safety of his Jeep feeling miles away. There was a second growl, louder, more menacing, and the harsh, aggressive sound of an answering challenge. Like a challenge for which wolf would be the champion to eat Stiles’ tasty human meats. Stiles hazarded a glance over his shoulder and what he saw sent a thrill of fear down his spine, which in turn sent a bolt of pain rippling through his nervous system. He tripped, hands automatically shooting
out to break his fall before his ADHD part of brain popped out the useful fact that most people broke their wrists by using their arms to break their fall, so he pulled his arms back at the last second and rolled, bony elbows scraping against the pavement before he skidded to a stop about 20 feet from his Jeep.

Illuminated by the moon’s light, two dark shapes rolled out of the darkened corner of the parking lot and into full view. The furious tangle of fur-covered legs seemed to burst apart, revealing the distinct difference between the two wolves. One— the one Stiles had thought was black— was actually a dark, rich brown, the other, a bright silver, almost eerie in appearance because it was just so misplaced. Stiles blinked, sure he was hallucinating, when the brown wolf turned its head and fixed its gaze on him. And then an absolutely thunderous growl filled the air, vibrating Stiles’ bones, worse than the most violent thunder storm. It took Stiles a moment to realize that sound had come from the Silver wolf— the silver wolf that was rising onto its hind quarters… getting bigger.

Stiles moved. It was like his brain had been misfiring, the signals backing up and suddenly the flood of messages reached his synapses. He wasn’t sure how he ended up in the driver’s side of his Jeep, scrambling to jam his keys into the ignition, but he didn’t question it. When the keys finally hit their mark on the battered steering column, he threw the Jeep into gear and peeled out of the parking lot, tires squealing.

It wasn’t until he was on the dark stretch of road that took him to the preserve that Stiles realized he wasn’t wearing a seat belt and that he was driving almost 15 miles over the posted limit. His foot felt like lead when he removed it from the gas and dropped it to the floor. His hand shook as he pulled his seat belt across his torso, trying to keep the car on the road with just one shaking hand.

“What the fuck?” he sobbed hysterically to the empty interior of his Jeep. “What the fuck was that?”

Despite wanting to pull into the parking entrance to the preserve, Stiles kept on driving, to the utility entrance that only the rarely seen conservation authority and himself seemed to use. He stopped driving only when he reached the Hale house and couldn’t control his shaking limbs enough to navigate the treacherous terrain the would take him to his usual place.

The night was utterly silent. Stiles ears were ringing with the lack of sound, until gradually, the ticking sound of his resting engine interrupted the silence persistently enough to drag him back to reality.

Wolves. There were wolves in Beacon Hills. What was it his dad always used to say? Once was chance, twice was co-incidence, and three times was suspicious? He had seen the exact same wolf twice now— the dark brown one. It was stalking him. He shivered, unsettled.

“You’re being fucking paranoid,” he muttered to himself. Just wait for the third time, his subconscious warned. He took a deep breath, started the car, drove.

It took time, but each day over the next week, Stiles’ muscles ached a little less, the pain buried inside of him decreased gradually from an aching stab, to a dull throb, to a bruising sensation. He’d taken the universe’s message finally and stayed off of the streets— though this meant that his stores weren’t being recovered as fast as they could have been. However the extra time with his Dad was nice. Allison seemed to be a semi-regular fixture at the hospital. She was mostly there in the afternoons, which told Stiles that she was likely in school during the days. He liked her, she was sweet, had a kind smile, and always stopped to say hi, but knew just when to take off so that he got time alone with his dad.
On Wednesday, Stiles had finally slunk off to find Lydia, tail between his legs. As usual, she was working at the motel. He caught her at the end of a shift, leaving the motel office in a short blue dress and towering red heels, giant tote bag slung over her arm that no-doubt hid her maid’s uniform.

“Need a ride?”

The redhead jumped a mile in the air, heels skidding against the pavement and Stiles managed to reach out and grab her in just enough time to keep her from landing hard on the asphalt.

“You could warn a girl,” the redhead snapped. “God, you go away for a few months and lose all your social graces.”

Stiles snorted.

“What social graces? Before this shit I was a complete nobody at school, girls had no clue I existed—”

“And you spent your time warming the lacrosse bench, yeah, yeah” Lydia muttered as she righted herself. Her expression softened, it almost seemed despite herself.

“I could use a ride,” she muttered after a beat. “My feet are killing me.”

“Oh I can see that,” Stiles joked, eyebrows raised in the direction of her footwear.

“Shut-up,” she replied without heat.

“You’re looking better,” Lydia commented as they crossed the parking lot.

“I’ve taken a few days off,” Stiles replied, feigning nonchalance as he opened the passenger door for his friend, before rounding the front of the Jeep. He knew once he got in he was going to get the third-degree.

“So,” Lydia started as soon as the door shut, “you didn’t happen to report what happened to the police did you?” Her tone was sharp as a whip. Stiles knew better than to look at her, so he started the Jeep, letting the sound of the engine roaring to life fill the silence. He waited until he’d pulled out of the motel lot before answering, keeping his eyes focused on the road.

“And why would I do that?”

The girl beside him made a frustrated sound, so Stiles plowed ahead.

“What did you expect me to do Lydia? Report him? How would I explain what I was doing with a man twice my age in a motel room?” he asked incredulously. “How would I explain what I was doing an hour away from the halfway house I disappeared from less than two weeks ago?”

Lydia stayed silent for so long, that Stiles hazarded a glance in her direction when they reached a stop light.

“I said yes Lydia. He offered me the cash, and I said yes. That is how it works—”

“You didn’t consent to being—”

“I really hope you’re not going to say the r word,” Stiles bit out. It had floated through his head enough on its own.

“Sex workers have some of the highest instances—”
“Look, he offered me money, I said yes,” Stiles interrupted, working hard to keep his voice away from a growl. “I don’t generally sit down and discuss the specifics of how exactly the dick ends up in my ass.”

There was an aggravated honk from behind. Stiles glanced up to see the light green, intersection virtually empty and a red truck in his rear view mirror. He raised a hand in apology, hoping the other driver could see through the back window, then put the car in gear and headed in the direction of Lydia’s apartment.

“Thanks for the ride,” Lydia said softly, cowed. “I’m sorry… I just… I worry about you.” And Stiles heart just about melted. His small but fierce friend looked so openly distraught. “I worry about your dad. You can’t help him if you aren’t here.”

Stiles stomach fell into his knees. He leaned over, pressed a quick peck into his friend’s temple. “I know,” he replied, voice gravel. She gave a half-hearted smile, stepped out of the Jeep.

“Be careful,” she said in parting.

“So there I am, behind the fucking dumpster with the guys cock in my mouth, listening to him talk to his buddy like he wasn’t about to come all over my face…”

Stiles watched Danny feign good humor as one the other guys on the block– Michael? Mark? Matt? – described the antics of his latest exploit. No wonder Danny was able to do so much business– his face was always open and friendly– even if he thought you were a tool. Well except for with Stiles, Stiles knew Danny’s ‘you’re a tool’ face intimately.

It was Thursday night, and Stiles sat in the bus stop shelter, still a little sore, out of utter spite for Peter. He glanced down at his wrist watch. It was nearly 10:30. He’d just gotten back from a quick blow job behind the gas station because fuck Peter and his stupid attempt at an appointment. He hoped the guy was sitting in the motel room alone, wacking off thinking about him, because that was the closest he was ever going to get to Stiles again. However now he got to listen to the sexual exploits of whatshisface while he waited for his turn up again. Unfortunately Danny was up next, and once he left, Stiles would be left alone to listen to this guy talk his ear off– unless whoever pulled up expressed a specific preference for a talker instead.

“Well, I’m heading out, down to the district,” the guy finally said with a sigh. “See you around?” Both Danny and Stiles nodded their assent, watched the other teen stroll off. A minute later Danny exhaled loudly, hair rushing out between his lips in a comically obnoxious way.

“I can’t stand that guy,” he exclaimed. “He does not shut up.” Both teens collapsed into a fit of laughter in the shelter and recovered just in time to notice the silver car pulling up to the curb. Stiles smile dropped instantly and he felt a cold, trickle of fear travel down his spine, sat up straight, before he realized that the car pulling up to the curb wasn’t the right make an model at all. Last time Peter had driven a modern Audi– this one was a Honda– likely just a business man or rich college kid. Besides, it was Danny’s turn up.

“Go get ‘em playa,” Stiles joked, reaching out to give Danny’s ass a backhanded smack as he stood up.

“Yeah, yeah,” Danny replied, shaking his ass for a second before slipping into his signature swagger to approach the car. Stiles watched the window roll down, partially obscured by Danny’s form as he
approached. The minutes passed, and Danny straightened up, but instead of rounding the front of the car, he turned and headed back towards the bus shelter.

“What’s up?” Stiles asked at Danny’s puzzled expression.

“He wants you.”

“What?” Because it what universe did anyone pick skinny, scrawny, mole-covered Stiles over tall, tanned and muscular Danny?

Danny shrugged like he was just as confused as Stiles was and when Stiles didn’t move, the other teen moved to the side with a dramatic sweep of his arms. Stiles stood, moving awkwardly past Danny with an apologetic look over his shoulder, then jogged towards the vehicle. The window didn’t roll down until he was inches away and when it did…

“Oh no, fuck no.”
Beware of Darkness

Chapter Notes

It's about darned time, eh? I'm so sorry for the extended period of time between updates. I had a good excuse—getting married makes you really busy! Back to our not-at-all-regularly-scheduled-updating.

“You didn’t show up to our appointment.” Peter’s voice was smooth, calm. He didn’t look angry. So Stiles defaulted to his usual response—sarcasm.

“Huh, I wonder why?” he replied bitingly sarcastic. And Peter smirked, actually fucking smirked. Stiles sighed, frustrated, and moved to back away from where he stood leaned over the window, one arm braced in the roof, the other on the edge of the open window, but a hand shot out and grabbed him by the forearm.

“Get in the car,” Peter growled in return.

“No,” Stiles objected reflexively. The hand on his arm gripped harder.

“Get your hands off of me. We’re not in a motel room anymore. We’re on a public street and if you don’t think I’ll—”

“You’ll what? Run? Scream? Please, don’t be so clichéd… or so foolish. You know I could chase you—and catch you—easily,” Peter replied calmly, too calmly.

Stiles stared—no glowered—down at Peter’s smug face. He glanced behind him, where Danny sat watching from the bus shelter. He was positive Danny couldn’t see the grip Peter had on his arm, and it would be hard to angle his body enough to reveal it. Stiles wasn’t worried about himself—provided he had Danny as back-up, the two, if push came to shove, could put the beat down on someone. Which is why, in the span of seconds, a car rounded the corner and pulled up to the curb on the other side of the lot, drawing Danny’s attention. If Stiles was going to take a chance, he had to do it now, while there were still witnesses.

“Fine,” he replied through a clenched jaw, ripping his arm away from Peter’s grip, marching angrily around the front of the car, hoping Danny noticed enough to stay on alert. He yanked open the passenger side door, slid into the seat. The interior of the Honda was just as immaculate as the Audi had been, and that’s when Stiles figured out that both vehicles had to have been rentals. Nobody had an Audi and a Honda and kept both vehicles to spotless. Silence filled the car. Stiles stared ahead, jaw-clenched, refusing to look at the older man. The car wasn’t moving, so that was a good sign. He jumped when knuckles traced across his cheek, jerked away.

“Don’t touch me,” he near-growled, finally turning to glare at Peter. The man looked just the same as the last time they’d negotiated a deal. It was more than a little off-putting. This time he looked different though. It was the dark colour of his shirt, a deep, dark red dress shirt, top button undone, immaculately fit.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Stiles snapped.
“Like what?” Peter replied.

“Like you didn’t– like you didn’t—” rape me the last time I went somewhere with you. Stiles swallowed hard, nose wrinkling as he swallowed back the choking urge in the back of his throat, the tingling at the corners of his eyes. He clenched his jaw for a moment, steeling himself.

“I am never letting you fuck me again,” he spat, tone venomous, “In fact, you’ll be lucky if anyone on this block ever bends over for you again.”

“Is that so?” Peter replied, eyebrow raised, a challenge. It made Stiles want to break things, made him want to rip the glove compartment out of its housing and clock the man with it.

“What if I gave you an offer you can’t refuse?” Stiles bit back a growl of frustration.

“No amount of money will ever make me fuck you again, get that through your clearly delusional brain,” he retorted. Peter’s response was to raise an eyebrow, lean across Stiles– who shrank back against the seat– and reach into the glove compartment.

“Did you hear me? This isn’t a negotiation,” Stiles said incredulously, hating the tremor in his voice. He couldn’t believe the audacity of the man as he watched him pull back with his wallet once more. He reached for the door to get out of the car. The automatic locks snapped closed. The next few seconds passed by too quickly and too slowly all at once. He looked back over his shoulder at Peter, followed the length of Peter’s arm to the dashboard where he was setting down his entire wallet. Then his hand drew back and Stiles felt like some creature had reached down his throat and was attempting to yank his stomach out through his mouth.

“Oh yes, I think it is,” Peter purred when the golden seal of the sheriffs’ department badge gleamed under the light of the street lamp outside. Stiles stared back, breathless. Felt the first tell-tale lick of an oncoming tide of panic reach out and tease along his spine.

“Do up your seat belt,” Peter lectured softly.

The car was moving. Stiles wasn’t sure if he’d lost seconds or minutes, but his seat belt was fastened, and he was gazing out the window at somewhat familiar scenery that passed. He knew where they were going; To the Comfort Plus, where he would be at Peter’s mercy again. His brain was scrambling to put together some sort of plan before he was trapped.

“Here is what we are going to do,” Peter said evenly. “You are going to stay calm as you accompany me to our room and we are going to have a little chat.”

“And what if I decide I don’t want to talk to you?” Stiles postured, pushing himself through the fear, because if juvie had taught him anything, it was that men like Peter could practically smell fear, and that made you prey.

“I see,” Peter replied contemplatively. Then he changed directions, away from the direction of the motel, and Stiles stomach clenched. He was going to end up a dead body in the middle of the woods. His dad was going to end up being put in some sort of state-run hospital, and the next pitfall in his health would see him on his death bed. Stiles’ brain continued on its worse-case-scenario train wreck until Peter pulled the car to a stop and spoke.

“You also have the right to remain silent, I suppose.”

Stiles’ blood ran cold at the first line of the Miranda rights that he’d memorized by age six. They
were directly across the street from the sheriff’s station.

“No,” he breathed, backing up against the door, elbow twinging in pain as it knocked slightly too hard against the arm rest. It was like going back to the first time he’d been arrested and seen the building in the harsh light of reality; a place where criminals went, where his life could be effectively ended.

“Or talk,” Peter replied calmly with a shrug. And Stiles found himself nodding before he found his voice again.

“Fine, we’ll go to the motel,” he replied, voice sounding like he’d swallowed gravel.

The drive felt like it took both an eternity and only a few brief seconds. For all the mental scrambling in the world, Stiles couldn’t formulate a plan. He knew he couldn’t just skip town and wait until everything blew over, which he was tempted to do. He couldn’t afford it, either financially or emotionally. He’d just gotten back to his dad, just promised his dad to not do something so stupid as to get caught ever again, and now… now Peter was parking his rented Honda in the lot of the Comfort Plus in what Stiles was almost positive was the same spot as last week. He mechanically undid his seat-belt, let it slither back into position as Peter killed the engine.

“I’m glad you’ve decided to co-operate–”

Stiles jerked open the car door, practically threw himself out onto the pavement and slammed the door closed behind him, leaning against the car. He scrubbed his hands over his face, glanced around the lot, praying that someone would spot them, that some nosy guest with nothing better to do would do something like call the motel manager and complain… but then if that same person called the police…

Stiles head swam, and he was just about the bend double, in an all-out panic attack, when Peter appeared out of nowhere in front of him. He moved closer, and despite the fact that they were nearly the same height, Stiles felt boxed in and small sandwiched between the cool metal and glass of the car’s door, and the warmth of Peter’s body.

“Relax Stiles,” Peter began calmly, “We’re not going to do anything you haven’t done before.”

And Stiles started to shake. Peter’s hand dropped down from the side of the car, slipped down his arm and circled around his wrist, thumb brushing over his pulse-point.

“I think you know where the room is,” he said conversationally, before pulling away. To anyone watching, it would look like a clandestine tryst between a man and his twink lover. Stiles wanted to run, could feel the twitching urge in his legs, but his feet felt encased in concrete. With one furtive glance behind him, he trudged towards the stairs, to whatever was awaiting him in the room upstairs.

This time, he hung back at the door behind Peter as he unlocked it, not touching him, hovering as far away as he sensed the older man would allow. He felt the last surging desire to run in his legs. Now would be the time, the last time and the best time. Peter would have to catch him, and likely wouldn’t. Then he’d have to get down a flight of stairs and either pursue Stiles on foot, or get in his car, and if he chose that, Stiles would be long gone. Maybe he could work in another town for awhile, outside of Beacon Hills’ jurisdiction…

Stiles feet acted before his brain could keep up. He bolted towards the stairs, ready to take them two at a time. And just as suddenly as he’d acted, he was on the ground, gasping for air, the wind
knocked out of his lungs. Then he was being dragged, his t-shirt riding up so that his back and sides scraped across the concrete before he was unceremoniously dragged to his feet, only to be tossed to the carpeted floor of the motel room. He lay gasping on the floor like a fish out of water for several seconds before Peter spoke;

“I must say, I expected you to have better judgement than that,” Peter said calmly as he walked past Stiles’ prone form to the chair in the corner to fish through the black duffle bag sitting on it. Stiles could do nothing but watch as Peter withdrew a set of handcuffs. And from his childhood, Stiles knew, they were the genuine artifact. He scrambled to get onto his side, to just move, to do anything at all, but in seconds Peter was on him, metal cuff snapping too easily around a skinny wrist. And Stiles couldn’t help it. He wailed– or tried through the lack of breath– kicking and thrashing, even though it made him dizzy from the lack of oxygen getting to his brain. He knew Peter was powerful, deceptively so, but now it was so much worse. His hands effortlessly gathered Stiles’ behind his back, made the connection of one cuffed wrist, to another. When Peter stepped back from him, away, Stiles lay on the floor, hands cuffed behind his back, face pressed into the smelly motel carpet where he lay on his side in defeat, sucking in stale air. The carpet smelled like cigarette smoke, a smothering, heavy scent. But it was breathe in that smell, and all the disgusting connotations that came with it or not breathe at all. When a finger traced across his cheek bone, Stiles jerked away from the touch.

“I am going to sit you up and we’re going to have a conversation,” Peter said, voice even, placating. Stiles response was to push the toxic smelling air from his lungs, jerk his head once in acknowledgement. Peter reached forward and righted the teenager, setting him against the foot of the bed before backing away.

“I know what this is,” Stiles spat at Peter’s knees, not bothering to crane his neck upwards, not wanting to give the clearly corrupt cop the satisfaction of that particular power dynamic. When Peter casually seated himself next to him on the floor at the foot of the bed, Stiles had to fight every muscle to not shrink away.

“And what is this, hmm?” Peter asked.

“Why the fuck are you asking? This is your stupid fucking game,” Stiles growled in return, hoping the hardness of the words tumbling from his lips would be enough to keep him from losing it completely. Fingers again, grazing his cheekbone. Again, he breathed through gritted teeth at the urge to pull away.

“What do you want me to do?”

Peter’s response was to cup his hand around the back of Stiles’ neck, and pull him forward, lips brushing against the teen’s. Stiles immediately stiffened, tried to jerk away.

“I think you know exactly what I want,” Peter murmured, and Stiles closed his eyes, squeezing tight.

“I told you I wasn’t fucking you ever again and I meant it,” he growled, jerking away. Peter’s response was to raise an eyebrow, glance down at where Stiles wrists were cuffed together. He stayed silent.

“You aren’t without choice here,” Peter finally said smoothly. His hand reaching up once more, this time to trace delicately along the back of Stiles’ neck, “You can be a good boy, give me what I want–”

“Or?” Stiles retorted sharply, jerking away once more.
“Or I can drag you into the station naked, after I’ve fucked you until you can’t walk,” Peter replied, voice deceivingly pleasant. Stiles stomach plummeted because he knew Peter could do it– would do it. And yet he couldn’t stop posturing.

“And when I tell them I was raped– that you were the one that did it, then what?”

“Who do you think they will believe; an esteemed officer of the law or a naked teenager facing his second charge for prostitution, and while on probation no less?”

“W-what?” Stiles stuttered, before he could think better of it. He scrambled backwards awkwardly, long limbs kicking out in an uncoordinated effort to get away until Peter grabbed an ankle, dragging him back to him, knocking the teen onto his back, his arms painfully wrenched under his own weight. Peter crawled over him, looming close, silent. Stiles stared off into space, eyes fixed on the door stopper affixed to the dingy baseboard. He couldn’t go back to juvie. He wouldn’t. His dad needed him. Like it or not right now, he was prey.

“If I do this, you leave me alone,” he finally said, a hollow growing in the pit of his stomach. After a few seconds Peter bent close to his ear.

“Roll over.”

Stiles’ pulse rate began to climb, stomach contracting, waiting, but not ready for the pain to start. Then he felt Peter’s form retreat from where it had shadowed him. Hands moved over his shoulders, rubbing almost gently before moving down the long line of Stiles’ arms, delicately tracing his wrists around the warmed metal of the handcuffs. There was a click and his hands were free, but before he could think to get up and run, Peter’s form draped over him again.

“Now go shower,” the man ordered, before pulling away. Stiles pulled himself up on shaking arms, twisting over as soon as he could so that he could see his aggressor. He moved to step towards the bathroom, put Peter was in the way. The man tutted softly, the sound of his tongue on the roof of his mouth grating against Stiles nerves.

“Do you usually shower in your clothes?”

Stiles desperately wanted to punch something. Instead he let his hands ball into fists, then release before taking a deep, steadying breath. He stripped off his t-shirt and tossed it to the floor, making no effort to be sensual– in fact, intending the exact opposite. All of the bravado was shattered when Peter reached forward, brushing his palms down Stiles’ naked sides, pushing his boxer-briefs down to his ankles. When the older man stood back, Stiles was shaking with barely contained rage and helplessness. He took a step towards the bathroom door, and Peter turned to the side, forcing Stiles to just barely brush past him into the tiled room.

Stiles closed the door behind him mechanically, moved to fiddle with the taps. He didn’t dare lock the door behind him. Peter had proven one thing: that he was unpredictable, potentially dangerous, and Stiles, for all of his posturing, was afraid of setting the man off. By the time he got the water temperature mostly right, Stiles felt like he was shaking apart. He clambered over the edge of the tub, gave up on standing pretty much immediately and collapsed in a heap on the floor. He gnawed at his lower lip, barely containing the tears of frustration welling up in the corners of his eyes. Because it was his fault that he was in this situation. He slammed a fist against the wall half-heartedly. And then the rushing noise started to fill his ear drums. He gripped the edge of the tub, fingers going white, as the panic attack roared through him.

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The shower curtain was ripped back suddenly, but Stiles had known it was coming. For days he had felt it in the air, felt the tension pressing in against him. He took a deep breath, reviewed his options, the plans he’d made in his head for the inevitable, knowing it would come to this. He took a breath in, stayed cool.

“You’re not my type,” he said to the wall, ignoring the three teenagers behind him, blocking his exit from the shower stall. This was not one of those scenarios where he could just ignore the situation until it went away and he knew it, but there was no reason to look weak.

“Really?” drawled the gangbanger with shitty tattoos that looked like they were done in somebody’s basement, “Because I hear that everyone is your type.”

Stiles turned around, facing the voice, kept his expression lazy.

“You must have heard wrong,” Stiles replied, rinsing the rest of the soap from his skin. He’d shed any sense of modesty a long time ago. Being naked in front of other people didn’t matter. Not after you’d spent months fucking older men for money. He swept his gaze up and down the three boys in front of him. All wore towels, all were in the correct, assigned bathroom on the floor. There was no reason for a guard to suspect anything. Stiles thought back to what his Dad had once told him about predators– only he’d meant the kind found in the preserve; ‘Never act like you’re prey or you’ll become it. If you detect a threat, act smart. Move away slowly and cautiously’. He turned and shut off the water. Sighed, tried to quash the sick feeling in his gut. He moved to shoulder past the other teenagers in front of him and was unceremoniously shoved backwards, the tap digging into back.

“I’m pretty sure I heard just fine,” the teen replied. Stiles knew he had some sort of stupid nickname, but couldn’t place it at the moment. He had a couple of inches on Stiles, but it wasn’t a game changer. The other two teenagers however… they were.

Stiles straightened up casually, smirked, and pushed between the gangbanger and the friend on his left.

“I charge extra for groups,” he replied, careful to keep his tone sarcastic, balancing ease and aggression in perfect harmony. He padded across the tiled floor to the locker his stuff was stashed in, shower shoes slapping against his heels. Opening the locker was a strategic maneuver, not a practical one, so he was ready when he was grabbed from behind, shoved. He twisted around quickly, landing an elbow to one face, the locker door to another before he was grabbed, spun and violently shoved over the bench affixed to the floor between the rows of lockers. He wasn’t about to go down without a fight. His height afforded him a few lucky punches, until a blow to the head knocked him into the tile hard enough to steal his breath, make the room sparkle with black dots. He opened his mouth to finally yell for help, and it was stuffed with a towel. He tried to struggle with limbs that didn’t want to work, that disobeyed his brain’s orders to kick and punch as he was shoved over the bench once more—moved into position. And because he was a fighter to the bitter end, he didn’t pass out until after it was over; Until three sets of bare feet, wet from the shower, retreated around the corner of the lockers.

Stiles woke up curled on his side in the hospital wing. Another inmate had found him, he didn’t know who, the nurses wouldn’t say. When the doctors and guards asked who did it, he didn’t give the names, though he remembered them now.

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Stiles slid the shower curtain back with shaking hands. His legs and arms felt noodley. His head and
stomach contained that horrible impending feeling of sickness one got when they got the flu, but before they threw up. He’d probably had the water too hot, if his bright pink skin was any indication. He grabbed one of the white motel towels from the rack, wrapped it tightly around his waist. He stared at the bathroom door for what felt like an excruciatingly long time so it shouldn’t have startled him so much when the door flew open. He jumped back instinctively, gripping the edge of the counter with one hand.

“What the hell?” he finally cursed after a few heart-stopping seconds. Peter simply leered at him from the doorway for a moment before stepping forward. He ran a hand down the center of Stiles’ chest, stopping only when he reached the tightly wrapped towel slung low on thin hips.

“All clean?”

Stiles found the strength to bring a hand up and knock Peter’s away.

“I need to take a piss,” he lied, hoping Peter would go away, let him have just a few more minutes alone. When Peter didn’t move, he attempted to skirt around the man. Lightning fast, Peter’s hand shot up, ripped the towel from Stiles slim hips, leaving the slighter man to stumble backwards. Peter grabbed him by the arm, yanked him into his body, back to front.

“Somehow I doubt that,” he breathed into Stiles’ ear, as he started to walk them back into the motel room. Stiles stumbled along, resisting the whole way, because he wasn’t about to make this easy. When they reached what Peter must have approximated to be ‘close enough’ to the bed, the older man tossed the teen to the mattress and immediately cloaked the naked body beneath him with his clothed one. Stiles shuddered at the feeling of stubble on his neck and raised his hands to push Peter away only to have his movement aborted by Peter’s hands on his wrists, pinning them to the mattress.

“We need to talk about our terms,” Stiles finally managed bravely. He winced at the feeling of Peter’s lips on his neck. “I fuck you and you fuck off, it’s a done deal,” he said to the ceiling.

Peter pulled away, his expression amused. He stood up, and moved away from the bed without a word and Stiles propped himself up on his elbows, heartbeat accelerating so fast it made his head spin.

“I think you fail to see the situation we have here for what it is.”

Peter’s voice broke through Stiles’ planning, and when he looked back, Peter had the handcuffs from earlier dangling from his hand. Stiles backed away on his hands, musing the comforter, heartbeat accelerating so fast it made his head spin.

“Lie down, put your hands above your head,” Peter ordered.

“Why?” Stiles blurted. “I’ve done everything you’ve told me so far.” Peter reached forward with his free hand and yanked Stiles by the ankle, dragging him down the bed.

“Just do it,” he ordered, his tone now measured but impatient. It was like a poker, stoking the flame of Stiles’ anger.

“No,” he objected as he attempted to jerk his foot away. “I haven’t done anything wrong.” When Peter held his gaze firm, Stiles kept talking. “I didn’t do anything wrong,” he repeated, voice slightly weaker. Another unsuccessful yank of his foot and Peter’s grip turned to steel. Stiles’ looked up, to see the man’s face as almost a mask of calm. He kicked out with his other foot only to have the hand
holding the cuffs rebuff his blow as if the man had seen it coming from miles away.


And something about Peter’s tone, the way he was looking at Stiles made something inside the teen recoil in terror. He shook as he lowered himself from his elbows to his back, but left his hands at his sides, torn between doing something he knew would cause him pain and grief, and gambling with it. When Peter moved over him, he flinched, but allowed his limbs to be moved.

“Lace your fingers together,” Peter commanded, his tone softer, clearly pleased that he was getting his way. Stiles did as he was told, shuddered as the police officer moved over him, placed the clasp of one cuff around one wrist, threaded the chain through the battered headboard, and fastened the other cuff to Stiles’ right wrist. Stiles could feel the older man’s erection against his hip through the expensive fabric of his dark grey trousers. Then Peter moved away.

Stiles watched from his tethered position as the officer stood at the foot of the bed, began to undress as he talked.

“Let me explain how our arrangement is to work,” he began, unbuttoning the cuffs of his shirt first. “All you have to do tonight, is everything I tell you, but I must say, you’re off to a mediocre start.” He started at his collar, unbuttoning, revealing the defined, but not overly muscular torso underneath. Deceptively powerful.

“If you expect me to start sucking up, you’re setting the bar too high,” Stiles spat. Peter’s smile was predatory and he slid his shirt from his shoulders and draped it over the armchair in the corner, peeled his socks from his feet and tucked them neatly into what Stiles assumed were his shoes— he couldn’t see. He unbuttoned and unzipped his pants.

“Well, you did do an exceptional job the last time, so I am sure my expectations aren’t that far off.”

“Fuck you.”

Peter chuckled as he stepped out of his pants, left them on the chair with his shirt, leaving him clad in only a pair of black boxer-briefs. He crossed the space to the foot of the bed and climbed into the bed, bracketing Stiles legs with his own. Stiles hated himself for flinching away.

“You’re awfully jumpy,” the man breathed into the teenager’s ear, seconds before his lips latched onto the tender stretch of skin from neck to shoulder that Stiles had unwittingly exposed trying to twist his face away.

“I wonder why?” Stiles replied sarcastically, teeth gritted, breath hitching as one of Peter’s hands trailed down his side and over his hip to grope at his complete non-erection. For once, Stiles was happy his body was just as horrified at what was going on as his brain was. Peter however, was not deterred. His hand circled Stiles, started to stroke as he sucked at bit at the expanse of Stiles’ exposed neck before zeroing in on one spot, making what was going to be a truly appalling hickey— again.

“Hey asshole, I have customers that like to at least pretend I am an innocent high school kid, quit bruising the merchandise,” Stiles finally snapped, yanking away, wincing at the feel of Peter’s teeth scraping across his skin, not willing to let go. In turn, Peter’s grip on his penis tightened considerably, reminding him— as if the handcuffs didn’t— just how vulnerable he was.

“It appears you are not enjoying yourself,” Peter tutted. And Stiles fixed him with a withering look rather than speaking. Peter gradually released him and sat back, staring, contemplative and somehow, Stiles felt impossibly more naked.
“Maybe I should release one of your hands so that you can use those pretty fingers to open yourself up for me.”

Stiles was done. He didn’t feel like indulging Peter anymore. So he stayed silent, stared up at the ceiling. If Peter expected him to show any enthusiasm, he was going to have to be disappointed. As far as Stiles was concerned, he had no obligation to be anything but a human blow-up doll. He wasn’t going to pretend otherwise. He jumped at the feel of Peter’s hands on his stomach, running up his sides.

“No,” he managed through the lump in his throat. His legs kicked out awkwardly, just trying to push Peter away, but the older man showed no signs of concern. He simply moved out of the way of Stiles’ flailing limbs. And stripped off his boxers.

Cue panic attack number two. Stiles felt his limbs curling towards himself. He felt like a bug, trapped under a pin, ready to have its wings torn off. Just as he was starting to wheeze, his vision tunneling, he felt the pressure on his wrists ease. Peter pressed a chaste kiss to try lips and backed away. Long moments passed while Stiles waited for the world to make sense again. His right hand was free, but his left was still attached to the headboard. As was the trend that night, Peter had made his choice for him.
Cost of (Free)dom

Chapter Notes

Whew! Thank you so much for your kudos, bookmarks, subscriptions and comments, I really do appreciate it and I'm not going to lie, it totally drives me to update this as fast as I can. I am thinking I am going to go back and start naming chapters, so don't be surprised if next time I update things are a little wee bit different.

In other news... I'm sorry Stiles :( 

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Stiles winced when Peter collapsed forward on top of him. This was the part he’d missed before– the sweaty weight of a body on top of him, the sound of panting breath, the sick, slick feel of cooling sweat on skin. He wanted desperately to slither out from under Peter, but his left hand was still tethered to the headboard and worse, Peter was still inside of him. He could feel the residue of lube on his right hand, his fingers tacky, sticking to the sheets. He took a deep, shuddering breath.

“You’re crushing me, asshole.”

“I can’t decide whether I like you better like this, or semi-conscious,” Peter retorted into the space between Stiles neck and his shoulder. Stiles cringed. Peter hadn’t hurt him as much this time– he’d been far from gentle, but he hadn’t actually followed through with his threat to fuck Stiles until he couldn’t walk. Instead, Peter had untethered Stiles right hand, pushed a bottle of lube into his palm, and retreated to the chair in the corner, his expectations for Stiles perfectly clear. By the time Peter had finally climbed back onto the bed, Stiles was just relieved to get the whole experience over with.

The teen chewed on his lower lip, took a stuttering breath and wriggled uncomfortably.

“You’re crushing me, asshole.”

“I can’t decide whether I like you better like this, or semi-conscious,” Peter retorted into the space between Stiles neck and his shoulder. Stiles cringed. Peter hadn’t hurt him as much this time– he’d been far from gentle, but he hadn’t actually followed through with his threat to fuck Stiles until he couldn’t walk. Instead, Peter had untethered Stiles right hand, pushed a bottle of lube into his palm, and retreated to the chair in the corner, his expectations for Stiles perfectly clear. By the time Peter had finally climbed back onto the bed, Stiles was just relieved to get the whole experience over with.

“Seriously– are you done? I’d like to get on with my night, maybe even shower first.”

“Not even near,” Peter replied, but nonetheless propped himself up on his elbows before reaching between their bodies to, presumably hold the condom in place as he withdrew. He pulled away, clambering off the bed, and Stiles watched as disappeared into the washroom to dispose of the used condom, a feeling like dread, but not quite, pooling in his stomach. When Peter strolled back into the room, he was still naked. Which left Stiles with an uneasy feeling because what now? His palm was starting to hurt where the metal edge of one handcuff was digging into his skin. He shifted back, easing the strain.

“You got what you wanted,” he began, trying to keep the waver out of his voice unsuccessfully. He swallowed. “Let me go Peter,” he ordered, but his voice had no conviction.

“I told you, all you have to do is everything I say,” the other man replied calmly as he circled the bed so that he stood beside Stiles, in between him and the fastest route to the door– not that he could reach it anyway. Long fingers reached out, traced over the sweat-damp skin of a cheek bone. “And I say this relationship is not over until I declare that it is.”

Stiles’ blood ran cold. He watched Peter crouch beside the bed, so that his face was just slightly above Stiles’ own.
“You will be in this room, next Thursday by ten thirty sharp. When you get here, you will be unsullied by your profession for the night— I will be the only one who has had the pleasure of your company. You will shower and then you will entertain me with your many talents.”

Stiles opened his mouth to protest, but Peter gave him a pointed look, glanced at where his wrist was still tethered to the headboard with a mild expression of rebuke. Stiles stilled.

“I may choose to let you spend the night, or I may choose to send you on your merry way early.”

Stiles desperately wanted to tell the man to ‘fuck off’, wanted to spit in his face, wanted to gouge his eyes out… but he was still handcuffed to the headboard, at the police officer’s mercy. Instead he ground his teeth together and for once in his life, didn’t say what he was thinking, stared at the ceiling until Peter tapped at his temple lightly.

“I know what you’re thinking,” he said evenly, lightly even. “You’re thinking that maybe you’ll disappear for awhile. Maybe work a few towns over.” Stiles swallowed because that was exactly what he’d been thinking.

“So I will tell you what I am thinking,” Peter said, moving over Stiles enough that they were face to face. “I am thinking, that would be a poor decision. Because I will find you. I will find you, and I will personally drag you back to the station and send you right back to McLean.”

Stiles opened his mouth to protest.

“Uhh, uhh, uhh,” Peter tutted, tapping his index finger against Stiles’ parted lips. “I’m not done yet. I think you may want to let me finish before you run that very talented mouth. I know it has a tendency to get you into trouble. There were a few incidents noted in your file at the facility. A few trips to the hospital ward after some of your friends got a little rough…”

Stiles stomach rolled. Peter knew. He knew what had been done to him, and God knows what else… and he’d still pushed Stiles boundaries in such a sadistic way that first night, Stiles had to wonder if the man hadn’t known exactly who he was picking up when Stiles had stupidly got in his car. The older man waited patiently for the realization to fully sink in.

“You will continue to show up every Thursday until I consider our arrangement over,” Peter continued, his hand slipped down the side of Stiles’ jaw to his neck. Almost like her knew Stiles had been about to turn his head away. “You are to get tested every month to assure that you are free of disease, and you will provide me with proof of that testing if I choose to ask for it. And I think it goes without saying, that the terms of this arrangement are never to be shared beyond these four walls, or McLean will seem like a paradise compared to the hole I will put you in,” his voice turned hard for a moment, but his touch turned soft, and his tone light as his hand began to travel south. “And where will that leave, dear—” his finger skipped over a rib, “old,” and another, “dad?”

Stiles’ heart felt like it was going to beat out of his chest. He squeezed his eyes closed but the tears still came, leaking out of the corners of his eyes, dripping down his temples, soaking into his hair and the pillow under his head. He was shaking apart when Peter climbed over him, back onto the bed. The hair on his legs brushed against Stiles’ hip and Stiles shrank back.

Stiles could hear the ring of the handcuff around of heard board, scraping ceaselessly, minutely. He opened his eyes to see his hand shaking against the pillow. He shrank away when he felt Peter move over him, until he realized the man was reaching for his tethered wrist, freeing it. He slowly lowered his hand, watching as Peter shifted, and set the cuffs on the night table beside the bed before getting up. Stiles waited until he felt like the officer was a safe enough distance away and moved slowly, wincing at the aching, bruised feeling in his ass as he sat up. He sat for a few moments, breathing
through his nose, eyes closed.

“Why are you doing this to me?” He hated the broken croak of his own voice. He heard Peter moving through the room, coming to stand in front of him, but he still jumped when one large hand cupped his jaw.

“Doing this to you? My dear boy, what do you think would have happened if some other officer had picked you up? Do you think he would have simply let you go? I’m doing this for your benefit.”

Stiles anger and resentment boiled over so suddenly that it shocked even him when he lunged forward, slamming an unsuspecting Peter to the floor beside the bed. Nonetheless, he couldn’t stop himself from the vicious attack, it was like he was a passenger in his own body, his brain shouting at him to stop while his body did what it wanted, punching and clawing at Peter’s flesh where he lay under him… face placid, amused. And something clicked inside Stiles, he had a choice– he could stop, beg for forgiveness and mercy, think of a plan later, or he could run now that he wasn’t handcuffed to the bed. He glanced up, looking for his jeans, spotted them at the bathroom door. It would mean backtracking through the room fast enough to grab them– there wouldn’t be enough time to put them on and get out the door. He’d have to hope nobody was on the balcony or in the parking lot outside. Then he’d have to run, with no shoes, for several blocks and not get arrested…

He started to sag in defeat, and Peter quickly took the upper hand, flipping them over, hands binding Stiles’ wrists in a vice grip on the floor beside his head. Stiles flinched, tried to move away when the older man pressed the long line of his body against Stiles’ own. He was hard.

“Temper, temper,” he teased with the wrong kind of heat before grinding his hips against the teen’s. “You know, this is just one of the many reasons I like you so much,” Peter panted. “You don’t quite know how to control yourself.”

Frustration made Stiles animal, made him struggle to buck the older man off of him for several fruitless seconds. He knew he was playing into Peter’s hand, but something inside of him demanded that he fight, that he not literally take this lying down. Peter deflected each blow almost lazily for several moments before calmly grabbing hold of Stiles’ flailing arms and pressing them hard into the floor above the teen’s head. The position saw the older man stretched above Stiles’ slighter form while he changed his grip to grasp both of Stiles’ wrists in one hand and Stiles took a chance without really thinking it through. He surged forward and sank his teeth into the skin of Peter’s left pectoral, just above his nipple– hard. Hard enough to feel the truly sickening sensation of skin parting under his teeth, a ripping, popping sensation before a flood of liquid.

Both men jerked away from one another; Stiles disgusted, Peter from shock or pain, or both, Stiles didn’t know– he was too distracted using his newly freed hands to frantically wipe the blood away from his mouth. It took less than seconds for Stiles to realize he was fighting an uphill battle if his goal was to get away from Peter– the man had sat back from him reflexively, and Stiles remained pinned to the floor from the waist down. He glanced at Peter to see the man’s eyes boring into him. In the seconds that passed, Stiles couldn’t help but think, if he’d still been on his ADD meds, he never would have done something so stupid, so reckless. His limbs barely had a chance to attempt to coordinate an escape before Peter seemed to calmly– too calmly– reach to the side and behind him, and grab a pillow from bed.

Stiles yelp of panic was abruptly cut off by the mound of fabric pressing over his face. For about three seconds, he marveled at the fact that the pillow didn’t smell as bad as he’d expected it to. Then he started to struggle. He clawed at an arm he couldn’t see, kicked out, trying to buck Peter off of him. The harder he struggled, the harder it got to breathe, the more persistent the pressure on his lungs became. It felt like his head was going to explode. Black spots danced in his vision, growing
denser and denser until Stiles’ limbs grew so heavy he couldn’t claw at Peter’s arm anymore. It took all of his efforts just to turn his head to the side enough to draw in a half a breath through his open mouth.

He had to have blacked out for a few seconds at least, because when Stiles opened his eyes and the world in front of him wasn’t the darkened heat of a pillow in his face. It wasn’t much better though; the bare hotel sheet and the battered headboard, and Peter’s hands holding him down by the forearms. He squirmed, and that was when he realized Peter was inside him again, moving in slow, grinding, but hard thrusts that made his hips and back ache.

“Stiles.” Peter sounded remarkably cool and calm for someone who was mid-fuck, who’d just been bitten by their lover. But most chilling was the fact that without any movement from the teen under him, he knew he was conscious. Stiles in turn, said nothing. This time he knew better. He’d keep his mouth shut, endure, like he’d had to do before.

“Stiles,” Peter drawled, slower, too low to be sing-song, but teasing nonetheless. The teenager hissed in pain at a particularly deep thrust, twisted so that Peter could see part of his face.

“What?” he groaned.

“That’s the second time you’ve bitten me.”

Suddenly Peter was blanketed over him inhumanly fast and then–

The razor sharp pressure, and a familiar popping sensation, only this time Stiles was on the receiving, not the giving end. Peter’s teeth sank into the tender flesh of the skin on the back of his neck, up high, near the hairline and it felt like the most painful place the man could have chosen. It wasn’t a quick, rash moment of anger like Stiles’. This was an act of brutal retaliation. Peter kept his jaw clamped tight, Stiles’ flesh between his teeth as his thrusts grew in intensity. And all Stiles could do was ride out the pain. It felt like several minutes passed before Peter finally released the flesh clamped in his jaw. His breath blew hot across the wound for a second before he spoke.

“Blood for blood.”

At that, the older man groaned, and abruptly pulled away. Stiles was distracted by the sudden cool air on his forearms once Peter’s hands had relinquished their grasp. It was when the first droplets of semen hit his back, that Stiles realized in a foreign sense of horror, that Peter hadn’t used a condom—or if he had, he’d deliberately taken it off in some animal display of dominance.

Stiles remained completely motionless until he heard the shower in the bathroom turn on. He pulled himself onto his elbows stiffly and rolled over just in time to see Peter standing in the doorway.

“Join me for a shower?”

The casual tone of his voice combined with the memory of what had happened the last time Stiles’ had showered with the man was enough to put him in motion. The teenager didn’t say a word, instead concentrating his efforts on leaving as fast as he could. He sat up and wiped away the semen on his back with the motel sheet before standing up stiffly. It wasn’t the gut-wrenching pain he had experienced the last time, but pain made his movements stilted as he stood and limped towards the pile of clothes he’d left by the bathroom door when Peter had ordered he shower earlier.

“Is that a request or a demand?” Stiles muttered, pausing in his movements, his clothing clutched in shaking hands.

“As with everything tonight, you have a choice,” Peter retorted, raising an eyebrow as he leaned
“Fine,” Stiles growled, a challenge. He moved away from Peter, sat on the edge of the bed and pulled on his briefs, quickly followed by his jeans, “I’m out. I have shit to do.”

“Suit yourself, but if I were you, I’d clear my schedule for next Thursday,” the older man replied. He strolled away from the doorway, back into the motel room as the tiny room behind him began to fill with steam. Stiles jumped when he sat back from tying his left shoe only to have Peter reach out and cradle his jaw in one large hand.

“Ten-thirty Stiles, don’t be late.” Stiles arm came up faster than he could quell the urge, but he managed to neuter the violent shove he had in mind down to an annoyed grimace.

“Got it,” he croaked, throat suddenly dry and tight.

“See you then,” the officer purred, a soft smile passing over his lips before he turned and strolled into the cloud of steam in the bathroom, shutting the door behind him. Stiles stared after him for a few seconds before he loudly and shakily exhaled, dragging his palms down his face. He stood up too fast, wincing at the sudden bright pain that ricocheted up his spine.

Stiles didn’t even have his hoodie fully on by the time he ripped the motel room door open and stomped into the night, slamming the motel room door after himself. He wanted to scream. He wanted to rip something apart or punch something. He wanted to utterly destroy something. It was a frustrated buzzing sensation in his limbs, made worse by the fact that he couldn’t even burn the feeling off with physical activity— he hurt too much for that. So without really thinking too much about where he was going, Stiles started to walk, hands shoved into his pockets, head down and hood up; the universal teenaged signal for ‘leave me the fuck alone’. His mind managed to cobble together a destination, his feet took him there on autopilot.

Beacon Hills high school was predictably dark, much to Stiles relief. He could feel the aching in his muscles and bones starting. He felt like he’d run a marathon after spending only a few hours with Peter and for once had to congratulate past self for the foresight of leaving his Jeep behind. It meant he could shower as long as he wanted without having to worry about a patrol car swinging by the school and spotting his Jeep in the parking lot. That could lead to a whole host of problems Stiles really didn’t need. The thought of the PD sent a shiver down his spine more intense than it had ever been before. He wondered how much pull Peter had as an officer. He didn’t doubt for a second that the man had meant every word he’d said that night, every threat he’d held over Stiles’ head. Which explained why Stiles was willing to risk running into fucking wild, rabid, wolves again just so he didn’t have to spend one more second with the corrupt officer, but could still get a shower.

So, it was with a little more vigilance than normal that Stiles trudged around the side of the school, his eyes searching the treeline that bordered the lacrosse pitch for any sign of movement at all. He felt electrified all over, a burning tension and sense of dread that made his guts clench— which of course, brought with it more discomfort. The teen desperately tried to relax, but it wasn’t until he’d squirmed through the window into the change room and checked that the coast was clear, that his body finally released an ounce of the tension it had been carrying.

“Oh my God yes,” Stiles moaned when he discovered the utility hamper that was piled high with clean bath towels. Before everything, he’d always been slightly grossed out at the lingering smell of bleach, and the thought of so many other bodies having intimately used those towels. Now he was grateful because it meant not having to struggle into clinging cotton while he air-dried… or use paper towels. He swiped a towel from the top of the pile, and headed for the locker he’d always used when
he was still a student.

It wasn’t until Stiles was standing under the burning hot stream of water, surrounded by steam and the echoing sound of the water hitting the tile that he crumpled. Hot tears prickled at the corner of his eyes, so sudden in their arrival that they spilled immediately so others could push their way through as well. The choked sound that bubbled out Stiles’ mouth was so startlingly loud in the tiled room that he immediately clasped a hand over his jaw to hold the sound in. Then the tremors started, ratcheting up to full violence before he could catch even a breath. In less than half a minute, Stiles sat curled at the bottom of the showers, shaking and all but sobbing, rubbing at the back of his neck where Peter had bit him, like if he rubbed hard enough it would just disappear. The bite stung—tiny pinpricks of pain where Peter’s teeth had broken the skin and the cheap school soap from the dispenser on the wall kept singing in the wounds.

He should have run. The second he’d realized it was Peter in that car, he should have hightailed it out of there–maybe even taken Danny with him. But he hadn’t, instead he’d been stupid enough to get in the car with Peter, thinking he would be able to talk his way out of another encounter, get out of the car and be done with the man once and for all. Instead, he had done the opposite, and as a result of his own false sense of invincibility—because he was still a stupid teenager, he’d ended up irrevocably tying himself to the man. He had no way out.

The worst part was all the uncertainty. Stiles couldn’t know exactly how much Peter knew about him. Obviously the officer had access to Stiles’ juvenile record. He knew where Stiles had been jailed, for how long, what for, and likely where he was supposed to be. He obviously knew about the former Sheriff as well, and by extension, the very reason—even if it wasn’t specific—that Stiles was in the position he was in now. But what Stiles didn’t know was if Peter knew about his Jeep—he probably did since there was no record of him ever selling it. He didn’t know if Peter knew where Stiles was living, or who his friends were, or where he went when he wasn’t on his knees or biting motel pillows. And that scared him more than anything. He’d be spending even more time looking over his shoulder than he ever had before.

The uncertainty of life started to move inward like a fast-moving tide. Stiles had known this was coming, but didn’t have the energy to fight it anymore. So he lay down naked, in the bottom of showers he had always worn sandals into before, and let it happen. The panic attack crashed over him with so much force it instantly stole his breath away. The horrifying feeling of being a vacuum began and Stiles wanted out. Like he always did. It shocked him every time. How prepared he thought he was, but in the end, just wasn’t. He clawed at the tile, clawed at his own skin, just wanting out until—

“Stiles…”

The voice was soft, calm. Stiles was used to fantasizing that he heard his mom during panic attacks. He tried to focus on it, let it draw him back, even though he knew that doing so would only make it worse when he emerged from the attack. Because his mom was gone. If she was still alive, Stiles would never have–

“Stiles.”

The voice seemed clearer, closer, but unsure. Not the steady, calming voice Stiles had always known as a child. It echoed through the room, and Stiles’ consciousness was hurled back into reality.

There was someone in the room with him. Long fingers fumbled frantically for the shower taps to turn them off. If he’d been caught showering at the school this was it, he would have trouble ever coming back. He was torn between duelling urges to call out to whoever was there–largely to see if he was crazy, or to hide because there was no chance he could run; naked, with wet feet and the
shape he was in. So he did nothing, sitting in the stillness and silence for a few minutes, simply listening, paranoid. There were no tell-tale footsteps. The person, if there ever was one, didn’t speak another word.

_I am cracking up._

Stiles stood up on shaking legs, ready to face the music. It would be the icing on top of a fucking arsenic-laced cake if someone had caught onto his trespassing-shower-trysts. Even better if he was completely crazy and dreaming the whole thing up. He wouldn’t be surprised. Afterall, he wasn’t entirely sure he hadn’t dreamed up the wolves he’d seen prowling– and growling– around Beacon Hills at night.

He reached for the hook at the side of the shower bay, grabbing the rough towel to wrap around his waist protectively. His steps were slow, deliberate heel to toe movements. If he walked into the changing room in the right place, he’d be able to hide behind a bay of lockers, out of view and see just about the whole room, and maybe even a person if they were there, before they saw him. He tried not to grope at the walls with shaking hands. He couldn’t quite shake the fact that he was, once upon a time, the Sheriff’s son– he couldn’t go leaving his fingerprints smeared all over the walls in strange places. When he rounded the corner though, nobody was there.

Heart-pounding, Stiles looked around, frantically scanning the dim room for any sign of life. The room was completely vacant, not even a whisper of sign that anyone had been there.

“I’m going crazy,” the teen muttered, the edge of his own voice echoing hysteria throughout the room. He scrambled to get dressed, clothing fighting against his damp skin like a cat against a bathtub full of water. The bottomless pit in his stomach seemed to open a little wider when he realized he’d walked from the motel and would still need to get back to his Jeep. If someone was around, was hiding somewhere, if he was unlucky enough to encounter the wolves again, he was as good as dead. He shoved his feet into his shoes quickly, rolled the towel up he’s been using and stuffed it in behind one of the sets of lockers, then moved towards the dry side of the showers so he could hop out the window, the same way he’d come in.

“Stiles?”

He just about jumped out of his skin, whipping around so suddenly, he slipped on the wet floor, skidding to his knees before scrambling awkwardly to his feet again, pain shooting through his kneecap where it had smashed so viciously into the tile floor.

“Stiles I’m not going to hurt you I swear.”

The woman in front of him held her hands up by her shoulders, palms up, a placating gesture. She wasn’t old, but she was older than Stiles, probably in her mid or late twenties. Her dark hair hung almost to her waist in long, slightly disheveled waves. She wore what looked like an oversized plaid shirt, belted at the waist to make it into a dress. Her lean, bare legs looked odd, plugged into a clunky pair of beat-up Doc Martins.

“I just want– need to talk to you for a minute. Okay?” Stiles nodded dumbly and the woman slowly lowered her hands to her sides. She definitely wasn’t a cop, wasn’t a teacher or a janitor, meaning there was no way she was supposed to be here either.

“How do you know my name?” the teenager managed hoarsely, suddenly freaked out that this woman knew his name. His brain frantically tried to place her somewhere in the recesses of his memory, but her face was only very distantly familiar; fair skin, pale green eyes, and when Stiles looked close, a pale, sparse sprinkling of freckles across the girl’s nose.
“You have to promise not to freak out when I tell you,” she replied. Stiles barked out a laugh.

“Usually when people say that, there is something to freak out about.” His mind was racing now. Was this some sort of tactic from child protective services? A social worker sent from McLean to drag him back to juvie for breaking the conditions of his release? She took a deep breath.

“I know you’re name because of your friend, Scott McCall.”

A coldness crept into Stiles’ chest.

“You’re lying,” Stiles retorted after a beat. Scott was gone. It was something he tried not to think about because it inevitably led to him thinking about the inordinate amount of crime scene photos he’d seen for someone his age. “Scott disappeared two and a half years ago. He’s…” he didn’t want to say it, “he’s gone.”

The woman shook her head slowly.

“He’s not,” she replied calmly. Stiles tried to breathe through the feeling that someone had punched him in the gut. He clenched and unclenched his fists.

“I– how do you know?”

“I’ve been trying to help him.”

“What do you mean trying to help him? Is he in trouble? Where is he?”

“He’s safe. But he’s been through a lot. He’s having trouble adjusting to everything,” the girl replied slowly, as if choosing her words very, very carefully.

“I want to see him,” Stiles said instantly. “I want to see him now.” He didn’t care what was wrong with Scott. Whatever it was, they could fix it.

“Stiles you have to listen to me. He’s dangerous right now– to other people, to himself. I can’t let him near you.”

“What do you mean dangerous?” Stiles asked incredulously, “Scott has never hurt anyone in his life.” At that, the girl looked saddened and Stiles felt a strange hollowness filling him up. Here Scott was, dangled in front of him, but unreachable– just like his own Dad. He couldn’t take it. Couldn’t take one more reminder that he was completely alone in this world.

“Please let me see him. Please.”

She sighed, the gesture making her entire frame heave with the motion.

“I can’t do that right now,” she replied, sounding genuinely regretful.

“Then why are you here?!” Stiles blurted, sounding every bit a petulant teenager. He didn’t care.

“Because I couldn’t wait any more,” the woman replied, sounding equally frustrated. “Scott keeps trying to get to you but it’s too risky right now. He won’t listen to me though– or he wasn’t. The only way I could get him to agree to wait just a bit longer was by promising I would check on you.”

“And now you have. So what are you going to tell him?” Stiles retorted bitterly.

“I don’t know,” the woman replied, voice soft. “You’re in trouble. I can fe– I can tell that you are. I don’t think telling Scott is going to help him, but I can’t hide it from him either.”
Stiles let the words sink in. Whoever this girl was, she definitely wasn’t a cop or a social worker or someone equally legitimate to those positions. Normally this would have had Stiles’ intuition calling foul, but there were no alarm bells sounding this time around. And like the true son of a detective, he wanted to know why.

“Who are you?” he finally asked.

“My name is Laura Hale,” she replied.

At the name Hale, Stiles knew immediately who he was talking to. He could practically smell the smoke and ash in the air. It had happened when he was a kid. He remembered smelling the smoke from his house, his Dad leaving in a rush before the sirens even started, leaving Stiles to sit next to Scott on the rooftop outside his bedroom and watch the smoke billow out of the woods near the preserve. It wasn’t until after his Dad came home that he found out it had been a house fire, not the bush fire he’d originally thought, and that almost everyone in the house had died.

“Your family died in a house fire seven years ago. Only a handful of you survived.”

She winced, but nodded.

“So what are you doing here?” He didn’t mean for it to sound like he was interrogating the girl, but he remembered his Dad mentioning that the surviving members of the family had moved out of the area, with the exception of an uncle who had been hospitalized with severe injuries.

“It’s complicated.”

“Complicated,” Stiles repeated slowly.

“If I asked you to, could you be here at the same time next week?” Laura asked, shifting the topic away from her own life effortlessly. Stiles opened his mouth to answer ‘yes’, that he would do anything to see his friend again when he remembered Peter and the fact that Peter was in control – at least of his Thursday nights.

“I-uh–”

Stiles’ negotiations were cut short immediately with a calm but low warning from Laura:

“Someone is coming.”

“What? From where?” That was the last thing Stiles needed – getting busted at the school. It would be the cherry on top of the shit-sundae that was his evening. Especially after everything he’d done tonight to keep himself out of the grips of the law. His heart started to pound as he scrambled to think of every escape route in the room, despite the fact that he hadn’t even heard the threat yet.

Laura moved quickly.

“Can you get out the window?” she asked quietly, but urgently.

“How do you think I got in?” the teenager retorted. She nodded curtly.

“Then go now – but watch it when you get out of the building – there’s a security truck outside I think. Go around the back, towards the field – you could hide under the bleachers if you had to.”

It wasn’t until Stiles fingers had wrapped around the edge of the window sill and he was poised to hoist himself out that he thought of Laura.
“Wait– what about you?” he hissed out.

“I can look after myself,” she replied, still standing on the tile floor of the boy’s showers. “Just meet me here– same time next week.” There was the distant bang of a door and Laura hissed one last order; “Go!”

Stiles scrambled out the window and into the night and with only a cursory glance around to make sure he hadn’t been spotted, took off running towards his neglected Jeep.

Chapter End Notes

Come tumble.
Revelations

Chapter Notes

I don't know what has come over me but lately, I can't seem to stop writing- like in stay up until 5:00am, sleep is for the weak kind of bursts. I originally was looking at this story playing out in about 10 chapters. My powers of estimation apparently are the worst ever. I have now written It's going to be a LOT longer than that, so I've added the "slow build" tag as a precaution.

As always thank you so much for reading!

By the time Stiles reached his Jeep, parked at the movie theater, he was out of breath and felt ready to vomit. He paused, bent double, one hand on the hood, heaving in air, head reeling from lack of oxygen, from the events of the entire night really. Aware that he probably looked drunk, Stiles quickly righted himself, looked around, and got into his Jeep. Once he was behind the wheel, his drive back to the preserve was cautious, like the atmosphere after a fight with a loved one; He came to full stops, used his signals perfectly, hands at ten and two, turns taken carefully and gracefully, eyes always on the road until reality slammed into him as hard as an errant deer could have. He didn’t want to be alone in the woods tonight. So, still very much composed, Stiles steered the Jeep in the opposite direction of the preserve, heading instead towards the hospital.

The second he pulled into the hospital parking lot, he could feel the pressure to break down, like too much water against an unstable dam. His hands shook on the steering wheel as he wrestled to maintain control. It was late– far past visiting hours. He didn’t care. He needed his dad in any way he could have him, even if it meant just being in the same room with his shell.

The hospital was always active to a certain degree and Stiles was familiar with almost all hours of it. He tried to be inconspicuous as he passed through the doors, winding his way down the corridors that lead to his dad’s room. He didn’t make a habit of making nocturnal visits– not only because of attempting to abide by hospital visiting hours, but also the sense of ‘wrong’ that he associated with the thought of coming to his dad’s room with the sweat of a stranger or smell of sex lingering on his skin. Tonight was an exception. Like it had been the first time…

‘Dad, I just didn’t know what to do. I’ve tried having a normal job. A normal life, but I am drowning. I can’t let you go down with me...’

The only answer was the whir and click of the machines in the room.

All he wanted was to curl up in the presence of his dad and talk, whether he could hear him or not. But what was he going to say?

“Sir! Sir!” Stiles jumped when a young nurse in burgundy scrubs seemed to just materialize in front
of him. Though she was a foot shorter than him, she had an air of authority that halted him in his tracks– if only temporarily. He scanned her face, fair skin, auburn hair, green eyes. He didn’t recognize her, meaning she pretty much had to be new or always worked an overnight shift.

“I– what?” he replied dumbly, side-stepping her to move down the hall, confused at her sudden interruption of his thoughts.

“Excuse me,” she replied indignantly, “Visiting hours are over!” Stiles stared at her blankly for a moment. He could feel his right hand shaking and tried clenching and unclenching his fist to still it. He didn’t like this nurse. She had an air of someone who had been given just an ounce of power and was exploiting it to any extent she thought she could get away with.

“I just need to see my dad,” Stiles muttered, hoping she’d give up when he set his eyes on the linoleum and moved to pass her.

“Yes, well, you can come back during regular visiting hours to see him,” the nurse replied tersely. Normally he would have made some sort of witty remark. But he was tired, exhausted even. He moved again to evade her and a hand shot out to stop him.

“Don’t TOUCH me.” His voice rang out in the near empty hallway louder than he’d intended it to.

“That’s it, I’m calling security,” she declared impatiently, turning to stomp towards the nurse’s station. And Stiles didn’t know whether to run for the door or his dad’s room, or just stand there until he collapsed into a heap of tears and then–

“Stiles honey, what are you doing here so late?”

Finally, in world of unfamiliarity, something– someone familiar.

“He’s making a scene,” the young night nurse replied, receiver of the phone already in her hand as she punched numbers on the phone.

Louanne’s face swam into Stiles’ view. She’d been there almost from the beginning, along with Melissa McCall, one of the team of nurses and doctors who took care of his dad.

“I want to see my Dad,” Stiles replied frantically, ignoring the other nurse completely. Louanne looked from Stiles to the other nurse and back again.

“Jennifer hang up the phone, he’s the Sheriff’s kid,” she said steadily, eyes trained on Stiles, hand on his shoulder.

“But he–”

“Go ahead sweetie,” the older nurse urged, thumb rubbing over the curve of his shoulder gently. Stiles nodded, before practically running down the hall. His dad’s room was of course, dim when he got there. All of the lights but the one over his bed near the various pieces of medical equipment were out, and even it was set to the dimmest level. As if the light would wake his Dad up. If it was that simple, Stiles would have lit the room up like it was Christmas long ago.

“Hey Dad,” he greeted softly. As usual when he was asleep, his dad was lying on his back in bed, eyes closed, arms positioned over the blankets, straight, but relaxed at his sides. Stiles shuffled around to the upholstered chair by the window, pulled it close and collapsed into it, limbs spilling over the sides, stood up again, agitated, when he noticed he’d forgotten to pull the door closed. The second the door clicked, he felt the tears that had been threatening to well up since he’d gotten into his Jeep, gather at the corners of his eyes. He’d barely made it back to the chair before starting to sob.
It had been a long time since Stiles had let himself feel anything but determination to just survive. All of his other emotions were always there, floating close to the surface, but wrought-iron control kept them at bay most of the time—good or bad. But there was no holding back the utter hopelessness he could feel settling in. For once, just once, he crumbled under the pressure of being only seventeen. He cried shamelessly, not bothering to wipe away the tears and snot leaking from his face, for several minutes, knowing it was a losing battle anyway.

“Dad I fucked up,” he croaked, when he was finally able to speak. “I don’t know what to do…” He took a deep breath— it shuddered worse on the way in than on the way out. He had confessed things to his Dad before, convincing himself that he really couldn’t hear him because if he could, he’d have already listened to his son’s pleas for him to wake up. And still…part of him was afraid to say it; I’m in over my head. I fucked a cop and now he’s blackmailing me.

“I… I went with someone I shouldn’t have,” he confessed, hollow. For all the months he’d been talking to his dad, he still had trouble saying the word ‘fucked’. He glanced at the former Sheriff’s face, looking for any sort of expression, any sign that his father was listening. All there was were the ghosts of expressions past; laugh lines around his mouth, crow’s feet at the corners of his eyes from happier times, deeper furrows in his brow from the darker ones. He took a breath, kept going, eyes fixed on his dad’s lax hand instead of his face.

“Last week this guy picked me up. We went back to a hotel and at first I thought everything was going to be fine. But it wasn’t. I started to get that feeling that you’d always warned me about— that something wasn’t right. And it wasn’t, but I was stupid and desperate and I stayed. And I paid for it.” He paused to take a shuddering breath. “I know I got what I deserved… consequences to actions… all that stuff you always used to warn me about…”

Stiles paused, not sure whether he wanted to continue. He kept his gaze fixed on the creases in the sheets on the bed as he spoke, voice hoarse, like he’d swallowed gravel.

“You want to know the really stupid thing though?” He glanced up, as if his father would ask him ‘what?’ before quickly looking down at his lap again. He felt like a child— naïve, powerless.

“I did it again. The second I saw him I should have run and instead I got into the fucking car.” Stiles could feel the tightness in his throat, choking his voice into hysteria as tears gathered in the corner of his eyes again.

“He was a cop,” he croaked. “He was a cop and now I can’t get away.” He swallowed hard around the lump in his throat. “He knows who I am— who you are. He knows—” he choked on a sob, “he knows I can’t just walk away. I have to do it. And I’m scared Dad. I’m so fucking scared of him.”

His stomach clenched as he thought about his future. How long would Peter keep this up? What would he do when he got tired of Stiles? Worse yet, what would happen to him when Peter got bored. He finally wiped at his face with his sleeves.

“Dad please wake up,” he pleaded, voice raw. “I need you.”

Stiles woke to a gentle rocking motion. He lifted his head, blinking as he stared into a dim room before his eyes settled on his dad’s motionless hand against worn blue sheets.

“Hey Stiles,” Louanne greeted quietly, expression soft, voice a near whisper, drawing Stiles gaze to her. He squinted, frowned before he remembered where he was, recognized an aching strain in his back from how he’d been slumped over in the chair by his father’s bed. “The doc is making his
rounds soon and I am going to be in it if he finds you here.” She sounded apologetic enough—Stiles got the picture as she retreated back towards the doorway, ducking her head out into the hall for a few seconds.

“Sorry,” he groaned as he stretched, “I must have fallen asleep. I’ll go.” He stood up, casting a look down at his father’s unconscious form.

“I’ll let you say goodbye alone,” Louanne whispered, “You’ve got about five or ten minutes.”

“Thanks,” he replied before the nurse slipped back out of the door.

Stiles felt empty. He stared down at his dad’s unconscious form and not for the first time in life, wondered what he was doing, why he was holding on. His dad was never coming back to him. Why did he do this? Night after night, week after week, only to have practically every penny sucked away at the end of every month to pay just to have his dad lie there, floating in the in between, completely unaware of everything his son was going through. And as was usual whenever Stiles started to think too much about what would happen if he just let go, guilt swiftly delivered a punch to the gut and he abandoned the thought process as suddenly as he had begun it.

“I love you Dad,” he whispered before leaning down to press his lips to the side of his forehead— the same way his dad used to do to him, before of course Stiles had hit adolescence and gotten too cool for it. He’d just started letting his dad extend the gesture once again at home when the incident at the station occurred.

His shoulders sagged as he walked from the room, trying to shrug off the weight of the world, and ease the ache of the emotionally and physically exhausting night. He decided to take things in steps, like he always had. First step; the Jeep. Next, make it back to the preserve without getting arrested for erratic driving. Everything else could be dealt with later.

***

The strange meeting with Laura Hale had left Stiles reeling. His friend Scott was alive. Alive, but not necessarily well. The conversation had been cryptic, revealing just enough to Stiles to leave him with a twisting feeling in his stomach— at times wrenched with stress and concern for his friend, and others, incredibly light as he thought about the prospect of seeing his best friend again, about everything that could mean.

Stiles’ first instinct was to tell Lydia about what had happened at the high school, but even she didn’t know that he trespassed there on a regular basis. She assumed he showered at the motel or the community centre and it was probably safest if he let her keep thinking that. Aside from that though there was just something… distinctly secret about his conversation with Laura. He couldn’t help but think that if there’d been time, she would have warned him to come alone, to not tell anyone about their meeting. Naturally, when Stiles saw a thread— even in his own subconscious— he tended to pull on it— which was how he ended up in the basement of the local library that Sunday afternoon looking at the town’s newspaper archives. He had a mixture of articles scattered around him; some on the computer, others on the table behind him in hard copy.

The Hale fire had happened when he was ten, that much, Stiles could remember. It had been scarce months since his mom had died. Stiles still wasn’t sleeping most nights, and the smell of smoke had roused him from the hazy doze he usually settled into. It was normally a smell he associated with
s’mores and camping trips with Scott and his dad, but when he’d woken up from his barely there slumber, he had known instantly that something was wrong. His dad had burst into the room mere seconds later, Sheriff browns already on. He quickly explained that there was a fire in the preserve and all emergency services had been called. Melissa was on her way over with Scott.

It was exciting but foreboding at the same time. Stiles could remember the dread in his stomach– the worry that his dad wasn’t going to come back. After Melissa had tucked him and Scott in, the two boys had clambered out onto the small thatch of roof outside of Stiles’ room and sat, wrapped in the comforter from Stiles’ bed, watching the smoke billow out of the preserve in the distance until eventually it died down– or they got too tired, Stiles couldn’t remember which– just that when he woke up in the morning his room smelled like ashes, Scott was sleeping next to him, and he could hear his dad and Scott’s mom talking downstairs. His dad had waited until Melissa and Scott had left to explain to him what had happened: There was a house fire at the Hale residence– the only house in the preserve. There were only three survivors that they knew of so far, everyone else in the family was presumed dead. The two eldest Hale kids and an uncle had survived– but he had been badly burned after attempting to rescue other members of the family.

Now, years later, Stiles was filling in what his own memory could supply with facts. The house fire had been declared an electrical fire– an accident– until a few years ago when the case had been reopened– in part thanks to his dad. Apparently “new evidence” had emerged pointing towards something much more sinister– arson. The two eldest Hale children– the survivors of the fire– were Laura and her younger brother Derek. The only reason they hadn’t been killed the night of the fire was because they hadn’t been home. Apparently both had been briefly considered as suspects, though both were quickly eliminated. There really wasn’t much mention of their uncle Peter– and it was a good thing really– even the name made Stiles shudder. He had been admitted to Beacon Hills memorial with severe burns and when Laura and Derek left Beacon Hills, he was transferred to another facility, assumedly closer to them.

Stiles couldn’t help but feel a twinge of empathy for Laura and Derek– both so young, both their parents gone. Laura had been seventeen at the time of the fire– a few weeks shy of her eighteenth birthday. Derek had been sixteen. Stiles studied their photos– obviously taken from the high school year book. Laura was still recognizable, but totally different from the woman she was today; she had the same thick, dark hair. She wore a Sex-Pistol’s t-shirt and a chain around her neck padlocked closed. But in the photo her eyes were bright, mischievous– at the school that light just hadn’t been there. Her brother was clearly the exact opposite of her socially, but undeniably related. He had the same dark hair, the same mischievous glint in his eyes, but he also had a borderline cocky grin to match. He looked like he’d probably been a jock.

When Stiles managed to find the Beacon Heights yearbook, his suspicions were both confirmed and denied; Laura Hale had been involved in a surprising variety of school activities; drama club, the debate team, field hockey. Derek, of course, had been the jock Stiles had assumed he was; lacrosse, baseball, track and field were all listed. The photos were almost crushing in their impact when Stiles really stopped to think about it. After all, these photos were taken mere months before the fire. Neither teen could have imagined that a few short weeks from those photos being taken, they would lose their entire family in one devastating night.

Which is how Stiles ended up looking at the Beacon Heights yearbook from the last year he’d attended– his sophomore year. He would have been in his final year now, taking SAT preparation, worrying about which colleges he was going to apply to– and more importantly, which ones he was going to get into and with what scholarships.

“Is that you?”
Stiles nearly jumped out of his skin at the sound of a voice just over his shoulder. He whipped around to face the person who had snuck up on him. It took a moment to place Allison outside of the hospital because she looked so different dressed head to toe in dark colours instead of the usual red and white striped apron.

“You scared the shit outta me!” Stiles declared loudly as his speeding heart gradually slowed. If he hadn’t been in such a remote area of the library’s basement he would have been concerned about the ire of the librarian. Allison’s smile was soft, apologetic.

“Sorry,” she replied. She looked past him, eyes settling on the yearbook page. “You look so young with your hair like that!” Stiles eyes flitted back to the page in front of him. In his yearbook photo he was sporting a freshly buzzed head, some super hero t-shirt and a plaid button up– his uniform of the time. These days, he kept things simpler; t-shirts, jeans, hoodies. Things that didn’t wrinkle easily from being pushed down or left on motel room floors, or left scrunched in a duffel bag in the back of his Jeep; Things that could be pulled up and put back on in a hurry, things that he could throw into a single load at a Laundromat and not worry about anything turning pink or dingy and grey. He ran a hand through his hair which was now about an inch and a half long, self-consciously.

“Yeah I guess I do,” he replied. “What are you doing here?”

“I needed some books for school, the library sucks there.”

“Ah,” Stiles replied. He wouldn’t know– he hadn’t been at Beacon Hills long enough to really experience the quality of the library– Scott and him had always been more interested in getting on the lacrosse team and chasing girls– for Stiles, especially Lydia. She’d been Stiles most hardcore crush– until she didn’t return after winter break sophomore year. Stiles never did find out why– never really asked either, just like Lydia had never asked him how he got the money to pay his dad’s medical bills.

“Hey, if you live in Beacon Hills, how come I never see you at school?”

“I’m homeschooled,” Stiles replied wryly. It was clear from Allison’s expression that she knew it was a bold-faced lie, but she didn’t push it either. Instead, she glanced over the table, craning her neck to check out his computer screen.

“What are you researching so intensely?”

“Oh, just some reading on the local history,” Stiles replied. “A few years back– okay, more than a few– there was this big fire that killed almost an entire family. My dad had re-opened the case before…” he trailed off, looking back Allison with a shrug. Her face was ashen.

“How did the fire start?” she asked quietly. She stayed standing, even moved back a few inches, like the various newspapers scattered across the table repelled her.

“Originally, back when my dad was the deputy, they said it was an electrical fire. That never did sit well with Dad, and after Mom died, he had a lot of time alone, started re-looking at cases and stuff. After he solved a few cold ones– which made the Sheriff look good– that Sheriff got promoted to a bigger city. My dad got the Sheriff job here– which gave him the power to open cases– including the Hale fire.”

“So what did your dad think it was?”

“Arson. Well, arson and murder,” Stiles supplied. He frowned as he watched Allison’s expression slip even further from her usual friendly smile. “Hey are you okay? You look really pale…”
“I uh, I have to go,” Allison excused quickly. She re-adjusted her bag over her shoulder, seemed to waver on her feet in indecision for a moment. “I’ll see you this week some time?”

Stiles barely had a chance to respond before the brunette, now a few shades paler, took off. Stiles shrugged before he turned back to his research. Some people were just squeamish he supposed. Not everyone spent their childhood snooping through old crime scene photos.

The thing was, the Hale fire didn’t make sense. By all accounts, the Hales were a quiet family that kept to themselves. There was nothing remarkable about them. They weren’t so squeaky clean it was suspicious, and they clearly weren’t the kind of people to get mixed up in something nefarious. Talia Hale had been a teacher on a reservation about half an hour outside Beacon Hills, her husband, Lukas, owned a small but successful bookstore downtown. The house had been in the family for years, been renovated with all the appropriate permits– including an electrical inspection. So who would set fire to a house full of people and why?

Maybe that was what Laura Hale had come back to find out.

Sundays were pretty much always Stiles’ errand day. Most men were either family men who wanted to pretend they weren’t fucking teenaged boys throughout the week whilst pretending to stay late at work, or alternatively, college guys who were cramming for assignments and exams because they’d been out chasing ass all week. Sometimes Stiles went out but frankly, he was still sore from his episode with Peter and the lack of break he’d taken afterwards– Fridays and Saturdays were always busy.

After taking a nap after his visit to the library, Stiles stuffed his dirty clothes into his pillowcase and headed out. The Save ‘n Suds Laundromat was 24 hours and, as predicted, the Laundromat was completely empty at 1:00am, save for the teenager.

He chose a machine towards the back of the room and started stuffing his clothing in. He’d just slid the change holder into the machine to start the load when a movement and light caught his attention out of the corner of his eyes. When Stiles twisted to look, it was to the sight of a cop car pulling up to the curb outside. He ducked his head, torn between hiding behind a machine, even taking refuge in the bathroom or just acting naturally. There was a time when Stiles wouldn’t have reacted with anything but curiosity– but being a juvenile offender who had skipped out on his probationary conditions tended to make one nervous. Especially when one cop seemed to hold a particular interest in him.

Please be going to the convenience store, he silently prayed as the car door swung open and an officer stepped out. It was too late to hide without it being obvious exactly what he was doing. So Stiles sank into one of the bright orange chairs affixed to the wall and pulled out his library book, trying to act natural. He bounced his leg up and down nervously, turning to casually look towards the front of the room just as the door opened, the bells above it ringing, sounding like an off-key choir of senior citizens.

“Fuck,” he muttered under his breath the second his brain registered officer browns. Okay, just read your book, be polite, act natural, he coached himself, willing his leg to still. The door closed and he tried to appear disinterested as he listened to the sound of slow footsteps across the linoleum. His heart raced. He read the same sentence in his book over and over again. He didn’t look up until he felt the shadow of the cop, seconds before his feet appeared in front of him. He swallowed hard before looking up.

His blood ran cold the second he recognized Peter.
“It’s awfully late for a boy your age to be out on a school night.”

“What are you doing here?” the teen bit out.

“This particular area of the city has seen a rise in criminal activity in recent months,” the officer replied. “Break-ins, theft, vandalism…” he gestured around him to the sharpie scribbled chairs, and something Stiles hadn’t noticed yet– the smashed up security camera hanging onto the ceiling by a single wire. “The city is considering imposing a curfew on youths, which I think may be a bit harsh, but in the meantime, we’ve stepped up patrols in the area in order to make concerned business owners feel a bit more secure.”

“Right, and I’m sure that has nothing to do with the fact that a curfew would put a serious damper on your ability to pick up teenaged boys.”

The officer arched a brow in amusement. It made Stiles want to kick something.

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” Peter replied, reaching out a hand, fingers trailing down the side of Stiles’ cheek, cupping his jaw. “My interests are very… specific.”

Stiles jerked back in his seat, jerking his head away.

“What do you want?” he spat. “In case you haven’t noticed, I’m busy.” He gestured towards the single running washing machine. To his surprise, and fury, the officer sat down in the chair next to him.

“What I would really love right now, is a corn beef on rye with extra mustard from Keeva’s,” the officer replied nonchalantly. Stiles stared back at him in disbelief for a few seconds, jaw slack because what the hell was with this guy?

“Yeah, well you missed the meat train by like, five hours,” he finally replied in reference to the Deli down the street.

“I know,” Peter retorted, sounding genuinely wistful. “I’m going to have to settle for something pre-packaged from next door.”

Stiles had been thinking about heading over to the convenience store himself to grab something cheap, but now found his appetite completely and entirely absent.

“That still doesn’t explain what you’re doing here,” Stiles retorted. “You can’t be trying to tell me that all of this was a result of an epic hunt for a sandwich.” He turned to look at the cop, waiting for an explanation.

“I was on patrol and noticed your Jeep in the lot,” Peter replied smoothly, so smoothly that Stiles almost, almost didn’t catch the significance of his reply. He bristled, clenching his jaw. He should have known better than to think that Peter wouldn’t know about the vehicle.

“You know, I wonder,” Peter began, voice deceptively light, “if I were to ask you for proof of insurance, you would be able to provide it?”

It was a testament to his self-control that Stiles didn’t immediately belt the man, or run his mouth. He knew better than to call his bluff too. He sagged in defeat.

“What do you want Peter?” he repeated, voice tired. He turned to look at the man when he didn’t immediately reply and found him close, too close for comfort, his face twisted into the crook of Stiles’ neck. He could feel his breath, crawling, a thick fog across his skin when he replied.
“I want the assurance that you’ll come when called,” Peter purred. Stiles flinched, cursed himself for doing so.

“Yeah, well, I want the assurance that by the time you’re done with me, I won’t look or feel like I got hit by a car,” he retorted. He noticed he was still holding onto the battered library paperback and tossed it onto the seat next to him. Peter’s laugh was a low rumble in his chest.

“Is somebody feeling a little sore?” he breathed, still too close. When Stiles didn’t reply, a hand came up to cup the back of his neck, fingers brushing over the bite mark that still throbbed. The teen stilled completely, eyes fixed on the turned and twisting action of his clothes in the washer. The hand on his neck trailed down his arm to pick up a wrist– still displaying a bruised ring from too tight handcuffs. Stiles had had enough. He picked up the paperback from the seat beside him, slapped it against Peter’s chest.

“You want my assurance I’ll be there Thursday?” he growled. “Here, borrow my library book. I hate overdue fees.”

Peter’s calm and pervy façade dropped enough for him to chuckle.

“Does it help if I promise to be gentle this time my sweet boy?”

“Not really,” Stiles replied dryly.

The sound of static burst through the room loudly, breaking the haze of tension unexpectedly; dispatch paging all units to a robbery in progress– Stiles recognized the code. At the sound of the radio, Peter stood. He held the beat-up paperback in his hand for a few seconds, considering it before reaching down to place it on Stiles’ lap, fingertips brushing suggestively against the teen’s inseam.

“Duty calls,” he declared lightly.

“Good– go bust someone actually breaking the law,” Stiles replied, glaring. He bit his lip before speaking. “I’ll see you Thursday,” he mumbled. Peter’s lips spread into a predatory grin and before Stiles could stop him, the man dipped down inhumanly fast, sealing his lips over the teenager’s.

“That’s my good boy,” he praised when he pulled back.

Stiles waited until the cop had left– the door’s bells ringing a discordant farewell before he stood up and landed a frustrated, brutal kick to the washer in front of him. The buzzer blared like an angry cab driver’s horn the second his foot connected, his laundry done.
Whew, thank you everyone for all the love on this story so far. I've been writing like crazy on this and am now substantially ahead in draft form. As usual, I keep adding tags, but now that I am so far ahead in draft, I'm including tags that will apply to future chapters as well. I sometimes write ridiculous notes and updates on my tumblr, so feel free to visit me there.

Thursday morning, Stiles woke with a headache, feeling like he was hung over, but it wasn’t the bruising pain behind his eyeballs that woke him up so much as the ugly nausea. He managed to throw the trunk of the Jeep open with just enough time to dry heave over the leaves, nothing in his stomach to actually vomit up.

Tonight would be the night he met with Laura and hopefully found out what was going on with Scott. Maybe even see him.

Tonight would be the first official night of his and Peter’s arrangement.

He didn’t know which one made him more nervous.

Luckily, he had planned ahead. To keep his mind off of everything, he’d already made plans for the afternoon. He would go see his dad, then meet Lydia for a coffee before heading out for the night, because despite Peter’s stipulation about wanting Lydia for a coffee before heading out for the night, because despite Peter’s stipulation about wanting him untouched, he really had no way to demand that, and no way to know that Stiles wasn’t about to sacrifice an entire night’s earnings for the cop’s stupid ego. He vaguely wondered if Allison would be at the hospital while he was there before realizing that she was in school, so probably not. School. God, he’d remembered hating his science teacher– Harris and the feeling had most definitely been mutual. The only reason Stiles hadn’t flunked science was that he was smart. What he wouldn’t give to have Harris be his biggest problem right now.

Stiles was late to his coffee date with Lydia. It was at a small shop downtown that typically he would never set foot in– a little too hipster, a little too expensive for his tastes, but he supposed a little bit of the rich girl she used to be a few years ago was still alive and well in Lydia Martin. Stiles could see his friend from the street when he walked up, sitting at a table near the front of the cozy storefront, hands wrapped around a wide mug, fingernails tapping against it impatiently. She looked up when the door chimed, smiling, and damn if it didn’t feel good to feel the eyes of at least two other guys, not to mention the female barista, follow him to the table.

“Sorry I’m late,” Stiles apologized, holding back a grin of self-satisfaction. He and Lydia would never go anywhere– they’d barely gone there once, and he was firmly in the friend zone and fine with it. That didn’t mean everyone else in the room had to know it.

“its fine,” Lydia replied dismissively, tossing her head to the side, red hair cascading down her shoulder. “This just means you can buy my second latte.” Stiles sighed.
“All right, let me have it,” he replied, waiting for her order. As expected, it was a complicated mishmash of instructions that he had to repeat under his breath until he reached the barista to order.

“Anything else?” the petite Asian girl behind the desk asked. She was pretty, had a shy, lopsided smile not entire unlike Stiles’ own.

“Oh uh, yeah,” Stiles replied. He had almost forgotten his own order in trying to remember Lydia’s. “Can I just get an ordinary coffee?”

“Sure, do you want room?” the girl replied as she punched his order into the till.

“Huh?”

Her giggle was warm, friendly from across the till.

“Room for milk or cream,” she explained. “It’s all at the counter over there.” She gestured with her hand towards the end of the counter where another barista was busy behind an impressive looking espresso machine.

“Oh yeah– sorry, yes, I like cream.”

By the time Stiles made it back to the table with his ordinary coffee– 3 sugars with cream– he was worried Lydia wasn’t going to get the chance to see her latte– which had a cat– drawn? Painted? Poured?– into the foam. When he set it down in front of her she made a pleased expression before lifting the cup to take a sip.

“Did I ever tell you why I dropped out of school?” she asked nonchalantly. The subject was so random that it was actually a welcome distraction from the prickling nervous sensation in Stiles’ gut that was getting worse by the hour. Nonetheless, his stomach lurched. Lydia had left school not long before him, just disappearing during winter break in freshman year never to return.

“It’s not really my business Lyd, you don’t have to tell me–”

“Its fine,” the redhead replied with a dismissive wave of her hand, her expression now more serious, pinched and hesitant, like she was girding herself for the worst possible reaction.

“I’d been having… problems,” she said carefully. “I’m sure you remember the time that your dad…”

“Found you wandering in the woods?”

“Naked,” Lydia added dryly. And yeah, Stiles didn’t need to be reminded of that one. At the time, he’d had a serious crush on Lydia, complete with a five year plan to woo her away from Jackson. It had taken him months to stop thinking about her every time he jacked off and probably only then because he felt supremely guilty about it afterwards every time.

“Yeah, uh, you don’t need to remind me about that part,” Stiles replied, face flushed. He’d tagged along with his dad on that call, his dad being fine with it because Stiles knew Lydia. And of course, they didn’t know she was naked at the time of the missing call.

“Well, the reason I didn’t come back to school wasn’t because I was embarrassed,” Lydia replied, one eyebrow raised in Stiles’ direction, effectively calling him out with the miniscule facial expression. “I mean, turning up naked in the woods is a little… uncomfortable, but not the end of the world. However my parents thought it was…” She cleared her throat softly, swallowed, continued. It
was the only time Stiles had ever really seen his friend need to gather her composure.

“Apparently, having a genius for a child only goes so far. I was still an embarrassment.” Stiles felt a pang of sympathy in his stomach. Lydia had always been smarter than she let on. While Stiles had been smart and, frankly, a bit of a smart ass, Lydia was better at playing the game than he had been. Teachers had always seen her as witty, intelligent, and socially advanced. Stiles, on the other hand, was the Sheriff’s kid who was too smart for his own good and never seemed to manage to keep control over his mouth. If anyone had been an embarrassment to their parents, it was him, and his dad had never made him feel that way.

“What I didn’t know at the time was, my parents were struggling to hang on financially and therefore, socially. They’d made some bad investments and were desperate to hide it, to keep up appearances. They sent me to Eichen House to ‘recover’ while they, I assume, tried to recover themselves. I’m not sure they ever really did.”

Stiles’ breath hitched and his chest felt tight at the bombardment of information. Eichen House was the psychiatric facility at the edge of town. The place had always given him the creeps… largely because the buildings were so old and let’s face it, full of crazy people. It had been around since the early 1900s. To think that Lydia had been there… she didn’t fit, he knew she didn’t.

“Wait… what do you mean you assume?” Stiles asked. Lydia took a sip of her latte before replying.

“When my parents came to get me, I wanted nothing to do with them. I let them sign me out. Two weeks later, I left home and I haven’t been back,” she replied matter-of-factly. “To be fair, they haven’t bothered to try and get to me. They moved out of Beacon Hills, I stayed here, you know the rest. But things change.”

“You know, you are really good at being cryptic,” Stiles replied. He felt a surge of guilt for his friend. What kind of parents could do that to their own child?

“My grandmother died,” Lydia replied softly. And just like that, her entire demeanor changed from hard to the soft, teenaged girl she actually was. She set her cup down on the table, toyed with the handle. “I don’t know why… but she left me everything. Skipped my mom completely.”

“She must have liked you,” Stiles found himself saying and wanted to reach out and smack himself for sounding so stupid.

“She did,” Lydia said with a soft smile. “She was the only one who came to visit me at Eichen House—she was the only other person who knew I was there. In return, I kept visiting her in the nursing home, even after she kind of… lost it. I feel like I kind of owed it to her.”

They sat in silence for a second. Stiles wanted to reach across the table and grab Lydia’s hand, even in just a friendly way to let her know he was there.

“My parents are contesting the will,” she said, more to the window than to Stiles. She turned to stare back at him and when she did, her eyes were alight with determination. “They want to prove my grandmother wasn’t in her right mind when she made it and place the money in a ‘trust account’ until I turn 21. And if I know them, by then, it will be gone. So I plan to win, and when I do, you and I are going to move in together into my grandmother’s cabin. You will get a job that covers your dad’s care without having to worry about rent.”

A lump grew in Stiles’ throat so big he found it hard to swallow. He choked down a mouthful of way too scalding hot chocolate to try and quell the feeling.
“What?” he replied hoarsely.

“We’re getting you out of… what you’re doing now. We’re both getting out of this. Hopefully six months from now, neither one of us will ever see the inside of a Comfort Plus room again.”

For a few, fleeting seconds, Stiles allowed himself hope, allowed himself to imagine what it would be like to wake up in the middle of the night and stumble through a house to an actual toilet instead of the nearest tree to pee, what it would be like to work a crappy factory job or waiting tables, knowing he had no rent, just his dad to take care of. Maybe he could get his GED, go to school eventually…

Then reality, dark and suffocating in its cold gripped his chest. Peter. What would he do about Peter?

“Lydia that’s… I don’t know what to say,” he croaked, hoping it came off as gratitude instead of panic.

“Don’t thank me yet,” Lydia replied. “I haven’t won, and we’re going to have to start hitting the library pretty hard to study up on the law. I have a court appointed Guardian Ad Litem, but she can’t do everything…”

By the time Stiles left the coffee house, his head was spinning. He was happy for his friend, but couldn’t bring himself to share the same sense of hope. Not while Peter was around. He agreed to help her study various cases for precedent over the next several weeks, starting the next day, they chatted more, made plans his heart just couldn’t bring itself to be in, and then they parted ways for the night—Stiles to see if he could take a few jobs before he had to meet up with Peter, and Lydia to head back to her place and plot her case.

A few hours later, Stiles stood in the parking lot of the Comfort Plus staring up at room 216 with a feeling of dread growing in the pit of his stomach. He glanced around the lot, hoping in vain that Peter wasn’t there yet but when his eyes fell on the shiny black sedan identical to the one from last week, all hope died. Though he knew that Peter knew what he drove, he’d still parked the car a couple of blocks away in a convenience store parking lot. Not near the hike that the Walmart of the movie theatre were, but not near the security either. However, he wasn’t counting on being in any sort of condition to walk too far after a night with the officer. Taking a deep, resolute breath, he did what he seldom let himself do: he let anger boil up to just below the surface, and stomped across the parking lot towards the flight of stairs leading to the second floor. When he reached the door— with every intention of ripping it open— he was caught off guard by the sudden arc inward that it made just as he’d reached for the knob. It swung wide open, revealing Peter, framed in the doorframe. He was dressed casually; dark jeans, a dark blue v-neck, clearly off duty, and wore a mildly amused facial expression. It was unnerving, like he knew exactly when Stiles had gotten to the door and was thrilled at ruining his ability to fling the door open the way he’d wanted.

“You’re late,” the man greeted.

Stiles shouldered his way past Peter without reply, stomping into the room until he was roughly in the center. He started resolutely at the wall beside the bathroom door as he unzipped his hoodie with shaking hands, tossed it to the floor, moved onto his t-shirt, his shoes, his socks. He had just moved onto the button and fly on his jeans when he heard an amused chuckle behind him.

“My, we are eager tonight,” Peter purred, coming up behind the teenager to rest his hands on the boy’s hips. Stiles stilled, goosebumps breaking out across his skin, raising the hair on his arms. He so desperately wanted to growl something about getting the whole thing over with, but he had a feeling
if he did, Peter would only make it last longer and tonight, he just couldn’t afford that, so he bit his
tongue, let his hands drop to his sides to allow Peter’s to roam over the planes of his stomach. One
hand drifted down, teasing just under the waistband of his boxers while the other slid up Stiles’ bare
chest slipped around his neck, fingers crawling across his scalp. A split second before he did it,
Stiles’ realized Peter’s intentions. When his head snapped back from the yank to his hair, he barely
flinched.

“I don’t think you understand the importance of upholding your end of our arrangement,” Peter
lectured lightly. “Being late was strike one.”

Stiles stomach clenched nervously. He was caught up in a battle of wills with himself. On the one
hand, he wanted to show Peter just how unwilling he was to participate in all of this by being his
usual sarcastic– sometimes even combative– self. On the other hand, part of him reasoned that just
keeping his head down and getting through this was the best road to go. He swallowed before
answering.

“Sorry,” he replied, voice dull, slightly choked from the angle of his neck. It must have been good
enough because Peter relinquished his grip on Stiles’ hair, refocusing his attention to running his
nose from the edge of Stiles shoulder up to just below his ear.

“You’ve been with other men tonight,” he said lightly. Stiles tried to ignore the chilling sensation
spreading across his chest.

“What?” he stated dumbly, mind racing. Had Peter followed him? Suddenly Peter’s grip on his hips
turned harsh and Stiles let out a hiss more out of irritation than pain.

“I am going to give you one opportunity to answer my question truthfully.” Peter’s tone was
deceivingly light, but his harsh grip on Stiles’ hips gave away his true feelings. “Were you with other
men tonight?” Each word was spoken slowly, deliberately, like each was its own sentence.

Stiles could feel his anger simmering beneath the surface.

“You don’t own me,” he retorted. “Before I get here, I’ll do whatever the fuck I want.” Peter sucked
Stiles’ left earlobe into his mouth where he tugged the tender flesh in between his teeth without
applying any pressure.

“Yes, or no,” the man murmured around the tender flesh between his teeth.

Stiles debated the merits and flaws of the truth versus a lie. If he told the truth, Peter may get angry.
Then again, he may just appreciate hearing Stiles tell the truth because it meant he had more control.
If Stiles lied, it meant not giving Peter that glory, but it also meant hedging a bet that Peter hadn’t
been watching him to know that Stiles was lying. He could get away with it. Then again, would
Peter believe him? In short, he was fucked. Stiles barked out a laugh– one that sounded sick, wrong.

“You think you’re the only one who can break rules?” he badgered. “What about tying me–”

Peter bit hard into the tender flesh at the same time that his arms wrapped around Stiles’ torso,
pinning his arms to his sides. Stiles jerked his head to the side in a pained attempt to get away, the
only result was more pain as the tender piece of skin pinched through Peter’s teeth.

“You fucking–” Stiles growled right before Peter’s teeth recaptured Stiles’ skin, this time at the back
of his neck, over the previous bite mark, still bruised and sore.

“Yes!”
Stiles answer sounded like it had been exhaled through a punch to the gut. He felt sick, when he really thought about things, thought about the amount of traffic his body saw on a weekly basis. Though he figured, that was probably the point of this.

Peter made a tutting noise with his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

“That’s strike two.”

Stiles sagged in submission. He didn’t want to know what Peter would do to him if he stepped even an inch out of line, and tonight he didn’t want to push things that far with his meeting with Laura on the line. A connection with Laura meant a connection with Scott, and Stiles couldn’t risk losing that. Peter dropped his arms leaving Stiles to stagger a few feet forward.

“Go take a shower, when you’re done, I want you on your hands and knees on the bed.”

At least the expectation was clear, and the night seemed to be moving along at a pace Stiles could manage. The sooner he got this over with, the better. He fumbled with the button and fly of his jeans before shoving them down his legs, took a deep breath and shoved his boxers down too.

The shower was at least, gloriously warm. Stiles carefully monitored his time, enjoying the reprieve from Peter and the feeling of tension leaving his muscles, but also very aware of what waited for him in the other room– especially if he took too long. The cop was hard to read. Stiles got the sense that he was part of a complicated game of which he knew very few of the rules. He was just going to have to play along long enough to figure out how remove himself from the situation or better yet, beat Peter at his own game.

When Stiles emerged from the bathroom, towel cinched tightly around his waist, Peter was lounged against the headboard, shirtless and reading a book.

“Catching up on ‘Corruption for Dummies’?” Stiles quipped from a safe distance away, still hovering in the doorway to the bathroom. Peter looked up, slowly closing the book to set it on the bedside table, a predatory grin spreading across his features like an oil slick on water. Stiles lopsided smirk dropped immediately from his face at the gaze Peter fixed on him and his stomach churned with anxiety.

“Come over here.” It wasn’t an invitation. Stiles took a steadying breath before striding across the room. He felt like a spooked deer, but that didn’t mean he had to act the part. Peter’s eyes raked over Stiles’ naked torso before the man reached out the pull at the towel wrapped around the teen’s waist, his intentions two-fold and clear. While Peter moved gracefully, moving away from the headboard to make room, Stiles clambered, slightly off-balance, moving away from the headboard to naturally ending up on his knees– exactly as Peter had wanted him. He concentrated on breathing, in through his nose, out through his mouth, eyes on his hands in front of him, balanced on his knees and elbows. A finger traced down his spine, slowly, lightly, making him shiver.

“Use a condom this time asshole,” he bit out. Peter made a sound of mock-offense.

“Are you implying that I didn’t?” the man asked.

“You got your spunk all over me last time so yeah, I am,” Stiles retorted, braving a glance over his shoulder to see Peter sliding his pants down. His body was muscular, and radiated power like an apex predator. To an ordinary person out in a bar, the man was probably quite the catch. To Stiles it felt like he was dealing with someone who had the manipulative prowess of a human, the raw,
predatory power of an animal. It was a dangerous combination.

“Well,” Peter began matter-of-factly, “I’ll have you know that I followed your rules the entire time I was inside of you,” he paused, smiled fondly at the memory, “Both times in fact. I removed the condom afterwards– call it the heat of the moment. Besides, you can’t catch anything by getting semen on your skin– or you’d be a cesspool of disease by now.”

Stiles turned away to hide the burning shame he could feel manifesting in his cheeks.

“You know what? Fuck–”

Peter thrust in, one fluid, brutal stroke, bottoming out so quickly Stiles felt like he’d been punched.

“Fuck!” he groaned, collapsing forward, clawing at the bed sheets, forehead grazing the pillow in front of him. His breath came in ragged pants. Behind him, Peter groaned.

“I guess it was only your mouth that was busy earlier,” the cop quipped, the end of his sentence marred by a dark chuckle. Stiles couldn’t breathe let alone respond. At least he knew Peter was wearing a condom– his entry wouldn’t have even been possible without the scant amount of lube a rubber provided. When Peter moved to withdraw Stiles threw a hand out behind him, grappling for the man’s hip.

“Don’t.” His own voice sounded utterly broken. He hated himself for it. He almost hated himself more for not just parking his Jeep in the motel lot because unless Peter let up, the walk to it was going to be agonizing. Peter paused, halfway out. Stiles could feel the moment of tension in the air and knew that the next couple of seconds meant everything in terms of how the night was going to go.

“Please,” he croaked. He couldn’t help but think of the first night, the brutal punishment he had taken then and the days it took to recover after. Then immediately to Peter’s false promise from the night at the laundromat.

A feather light touch to his hip. He flinched and the grip grew more firm, but not by any means rough. Slowly, more carefully than Stiles thought Peter was capable of, the man withdrew.

“Jesus Christ are you new?” Stiles panted, after several seconds, turning to glare over his shoulder.

“No but you certainly feel that way,” Peter retorted, voice coloured by lust. Thankfully, he was spreading lube over his erection.

“So I’ve been told,” Stiles muttered. His sense of humor immediately left him at the feel of a hand on his hip again. When he felt the tip of Peter’s erection bump against his entrance, he shrank away– to the result of the grip on his hip growing much firmer. Peter draped himself over Stiles’ back.

“Take a deep breath,” he ordered. Stiles did as he was told, doing his best to control his exhale when Peter slowly pushed back in. His arms shook, the angle of them revealing just how much the teen didn’t want this as he fought the urge to pull away, at war with the desire not to make the predator behind him– inside him– angry.

“Deep breathing isn’t going to– oh fuck,” Stiles whimpered, felt his arms waver tellingly. He had just enough time to control his fall forward so that he didn’t land on his face with his arms bunched under him.

Peter hammered into him. Stiles arms found their way under the pillow, fingers clawing the lumpy foam, nails scratching against cotton. He squeezed his eyes shut, buried his face in his only source of
comfort. The room filled with the sounds of his own staggered breathing, whines of pain, and the thud of flesh on flesh. When Peter grabbed for Stiles hips again, to pull him into his thrusts, the teen dissolved into the prey role he’d been trying so hard to avoid.

“Stopstopstop!” he cried out, voice rushed and hoarse. He relinquished his grip on the pillow in favor of grabbing for the edge of the mattress to use as leverage to haul himself out from under the man on top of him. He didn’t understand it– Peter wasn’t that much bigger than him– they stood at about the same height, and though Peter was more muscular than Stiles was, his strength was almost inhuman. In short, Stiles was completely at his mercy.

Thankfully the man listened, slowing his thrusts to a shallow grind as he leaned over, lips next to Stiles’ ear.

“Apparently, this position can be excellent for prostate stimulation,” he purred, not even panting from exertion. A hand slipped around Stiles’ pelvis, groping at his limp penis. “But perhaps you favor a different position?”

Stiles scrunched his eyes closed, channeling his fear and pain into rage.

“If you think any position you put me in is going to get me off you have delusions of grandeur,” he bit out. Peter made a light noise of amusement before slowly withdrawing. Stiles stayed where he was, watching with wary eyes as Peter moved out from behind him.

“Move over,” Peter commanded, as he moved to reposition himself, one hand gently nudging at Stiles’ side until the teen reluctantly pulled himself up on his elbows, then hands and knees. The officer’s next order came softer; “Come here.” Peter sat against the headboard in a position nearly identical to the one he’d been in while reading and Stiles knew right away what he wanted.

It wasn’t like other clients didn’t request Stiles ride them– they did, just as much as any other position– but the idea of having to look Peter in the eye while he did it was nauseating; The idea of refusing… downright frightening. So he crawled forwards, noting that yes, Peter was wearing a condom– thank God– until he was in approximately the right position. He kept his eyes glued to a tiny tear in the wallpaper just above the headboard and to the right of Peter’s head, felt Peter reach between them to position himself.

“Since you’re so sure I can’t– what do the kids say these days– get you off?” Peter teased, “I’ll leave things in your capable…”

Stiles eyes snapped to the officer’s face.

“Don’t say it or I will hit you so help me God,” he growled. Peter just raised an eyebrow in challenge.

“So what now? Are you not going to let me go until I come too? How romantic,” he snarked. He winced as Peter pressed forward and used one hand to tug his hip downward. He gasped, scrunching his eyes closed despite himself, pressing his forehead into the headboard until his body adjusted to the discomfort. When his eyes snapped open again, Peter was studying him.

“Good?” he dared ask, and that’s when Stiles realized…

“You can not be serious!” he squirmed, trying to move away from Peter, who quickly captured both of his arms in his hands. If the night wasn’t over until he got off he was never going to get out of this room.

“You’re a professional,” Peter said smoothly, “I’m sure you’ll manage.”
“Oh fuck you!”

“That’s the idea…”

It felt like an eternity. Stiles’ hips and back ached, his thighs shook from exertion, even his stomach muscles hurt from continuously levering himself up and down. He felt like a broken carousel ride. Peter had the stamina of a porn star. Both of them were covered in sweat by the time Stiles’ brain managed to cobble together enough signals of pleasure to actually maintain an erection. Peter’s hands rested on his ass, kneading and squeezing with each thrust until one of them drifted, tickling across the teen’s pelvis until long fingers wrapped around his erection.

“Want some help?” he purred.

Stiles smacked his hand out of the way, afraid he’d lose what little physical arousal his body had mustered and make himself suffer longer.

“Just get off already,” he spat bitterly.

“I could say the same for you. For a young man, your stamina is very impressive.”

“I think you’ve confused ‘stamina’ with ‘utter lack of consent or interest,’” Stiles retorted angrily, to which Peter outright laughed. It made Stiles want to put his fist through the wall. Or Peter’s face. Suddenly a hand was in his hair, directing him.

Peter’s lips crashed against his, a kiss that was just as much teeth as it was tongue. Stiles was just about to jerk away when Peter suddenly changed angles, driving into him at just the right trajectory to brush his prostate—not a direct hit, but enough to make the teenager shudder. Peter’s smile was smug as he returned both hands to Stiles’ hips, adjusting his position before he thrust in again. Stiles barely held in his groan. On the one hand, this was a good thing. It would be over faster. On the other hand, Stiles couldn’t believe the betrayal of his own body. He couldn’t help but feel like he was sitting in his Jeep, watching helplessly as another version of himself sat in the driver’s seat, manically laughing as they hurtled towards a tree.

It was like Peter knew the second Stiles passed the point of no return. The older man took complete control, relentlessly slamming into the same spot. Stiles tried to fight it, tried to push himself away, struggled against the officer until he pitched backwards, off balance. Peter though, moved swiftly, following the momentum. His erection slipped free from Stiles’ hole for only a few seconds while the teen scrambled to sort out his limbs. When he pushed home again, it was at precisely the right angle. Stiles struggled to push the rising heat down, but like bile it rose, acidic and bitter and completely unwanted. He squeezed his eyes closed, wincing at the feeling of the first droplets of his own release hit his stomach and chest.

That seemed to be enough to set Peter off. Before Stiles had even finished ejaculating, Peter grabbed the teen’s thighs, practically folding him in half before powering into him for a handful of thrusts before groaning, and collapsing forward, his hips in a slow grind until he’d ridden his orgasm out.

Stiles knew better than to move. He stayed completely still, for once in his life, found it easier than constantly moving. He didn’t want to move. He wanted some black hole to open below the bed and swallow him alive.

“I have one more question…” Peter panted, pulling back enough to look at the teenager’s face.

“If you ask me if it was good, so help me God I will punch you in the face.” Peter smiled softly for a
moment before his face drastically changed– like one of those transitioning billboards.

“Who did you tell about this arrangement?”
There ARE Wolves in California

Chapter Notes

I promised myself I would not upload another chapter until I could say this: Derek is in my draft form! (Finally).

So that means he is not this elusive figure that just shows up for the last couple of chapters just so that I could tag this Sterek because seriously, I love me some Sterek. Especially porny Sterek.

That being said, in the words of Dumbledore; "Dark and difficult times lie ahead". I'm sorry. On the upside, this is one of the lighter chapters? Enjoy!

The air felt thick. Stiles’ mind raced. He hadn’t told anyone? Had he? His mind raced. Had he said something to Lydia, had Peter followed him all day… no he hadn’t said a thing, he was sure of it…

One. His father’s voice, firm, but kind like it always was. Deep breath in kiddo, try again. One. A shuddering inhale, a shaking exhale. Good, now two. Every time he had a panic attack, a way of talking him down.

“No, I didn’t, I didn’t tell anyone,” his voice shook, and for a few terrifying seconds, Peter’s blue eyes bore into him, his expression giving nothing away. And then…

“Good boy.” Peter leaned forward, brushed the hair that had pasted itself to Stiles’ forehead out of the way and kissed him. Stiles for the most part, lay still as a stone.

When Peter pulled away, Stiles struggled to a seated position at the side of the bed, a noise of disgust escaping him when he realized he was still covered in his own cum. He grabbed for his discarded towel by the bed, still slightly damp and scrubbed at his skin.

“Join me for a shower?” Peter invited. Stiles glanced at the bedside clock. 12:30am. Laura may very well be at the school already, but then again, they hadn’t really set a time. It had been closer to 1:00am the last time they’d met. He really didn’t want to walk around for any length of time smelling like a brothel, especially when he was supposed to meeting someone. And it wasn’t like he could excuse himself for a quick shower if Laura was there when he got there.

“Shower only?” Stiles confirmed warily. Peter’s lips rose to a lopsided sneer.

“Up for round two already?”

Stiles threw his towel to the floor.

“Forget it,” he muttered, standing slowly, staggering towards his discarded clothing between the bathroom door and the armchair beside it. He’d risk taking a shower at the school or not getting one at all over subjecting himself to the Peter again. The officer’s arms wrapped around his waist when he bent to pick up his jeans, and the teen immediately stilled.

“Just a shower,” Peter murmured in his ear. “No sense getting dirty while we get clean.”
“I don’t trust you,” Stiles retorted.

“Suit yourself,” Peter replied, releasing him. “Join me and you’ll feel quite refreshed, don’t and I’ll just have to wait until next week to get out the rest of my…” he tilted his head to the side as if waiting for the right word to just drop into his ear… “frustration.”

It was nearly 1:30am by the time Stiles pulled into his hiding place behind the dumpster at the school. His stomach was twisted in knots. He’d caved to the feeling of his skin crawling, the mingling sweat of his and Peter’s on his skin and taken a shower with the man. He was sure that by now, Laura had to be long gone. While Peter hadn’t insisted on another round, he had definitely been a lot more hands on than he had to be in the shower, and that had put Stiles behind. Nonetheless, it was with some hope that Stiles circled round the back of the school and went to his usual window, slithered inside, albeit clumsier than usual. He landed harshly on the tiled floor of the boy’s locker room, crying out at the jolt of pain that felt like an electrical current racing through him to settle uncomfortably at his core. He drew in a hissed breath and limped forward a couple of steps. As tempting as it was to call out for Laura, it would be just his luck that this would be the night someone distinctly not Laura would be in the building. He leaned back against the tile for a few seconds, eyes closed, willing himself to calm down. The apprehension he felt about Laura, their meeting was making his stomach clench nervously, and in turn, that made the dull ache left in Peter’s wake much worse. Finally, Stiles steeled himself to move, to look around for Laura, tipped his head and opened his eyes, looking in the direction of the locker bay.

He nearly jumped out of his skin.

Laura stood a few feet away right in the wide doorway between the showers and the rest of the locker room looking much the same as she had the other night. Her long dark hair was still wavy and wild looking and she was wearing the same heavy looking boots, however this time she wore a pair of faded blue jeans and a baggy burgundy sweater that looked moth-eaten but in a way that Stiles’ supposed was meant to be fashionable. This time though, the woman looked guarded, tense. “Stiles?” She took a few aborted steps towards him, like she was fighting herself along the way. A hand reached out, dropped. “Are you okay?”

Shit, was he that obvious?

“Hi– I yeah, I’m fine,” he replied with a shrug, pushed away from the wall. Laura didn’t look one hundred percent convinced, but she nodded nonetheless.

“I checked the place out, there’s nobody here, why don’t we talk somewhere other than the boy’s locker room?” she suggested, nodding in the direction of the exit. “It smells rank in here,” she added, wrinkling her nose.

“Sure,” Stiles agreed, pushing off the wall. He couldn’t smell anything but the chlorine bleach smell that seemed to cling to everything in the locker room like a thin film but then again, he was a teenage guy, maybe he was somewhat immune to the smell.

He followed Laura towards the exit with some trepidation. He’d never had the guts to wander around the rest of the school at night, too worried about some sort of security or custodian catching him trespassing to venture past the locker room or once, Finstock’s office.

“Where’s Scott?” he couldn’t help but ask after Laura had stepped ahead of him out into the gym hallway and checked that the coast was clear.
“I promised you answers and I will give them to you, but it’s a long story,” she replied, keeping her eyes glued ahead of her as she marched ahead. Though she was shorter than him, Stiles found he was having to keep a much brisker pace than he expected. He could feel the muscles in his legs screaming, already over-exerted from earlier in the night. He wanted to ask for a break, to sit down, but he didn’t.

In the darkness they passed through the High school halls and Stiles felt like a ghost. They passed by his and Scott’s old lockers, the front office. He could feel himself slowing, whether it was from his aching body or nostalgia, he couldn’t be sure.

“This way,” Laura commanded after a few minutes, reaching behind her to haul Stiles around a corner, heading towards the library, but the second her hand wrapped around his forearm, she gasped, dropping his limb like he was on fire. She whipped around to look at him, eyes wide and… well not surprised but… wounded almost.

“You’re hurt.” A crease appeared in her brow, marring her otherwise young complexion. Stiles heart stuttered and stalled. How did she know? He had to have been limping… something. God, he was worse than he thought, Peter was worse than he thought.

“I– I’m fine,” he replied lamely. “I just… I want to know what’s going on with Scott.” He tried not to sound like he was pleading. Laura’s expression softened. She nodded, shrugging in the direction of the library doors in front of her.

“In here.”

The library was downright creepy in the dark and the windows on the back wall did nothing to mitigate that fact. The rows of books made for too many blind corners and dark cavernous looking spaces for Stiles’ liking. Laura headed to a low table and set of couches and chairs near the window and Stiles realized that her plan was actually pretty smart even if he didn’t like the location; The library windows overlooked the school parking lot and front steps, making it easy to spot trouble from a safe distance– like a police cruiser or security truck on patrol.

She sat down, eyes out the window and Stiles followed suit. For one very long minute, Laura just seemed to stare at the table, her hands folded in front of her, hanging loosely between her knees. Stiles picked at the rolled seam of the vinyl covered couch, impatient but not wanting to be rude.

“How did you get hurt?” Laura asked softly.

“How do you know I’m hurt? I’m fine,” Stiles replied stubbornly. He wasn’t about to make up excuses for a stranger– nor pour his heart out to one. Laura sighed, looking unconvinced, but she continued.

“One of the things they always told us in school was that in order to have a person trust you, it’s best that you tell them a few things about yourself first,” she began, finally lifting her head to make eye-contact. Stiles immediately stopped picking at the couch arm at the intensity of her stare. “So that’s what I’m going to do.” She seemed to wait for an objection, Stiles gave none.

“I know that you already know what happened to my family,” she began again. Stiles hesitated before nodding.

“My brother and I decided we couldn’t stay here anymore. There was just too much pain– especially for him. Beacon Hills didn’t have anything for us anymore except an uncle who would never be the same again. So we left– went to New York because I’d been accepted to college there. We got an apartment together and shared until Derek finished high school, then went our separate ways. I knew
I would end up back here one day. Derek though, he never wanted to come back. Refuses to come back– he’s still in New York, unless I tell him I need him here. It’s been seven years since we left.” She paused, looked down at her hands as if they held her next sentence and Stiles didn’t bother her, didn’t interject with the usual barrage of questions and ‘get to the point’ kind of statements that he normally would.

“I came back the first time because something didn’t feel right.” She glanced up. “A few days before, I woke up from a nightmare. It wasn’t vivid, but when I woke up I felt angry, out of control. I could practically taste the blood in the air and everything was red, red, red.” She ran both hands through her hair, smoothing the wild waves back before they rebelliously leapt back up the second her hands moved. “Something made me come back here. Call it my conscience, I don’t know. My uncle was in a long term care residence and I had to check on him, had this feeling. When I got here, the town was crazy. There had been an incident they said.” She looked pained when she looked at him. “The night of my dream, almost everyone at the police station died… except for your father.” She winced as she said it. Stiles was only mildly surprised that she knew. If she’d been talking to Scott, it would have been easy to connect Stiles to the sheriff without ever having asked him about it.

Stiles swallowed, letting the information sink in. Okay, so she was some sort of clairvoyant or something. He’d read a bunch of old case studies from the seventies, back when they believed in that stuff… it wasn’t that far-fetched. When Stiles didn’t say a word, Laura kept talking.

“I went and checked on my uncle because I was in town. I still felt… guilty, for leaving him behind you know? I mean, I knew he wasn’t in there anymore, but I never felt right leaving him alone.” She had no idea how much those words rang true to Stiles.

“After I checked on him, I decided to get him transferred closer to Derek and me so that we could visit more often. The transfer would take a few months while they found space in a facility in New York, so I just held tight, waited for all the paperwork to go through. Everything was fine, a place in a private care home had been found and we just needed to finish arranging transport– and that’s when my uncle Peter went missing. Just up, gone, vanished. It was like my uncle walked right out of the hospital one day. I got a call that he was just gone.” Stiles couldn’t help but bristle at the name though he knew it was just a name, wasn’t the same person. This Peter was a brutally burned arson victim, his Peter was a brutally manipulative officer of the law.

“The hospital searched, sent out the police, everything. I mean, how hard could it have been to find a man who was in a catatonic state with burns covering three-quarters of his body right?” She paused, looking back down at her hands.

“They found remains in the woods a couple of months ago they think. They can’t conclude anything, but partial dental records indicate they could be my uncle. He wasn’t really you know, in there anymore, but he was able to walk around. The police think he must have just wandered off one day.” Stiles winced.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized softly. He couldn’t imagine losing his dad that way, or worse yet, not even knowing for certain that his dad was gone.

“Don’t be,” she replied with a sigh. “I think– I think I felt like he was gone years ago. This just… made it feel a bit more permanent. That leads us to now though… You have to promise, whatever I say next, that you will hear me out, that you will try your best to believe me, even though you won’t want to, might not be able to.”

Stiles felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. Now was when he had to pay attention. He nodded.
“Yeah– I’ll– I can do that,” he replied. Laura, for her part, didn’t look entirely convinced.

“How much do you know about the Hales?” she asked. It seemed like a random departure. Stiles made a non-committal gesture, shrugging. He knew about the fire, and now all of this…

“My family has been in Beacon Hills for several generations, enough to say that they’ve been here since before there even was a Beacon Hills. Ask me why or how.”

Stiles shrugged, not sure where this was going, but decided to humor the young woman.

“Okay how…?”

“It’s our territory,” Laura replied evenly.

And that, well that was not at all what Stiles had been expecting to hear, after all, the newspapers had all indicated that the Hales were quiet, unassuming folks. What Laura was insinuating was…

“Are you telling me your family is like, the Beacon Hills mob?” Stiles asked, raising one eyebrow in utter disbelief, “Because I call bullshit on that– no way.”

“No. We’re werewolves.”

The silence that bloomed between them hung like a thick fog as Stiles tried to make sense of what had just come out of the woman’s mouth.

“Pardon? I’m sorry, for a second there I thought you might have said werewolves.” His mind raced. For the first time, Stiles doubted Laura’s sanity.

“I did.”

A trickle of unease made its way from the back of Stiles’ neck down to the base of his spine.

“No,” he replied. Suddenly angry. Very, very angry. Laura Hale had lost it. She was insane. Obviously she somehow knew Stiles and Scott had been best friends but she probably had no idea where Scott was now. Best case scenario, her deluded brain made her think she did, worst case scenario, she was doing this to be cruel. He jumped up.

“No! You… you’re, oh my God you have lost it. I mean I know you’ve been though a lot but Jesus.” He started to back away, reached up and ran both of his hands through his hair. He couldn’t be in the same room as this woman. He was too angry, to crushed because he’d basically just lost his best friend again.

“Stiles.” It wasn’t a plea like he expected. Laura’s voice was surprisingly level and calm. She hadn’t even stood up to stop him from leaving. “My family is the Hale pack.” She stood slowly so that she could come closer to looking him in the eye though she was almost a foot shorter than he was. “We’re–”

“You’re not a fucking wolf okay?” Stiles almost shouted, hysterical. He was angry, confused, but most of all so fucking disappointed in himself for hoping for even a second that Scott was alive somewhere. “Wolves walk on four legs and have fucking fur, and a tail and they don’t live in California.”

His chest heaved and then furiously tightened. Shit, oh shit. This was the last thing he needed, a fucking panic attack in the school, at night, with a goddamned crazy person as his guide. He bent double, suddenly unable to breathe, gasping like a fish out of water.
“Stiles?”

Laura’s voice sounded distorted, underwater. He pitched off balance, blood rushing in his ears, fucking with his equilibrium. He sank to the couch, struggling to pull in air and exhale at the same time, frantic because he couldn’t seem to do either. His vision started to blacken around the edges.

“Stiles!”

A hand wrapped around his wrist, pushing his sweater up just slightly and then… it was the same effect as the “emergency” medication his doctor had reluctantly prescribed right after his mom died. A tranquil calm that washed in like a tidal wave, pulling panic away in the riptide, leaving Stiles safe on the shore. He opened his eyes slowly, sockets aching from the ferocious way he’d squeezed his eyes shut. Laura was sitting on the couch next to him, one hand on his arm. Her lips grimaced into a weak smile of reassurance.

“I was so afraid of this happening…” she said softly.

“You can’t be…” Stiles trailed, voice sounding far away. It felt like he was trying to pick information out of the white noise on a television screen.

“It is,” Laura replied calmly. “Let me show you…”

Stiles looked at Laura’s face, earnest, worried. She had clear, steel blue eyes that slowly intensified to purple before glowing like embers, dark, ruby red. Stiles moved to jerk away but Laura’s grip on his arm was suddenly like steel.

“I won’t hurt you,” she reassured. And the softness of her voice was so unexpected against the vivid red of her irises that seemed to come from Stiles’ worst nightmares.

It happened slowly. Her hairline seemed to push further down her forehead, her cheekbones became more angular, her ears pointed. Stiles didn’t want to look anymore, couldn’t believe what he was seeing. He looked away just as her incisors grew to sharp points, protruding out from between her lips. When he glanced down at his arm, it was to see it encased in a hand that was tipped with giant, lethal looking claws. He struggled to free himself for a second, heartbeat erratic, thumping a staccato rhythm against his ribs. He watched as slowly, so slowly, the claws seemed to retract back into human hands. By the time he looked up again, Laura’s face was back to normal—except for the glowing red eyes.

“Believe me now?” she asked, wry smile playing across her lips. Stiles found himself nodding and really, really hoping that this wasn’t the beginning of his descent into madness. Laura’s eyes smoothly transitioned back to their normal, steel grey blue.

They sat for several moments in silence as Stiles tried to parse what he’d just been told—shown. Everything he’d ever known to be true, wasn’t. Werewolves were a thing and not just a movie thing, but real, actual creatures that lived and breathed, and walked the earth with people and—

“So how does… how are you…?”

“I was born like this,” Laura supplied. Her demeanor had ever so slightly changed. The weariness and tension she had carried with her seemed to have bled away now that she knew Stiles believed her. “My entire family was made up of what we call born wolves… well there were some humans too but what I mean is that none of us were bitten to become what we are.”

“So that’s a thing?” Stiles replied, because now that his entire world view had been altered, he was curious. “Like you can get bit by a werewolf and be turned into one?”
Laura nodded.

“Our kind though, for the most part, leaves humans alone. We only bite those we feel would make good wolves and those who want to be bitten, who know about our kind and understand us, maybe marry into the family and seek a deeper connection. That’s why we have packs, territory. We protect the humans in our territory, as much as possible, from wolves who may not have the same values we do.”

Stiles let the information sink in before the purpose of the entire meeting reached up and smacked him in the face.

“What does any of this have to do with Scott?” he asked wearily, already dreading the answer. Laura swallowed.

“When I came back a couple of months ago,” Laura began, “I found your friend Scott. He attacked me in the woods. He’s a wolf, like me. Someone bit him, and left him.”

Stiles stared, jaw slack, trying to understand. His friend Scott, a werewolf… it didn’t seem real. Everything still felt very much like something out of a horror movie.

“It’s a horrible thing to do to a person if they don’t want to be bitten,” Laura explained, voice pained, “It’s cruel. When I met Scott he was almost… feral. He couldn’t control his shift at all. Kept wavering in and out of wolf, and human, and beta— that’s our half-form that I just showed you— and he couldn’t control it. And he was scared, so scared.” She shook her head. “He attacked me and ran off, and I’d give chase, trying to figure out who he was, smelling his fear and confusion, did it over and over again. I’d never dealt with anything like it— never expected to. Derek and I were our own small pack. We had no plans to expand any time soon. I never thought I’d have to teach someone how to… just be.” She shrugged. “I’m sure you get it at least a little bit now. It’s not like we run around telling every human what we are. It’s a complicated mess of a world. It’s dangerous, we keep to ourselves… but Scott, he was making things extremely dangerous for our kind.”

Stiles nodded because that he did understand. If Scott was a werewolf, like Laura said he was, and he didn’t have any control over himself, that meant people were at risk, that meant Laura and her kind were at risk… Scott…

“Scott is a danger to himself,” Stiles murmured. Laura nodded sadly before smiling weakly.

“Was,” she replied. “He’s… he’s learning. But it’s taken a lot of work. He struggles. I struggle. We fight because I’m not used to this… I need to back up… explain…."

And it was right then that Stiles saw how very human Laura was. And how young. She had to still be in her twenties… and here she was, acting like a parent.

“In the pack, there are roles— alpha, beta and omega. Most packs are composed of one to several betas, and a single alpha. Omegas are wolves that are packless. Many slip into a feral state and become dangerous. We need a pack Stiles. My mom— she was the alpha… until the fire.” Laura swallowed hard. “I still remember feeling it when I inherited her power. I felt something wrong and then suddenly there was this rush, a horrible, overwhelming feeling. I almost puked. Derek and I were on our way home from a party and I knew from the look on his face…” She trailed off. “The night of the fire, I became the Alpha of the Hale pack. The power isn’t something someone can choose. The position of alpha shifts to the person most capable of handling the role, at least, that’s what the lore says… and that was me. At eighteen.”

Stiles couldn’t understand it entirely, but he knew what it felt like to carry the world on your
shoulders because there wasn’t a choice.

“That brings me to Scott,” Laura continued. “I knew he didn’t understand what was going on, but one day my frustration and anger just boiled over. I turned around and… roared at him.”

Stiles pictured the MGM Lion, and with Laura’s sheepish expression, he couldn’t help but start to laugh.

“You what?” he asked through a fit of giggles. It was just so ridiculous, the cherry on top of the most weirdtastic sundae he’d ever been fed.

Laura raised an eyebrow, stood up, and backed away from Stiles. He watched her move out from the couches, back against a wall, had just opened his mouth to ask what she was doing when–

The sound was deafening at such close range. Stiles could feel the decibels vibrate through his chair like he was front-row centre at a rock concert. By the time the sound stopped, his heart was pounding. Laura straightened up again, returned to the couch across from Stiles.

“Shit,” he exclaimed. He pressed a palm to his heart, just in case it tried to make an escape attempt through his ribcage. He could cram it back in.

“Thing is, Scott didn’t take it like a challenge like I originally thought he would– like most other werewolves would have. If you think you just had a reaction– heart pounding, ears ringing… it worked on Scott. In fact more so on Scott than you. And it shouldn’t have. Scare him? Yes. Show him who owns this territory? Yes. But make him utterly surrender? That only happens when you’re a beta in a pack responding to your alpha.”

Stiles wrinkled his brow. Things weren’t adding up.

“You’re getting it now,” Laura replied, and Stiles nodded slowly.

“Someone from your pack bit Scott,” he replied, to which Laura nodded. “But it couldn’t have been you or your brother…” He looked up suddenly.

“Your uncle,” he said softly and Laura nodded.

“That’s what I am beginning to think, but I just don’t know how.”

“So where does this leave Scott?” Stiles replied. “I… he’s like a brother to me, I have to see him.”

“I understand,” Laura replied. “But Stiles… he’s not going to be the same guy you remember. He was alone for months.” At that, she sounded pained. “He was alone for months in a body that wasn’t his… just… think on that for a moment.”

Stiles tried, but the reality was just so wild. He couldn’t imagine being a human being one day, then suddenly, not, with no explanation as to why. As he started to think more and more, his heart clenched. If Scott was anything like Stiles, he’d probably watched as his own mom sold the house he’d lived in, moved away– seemed to move on from him. He had to have felt utterly powerless.

“Oh man,” he muttered, scraping a hand down his face. “Jesus he must be more fucked up than I am.” Laura winced.

“He’s going to be okay,” she comforted, “But… his control is shaky– especially around the full moon or too many people.”
Stiles glanced outside into the clear starry night, and his heart clenched painfully. The moon was bright, not quite full, another night and it would be.

“I don’t want him to hurt you,” Laura reasoned. “I know he doesn’t want to hurt you. He’s scared to death of it. He’s already had a close call…”

Stiles mind instantly went to the incident at the Hale property, the Lacrosse pitch…

“Two weeks ago here—” he blurted.

“That was us,” Laura confirmed, “fighting. He was angry with me because I wouldn’t let him reveal himself to you. He didn’t want to follow any sort of plan. And after what happened at my old house… when he had lost control.”

“Holy shit,” Stiles breathed.

“I want you to see your friend,” Laura replied, and Stiles believed her. “It would be good for Scott too. But I can’t let him right now. His control is just too shaky.”

“Where is he?” Stiles asked.

“I found a safe place to keep him,” Laura replied and at that Stiles looked panicked. “Relax— he’s there of his own volition,” Laura reassured. “I promise, as soon as he can handle it, I will bring him to you… or you to him. He’s beginning to do so well. Tonight, tonight he knew he’d barely be able to hang onto his control.”

Stiles watched as Laura leaned back against the back of the couch, lifting one thigh slightly to dig into the back pocket of her jeans.

“I promised him that I’d give you this,” she supplied as she handed a square of paper to Stiles from across the table. He took it with shaking hands just as Laura’s fingers dropped it, very suddenly.

“Someone’s here,” she said, not hissed or hurried, but calm. Stiles frantically looked towards the window where a security car had pulled up to the school. His heart skipped a beat, bounded forward.

“Shit,” he cursed again. “This can’t be happening, if he sees my Jeep…”

“He won’t,” Laura said calmly. In the moment that Stiles had been occupied looking out the window, Laura had acted. She had a computer monitor in her arms.

“I’m afraid we’re going to have to continue this another night,” she said calmly. “Next week, same night?”

Stiles nodded dumbly. He figured out her plan at the precise moment that she lifted the monitor, levering it in her hands for a few seconds before she hurled the machinery at the library window with a strength Stiles knew she couldn’t have if she wasn’t a supernatural creature. The glass shattered on impact, and the monitor sailed through. Stiles wasn’t looking when he heard the smashing, scattering clatter as it hit the pavement below.

“Woooooo!” Laura hollered in a passable imitation of a drunken high-schooler. Stiles dared to peek over the sill to see the security guard frantically talking into the walkie on his chest before jogging
towards the front of the school doors.

“Go!” Laura hissed, “Go, go, go, go, go, go, go!”

Stiles didn’t need to be told twice, let alone seven times. After scrambling like a turtle on its back he got to his feet and scrambled for the library doors that would take him out to the side stairwell near the drama hall. He could take that all the way down to the locker rooms, get out his usual way, but he was going to have to move fast and hope that the police didn’t show up and Laura occupied the security guard long enough to keep him from noticing Stiles presence.

He had to trust Laura would be here next week– and hopefully with Scott. He took off running, trying not to trip on the library carpet or smash into any of the shelves. His heart pounded as he raced down the stairwell, through the boy’s locker room. He was too high on adrenaline to feel the aches and pains he’d felt so acutely earlier that night but it didn’t stop his body from protesting the sudden exertion. It took him three runs at the wall to jump high enough to get a grip on the window sill and pull himself out into the night. He scrambled into his Jeep, listening for any sign of the security guard but heard nothing. He jammed the keys in the ignition, wincing as his Jeep, lovingly nicknamed Roscoe roared to life, afraid of catching the attention of the guard, but there wasn’t a sign of him. Wherever he was, he was too preoccupied trying to find Laura or couldn’t hear the Jeep start up. Stiles didn’t want to take any chances though. He kept his lights off until he swung out of the parking lot and onto the road. He was three blocks away when he spotted two police cruisers heading the opposite direction– towards the school.

When Stiles’ Jeep came to a bumpy rest in its usual spot in the preserve, his mind was racing. He turned on the overhead light and pulled the folded square of paper from his pocket, carefully unfolding with sweat-damp hands until the plain paper lay flat against his steering wheel. He recognized Scott’s scrawl instantly, the slant to the left, like his writing was running towards the edge of the page.


Stiles,

It’s really I

There is so much that I wanted to write, but I think it is a lot better if I explain in person…

I’m sorry for everything. For just disappearing. For scaring you. For not finding you sooner. For a long time, I thought you’d left, just like everyone else and I don’t know where you went, but I am glad you are back. I know that is selfish. By the time you read this, you’ll probably have talked to Laura and know what I am.

Everything is so messed up and I don’t know how to fix it. I miss my mom. I miss you. But… I trust Laura. She’s a good person. I promise. She’s trying to help me. I can’t be near you right now…not until I’m better at controlling myself. I hope you understand. Laura said she’d explain everything to you. I hope she did. I hope you believe her…

I know what you’ve gotten your

I know life sucks right now, but maybe she can help you too. You should ask. I’m sure she would.
I miss you… I hope you’re okay. I’ll see you when I can,

Scott

Stiles read the note four times before carefully folding it and placing it in the glove compartment of the Jeep. Exhausted, he crawled between the seats and into the back, burying himself in his sleeping bag. Sleep came quickly, enveloping him in a deep, dreamless unconsciousness.
The Odds are Never in Our Favor

Chapter Notes

This chapter talks a little bit about the emancipation of youths from their parents, and while I did some research into the topic, I’ve probably taken some creative liberties with it (in fact, I know I have). While I am still trying to be somewhat realistic, I’m not playing by all the rules. I’m a writer– deal with it.

This chapter also comes with new tags, and me feeling very, very sorry as a writer for what I just did. So note them, and read on (if you wish) more about this later.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stiles woke up only a couple of hours after falling asleep. Everything that had happened the night before was still fresh in his mind. Werewolves. Werewolves were fucking real and he knew two of them. It was still hard to imagine anything about last night as real, and yet, it was if the aching in his bones and muscles from his time with Peter was any indication.

He stared up at the roof of the Jeep for several minutes unsure of what to do. The morning light was just beginning to creep over the horizon. It was barely past five am. He hadn’t even really slept at all. He could feel a nervous energy vibrating through his limbs and it took him several long minutes to place it; This is what hope felt like.

His life was never going to be perfect again and there were a lot of loose threads he was going to have to tie up, one at a time. But he was going to have Scott back again, and he knew him and his best friend could manage anything together— as afterschool special as that sounded. On a more practical level that he hadn’t thought about enough until now; if Lydia and her legal aide managed to keep her inheritance, he had a real chance at a life that didn’t involve getting on his knees for strangers. His visits to his dad could start to be normal visits where he could still miss him, still wish him to wake every second, but without the clawing desperation he felt now, without the shame-filled confessions he—

Holy shit.

He had lied to Peter. He had actually committed strike three, but gotten away with it.

He had told someone what Peter was doing— his dad.

At that Stiles sat bolt upright, suddenly irrationally afraid. His dad. He needed to make sure his dad was okay.

The entire drive into town, Stiles tried to calm himself down. There was no reason to think Peter would have done anything to his dad. The man had seemed to accept Stiles’ answer readily enough, after all, he had known when Stiles was lying before and called him on it, and really, Stiles’ hadn’t even realized he’d lied until now. Because who was his dad going to tell? Still, he needed to know, needed to be sure that his dad was safe and sound.
“Stiles, you’re here awfully early,” Louanne greeted from the nurses station when he rounded the corner. He was surprised to see her and then remembered that the night nurses usually worked from eleven at night to seven in the morning. A quick look at the clock behind the nursing station showed that it was just before six am.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, momentarily deflated. Visiting hours for the long term care patients were a little more flexible than the rest of the hospital, but they still didn’t begin until eight.

“It’s okay– if something is getting a teenaged boy out of bed at this hour, it must be important,” the nurse replied kindly. She leaned across the desk and lowered her voice. “Go on, but be quick about it. I was on break, I didn’t see you.” She sat back and winked, and Stiles mouthed a grateful “thank you” before taking off down the hall. She had really put herself out there for him more than once in little over week, he owed her a coffee at least.

Stiles skidded to a stop just inside the doorway of his dad’s room to see his father safe and sound in bed, chest rising and falling softly under his hospital gown and the robe Stiles had got him last Christmas.

“Thank God,” the teenager muttered, crossing the room to sit in his usual spot in the chair beside the bed. He leaned over the side of the bed, awkwardly hugging his dad’s unconscious form, sure he imagined the twitch of the older man’s fingers against his side.

Stiles kept his visit short. He had what he needed– confirmation that his dad was all right. He took off before Louanne was done her shift, dropping a scalding hot cup of tea at the nurse’s station (decaf Orange Pekoe, lots of milk, no sugar, just the way Louanne liked it if he remembered right) winked his thanks at the nurse and took off down the hall.

Waking up so early meant Stiles had time to waste, but it also meant he was exhausted. All he really wanted was to drive back to the preserve and sleep but with the amount of gas his Jeep seemed to guzzle he tended to make his trips into town worth it. So he headed to the health clinic. Might as well find out now whether or not he’d caught anything in the past few weeks. Part of him hoped that if he did, he had at least managed to pass it on to Peter.

“You feeling okay kiddo?” Gloria asked as she expertly drew blood from the crook of Stiles elbow with practiced ease.

“Yeah,” he replied, caught off guard. He’d started thinking about the future again, daydreaming, then abruptly remembered why he was here. “Why?”

“You never used to be this diligent about testing. Almost three weeks on the money and with your history that means either you’ve found someone worth being tested for or–”

“You don’t want to know the answer to that,” Stiles replied. The nurse paused midway through packaging the blood sample in a clear plastic bag before nodding her understanding.

“I guess since its Friday I’ll see you Monday for the results?” he said calmly. She nodded.

“Yeah, sure thing kiddo.”

Stiles left the clinic with another two paper bags full of condoms. By eleven am, he was crashing hard and knew no amount of coffee was going to keep him conscious for another twelve hours.
Food? Maybe, but food cost a lot more money than a coffee and Stiles tried to keep it to one decent meal a day and maybe some inexpensive snacks in between. He kept a stock of granola bars and apples in the Jeep since the Supermarket was cheap. If he was lucky, some of the time he could get a trick to buy him something to eat, but those times were few and far between and were usually some sort of weird bargain for an extra bizarre but typically not particularly invasive fetish. Like the meat-head college jock that liked it when Stiles jerked off onto his chest.

Before leaving the coffee shop the day before, Stiles had promised he’d meet Lydia at the library after she was done work to start doing some research. Thankfully, this gave him a few hours to catch up on sleep, so he headed back to the preserve, justifying that with only a couple of hours of sleep the night before, he deserved the nap.

Stiles tried not to spend most of his daylight hours sleeping. He’d done that a lot in the first few months. It had become a brutal rhythm of sleep, wake, eat, fuck, repeat for months until he’d pulled himself out of it and realized that sleeping all day only to wake up and fuck strangers sometimes twice his age for money was only forcing him to spiral further into depression. Now, Stiles made an effort to stay busy. There really wasn’t a whole lot to do when you didn’t have to go to school and didn’t have consistent access to television or the internet. So he spent most of his time either jogging or hiking the trails of the preserve or reading. The winter months were always the worst though, and he often found himself slipping into old habits. Even though California didn’t get cold in the winter in comparison to much of the United States’ standards, the cool weather often forced Stiles to spend much of his days huddled in the sleeping bags in the back of his Jeep, more often than not, not reading because he valued the use of his fingers.

Stiles set his wrist-watch to go off in time to get to the library before Lydia and fit in some research of his own before she arrived. He couldn’t stop thinking about the fact that werewolves were a thing that didn’t just exist in horror movies, and he was determined to find out as much as he could. He knew he could pretty much count on inaccuracies, but that was what Laura was there for, right? And the more he could find out, and figure out, the better the chance he had of eventually helping Scott.

“So, if I am understanding right, in this case an executor was put in place to determine how the funds would be released to the minor…” Lydia trailed. She had a thick, leather-bound legal volume on the table in front of her, her diminutive figure curled onto the chair with her knees tucked under her so she could get enough height to hover over the book. She wore an expression of frustration and Stiles couldn’t say he blamed her. Most of the cases they’d come across were of adult children who had a disagreement with their parents, or child stars arguing about income from their employment. The case Lydia had been looking at was the closest they’d come to anything resembling Lydia’s case.

“Let me see that,” Stiles requested, fingers tapping against the corner of the thick book.

“Sure,” she replied, shifting the book across the table.

They’d been at it for an hour and a half. Stiles had already been at the library for three hours now, but he hadn’t told Lydia that. His shoulders ached from leaning over the table for so long. He skimmed the facts of the case until–

“Lydia, are you legally emancipated?”

“Why?” she asked offhandedly, already looking at some sort of legal journal article.

“It says here that Rebecca—the girl in the case— wasn’t legally emancipated from her parents,” Stiles replied. “Therefore, technically they still had legal responsibility to act in her best interest. That’s
why she had to have a lawyer dole out her inheritance—though she had been living on her own, she wasn’t legally an adult that was capable of making her own decisions—at least not according to the courts, but they wanted to reach a compromise that would make both parties happy.”

“Are *you* emancipated?” Lydia retorted. Stiles didn’t like where this was going. He looked up, surveying his friend carefully. One manicured nail was flicking the pages of the corner of the journal endlessly, a nervous tick. She kept her eyes on his face, nowhere but, clearly expecting an answer.

“Yes,” he replied. It hadn’t been an easy process, but Stiles had been determined not to end up in the foster care system where he would lose all control of his own life and more importantly, the right to make decisions about his dad’s care. He knew he had relatives back in Poland somewhere on his mom’s side—a uncle or something, but he couldn’t begin to tell someone how to find them. He’d had to prove he could survive on his own and that it was in his best interests to be considered an adult. In the end, he’d coaxed a trick into faking a job letter that stated he was employed. Technically he was—just not in a trade the courts would accept.

“How?” Lydia asked. And that, that gave it away even before Stiles’ reply.

“I have my ways,” Stiles replied lightly before turning more serious. “Answer the question.”

Lydia bit her lower lip.

“No.”

He’d been afraid of that, but his stomach twisted nonetheless as a small amount of hope in him threatened to die.

“It’s in the works,” Lydia rushed to add. “I have a court date in a few of weeks. My guardian ad litem will be there. She thinks we’re in a good position.”

“Why didn’t you do it as soon as you got out of Eichen House?” Stiles couldn’t help but asked. He felt exasperated but didn’t want to show it. It was clear that was the last thing Lydia needed right now. Lydia leveled him with a steady gaze.

“If you were a judge and a barely sixteen year old girl put in a petition to be emancipated from her parents right after being released from a psychiatric institution that they put her in and signed her out of, would *you* grant that request?”

She had a point.

“Fair enough,” Stiles retorted. He sat back from the table, stretching his arms over his head. He felt like he’d run a marathon, despite the nap earlier in the afternoon. He really wasn’t looking forward to the rigorous demands he was sure the night was going to bring.

“So what makes you think this time the judge will grant it?” he asked through a yawn, playing devil’s advocate. Lydia raised an eyebrow.

“Do I even want to know why you’re this tired?”

“Answer the question,” Stiles replied, using the prompt for a second time in as many minutes.

“You should have been a cop,” Lydia grumbled and Stiles stomach twisted as Peter crossed his mind, then utterly wrenched at the realization that he no longer counted the police as the ‘good guys’ like he always had when he a kid.
“Well for starters, I haven’t had any incidents that have necessitated my return to a mental health facility,” Lydia began. “And this time, I have a job that is more than a few weeks old and my own place. I bring in enough—barely, but enough—money to support myself. Marin—my guardian ad litem—thinks that is enough.”

Stiles nodded. It seemed reasonable to him. And if a judge had been willing to grant him emancipated, he thought Lydia at least stood a chance.

“I hope so,” he replied. It was selfish, but he really did. Because though he hated to see Lydia fight like this with her parents, he couldn’t help but see that fact in the shadow of the much larger, eclipsing effect; if Lydia won her inheritance, his life could really change.

“Well, I think I have had enough of the legal jargon for today,” Lydia finally sighed. Though Stiles suspected it was their conversation more than the reading that was making his friend call it a day.

“Yeah,” he replied tiredly. He’d stashed his pile of werewolf lore under the table and luckily Lydia hadn’t noticed. He was eager to take out a few of the books that he’d pegged as more reliable for one reason or another. “You work all weekend?” he asked.

“Sunday off,” Lydia replied. “Thank God. Next to Saturdays, Sundays are the absolute worst days to work. Nobody ever checks out on time and the rooms are always a disaster because the owner never enforces the occupancy rules. Nothing is worse than cleaning up after a bunch of idiot college students… or swingers.”

Stiles snorted a laugh. He could believe it.

“Thanks for all your help today,” the red-head added softly. “I really appreciate it.” She pulled her chair out from the desk and stood up, gathering books and journals to return to the re-shelving cart.

“Don’t worry about it,” Stiles replied, meaning both the help and the books. He stood up and came around the table, pulling his friend into a hug. Her head reached the middle of his chest. It felt good to wrap his arms around small shoulders and squeeze.

“Everything is going to be okay,” he reassured. It was meant for both of them and Lydia didn’t miss the fact.

“You too,” she replied, voice muffled by Stiles’ chest.

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Stiles practically devoured the books he checked out from the library, making a return trip that Monday to exchange the books he’d just taken out for more. He had learned what he hoped was a lot about werewolves—or what he hoped was at least a solid start.

Many of the books perpetuated the movie stereotypes, mentioning things like silver bullets and full moons. Other books took a purely speculative stance, theorizing that werewolf sightings reported as far back as the eighteenth century were either manifestations of mental illness or were sightings of types of wolves that had once existed, but were now extinct for one reason or another. Only a handful of books had the right mouth feel to Stiles, made him come up with legitimate questions he thought he could ask Laura without looking…species insensitive?
The most interesting of all the books he had found were two distinctly different volumes. The first was an English translation of a French fable that seemed to be in the vein of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ but with anti-wolf propaganda about wolves that transformed into men. The latter was a book that appeared to be written by some sort of an advisor, more contemporary, more in favor of wolves than the other book was. The one clue Stiles had that is could be legitimate, was the reference to the roles of werewolves within a pack; alpha, beta, omega, and how similar the descriptions had been to what Laura had told him. Stiles took them out, resolving to read them cover to cover before the following week.

***

Stiles had a list. It was scribbled and crossed out and messy, but it was a list. And it was full of questions for Laura. Everything from ‘How does transforming feel?’ to ‘Can it be cured?’ He wasn’t sure he would get to see Scott this week, but he was beginning to be okay with that. Something felt right about trusting Laura in all of this, and Scott’s note had gone a long way towards creating that feeling too. He sighed, folding the lined paper back into its neat square before putting it back in the glove compartment next to his ‘all-clear’ report from the health clinic. The receptionist had given him a questioning look when he’d requested a printed copy for the first time in his life, but had quickly handed it over without a question.

The entire week, Stiles felt like he was on pins and needles. He could feel the ADD he’d always suffered worse than ever, distracted into daydreaming without any provocation, only able to focus when he was on the road. While downing excessive amounts of coffee seemed to help, what ended up helping most was burning off the excess energy at night. He let himself fantasize about actually enjoying sex for once. Playing pretend, or sometimes not with the various clients he had throughout the week. It was easier with the guys closer to his own age of course, but still not quite right. Because looming in the shadows, was the knowledge that on Thursday, he belonged to someone else. Peter had known that last week he hadn’t fully followed through on his end of the bargain, and he didn’t want to risk pissing the man off. In the past couple of weeks, Stiles had recognized an almost unhinged side to the officer’s personality, and that volatility scared him enough to keep him in line.

Stiles was resigned to his fate of making it through another week of Peter. His plan was simple. Make the act of meeting the man look perfunctory enough that it either started to look that way to the officer, or started to feel that way to Stiles— whichever worked. Just because he was being forced into the arrangement, didn’t mean he had any responsibility to provide anything more than a body to fuck into. He found himself standing in the motel parking lot with his hands in his hoodie’s pockets that Thursday night, feeling a nauseating sense of wrongness, while buzzing with excess energy. Peter had this way of making him feel completely untethered sometimes and the lack of control over his own disorder was making him feel even more nervous about the night’s events. He prayed he could keep his running mouth from being too smart, could keep his temper in check. After all, all he had to do was everything Peter said.

As usual, he’d stashed his Jeep and walked the rest of the way to the motel. He took a shuddering breath at the bottom of the stairs, pulled his wrist-watch out of his pocket where he put it when he knew he’d be… active, and saw that it was less than a minute to the agreed meeting time. He ascended the concrete stairs with the lowest level of energy he’d had all week.
When Peter opened the door suddenly, just as he had the week before, Stiles took a step back. The man’s eyes were a storm, his jaw set tight and angry.

_Runaway. Runaway. Runaway!

Stiles faltered and in those few seconds, Peter’s arm snapped out to grab him around the waist and drag him into the room.

“What did I do?” Stiles asked urgently. He squirmed to free himself, backed away from the man the second his arms slipped free. “Peter what the fuck?”

The man closed the distance between them effortlessly, forcing Stiles back against the wall next to the room’s door. The police officer leaned in, running his nose along the teenager’s neck, across his jawline.

“You smell pure– almost innocent this time,” he commented.

Stiles rolled his eyes.

“Does that make you feel better? Easier to pretend you aren’t client number twenty-six this week?” he replied with a raised eyebrow. In an instant, Peter’s eyes narrowed and turned even darker.

Idiot. Fucking idiot. He should have known better than to bait the man, especially with something that wasn’t even true. Well it could have been. Stiles tended to avoid thinking about the exact amount of men he’d been with in a given week.

“Oh I know I hold a number much higher than twenty-six,” the man purred. The comment stung, and Stiles walked right into Peter’s trap– knew he did but couldn’t help it when he retorted just to shove down the biting shame creating a rolling lump in his throat.

“So what’s on the agenda this week?” Stiles said brightly. “Let me guess– I take a shower. Then you shove your dick into one of my orifices in the most painful or degrading possible way you can manage without hurting yourself, then–”

Stiles ill-advised rant was cut off with a sharp slap to his rear. It left a stinging, almost bruised feeling in its wake and he actually stumbled to the side.

“Fine, I get it, less talking, more fucking– or showering as the case may be,” he grumbled. Peter had stepped farther back into the room, watching from the corner near the chair as Stiles went through the motions of stripping off his clothes. There was something even more unsettling than usual about Peter’s gaze and a cold feeling was settling into Stiles’ core. Dread. He kept his back to the man as he stripped to avoid his gaze, though he could feel it almost more without the visual reminder. When he tossed his boxers onto the floor beside his jeans, he moved towards the bathroom to begin the usual routine of showering. Looking forward to his last five minutes alone of the night.

“No shower tonight,” Peter said softly from behind him the second he made a move toward the bathroom door. Stiles turned slowly, a chill racing down his limbs. He wasn’t about to let Peter know he was getting into his head.

“Someone’s in a hurry tonight,” he quipped. “Fine by me. So what’ll it be this time?” He turned and flopped back into the bed, sitting, his limbs in a mess. Stiles felt something heavy in his stomach, a black hole, threatening to make him implode. He bent stiffly and scraped the scant pile
from the floor, walked the few steps towards Peter and dropped them at his feet, then stood and waited.

Peter’s hand came up to brush down his side, over his hip and thigh where the skin still felt heated from the stinging slap delivered moments earlier.

“Go bend over the bed, forearms on the mattress,” he said after a moment, tone considering. Stiles felt the waver in his own feet, that moment where his fight or flight of instinct started to claw to the surface. He shoved it down. Tonight was not the night to fuck around. Not when he had Laura and potentially Scott to meet. He teetered off balance for a few seconds before stumbling towards the bed like a puppet on strings.

Peter, of course, was on him only seconds after he’d positioned himself as the man wanted.

“Have you ever had one of those days where you just feel wound too tight?” he asked conversationally. Stiles wasn’t sure if he was meant to answer the question, but for once, just once, he felt like him and Peter may have some sort of shared experience. It was a scary thought. He stared ahead at the headboard, the same peeling section of wallpaper. Took as deep of a breath as he dared, released it as he listened to Peter moving around the room behind him.

“You know, I never did punish you for your errant ways last week,” Peter began, his voice its usual mix of unsettling calm and mild amusement. It had taken awhile for Stiles to come up with the perfect analogy for the man; Peter was the wolf, dressed as the grandmother in ‘Little Red Riding Hood’. Stiles clamped his jaw closed, effectively biting back any retort before it tumbled from his lips. All he had to do was ride out the storm. He was starting to figure Peter out, at least enough to survive. The man liked submission almost as much as he liked when Stiles fought him. The harder Stiles fought, the more Peter seemed to enjoy it.

Once again, Peter’s hand traced over the reddened spot on Stiles’ ass. He chuckled.

“You’re going to have a print of my hand on that pert little ass for days.”

“You mean I’m going to have a hand print I have to explain for days,” Stiles muttered. He could hear Peter undressing behind him and forced himself to relax into the mattress as he waited for the inevitable. He fidgeted nervously, fingers toying with the worn comforter, just waiting. He jumped when Peter’s hand connected with his other ass cheek, less forceful than the first blow, but still enough to leave a stinging, heated sensation in its wake.

“Isn’t it a little late for a spanking?” Stiles bit out. “I mean, that ship has sailed don’t you think? Kind of like when a dog shits on the rug but you don’t catch it—”

Suddenly Peter was draped over him.

“I’ve had a very stressful day,” he repeated, breath gusting across the teen’s neck and ear, “and I have a headache. So. Stop. Talking.”

“Less talking, more fucking, got it,” Stiles replied in his best attempt at bravery despite the other man’s uncomfortable proximity. Peter moved away once more and Stiles took a stilted breath just… waiting. He winced, a cold pulse of fear racing up his spine as the sound of Peter shuffling around behind him—likely hunting for a condom. So naturally, he startled when one hand brushed over his flushed skin. Peter was no longer behind him, but off to the side. Stiles could just see him in his peripheral vision.

“Hold still,” he murmured, voice eerily smooth. Stiles had just begun to twist, arms still in place on
the mattress, to see what Peter was up to when the first strike came, the only warning the whizzing sound in the air before Stiles felt the heated, acute pain snap across his skin like something electric. He was so startled, he didn’t even yelp, just clenched his hands tight, rumpling the comforter as his whole body curled inwards. He inhaled sharply before the pained sound punched out of him.

“What the fuck?” he whined, abandoning his prescribed position to face Peter. As the seconds passed, the stinging soreness grew exponentially worse. Peter, surprisingly enough, didn’t move to put Stiles back in place but he didn’t let go of the belt in his hand either.

“It wasn’t in your rules,” he stated calmly.

“Well it is now!” Stiles cried indignantly. “What the fuck?” he repeated, scrambling to move away from Peter. “As much as you seem to think otherwise, I still have to work.” He glared up at Peter from his position on the floor, ass stinging horribly. Peter raised an eyebrow.

“Have your rules ever really mattered?” he asked. At that, Stiles stomach dropped. Peter bent down, crouching so that he was eye-level with the teenager. “I mean, is there anything you don’t have a price for? Be honest with yourself.”

It hurt more than being whipped. Stiles had done a lot of things for money, for survival, that he’d regretted, even hated himself for. Hell, it was how he’d devised some of his rules. Most of the time he didn’t break all of them out at once and stuck to his main three; no groups, no restraints, condoms for everything. The rest of his rules generally didn’t need stating because his first few just about sent anyone with supremely kinky crap in another direction.

“Kinky shit is extra,” Stiles retorted bitterly.

“How much?” Peter asked, one eyebrow raised, curious.

“I know what cops make, so more than you can afford,” Stiles retorted sharply. Peter hummed.

“The question isn’t what I can afford dear boy.”

The veiled threat stole the breath from Stiles’ lungs. He could feel the shaking start from somewhere deep inside. It was a tumultuous mixture of fear and rage– not at Peter, but himself for being stupid enough to ever let this happen. Peter manhandled him back into position on the bed easily and Stiles let him, seeing no other option. He thought of Laura, of Scott, waiting for him.

“So this is what gets you off?” he said when he was bent back over the mattress. When Peter didn’t immediately reply, he braced himself, as the buzzing of the belt sounded and another punishing blow was landed.

“No, that comes after,” Peter replied. Stiles was too pre-occupied sucking in air to respond.

It didn’t take long for Stiles to start trying to drag himself away from the pain. He’d lost track of how many blows Peter had landed, but however many it was, Stiles was losing his composure. He wasn’t going to be able to sit for a week and the worst part was that Peter hadn’t even done anything overtly sexual yet– in fact, as far as Stiles knew, the man was still clad in boxer briefs.

Another blow and Stiles scrambled forward, yanking himself up the bed only to have Peter bodily pull him back into position by his ankles.

Stiles was sobbing by the time he finally heard the tell-tale thud of the belt buckle hitting the carpet
when, at long last, Peter was finished. His first staggered breaths were hesitant.

“Get up,” Peter ordered, voice dark, lust tinted. “On the bed.” Stiles was surprised at how much his entire body ached. Hadn’t realized how much he’d been straining to curl into himself and for how long. His movements were labored, uncoordinated, but he managed to pull himself into the middle of the bed.

“Hands and knees,” Peter ordered. Stiles braced himself, unsure of if he would be able to follow the order, scared of what the consequences would be if he didn’t try. He wavered unsteadily, skin feeling stretched too tight. When Peter’s hands glided feather-light over the abused skin of his ass and the back of his thighs, he bit his lips to keep from whimpering. The older man’s hands kept moving, gradually massaging harder.

“You know I feel, a lot better now,” Peter said softly. “I think it’s your turn.”

Stiles jumped, arms collapsing out from under him when Peter licked a broad path across his entrance. He moaned at the distinct sensation of saliva drying cool, almost soothing on his skin. He eyes flitted to the bedside clock. Peter had beaten him for nearly an hour already. Hope of being able to meet Laura was rapidly diminishing. He closed his eyes, turned his face into the comforter just in time to hide tears that he couldn’t hold back any more.

Stiles felt like he needed to pry his eyes open from where they were squeezed closed. He knew he wasn’t going to like what he saw. The standard issue motel room clock’s numbers burned red in the darkness; 3:00am. Everything hurt, from his hair follicles to his toenails. When he’d passed out, exhausted, sore, he’d just begun to feel the extent of his injuries. The welts on his ass, thighs, and lower back didn’t just sting—Peter had put enough force into his blows that Stiles could now feel a deep ache. He didn’t need a light or a mirror to know he was black and blue. He shifted trying to find a position that wasn’t comfortable—he knew that wasn’t going to happen— but at least wasn’t miserable. The arm around his waist tightened ever so slightly.

“Shhh,” Peter soothed, his lips tracing a path of skin from the back of Stiles’ neck to his shoulder. “Go back to sleep.”

“Hurts,” Stiles whined sleepily. The sweat that had gathered between their bodies stung the places where his skin had actually broken. He twisted, his free arm clawing at the forearm around his waist with no real force or determination. “Peter…” he whined, voice hoarse.

“Quit moving, or I’ll go get the handcuffs again.”

He’d missed his chance to see Laura, maybe even Scott. He had no chance, no way to get a hold of her to tell her he was sorry, to try and arrange another time. And what if you’ve missed your chance completely? What if you never see her again? A dark corner of his brain provided helpfully.

Stiles stilled, giving in, trying his best to ignore the discomfort in favor of his freedom.

When Stiles blinked awake, it was entirely too soon. He groaned, face twisting into the pillow. The motel room light was on. He glanced at the clock—6:30am. Though it had been two and a half hours, he felt like he’d been asleep for maybe twenty minutes. He twisted at the sound of movement behind him to see Peter getting dressed in his uniform. He hesitated before pulling up onto his elbows.

“I need to go,” he mumbled, gingerly attempting to untangle himself from the sheets. He was
thinking of his Jeep, parked overnight, and though he wasn’t too worried about it, it would be just his fucking luck that it would get towed.

“If you’re worried about your Jeep, it hasn’t been towed,” Peter replied, as if reading Stiles’ mind. Stiles stared at him for a few seconds, jaw slack.

“Oh come on, you always park it in walking distance, which admittedly today, is probably much shorter than usual,” Peter replied with a smirk. Stiles wanted to punch him in the face, was figuring out how to muster enough energy when Peter continued to talk. “It didn’t take me long to figure out where I would find it. I moved it. It’s safe and sound in the lot. I put you keys back on your pants pocket.”

Peter had been in his Jeep. The thought made Stiles blood boil and yet… it was a strange relief knowing his vehicle was so close, that he wouldn’t have to walk the three blocks to get to it. Truth be told, he wasn’t sure he could have made the three blocks.

“The room is paid, including for late check-out” Peter continued, conversationally. He was already showered, mostly dressed. “You look like you need the extra hours of sleep.”

Stiles needed an extra decade of sleep. Peter strolled closer to the bed, and the teen shrank away as he brushed a hand across his forehead.

“I’ll see you next week,” the officer reminded him softly. Then he was gone, flicking out the light as he closed the motel room door behind him.

Stiles fell asleep again almost instantly.

Chapter End Notes

Before I get the inevitable messages/reviews about tagging this BDSM, I am firmly in the camp of BDSM being an act that takes place between consensual partners who are adults and therefore won’t tag something as such that doesn’t fit that. Yes people tag, non-con BDSM but to me, that’s an oxymoron, so I chose what I think are much more fitting tags for the situation Stiles found himself in with Peter.

As usual, thank you all so much for your comments, kudos and bookmarks. It definitely keeps me motivated as a writer!
As usual, thank you so much for all the love- it really motivates me to keep writing. This chapter is mercifully a little on the lighter side thematically because you guys deserved the break, but has lots of plotty goodness to keep things interesting.

Now I must return to my hovel to keep writing!

As much as he wanted to curl up on the mattress of the motel room and die, Stiles knew he had to get up. If Lydia was working, she’d be starting by nine and he didn’t want her to see his Jeep in the lot. He practically crawled to the bathroom, kneeling beside the tub to turn the water on as warm as he thought he could bear, which turned out to be lukewarm. He managed to stand under the stream, gradually increasing the water temperature for about ten minutes. The effort was exhausting. His head felt fogged as the room when he was done.

Dressing took monumental effort. All Stiles wanted to do was coil into a ball in the sleeping bag in the back of his Jeep and sleep for days. His keys were exactly where Peter had left them– in his jeans pocket. Normally Stiles would have worried about the condoms he kept there, but Peter had used them all.

Peter. He’d been in the Jeep. He had driven Stiles’ Jeep. Been in his home. And of all the ways Stiles had been violated, it was the one that would stick with him most hauntingly. He staggered down the concrete steps, looking around the quiet parking lot. Peter had parked the Jeep almost directly at the bottom of the stairs.

It wasn’t until halfway to the preserve that it dawned on Stiles to check the glove compartment. He didn’t trust himself to do it while driving. Normally waiting would have set him on edge; drumming his fingers against the steering wheel, singing to the patchy radio when it managed to pick up a signal. He stayed silent, still but for the motions needed to drive or readjust to get less uncomfortable. Peter had beat the wild, kinetic energy of his ADD right out of him.

When he got to the preserve, he was sweating all over, cold and shaky. He slipped open the glove compartment with shaking hands as soon as he killed the ignition in his usual spot. There, on top of his dog-eared driver’s manual, were the folded squares of paper he’d hoped for– his note from Scott, his questions for Laura. He swallowed, tears of relief threatening to spill out of the corners of his eyes until he pinched them away. He had to know one more thing though, so he reached back, releasing the glove compartment from its housing. The movement strained the too-tight feeling skin on his lower back. He groped around for the battered Ziploc bag until his fingers grazed the plastic, then withdrew the object quickly, heart hammering the entire time.

Stiles stared down at the bag, hammering heart slowing as he recognized the battered twenty on top with Andrew Jackson’s face defaced by a truly spectacular sharpie mustache. His last job on Wednesday night before he’d stashed his cash in its hiding place. Everything was fine.

He slept, would have worried about falling into old, depressive patterns if not for the fact that he
didn’t bother waking to leave the preserve to make a living. He didn’t leave to eat, visit his dad, nothing. And that gave him a lot of time to think.

His best chances in life right now were Lydia and Laura, each with their own complications. Lydia was working on being emancipated and Stiles could only hope it would be possible, but truthfully, with how his life had been going lately, he wasn’t optimistic. He had to look at it from the judge’s point of view. Lydia came from a wealthy family, had been institutionalized in her early teens, then released, brought home by her parents only to leave what most people would call a good life to become a high school drop-out who worked at a lousy motel on the edge of town. Any reasonable adult in the justice system would look at all the reasons not to emancipate. If Lydia was lucky, maybe the judge would consider abuse– but even so, a legal, related guardian, or even foster care would be considered before emancipation. Stiles was pretty sure the only reasons he’d succeeded were his dad’s condition and the fact that, once upon a time, the judge had probably known his father. In short, Sties knew better than to hold out hope for Lydia– as shitty of a friend as that made him.

That left Laura and God, where did he even begin there? Responsible adult wasn’t exactly the first thing he thought of when he thought of her, especially with her penchant for trespassing and property damage. And yet, he trusted her. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that she wasn’t a squeaky clean adult and didn’t try to be. Maybe it had something to do with the pack hierarchy she’d told him about. Maybe it was just… her. But he also knew he was a long way off from being able to actual utter the awful story to her, but hopefully he could one day say enough to get help. She had enough on her plate with Scott as it was.

It felt like the week had passed too quickly. Stiles found himself in his dad’s hospital room on Thursday afternoon, steeling himself for his “appointment” later that night. The closer it drew, the more he worried he wouldn’t have the strength to show up— that he’d fuck everything up by being scared. By being a coward. He needed to see his dad to remind himself why he was going to walk right into hell again.

He sat beside the bed in ‘his’ chair, chewing his fingernails and the skin around them raw when he wasn’t drumming them against the side of his coffee cup from the hospital cafeteria. The coffee itself, he’d hardly touched. He’d been fighting nausea all day, never so afraid of facing Peter before. When he really stopped to think about it, the situation was completely fucked up. Of all the times to be afraid… instead of the myriad of things he should be afraid of Peter for, it was the prospect of being subjected to more pain. As the hours ticked by, he became more and more nervous— and that was how Allison found him, staring out the window to avoid looking at the clock.

“You okay Stiles?” she asked from the doorway, voice soft enough that she didn’t startle the other teen. When he glanced over at her, she approached slowly, like he was a spooked deer.

“I do that too,” she supplied, gesturing at his hand where he was distractedly ripping at the nail of his ring-finger. “When I get nervous or if I am worrying about something.”

“I’m always worried about my dad.” It was the closest to the truth that he could reply with. Allison nodded her understanding.

“For what its worth, I keep an eye on him in particular. From what the nurses tell me– what you tell me– he sounds a lot like my dad, and my dad is all I have too.”

A few seconds passed and Stiles just didn’t know what to say. The fact that Allison didn’t refer to his dad in the past sense didn’t go unnoticed.
“Thanks,” he finally settled on with a weak smile, because really, in the grand scheme of things, what could a teenaged hospital volunteer do to protect his dad? He shifted the conversation to Allison, trying to distract himself. “So what does your dad do?”

She smiled softly, brushed a lock of hair behind her ear– a movement that Stiles realized was about as reflexive for her as the motion of running his hand across the back of his scalp was for him. So naturally, Stiles didn’t at all expect what came out of her mouth next:

“He’s an arms dealer.”

Stiles stood just outside room 216, heart thudding heavily against his chest. He’d had to pull over on the way to the motel to dry heave at the side of the road. It didn’t surprise him that nothing came up– he hadn’t eaten anything all day– couldn’t bring himself to with the knowledge of what was in store for him. His fingers grazed the doorknob and he half expected Peter to rip the door open. Instead, it was his own hand that opened the door with a soft click.

The bathroom door was ajar, revealing a shirtless Peter standing over the sink, toweling off his face. He looked up at the sound of the door closing, tossed the towel he’d been using to dry his face to the counter and casually strolled towards Stiles… who found himself backing up as Peter drew closer. He managed to stop himself before he hit the back of the motel room door. He was about to open his mouth to speak when Peter’s hands snapped up to cup his jaw, surprisingly gently, and pulled him in for a kiss. Stiles barely controlled himself, kept his desire to run at bay, and Peter in turn, backed the both of them against the motel room door.

Despite how deep the kiss was, Peter kept it gentle enough for Stiles to be able to keep up, to not feel absolute, suffocating terror that would trip him into a panic attack. Of course, naturally this meant Stiles didn’t trust Peter for one second.

“I thought I’d have to go out and find you tonight,” Peter said when he pulled away. He kept a hand across the back of Stiles’ next, forehead touching the teenager’s. The proximity set Stiles on edge. He realized his body was betraying him, had racked right up to full tremors again.

“I’m going to reward you for being such a good boy,” Peter hummed, running his nose along Stiles jawline, nipping at his ear. The man had just shaved, his skin smooth, still the slightest bit damp, but absent of the cloying smell of aftershave Stiles would have expected. He shuddered, his hands coming up at his sides to push Peter away before he aborted the movement. A hand slipped under the hem of his t-shirt, one large, warm palm sliding against his skin, travelling up, around his back. He knew what Peter was doing.

“I can’t–” he swallowed around the harsh lump in his throat that threatened to suffocate him. “I can’t do it again. I…” his breath rattled out of his lungs when Peter’s hand brushed against one of five or six welts that peeked out from the top of the back of Stiles’ jeans.

“Shhh,” Peter soothed, pressing his lips against Stiles’ again. He pulled away from Stiles and took a hold of one of his wrists, pulling him into the room before letting him go. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Why should I believe you?” Stiles croaked, daring to look Peter in the eye. “Every time I’ve been in this room, you have done something to hurt me.”

“Every time you’ve been in this room, you’ve done something to provoke me,” Peter retorted, voice and eyes slightly sharper than they’d been seconds before.
“I didn’t do anything the first time you picked me up. I did everything you wanted.” Stiles took in a shuddering breath as he remembered that night. He stopped himself before he lost complete control of his mouth, did exactly what Peter accused him of always doing. He chewed his lip, crossed one arm across his middle to grip the elbow of his other arm, a defensive stance, shielding himself, keeping himself from flying apart at the seams.

“Just… just do it. Whatever sick thing you have in store for me, get it over with,” he mumbled. Peter tilted his head to the side, considering and Stiles’ stomach clenched when the man took a step forward, gently pulling Stiles arms apart, setting them at his sides before reaching up to push his hands under the collar of Stiles’ hoodie, shove the sleeves down his arms. The fabric dropped behind Stiles, pooling around behind his feet. He stood completely immobile as Peter’s hands worked their way under his t-shirt and travelled up, the fabric pooling under his arms until he got the message and lifted his limbs so that Peter could pull the fabric over his head. As Peter tossed the fabric aside, he toed out of his own sneakers thinking maybe, just maybe, if he didn’t provoke Peter too much, he’d stand a chance of getting out of the motel in time to check and see if Laura had made any attempt to meet him at the high school.

“Turn around,” Peter ordered softly. Stiles did, stumbling slightly on the gathering pile of his own clothing. Peter’s fingers played at the skin just above the back of Stiles’ pants, tracing one long welt before his hands traveled around Stiles’ middle, drifted to undo his button and fly. Stiles didn’t know what to do with his hands, they clenched and unclenched into and out of fists at his sides until he pushed Peter’s hands away.

“I can undress myself,” he muttered, taking a step forward, away from the man, but unfortunately, towards the bed. Peter followed.

“Let me,” he ordered, voice still soft, but with an edge too it Stiles knew enough to be afraid of. Peter’s hands slipped under the waist of his jeans and boxers at the same time, pushed them down. The motion no longer hurt the way it would have a few days before. At some point, the welts that covered his ass and thighs had stopped their screaming chorus of pain, and that had given way to a deeply bruised feeling. Stiles hadn’t needed to look to know he was a mess of angry red and purple marks, tinged yellow at the edges.

“God your skin,” Peter murmured, fingers tracing over the damaged flesh. “It marks so beautifully. I can’t say I’m not tempted to want to do this again.”

Stiles heartbeat jackhammered in his chest. The blood rushed in his ears. He suddenly felt dizzy, nauseous again. He stumbled in his next effort to move away from Peter, tripping when a foot tangled in his own hooded sweater. Once again, Peter grabbed him, this time around the waist, pulled him so close they touched everywhere, back to chest, legs… the erection pressing into Stiles exposed rear.

“Shhhh, not this time,” the officer soothed. Peter walked them closer to the bed, releasing Stiles only when he had no other option but to crawl forward onto the mattress or sink to the floor like a petulant child having a tantrum. He knew the path of least resistance. He got on the bed.

He glanced behind him only to see Peter ridding himself of his boxers before he joined him on the bed. He took a deep, shuddering breath, counted to five as he held it, released. Just because the belt was nowhere in sight, didn’t mean Peter couldn’t cause him pain. If he’d learned any lesson from the man, it was that he dealt pain like drug dealers dealt junk to druggies; a reminder that the alternative—to be without—could quite possibly mean more suffering. He bristled as a hand brushed over damaged skin.

“Relax…”
Peter was surprisingly true to his word. Stiles left the motel just after midnight with no new injuries and only a faint ache in his ass. It was the first time intercourse with Peter hadn’t been inherently painful. The first time it seemed like the man actually cared for Stiles’ pleasure in any sense other than some sick game. It made Stiles’ head feel like someone had stuffed it full of cotton wool; Too full and empty all at once. He’d showered with Peter afterwards, walked the three blocks to his Jeep and now stood in the empty boy’s locker room at the high school. Laura was nowhere to be seen, hadn’t made herself known.

He dared to wander through the empty halls of the school, sticking to the shadows, jumping at the slightest sound until he reached the library. It was just as empty as the rest of the building, creepy without company there, the rows and rows of bookshelves casting long, sinister shadows on the floors. The window that Laura had smashed had been repaired. The desk where the computer had been still sat empty.

Stiles made two more rounds to the locker room and back up to the library again before he gave up and left the school just after 2:30am.

The next two weeks passed in a numb haze. He got up, he visited his dad, he let men fuck him in cars and alleyways, motel rooms, public restrooms and even the park. He slept a lot– too much. He helped Lydia research case law that she’d probably never be able to use. He showed up at room 216 at the Comfort Plus at 10:30 sharp each week and let Peter drill him into the mattress. He went to the high school after and waited, hoping that this would be the week Laura showed up, that she’d have a reason for abandoning him. He went home disappointed– no, heartbroken– and slept in the cramped back of his Jeep.

Lydia slammed the heavy leather volume shut so loudly that Stiles jumped, immediately glancing around for any sign of the librarian. He got a raised eyebrow from a woman pursuing some travel book, but the college student a few tables away didn’t even flinch where he were pouring over his notes, no less than four or five books scattered across the table in front of him.

“Okay what gives? What’s going on with you?” Lydia questioned. She flopped back in her chair, crossed her arms, and fixed Stiles’ with the patented Martin stare down.

*I’m tired. I’m used up, and I’m seventeen years old. I thought I had a chance to get some part of my life back, but now it is gone and I am stuck in this endless hell because I dared hope that for once, something could be good for me.*

“Nothing,” Stiles replied with a shrug. His friend raised an eyebrow skeptically.

“Not buying it,” she replied coolly when Stiles did nothing to indulge her. “You have been off for over two weeks now. So what the hell happened?”

Stiles stomach churned. He was going to have to make something up. It felt like shit to do– to have to lie to one of his best friends, but it was the only way. Telling Lydia about Laura or Scott would only make his life more complicated. Telling her about Peter was completely out of the question.

“I got a suspicious test result at the clinic,” he lied after a beat, making it seem like Lydia’s stare had worn down ironclad resolve. It was the most innocuous thing he could think of on a dime, the most
believable. “They won’t have the results until the end of the week and I’ve been worrying about it ever since I slept with this one guy a couple of weeks back.”

“What are they testing for?”

Stiles scrambled to think of something that might take a bit more time to get back and hoped Lydia would buy it. He knew full well that the longest the clinic took to get test results back was a week and change, but he couldn’t think of a reason for Lydia to know that.

“Hepatitis,” he replied.

“But you used protection right?” Lydia replied, leaning across the table so she could keep her voice low and Stiles could still hear her.

“Yeah, I did,” he replied. “I always do. I just… I’ve been feeling off lately and that’s got me worried.”

Stiles knew Lydia had bought it the moment her facial expression dropped the last vestiges of determination and became one of pure concern. He wanted to feel at least some relief that Lydia had bought his lie, but he didn’t. He only felt worse because if Laura didn’t miraculously turn up in the next few days, his mood wouldn’t improve, and then what would he tell Lydia?

“You’re going to be okay,” Lydia said softly, extending a hand to grab Stiles’ and squeeze. “You’re careful, you use condoms. You’re probably only feeling ‘off’ because you are anxious about the results. So Calm. Down.”

He offered a watery smile. If only it was that simple.

“I’m trying,” he replied. And at that the matter was settled.

“I know,” Lydia replied. She stood up. “I’m going to get more journals, I feel like they’re more useful.”

They worked for another hour or so before Lydia stretched. Stiles watched with mild amusement, and if he was honest, lingering attraction.

“Okay, my back cannot take any more,” Lydia complained. “I’d say I’m going home to soak in the tub, but let’s be honest, I don’t have one.”

Stiles snorted his laugh.

“At least you have a bathroom.”

“If you can call it that.”

Stiles had never really asked Lydia too much about where she lived. He suspected that it was either social housing or even a room in the motel. All he knew was that if it were possible, she would have offered him a place to live— but obviously, it wasn’t. Lydia came from a good background. She had a lot of pride, and Stiles understood her not wanting to let go of that. She deserved to be able to hang on to something.

“I should probably head out soon too,” Stiles replied, checking his watch. He had just enough time to grab a bite to eat before he’d have to get out to Abe and Lawrence for the night. It was Saturday, one of his busier nights thanks to the closeted college students that came to Beacon Hills to hit up the gay bars because they didn’t want to risk being seen in clubs closer to school in the larger cities. Stiles
was relieved that, ever since the brutal beating he’d taken a few weeks ago, Peter had been relatively
tame when it came to his weekly bedroom blackmail antics.

“Well, my court day is a week Tuesday, so when your test comes back clean, and my emancipation
goes through, we’ll go out and celebrate both,” Lydia declared as she gathered up her purse and
shrugged on her jacket. She leaned over as she passed Stiles and pressed her lips to his forehead.

“You’re okay,” she said, as if the universe wouldn’t dare contradict her.

The air was cool and crisp, the sky darkening quickly by the time Stiles left the library. He’d stuck
around to exchange his own books, trying to keep distracted as he debated between titles. He usually
stayed with science fiction and fantasy— too many of the books that looked remotely interesting
outside of the young adult section featured police officers and private investigators, and that was
definitely a topic he wanted to stay away from for more reasons than one. He slung his beat up
canvas backpack over his shoulder— another treasure that had belonged to his mother, and shoved his
hands in the pocket of his hoodie. He strolled around the corner of the aging building to the small
parking lot where his Jeep was parked. The building was just a bit too far away from the ‘red light
district’ at the edge of town to walk it, and quite frankly, Stiles didn’t trust leaving his Jeep in such a
conspicuous spot for the bulk of the evening anyway. Plus he wanted curly fries. Sue him.

He just about jumped out of his skin when he rounded the corner to the nearly empty lot and found
Laura Hale leaning against the passenger side of his Jeep, arms crossed, expression breaking from
strained to relieved the second their eyes met.

Stiles didn’t know whether to punch her, hug her, or break down and cry so he settled for straight-
forward.

“What are you doing here?” he deadpanned as he tried to sort through the twisting emotions circling
in his gut.

“I’m sorry,” Laura apologized instantly. Her expression said she’d been waiting for that exact
reaction; slightly wounded, but hopeful. “I– there is a lot to explain.”

Stiles walked resolutely over to the Jeep, jaw clenching and unclenching as he bit back all the things
he wanted to say.

“Where were you?” he asked softly when he stood only a couple of feet away. Laura took a deep
breath, let it out in a shuddering exhale.

“When you didn’t show up three weeks ago, I thought maybe…”

It clicked then. The night Stiles hadn’t shown up was a week after Laura had told him about the
existence of werewolves. She’d probably thought that he had been in shock at the time, then had
time to process…

“You thought I didn’t believe you,” he supplied. The young woman nodded. Her hair was pulled
back into a messy arrangement on the back of her head, help up by what looked like chop-sticks. It
looked like any second her hair was going to declare mutiny and break free from the puny sticks
holding it in rank.

“I thought you’d decided I was crazy, or that it was too much to deal with…”

Stiles felt a small amount of anger at that– he would never abandon his friend like that, no matter
what. *But Laura has only met you twice* he reminded himself. She doesn’t know you yet.

“I– no… I don’t think you’re crazy,” Stiles replied. “I believed you– as strange as that probably
sounds.” He shrugged. “I read a lot of science fiction.” At that, Laura smiled, gentle, soft even. “I
just… I got tied up and I couldn’t get there.” Laura’s expression faltered into concern.

“What happened? Your heartbeat its…”

“My what?”

“Your heartbeat just, skipped… like you are distressed.”

“How did you…” Stiles scrutinized Laura, heart-beating even wilder.

“I can hear it,” Laura continued. “Heightened senses– I have a better sense of smell and hearing than
humans. Sight too” she shrugs, “at least I think so, I’ve never needed glasses before. We learn pretty
early how a person’s heart sounds when they feel different ways.”

Well, there was one thing Stiles could cross off his question list.

“I’ve… I’ve been better,” Stiles replied honestly. He toed at a gob of fading purple bubble gum stuck
to the pavement. “I’ve been at the school for the last two Thursdays in a row,” he supplied. Laura
seemed to suck in a breath.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t.”

“Its fine,” Stiles lied.

“No it’s not.” Laura stepped away from his truck. “Do you know where my old house is?”

“You’re asking the son of the former Sheriff who has *never* understood why crime scene photos are
not age appropriate for a kid that question?”

Laura shook her head, smirk written on her features, warming the sharp planes of her cheekbones,
her cool, steel coloured eyes.

“I guess I should know better,” she replied. “Can you meet me there this Thursday?”

Stiles sucked in a breath.

“Why there?” he replied.

“The school has a Lacrosse game that night, so I don’t want to risk it. I can’t really think of
anywhere else but my old house… It’s not like lightening’s going to strike twice,” Laura replied.
“You can’t lose the house or family you don’t have left.” And Stiles, Stiles didn’t know what to say
to that, so he just awkwardly stuttered:

“I uh… what time?” defaulting to his habit of running his hand across the back of his scalp, a
soothing motion. He didn’t want to chance Peter fucking things up again.

“Does 9:00 work?” Laura asked hopefully, “Or do you have somewhere you need to be?” Stiles
heaved a sigh of relief. His meetings with Laura hadn’t exactly been long so far and it was only
about a fifteen minute drive to the motel from the preserve once he got to its edge.

“I have an appointment,” Stiles muttered, trying to make a concerted effort to keep the bitterness out
of his voice. “But yeah… as long as I leave by like, 10:00, everything should be fine.”
Laura nodded.

“Good,” she replied, looking relieved. “Look, I would stay and talk now, but I don’t want to leave Scott on his own for too long. He’s just getting the hang of this control thing and I don’t want to test him just yet. I… I want to bring him with me on Thursday— or take you to him.”

His heartbeat definitely gave away his enthusiasm for that prospect. Laura’s smile was soft, patient.

“I’m not making any promises,” she cautioned. “But it would be nice. To let him see his best friend I mean.”

“Yeah,” Stiles replied fondly.

“It would also be really nice, if I didn’t have to worry about him tearing you in half,” Laura continued then made a face not unlike Hagrid’s ‘I shouldn’t ‘ave told ya’ that’ expression. “Not that I think that’s going to happen,” she added in a rush.

The two stood awkwardly across from one another for a minute before Laura seemed to realize that she was making leaving weird for both of them.

“I’ll see you Thursday,” she said with a nod, then moved off past Stiles, back in the direction he’d come. He glanced over his shoulder, watching her go.

A slew of emotions erupted in the teenager’s chest; hope, confusion, a touch of dread, more happiness, anticipation. It was a welcome change from the constant barrage of depression. Stiles, for the first time in weeks, had something to look forward too.
I freaking agonized over every single little detail in this chapter and the one to follow. Thank you all so much for all of your love whether it be kudos, comments or bookmarks. I REALLY appreciate it and it makes me want to write at my best and update as fast as possible. Pavlov and Skinner would be so proud of how you've conditioned me :/
darkness of the woods at night that set Stiles on edge, made him feel restless without the safe cover of his Jeep. It was nearby—tucked around the side of the house, but still, not close enough for his overactive imagination.

“Hi Stiles.”

Laura’s voice wasn’t loud, but it was clear in the quiet stillness of the woods and startled the teenager in question enough to make him jump.

“Jesus,” he muttered, hand over his heart. Laura smirked.

“Didn’t mean to scare you,” she replied, crossing what was likely the remnants of a driveway, asphalt poking like broken, blackened bits of pottery through the forest floor.

“Sorry, I tend to get a little jumpy out here at night,” Stiles replied. “Unless I am in my Jeep, then, not so much. For some reason, that hunk of metal makes me feel more safe and sound.” He gestured over his shoulder to where it waited, parked a couple of yards to the side of the house, just kind of there because it wasn’t like there was actually a driveway anymore.

“So uh… where do we start?” he asked. As much as he wanted to see Scott rightnowyesterdaystraightaway he was also curious. His dad had always told him it was simultaneously his best and worst trait.

“What do you want to know?” Laura replied as she sank down next to him on the steps, her movements hesitant, like she wasn’t sure she wanted to be there. She seemed to take a steadying breath as she seated herself, leaned against a wooden support, one knee pulled up to her chest. She folded her arms around her knee and seemed to relax, just slightly. Compared to Stiles, she was not dressed for the weather at all—just jeans and a faded Iggy and the Stooges t-shirt.

“Everything,” Stiles replied honestly. “The truth or the fiction behind every myth, every old wives tale, fairy tales. I wrote a list.”

Laura raised an eyebrow in amusement as he fished through his jeans pocket, brandishing the piece of paper victoriously, though by now, he’d practically memorized it all.

“Well, the more you know, the better you’ll be able to understand Scott, maybe even help him,” she replied.

“That’s the idea,” Stiles declared. “Maybe even… tonight?” He tried not to seem too desperate, too hopeful, but Laura, she nodded. Stiles felt like standing up and running circles around the house, crowing his victory. As it was, he jumped to his feet.

“Really?!” He flapped his arms in a passable imitation of a duck. Laura laughed, smile bright.

“He’s doing pretty well. I don’t think he needs any help tonight but eventually, I’m going to have to go back to New York, if only for a short time, and I can’t make the trip with him—don’t even think I should try, so I’ll need some help—someone or a couple of people even, to look over him while I’m gone,” Laura replied, “And it would be better if it was people he already knows and trusts.”

“I can do that,” Stiles responded immediately.

“That’s the idea,” Laura replied—a perfect imitation of Stiles. He smirked, recognizing the joust.

“Okay well, should I start with the questions?”
Laura nodded her head, “Go for it.”

Stiles had ten on the tip of his tongue already.

“Well, for start… does the full moon like make you transform? Or do you have control over it?”

“The moon doesn’t make a werewolf do anything. It acts kind of like a magnet,” she explained. “It pulls at the ‘wolf’ side of us, brings it closer to the surface. Some wolves do find it harder to control their shift the closer it gets to the full moon. It’s easier for born wolves to learn control– harder for the bitten. A strong pack can help struggling betas with this, but so can plain old practice.”

Stiles nodded his understanding. And so the night began.

“So, when someone gets bitten… do they have to be bitten by an alpha to become a werewolf? Or can it be any kind of werewolf? Is it a special kind of bite?”

“Good questions,” Laura replied. She unfolded and reseated herself, cross legged, getting comfortable. “Yes, when someone is bitten, it has to be the alpha that does it and they need to be in full form for the bite to take. You saw that– when you thought Scott and I were actual wolves, we were actually fully transformed– not into wolves, but werewolves. There aren’t many of us who can actually shift into a wolf. I’ve only ever heard of a handful. Anyway, you have to be in the werewolf form– not human, not beta– which is what I showed you the other night– in order to bite someone and have them change. It’s a way of controlling the growth of the pack– giving the power to grow it to only the alpha.”

“But you’re the alpha.”

“Exactly.”

“So, if Scott got bit, and it wasn’t you… I don’t understand.”

“Neither do I,” Laura responded honestly.

“Does it ever not work? Like if someone didn’t want it or something, could they will it away?”

Laura shook her head, expression sad.

“Some people reject the bite. It happened to someone in my family once… he asked an older wolf to bite his girlfriend, so he could make her a bit more… durable I guess. She died.”

“That’s horrible,” Stiles replied. “How… why did she die?”

Laura shrugged.

“Some people change– in fact most do, unless there is some sort of flaw that would keep them from being a good wolf. Some people are immune to the bite, they simply never transform. They are incredibly rare. Then, finally, there are those that just aren’t strong enough to withstand the first change and they die– that’s what happened to her.”

The two were silent for a long time. Stiles felt disrespectful, just moving onto the next question, so he waited a few minutes, thinking things over, staring out at the woods.

“Come on, I know you are dying to ask me another one,” Laura prompted teasingly. Well okay then, Stiles would keep the questions coming.

“What about silver bullets?”
“Like any bullet, it would hurt like a bitch if you get shot, but they don’t do any more damage than a regular bullet and we heal pretty quickly.”

“Define ‘pretty quickly’,” Stiles replied.

“I’ve never been shot,” Laura replied with a shrug. “Fifteen minutes maybe?”

Stiles let his mouth hang completely agape.

“That’s insane.”

“Try explaining the healing factor to a four year old that really wants to wear a batman band aid,” Laura supplied. Stiles raised his eyebrow. She didn’t look old enough for a kid.

“My brother, when he was little,” she supplied. “He used to deliberately, mildly injure himself so that he could have one of the band aids mom kept around for our human cousins.” Stiles smirked, amused. He probably would have done the same because come on– Batman!

“Well at least he had good taste.” He moved on to the next question.

“So you guys heal from what… everything?”

“Basically,” Laura replied. “We do have weaknesses though. Sometimes an injury is just too grave to recover from. And there are some plants that hinder our healing factor and are even fatal to us, if you can believe that.”

“Wolfsbane,” Stiles supplied. He’d come across that in one of the books in his car– the French one. Laura tilted her head considering.

“Yes,” she replied. “How did you know that?”

“Read it in a book,” Stiles replied with a shrug, “and I don’t know anything. That’s why I’m asking you.”

Their conversation kept going, Stiles asked questions until, miraculously enough, he ran out.

Do you change every full moon?

What if an Alpha wants to step down?

They can, but it is very complicated.

Is there any other way to become an Alpha, other than being defined right for the role by some higher power?

Yes, by killing an Alpha and taking their power– and their pack.

Can you switch packs?

Yes, but only if you are not the Alpha.

“Is there any way to reverse what happened to Scott?” Stiles found himself asking before he could moderate his brain to mouth filter. Somehow, the question felt offensive to ask, luckily Laura didn’t take it that way.

“I’ve heard rumors,” Laura replied. “But they could be as much legend as some of your books were.
One is that, if you can find the wolf that sired you and kill them, the change can be undone. But I’ve never actually seen or heard of that happening in any of the circles I run in.”

“I think I’m out of questions,” Stiles murmured, staring at the ground as he thought about Scott. There was still a small chance his friend could go back to living a normal life.

“Good… because I have some for you,” Laura replied. Stiles frowned.

“Can’t we do that part after I get to see Scott?”

“I’m afraid not.”

Stiles could immediately feel the frustration tighten his chest and he struggled to keep it from manifesting in his entire body.

“What do you mean?” he practically growled.

“Don’t get angry,” Laura pleaded, holding her hands up defensively, the same ‘mean no harm’ gesture she’d used the night she met him. “I told Scott where to wait, and he shouldn’t be able to hear you, but if he does and you’re upset, he might lose control and then I’ll be caught between you and him.” The distressed tone of Laura’s voice was enough to make Stiles reluctantly put his guard down. The last thing he wanted was to put Scott or Laura at risk. So Stiles took a deep breath. There was nothing she could ask him that could be that bad, was there. He blew a breath out of his lungs, ran his hands through his hair and looked up at the sky full of stars.

“Okay hit me.”

“Why do you shower at the high school?”

Stiles turned away from the sky, leveled Laura with a disarmingly calm stare.

“Because the community centre is closed at 9:00.”

Laura rolled her eyes in a way that made Stiles grin wryly before he suddenly felt self-conscious, fidgety and… ashamed? Almost, not quite.

“You know why I shower at the school,” he mumbled as he picked at a seam in his jeans.

“Where do you live?” Laura asked softly. Stiles shoulders heaved.

“Technically speaking, wherever I want,” he replied, finally looking up again. Laura looked like she didn’t fully understand. “I usually prefer, about a fifteen minute hike in that direction.” He gestured into the trees and Laura’s gaze flickered there momentarily before returning to his face.

“How do you–”

“I fuck men for money.”

The non-question and brutal answer hung in the air for several seconds, like the snd of the axe after an executioner’s swing. Stiles imagined Laura was listening to his thundering heartbeat. The heartbeat that gave away that he was not as cool and jaded about his life as he tried to make people think he was.

“Stiles…” Laura breathed, her expression pained, like someone had reached into her chest, grabbed her heart and squeezed. “Jesus, you’re just a k–”
“A kid– yeah. But the world doesn’t stop sucking the life out of you just because you’re technically a kid.”

“You’re not a kid anymore,” she murmured.

It felt like a punch in the gut, sucked the air right out of Stiles’ lungs. After all, Stiles felt he’d definitely earned the right to refer to himself as an adult– or at least choose the times when he wanted to be seen as a kid.

“I mean– life kind of took that away with you,” Laura said softly. “Not that you–”

“I know,” Stiles breathed, nodding, eyes on his hands.

“Where were you three months ago?”

Stiles looked up at the odd question.

“Why?”

“That’s when I found Scott,” Laura supplied. “One of the reasons he was so hard to control was that he was desperate to find you. When I eventually got him calmed down enough to talk to me, he told me you had just vanished, and he’d been looking for you ever since.” Laura’s face echoed the heartbreak Stiles felt.

“I got caught about eight months ago,” Stiles felt compelled to explain. “They put me in a Juvenile detention centre three hours away from here for six months.”

“That night a few weeks ago– you really were hurt. It radiated off of you like heat from a fire. Did someone you… did a trick do that to you?” She grimaced at the word, flinching as she said it. It was one thing for him to refer to the men he picked up as tricks. Something was so much more real and raw and shameful about it when someone else said the word.

“Yeah,” Stiles replied, voice like he’d swallowed gravel.

“Why didn’t you report him to the police?” Laura replied, not even a hint of judgment in her voice. There were a million things Stiles would have said to any other person on the planet. About how it wasn’t that simple, how sex workers are the most at risk for sexual assault. But with Laura, it was different. He felt like he was at the top of a roller coaster, a thrill of fear in the pit of his stomach at the knowledge of what was about to happen, any second, the safety of the restraints on the ride there, but just as present, the tiny thought of ‘what if…?’ He closed his eyes. Here went nothing.

“He is the police.”

The silence stretched on and on. Stiles was afraid to look up from to Laura’s face. His held one arm at the elbow, with the other crossed over him, guarded, defensive.

“He won’t be when I’m done with him,” Laura finally growled. The sense of rightness and relief, terror and adrenaline was so great, Stiles thought he was going to trip headlong into a panic because his body didn’t know what else to do. One look in Laura’s face, the determined, protective, blazing look in her eyes, and he crumpled. The tears boiled up and poured out of the teenager like he was an over-flowing pot. Laura sat up straight and twisted to turn to Stiles, arms ready and waiting when he practically dove at her. She squeezed as tight as Stiles did, made no move to let go until eventually, he pulled away.

“What am I doing?” Stiles rasped pathetically. “I mean what am I going to—”
“We’ll figure it out,” Laura replied softly, taking his hand briefly, fingers rubbing over his knuckles. “But right now, I’d better get Scott. If that’s still okay? It’s almost 10:00 already.”

Holy shit Scott. He got to see Scott.

“Yes,” he replied, voice totally hoarse from crying. His face split into a smile. “Holy shit, yes.” Laura’s smile was less manic, softer as she stood up.

“And you’re okay here?”

“Yeah. I’m fine, I’ll be fine.”

“You’re going to be late for your–” Laura grimaced as it dawned on her, eyes widening.

“It’ll be fine, I’ve been late before,” Stiles replied. Never mind the fact that he still wore traces of evidence of his punishment in fading yellow, black and blue. He wasn’t about to sacrifice seeing his best friend to appease Peter – especially when he knew that soon enough, the corrupt cop wouldn’t be able to hurt him anymore. As Laura went into the woods, presumably to retrieve Scott, Stiles allowed his thoughts to drift aimlessly as he waited for Scott and Laura to return, fantasized in abstract ways about how his life was about to maybe, finally, turn a corner.

Stiles looked up at the sounds of two sets of footsteps approaching. Like spectres, the shadows emerged from the tree line, dark at first, before being illuminated in the moonlight. The other boy looked a little older, a little worse for wear. His hair was shaggy, but Stiles could tell it was clean. He didn’t know what he was expecting, but it wasn’t for his friend to look so… ordinary. To look so much like the teenager he was.

Stiles stood up, was practically tripping into a run the second he recognized Scott’s face. Scott for the most part, stood dumbstruck, Laura a few feet behind them, until he jolted into action; the two boys didn’t so much hug as they collided on the remains of the old driveway.

“God, I’ve never been so happy to see you in my life.” Stiles voice was muffled in Scott’s shoulder as he spoke.

“Me too bro,” Scott replied, voice equally as muffled. They finally parted, visibly taking stock of one another for a few seconds before either one of them spoke.

“I’m sorry I went away,” Stiles said after a beat.

“Why did you?” Scott replied, sounding incredibly hurt. “I searched and searched for you– I don’t know what I would have done if I’d found you, but I looked for you everywhere man.” Stiles looked past Scott to Laura.

“You didn’t tell him?” he said in disbelief.

“It’s not my story to tell,” Laura replied simply. “That is up to you to share.”

“What’s going on?” Scott asked, his voice moving up an octave in distress.

“Scott, calm down,” Laura said steadily. Scott chewed on his lower lip, closed his eyes, tried to breathe.

“Scott?” Stiles implored cautiously. “I’ll tell you, but you need to calm down.” Speak for yourself. Stiles’ heart was pounding. Somehow the prospect of telling Scott about how he’d been getting by was far more daunting than it had been to tell Laura.
“I will, when you do,” Scott replied, panting. Stiles could see him fighting to keep control. In an instant, Laura was at his side, one hand on his arm, holding him steady.

“Anchor Scott,” she said, voice low, and Stiles made a mental note to ask about that later.

“Let’s go sit down,” Stiles suggested, nodding towards the dilapidated house behind him.

“So I guess I probably need to start from the beginning huh?” Stiles started once they had all sat down on the former front porch of the Hale house. He had one leg drawn up and crossed in front of him, the other dangling from the old structure.


Stiles wouldn’t have noticed the time if he hadn’t been fiddling with his shoelace.

“Fuck,” he cursed under his breath when he noticed the time on his watch read 10:21. There was no way he would make it to the motel in time. He could feel his anxiety ratchet up a few notches. Both Laura and Scott straightened, listening to his heartbeat. It was kind of disconcerting when Stiles stopped to think about it.

“What?” Scott asked urgently.

“The time,” Laura supplied for Stiles. Her eyes narrowed, then widened at the realization.

“Your appointment,” she said slowly as the realization dawned on her. “It’s–”

“Yeah,” Stiles replied dryly. He felt an emptiness in the pit of his stomach. He’d just gotten his friend back and now he was going to have to leave, and for what? To make a pervert predator happy, or face his wrath.

“You don’t have to go Stiles,” Laura said fiercely. “I mean it. Just don’t do it. I can give you somewhere to stay, everything else, we’ll figure out.”

Scott had an expression on his face like a confused puppy.

“What is going on?” he asked. Stiles took a deep breath.

“Scott… a lot has changed…” Stiles began his story.

“The night that you… disappeared, someone or something attacked the police station. Everybody died except for two officers who were out on a call and…”

“Your dad,” Scott provided.

“Yeah… and he, he’s not the same. He’s been in and out of comas and catatonic states ever since then.”

Silence filled the space between them, heavy and oppressing and Stiles decided the only way to cut through it was to keep going. As the minutes ticked by he felt like he was on a roller coaster. Anxiety over being late to his weekly meet up with Peter seemed to ratchet up higher and higher until it reached a peak, until he told himself that he was late. He was already screwed, so why bother trying to fix it. So he kept talking, filling in everything that had happened since the night of the incident at the police station. He faltered at certain points; when Melissa left, when he lost the house, when he’d turned his first trick, when he’d been arrested and sent to McLean. Scott listened somberly, not
interrupting once. Behind him, Laura stood leaned against the– well, pretty unstable looking beam that supported what was left of the porch roof, frowning, look contemplative.

“I– Jesus Stiles,” Scott breathed. “I feel like I was the lucky one– and I got turned into a werewolf.”

“Hey,” Laura cried in mock offense, delivering a light smack to the other boy’s shoulder before her expression softened again. “Stiles, how about you stay with Scott and me tonight?” Laura offered. “We can keep talking on there, Scott can tell you his side of everything and it definitely beats sitting in the dark here.”

Stiles looked down at his watch, swallowed the lump in his throat.

“I uh…” It was after 11:00. “If I go with you, I’m really going to need to stay with you for a few days… longer even. My appointment he’ll…”

“You blackmailer you mean?” Laura asked sharply. Stiles nodded.

“He’ll do nothing,” Laura replied, her voice very nearly a growl. The silence rested between all of them for several seconds. She sank down onto the porch next to Scott.

“You think you can handle it for a minute if I go inside, give my brother a call?”

“You know I can hear you anyway,” Scott replied.

“It’s not for privacy,” Laura laughed. “Unless they put in a cell tower, the only place I’ve ever gotten reception out here is the top floor.”

“Sure, we’re fine,” Scott insisted. “Or… we will be.” Laura nodded and got up, drawing a small cellphone from her pocket as she went. Stiles knew even without werewolf hearing he’d be able to hear at least her side of the conversation, the house was in such rough shape. She left the door open behind her, and both boys listened to her footsteps up the staircase.

“So,” Scott began. “I guess I should tell you what happened to me that night.”

“You don’t have to man,” Stiles replied, not wanting his friend to get upset. From what he understood, the shift, when a wolf couldn’t control it, was like an anxiety attack on steroids, with the very unfortunate side effect of turning one into a blood hungry maniac. When Scott doesn’t say anything, Stiles suddenly feels a bit guilty, like maybe he has somehow made his friend feel like his story isn’t welcome. Stiles could hear Laura in the house, swearing– something about reception and ‘stupid, fucked up, piece of shit phone’.

“She’s really worried, but trying to hide it,” Scott supplied, filling in all of the unspoken information that Stiles will never be able to catalogue.

“I didn’t mean I didn’t want to hear what you had to tell me,” Stiles says rather abruptly. “I mean if you were uncomfortable–”

“I know what you meant, it’s okay,” Scott reassured, and it sounds as honest as he’s always been. “The night of the accident at the police station, I went out to bring my mom dinner at work. We hadn’t seen much of each other that week because of work– she was on the night shift. It didn’t happen until I was on my way home. I was cutting through the field at school when there was this noise behind me. It was too late to run. I don’t really remember being bitten. But I remember waking up in the woods after, being confused, overwhelmed because I could hear every, little thing.”

Laura’s voice drifted over them from inside the house and Stiles glanced back, distracted.
“…don’t know why we got cell phones since you never answer yours. I need you in Beacon Hills—its urgent. Call me back when you get this, love you baby bro.”

Even Stiles could hear Laura kick at something, frustrated, before the descended the stairs.

“She really is worried,” Stiles marveled absently before turning back to look at Scott. When he did, his friend was stark still, staring at the treeline in a truly unsettling way. So naturally, Stiles wanted to know what he was looking at. He followed his friend’s gaze, expecting at best, a wild animal, at worst, the wolf who’d bitten him. It was so much worse than that.

There, in the treeline bordering the property, dressed casually in all black, was Peter.

Stiles didn’t turn around when he heard Laura’s sharp intake of breath as she appeared in the doorway behind him.

“What a touching reunion,” Peter quipped, both face and tone completely devoid of any humor.

Chapter End Notes

I'd apologize for the cliffhanger but...

Any grievances- come take it up on tumblr
A cold trickle of fear raced down Stiles’ spine, lightning in his veins, his entire body viscerally reacting to Peter’s presence.

*I thought I’d have to go out and find you tonight…*

Stiles was about to open his mouth to say *something* to Peter, anything when–

“Peter.” It wasn’t a question. Laura’s voice was flat, disbelieving, angry even. She glanced at Stiles and he knew she could hear his thundering heart. Knew what it gave away.

“You missed our appointment Stiles,” Peter stated calmly, eyes fixed on him. Stiles could feel himself practically vibrating off the porch before a bunch of things hit him at once:

He was in the company of two werewolves.

Those two wolves could rip Peter apart.

Laura knew Peter.

Holy shit, Laura KNEW Peter.

His Peter, was Laura’s Peter. It seemed stupid he hadn’t figured it out before.

“No,” Stiles breathed in disbelief.

“Yes,” Laura replied behind him, voice fraught with regret, disgust. “That is my uncle.”

“I must say, I didn’t expect a reunion so soon,” Peter said lightly. “What brings you to Beacon Hills?”

Stiles watched Laura saunter forward, eyebrow raised.

“I’m the alpha,” she replied, as if that was reason enough. “What are you doing *here*?” she spat. And man, as unassuming as she could posture herself to be, she exuded power now.

“I’ve come to collect what’s mine. Stiles and I have an arrangement.” Peter took a few steps forward.

“If I were you, I wouldn’t take another step,” Laura growled. She side-stepped so that she stood with Scott and Stiles shielded behind her. “That arrangement it over.” Peter stopped walking, but Stiles had an unnerving feeling it was only for show.

“Everyone knows an alpha needs a mate,” Peter retorted coolly. Laura met him in tone.

“Yes, well, you aren’t the alpha, and he is a little young for me.” From where she stood in semi-profile, Stiles could see her face contort in disgust. “And I can’t even begin to tell you how young he is for you.”

“I should be alpha!” Peter almost shouted, completely ignoring the latter half of Laura’s sentence, unhinged. “I was the one who ran back into that basement–”
“And look what that did to you! Look what you’ve become!”

Laura was fury embodied, her limbs tight, and posture strained. Stiles imagined she was just barely holding the shift at bay.

It was like a spirit drifted by and whispered in his ear then…

*Peter. Peter Hale. Peter Hale is a werewolf.*

Stiles glanced at Scott, he’d been too preoccupied with Peter’s sudden arrival until now. His friend looked horror-stricken, staring right back at Stiles. It took a second for Stiles to notice the claws contracting and retracting every few seconds on his friend’s hands. Peter moved forward a few more paces.

“I didn’t want to do this,” Peter said, shaking his head, his voice entirely remorseless. He tilted his head back, and all hell broke loose.

The howl Peter released was ear-splitting. Stiles could feel it reverberate through the wooden planks underneath him. He caught the tail end of Scott’s wail of agony. When he recovered from covering his ears, he glanced at his friend to see him with glowing yellow eyes. Then his entire body rippled, contorted in unnatural and painful looking ways. Right before Stiles’ eyes, Scott shifted.

Laura was right, werewolves were *not* wolves. This close, they were infinitely more terrifying.

Both Laura and Peter shifted at nearly the same instant, the change even faster than Scott’s. Stiles scrambled backwards from all three wolves, still twitching with movement when his back slammed into the worn wooden siding of the house behind him.

He looked on in horror as the three wolves met in a snarling tangle; Scott and Laura he recognized—Scott a deep brown, and Laura bright silver. Peter was dark grey, nearly black. Their movements were too fast for Stiles’ human senses, so it took him far too long to realize what was wrong.

Scott was attacking Laura, and though she was vicious, she was losing the fight because she was out numbered.

“Scott stop!” Stiles cried out when he finally found his words. They were very nearly lost in the soundscape of snarls and growls. Scott paused for what seemed like a fraction of a second, eyes on Stiles. But they were not Scott’s. His friend was absent of his body, probably floating around in his consciousness somewhere, looking on in horror at his actions. Now, now he had his eyes fixed on Stiles and fuck, Stiles knew with his rabbiting heart, he was all but far too tempting prey. Scott lunged towards Stiles and in that second, Laura moved, tossing him backwards into a small tree so violently, that the barely beyond sapling broke in half. The movement saw her extended, taller, bigger, more powerful.

“Stiles run!” she forced out, her voice deeper, changed in her form, but still recognizable, just before Peter closed one clawed hand over her throat, tearing at the flesh before tossing her to the ground.

Stiles made a noise of utter horror and scrambled into action when Scott started to get up. The lanky teen clambered off the porch, stumbling over his own limbs on his way to the ground. Peter’s act of violence seemed to have knocked Laura’s shift right out of her. Her form had slipped back to mostly human and her face was tipped to the side, eyes on Stiles. Her neck was bloody, torn, but in the few seconds that Stiles watched, he could see the wounds knitting themselves closed. She was gasping for air, trying to say something.

Stiles watched as Peter, still in wolf form, stalked towards Scott and Stiles didn’t know what to do.
His friend looked like he was coming back to this world, figuring out who the real enemy was, which was likely why Peter shoved him backwards, effectively impaling him on the jagged fracture of the tree behind him.

“Scott!” Stiles screamed– a vocal cord tearing level of sound. Like Laura, Scott’s injury seemed to knock the shift out of him. He lay shocked, spitting blood, the tree’s small stump, bloodied and jagged, protruding from his stomach.

“Stiles,” he croaked out, utterly broken, remorse and terror written all over his face. It made him look younger, every bit the kid he still was. Stiles attempted to stand on legs like jelly, collapsing the second he put any weight on them. He stilled as Peter’s harrowing shadow loomed over him, still in wolf form.

Laura was staggering weakly to her knees.

“Stiles run,” she ordered again. But he was frozen, rooted in place. He couldn’t leave, not with her and Scott like this. Peter allowed her to get to her feet.

“You should never have taken what’s MINE!” he snarled, just as Laura had moved to shift again.

It happened in the span of seconds. Peter’s clawed hands grabbed Laura– still mostly human– one at hip level, one in her shoulder and tore.

Stiles jumped back, squeezing his eyes closed. It wasn’t enough. The sound of bone cracking, the wet sound of blood, and everything that was supposed to be inside the human body, sloshing onto the leaves of the forest floor, and in the distance, a pained sound from Scott, made Stiles mind go mercifully blank.

Stiles didn’t want to open his eyes. Ever again. The first thing he noticed as he came back to himself was that his face was wet. He rubbed at it absently before opening his eyes, finally, at the feeling of someone in front of him. His hand was smeared with blood. Laura’s blood his brain supplied helpfully. He stared and stared at his hand until Peter put a human finger under his chin and tipped his face up until they were eye to eye.

“Stiles.” His voice was steady, unlike Stiles himself. “Listen to me.”

“No,” Stiles retorted, shrugging away from Peter’s touch, defiant to the end. “You killed her. Laura was my friend.”

“And she was my niece,” Peter retorted, voice tinged with irritation before turning much darker. “And if I was willing to do that to my own flesh and blood, just imagine what lengths I would be willing to go to, who else I’d be ready to sacrifice…”

As if on cue, Scott coughed, sputtering in the background– alive, at least for now. Peter raised one eyebrow.

“Your friend Scott will live, if I pull him off of there in time. If I leave him there, like a typical human, he’ll bleed out. Even us wolves aren’t invincible, as you obviously now know.”

“What do you want?” Stiles bit out. He knew the answer, was terrified by it, but willing to pay the price– any price to let his friend live.

“Your obedience,” Peter replied coolly, as if it were that simple. “As a gesture of good faith, I’m going to let your friend go so he can run off and lick his wounds.” Peter was already rising, moving towards Scott, who was deathly pale in the moonlight. In one swift motion, the larger wolf grabbed
Scott’s limp form and pulled it free of the tree’s torture, dumping him unceremoniously to the ground.

“Run along pup,” Peter commanded lightly as Scott struggled to his hands and knees. It was the word ‘pup’ that sent Stiles reeling. So Peter was the one who had turned his friend. Stiles watched Scott struggle to stand, one hand pressed to the bloodied section on the front of his shirt. When he finally steadied, he started towards Stiles.

“Uhuhuh,” Peter reprimanded. “Run along now.”

“Stiles…” Scott called out weakly. And Stiles wanted so badly to get up and run to him—run with him, but he was too afraid of what Peter would do— to either of them. He sat rooted to the ground where he was.

“Listen to your alpha,” Peter chastised. Then his voice seemed to lower several registers, becoming a vibration in the air; “I said GO!”

Scott wavered on his feet before Peter released another ear-splitting growl. Stiles squeezed his eyes closed, shuddering as the sound moved through him. When he opened them again, the night was too still, too silent. As if every animal in the area recognized the danger of the predator in their midst and abandoned their post. Stiles was alone with Peter and Laura’s mutilated body.

As Peter stalked towards Stiles, the teen noticed that the man’s hands were deep, crimson, nearly black in the moonlight. Blood. So much blood.

“Get up,” the werewolf ordered, not with the same force he had used with Scott, but intimidating nonetheless for Stiles, who was an all too fragile human. All he could do was stare at Laura’s body. Less than half an hour ago she had been his knight in shining armor, ready to move in and help him piece together his life again. Now, she lay lifeless on the forest floor, a fallen soldier on the same soil as the rest of her family. Peter swiftly grabbed Stiles by the elbow, not even pausing his stride to haul the teenager to his feet. Stiles registered about halfway there, that they were heading for his Jeep.

“Where are you taking me?” he asked frantically.

“Not far.”

When they reached the aging vehicle, Peter yanked the passenger door open and shoved Stiles inside.

“Get in the back.”

It was the same coldness from a few weeks ago. The night he’d beaten Stiles and kept him until the next morning. Stiles knew Peter could hear the terror in his heartbeat. He scrambled to run away. It was a stupid move. Peter immediately grabbed him around his middle and dragged the teen, kicking and screaming, around to the rear of the Jeep. It seemed to take no effort at all for Peter to open the hatch at the back and shove Stiles through the opening.

The teen landed in a crumpled heap on the floor, smacking his head on the console between the two front seats, almost blacking out from the harsh blow, probably would have if not for his own rumpled sleeping bag cushioning it. Peter had undone the tail gate, leaving the entire back of the Jeep open to the night air. When he attempted to crawl in, Stiles kicked at him, trying to shove him out, but the man rebuffed his blows easily.

“It’s cozy back here,” Peter remarked. Stiles scrambled to move past him, but the struggle ended the second Peter’s bloody hands grabbed him once again, this time against his bare skin. A high,
hysterical sound left Stiles lungs. He couldn’t help it, he doubled over, half hanging out of the Jeep, and vomited onto the forest floor. It was worse when Peter held him, bloody hands slipping and sticking on his skin. Stiles knew what was coming next when Peter flipped him over so that his back was on the hard metal floor of the Jeep, his head on the cool metal of the tailgate. He could feel the tears burning a path down his temples, into his hair. He kicked, screamed, bit as Peter stripped him, tossing his clothing behind them into the front seat— not all of it in one piece. The man’s gaze was steady, unnervingly so given the arterial spray that splattered his face. This was Stiles’ home— he was about to be raped in the one place that was still his.

“No– not here, not here, not here!” he pleaded. “Take me to the motel – just—” His breathing became ragged and harsh. “Please Peter,” he whimpered, one last plea before the panic completely overtook his system.

He rose out of the panic attack the same way he always did, head in a thick fog. His world was upside down. The night sky, endless and dark, peeked out from the canopy of trees, the metal edge of the hard top of the Jeep swaying in and out of sight. A shrill, grating sound was drawing Stiles out of his post-panic attack stupor. He let his head drop to the side, heavy, aching from where one of the metal ridges was digging into his skull. He slammed back into reality with a feeling like having the wind knocked out of him when he recognized what he was staring at and what he was hearing. Just beyond the side of the Jeep, Stiles could see Laura’s hair and one bare arm extending like a beckoning ghost into his field of vision. The shrill sound was the call of her cellphone ringing. Stiles struggled to get up again and Peter’s hands snapped to his wrists, holding him down as he thrust into him, brutally hard. Stiles whimpered.

“If you ever run from me again, ever avoid me again, I’ll do the same thing to your pretty red-haired friend.” Peter threatened, knowing exactly what Stiles was staring at. Stiles shut his eyes against another wave of nausea. Peter had done this right here on purpose.

“If Am I clear?” the werewolf asked, bending low over Stiles, face next to his. All Stiles could do was nod.

When Peter was done, he stepped out into the moonlight naked, shaking his limbs out languidly. His hands were still bloody, though Stiles now wore his share of it, bloody handprints on his hips, his stomach, his wrists; smears on his knees, ankles and face. There was blood on the floor of his Jeep, smeared in grotesque handprints like the set of a horror movie. He would never feel safe here again. He slowly sat up, listening to Peter moving around outside, feet brushing through the fallen leaves, the occasional particularly loud snap of a tree branch. He pulled his knees up to his chest, curled into the smallest shape his gangly limbs would allow, leaned against the back of the driver’s seat.

He didn’t want to believe that Laura was actually gone, even though he had seen and heard the evidence, he didn’t want to believe that someone he had put all his trust and hope in was gone. He didn’t know how long he sat curled up naked, not wanting to touch anything he owned, not wanting to taint his life any further. What he really wanted to do was run into the woods naked, find the embankment that led to the river, and drown himself.

*If you’re going through hell, keep going.*

A high school guidance counsellor had said that to him at one point, right after his dad had been admitted to hospital. At the time, he’d appreciated Churchill’s wisdom, but now he was beginning to wonder if he would ever make it out of this hell— or if he did, what he would become in the process.
A low growl, reverberating through the air made Stiles blearily look up from his folded arms, squinting into the night.

“I wouldn’t venture any closer if I were you,” Peter’s voice said lightly. “The moon is round and almost full, just a few more nights. I know you are barely holding on.”

Stiles scrambled up, only a vague sense of modesty causing him to pause inside the Jeep.

“Stiles?” Scott called out. His voice was scared, shaking.

“Where is he?” He was addressing Peter. There was no ‘what did you do to him’.

“Scott?” Stiles dared to call out, not wanting his friend to anger the new alpha. His own voice cracked and wavered.

“Stiles,” Scott’s voice was closer. There was a low, reverberating growl.

“Not another step Scott,” Peter warned. Stiles stayed so still it was like the order had been issued to him. From what he could tell, Scott didn’t move.

“Stiles, I promise I’ll get help, I’ll find someone.” Stiles frantically looked around, trying to catch sight of his friend, but wherever he was, it wasn’t visible through one of the Jeep’s windows. Peter though, was. He sauntered past the passenger side of the Jeep, sighed, an exaggerated, heavy sound.

“I can’t have that Scott,” Peter said nonchalantly. “I value your place in my pack. I just wish you would too. Maybe spending some time getting better in touch with what connects us will do the trick.”

There was a thunderous roar. Stiles used his arms to cover his ears. It was so loud Stiles could feel his heart skip a beat, could see the force of the sound shaking the Jeep. When the sound finally stopped, the trees shivered through the last tremors of sound. Peter appeared in the frame of the rear of the Jeep.

“What did you do?” Stiles thought he asked, but couldn’t be sure, he could barely hear himself think.

“I sent Scott off for some time to think,” he replied cryptically, “let him get more in touch with his wolf if you will. Don’t worry, I’ll call him back when the timing is right.” The werewolf held out a hand.

“Come on, let’s get you cleaned up.”

Stiles wandered across the former Hale property in a stupor, trying not to look in the direction of Laura’s body. He’d only glanced long enough in that direction to know she was still there. As Peter led him by the hand around the back of the house, Stiles reflected that he had never spent too much time on the property. The back of the house was where a lot of the fire’s damage had occurred. The deepest blacks were near the basement windows, and he could practically see the billowing smoke, the siding ruined with black stains from where the flames had licked at it. The back right side of the house was the most damaged– where the basement stairs were. An area of the main floor was exposed, flooring sagging in the corner, ready to collapse into the basement below at the slightest provocation. Peter led him to a pump a few yards from the house, let go of his hand.

The water was freezing, and smelled like copper. It was slick on Stiles skin but clear. Peter started at his legs and feet, hands rubbing away at the smears of blood that painted the teenager’s skin. Stiles
watched, detached, as the water slowly started to run clear again. When Peter was done with him, he did a quick job of himself, looming close enough to Stiles that he knew it would be suicidal to run.

He led him back to the Jeep with a simple directive; “Get dressed.”

Stiles did as he was told, blindly grabbing the essentials from the duffle bag that doubled as a pillow on most nights. When he got to his socks and shoes, moving to grab his sneakers first from the front seat, Peter grabbed his arm.

“You don’t need those.”

Stiles swallowed around a lump in his throat.

“Why?”

“Because I say so,” was Peter’s smug retort.

This time, Peter walked him right past Laura’s body, hauling him up the front steps and into the Hale house.

“What are you doing?” Stiles demanded, trying to jerk out of Peter’s hold. He knew it was senseless to try but it didn’t stop him. He dug his bare feet into the floorboards as they passed over the threshold but they slid, no traction at all against the smooth wood. Now that he knew so much of the house’s past, the place seemed even more haunted. Peter didn’t answer him, just continued to pull Stiles along, showing no regard for his stumbled steps, even as he fell to his knees on the aging floorboards. When Peter opened the door to the basement, Stiles wanted to be sick.

“Peter?”

The man turned to look at him expectantly.

“What are you doing?” Stiles repeated, this time his voice much less demanding, way more scared. Peter tilted his head, contemplative, before abruptly hoisting Stiles over one shoulder. Stiles’ heartbeat thundered as Peter walked down four of five stairs before stopping and just… letting go.

It was like one of those dreams you have where you’re falling and jerk awake just before you’re sure you’re going to splatter all over whatever surface you were hurtling towards. In the darkness, Stiles could see nothing. It made no difference if the hole he’d just been thrown into was five feet or twenty feet, it was terrifying, plain and simple. He hit the ground fast, his cry of fear coming out in an aborted gasp as he landed hard on his back. He scrambled around in the darkness for several seconds before his eyes started to adjust. The basement stairs were almost entirely gone—Peter had thrown him into the darkness where the stairs had rotted out. He looked up to the opening where the door was just in time to see Peter stomp on the remaining steps, splintered, charred wood raining down a few feet from where Stiles stood.

“Peter!” he shouted, almost hysterical with fear. No, it couldn’t end like this. He didn’t want to die trapped in the basement an abandoned house knowing the last things he’d done in life were kill an innocent woman, put his best friends in danger, and now, effectively kill his dad.

He couldn’t see Peter’s form at the top of the stairs anymore, could hear him walking away. His yelled as loud as he could, screaming Peter’s name until the man’s shadow passed in front of the door again. Something was tossed down into the hole; a swishing, light sound. When Stiles scrambled forward, he realized it was his sleeping bag. He looked up, not understanding what was
“Since you have proven yourself unreliable, I have no choice but to put you in safe keeping,” Peter explained. Stiles eyes had adjusted to the darkness, he could now see the man’s face. His placid, all too calm expression. “I can’t have you driving off somewhere, thinking that I’ll never catch up to you– because I would, and I would be very, very angry. And you have seen what happens when I get upset Stiles.”

The teenager swallowed hard around the lump in his throat.

“Peter don’t do this to me,” he pleaded as the man reached around the side of the doorway. Something else sailed into the hole, landing with a clang. A metal bucket. The second Stiles realized what it was meant for, his insides seized up, tears rushing to the corner of his eyes.

“Don’t leave me here.”

Peter stood up.

“No!” Stiles cried out, running forward to jump uselessly at the threshold above him.

“Shhhh,” Peter soothed, leaning over so that his face was illuminated in the moonlight. “I’ll see you in a week dear boy.”

Stiles lost himself, going completely ballistic as Peter walked away. He screamed and pounded at the walls until his knuckles bled, then he heard his Jeep start. He frantically ran to the barred window at the side of the house, craning his neck, but could see nothing but the red glow of his brake lights, reflected off the ground as they slowly disappeared. He finally sank to the gritty cement floor, head in his hands and sobbed until he was to the point of exhaustion, then gave in, pulled his sleeping bag into the corner and crawled inside.

At first, hours passed, then days. It was cold at night, dark. The sounds of the woods around Stiles no longer soothing, but utterly terrifying because what if they got in? What if it was Peter?. The mornings brought with them a whole different kind of darkness. Stiles woke up each morning, pissed, coiled back into the sleeping bag, trying to stay as mentally detached as he could. He spent the hours when he just couldn’t sleep anymore looking for any means to escape. He tried digging at the ground in one corner where the cement had begun to chip away, tried piling the debris of the basement into a pile tall enough to climb– the day after he did that, he woke up in the morning with two big water bottles on the ground where the stairs had been. Peter’s subtle way of reminding him that he was being watched.

Mostly, Stiles worried about his dad, Scott, Lydia. His own mind was his worst enemy, dreaming up every imaginable torture Peter could inflict on any one of the people he loved. He thought about Laura, her last message to her brother. Did he ever get it? What would he do once he found out that Laura was gone– at the hands of his uncle?

It wasn’t until Wednesday that Stiles realized that Lydia’s bid for emancipation would have had its day in court. He was supposed to be (hopefully) out celebrating his clean test results and Lydia’s legal victory. Instead, she would be wondering why he’d bailed on her, if he’d gotten picked up… if he’d had such little faith that he didn’t care to contact her to see how everything had gone. It made him feel sicker than he already felt. He needed a shower, could smell the sweat clinging to his clothes.
and skin, the grease caking his hair to his scalp. His skin had picked up a layer of grime from the floor, and every night it felt like he was rolling around in it whenever he got into his sleeping bag.

Stiles was sitting with his knees pulled up to his chest, mind finally, successfully blank—thanks to focusing on the hollow ache in his stomach—when Peter appeared at the doorway to the basement. Stiles knew it wasn’t their usual time yet, but he didn’t care. Whether Peter tortured him now or later didn’t make a difference, just as long as he left everyone else in Stiles’ life out of it.

“Can you get up?” Peter called down into the hole. Stiles nodded.

“Good,” the man praised, leaning to the side to produce a metal extension ladder.

Stiles’ entire body ached as he climbed the unsteady metal frame to the basement door’s former threshold, pulling himself up the last few inches like one does at the side of a swimming pool. He followed, slow and unsteady, when Peter led him outside. Laura’s body was gone. He didn’t ask what Peter had done with it. His Jeep had been put back where it was, the blood smears on the exterior cleaned away—Stiles could only assume the inside had been cleaned as well. They kept walking, several minutes passed and Stiles started to feel lightheaded.

“Peter, I—”

The second he lifted his head, the world spun. Everything seemed to pitch backwards. He stayed conscious just long enough to feel Peter’s arms wrap around him to prevent him from hitting the ground.

Chapter End Notes

I’m sorry. Believe me, this was as hard for me to write as it was for you to read and I hope that all of you will eventually understand why it had to be done.

On another note, as you can probably tell, I’ve messed with Jeff Davis’ version of pack dynamics. Whereas Peter had killed Laura in the series prior to biting Scott, in this AU something allowed him to bite and change Scott without being the alpha (or was he an alpha?!?) Only time will tell what that is!

Come yell at me on tumblr
Knight with Shining Headlights

Chapter Notes

Wow- I am overwhelmed at the response to the previous chapter and just want to say "thank you" to everyone. Especially surprising to me (pleasantly so) were the amount of people who were surprised at how everything went down. I got a lot of "wow, I wasn't expecting that" kind of comments, and was so happy I could keep people on their toes. I hope I can continue to do so.

So without further adieu- the aftermath.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Stiles watched, detached, as parts of leaves, pine needles and bits of earth sailed across the smooth white bottom of the bathtub, before swirling down the drain. Peter’s hands massaged his scalp, working shampoo through his greasy hair for the second time. Stiles stood completely still, but for the rocking motions Peter’s hands created. They’d fucked already, Peter roughly taking him on the motel room floor before dragging him into the shower with the promise of doing it again on the bed once they’d cleaned up. And Stiles didn’t care. Because he would do anything if it meant Peter wouldn’t throw him down in the basement of the Hale house again to rot.

The silence after Peter turned off the shower was jarring. Stiles didn’t dare move until Peter took a hold of his wrist, guiding him out of the tub. He wasn’t sure what Peter would do when he was done with him; take him back to the Hale house? Back to his Jeep? Kill him and bury him in the preserve? That uncertainty, more than weakness, was what made his legs shake.

Stiles stared straight ahead as Peter dropped to his knees in front of him and drew him into his mouth. He flinched. He wasn’t hard, was in no way able to get there after what he’d been through at Peter’s hands that week and he was petrified. His heartbeat felt too heavy and hard in his ribcage. Finally, he raised a limp hand to shove lightly at Peter’s shoulder. If the werewolf was going to get angry, Stiles preferred he not do it with his delicate parts in his mouth. Peter pulled away easily enough, but his gaze as he met Stiles’ was sharp, his eyes glowing deep crimson.

“I can’t,” Stiles protested, his voice hoarse. Peter’s gaze darkened and Stiles hissed in pain, flinching as the wolf’s claws pierced the skin on his hip. And it was like the pain lifted the fog Stiles’ brain had been in. He pulled away quickly as Peter’s claws retracted, but he still felt their tips sear across his hip as he stumbled back.

“I’m not a freaking werewolf,” the teenager hissed through the pain. He couldn’t help clutching at his hip. “I can break! I can’t bounce back from claws or you know, getting a stump stabbed through my chest— things like that.”

Peter rose slowly, dangerously but his next movements were in stark contrast. Stiles wasn’t sure what happened; one second he was on his feet and the next he was sailing a few short feet through the air to land on his back on the bed. He bounced jarringly enough that the aches and pains from sleeping on the charred basement floor of the Hale house made themselves known again.

“How much did my dear niece tell you about our kind?” Peter asked casually as he swept one of the damp bath towels off the hotel room floor. He was surprisingly gentle when he pressed it to the
sluggishly bleeding wounds on Stiles’ hip.

“That you have enhanced senses—like being able to hear someone’s heartbeat,” Stiles replied. Peter made an agreeable noise that implied Stiles should carry on.

“That you heal quickly from injuries,” he continued. “That while silver bullets can’t kill you, other things can.” At that, Peter raised an eyebrow.

“I bet that clever mind of yours filed that piece of information away,” he retorted. “But it’s going to take a lot of very lethal wolfsbane to get rid of me now that I’m the alpha.”

“I’d rather rip you in half,” Stiles growled against his better judgement. Peter merely looked amused as he lifted the towel and tossed it to the floor.

“One day that sharp tongue is going to get you in trouble,” he lectured, hand resting over Stiles’ injured hip, the wounds still stinging, but not bleeding. “But I think you’ve had enough punishment lately.” The pain in Stiles’ hip seemed to slip away. He barely held in a groan of relief, instead letting the most minute exhale gust from his lips.

“I see Laura didn’t reveal all our tricks,” Peter murmured. He levered up, climbing over Stiles to reach into the nightstand beside the bed and pull out the requisite condom and bottle of lube. Stiles was beginning to wonder if he just left a supply there. It wouldn’t surprise him.

“What did Laura tell you about our family?” Peter continued nonchalantly. Stiles shrugged, shoulder blades lifting and falling against the soft comforter.

“You are born wolves.” He watched with some apprehension as Peter ripped open the condom packet and sheathed himself. Though he’d just been fucked, Stiles wasn’t keen on another round so soon. He squirmed backwards, even though Peter’s body prevented his escape. He swallowed the lump that was growing in his throat. “That most of you died in a fire when she was just about to graduate high school.” His eyes tracked Peter’s movements as he reached for the lube, flicked open the cap before examining the bottle—mostly empty. Stiles could feel his heartbeat, like someone had their foot pressed steadily against the accelerator. “That you ended up badly burned trying to rescue relatives.” Peter snapped the lid from the cap on the bottle with one, deft, thumb. Stiles heaved in a breath only to have it sucked from his lungs when Peter shoved the neck of the bottle into him and squeezed until cold lube flooded into his guts. He fidgeted and panted, uncomfortable but not hurt.

“Keep going,” Peter prompted as he tossed the spent bottle aside. Stiles winced at the clattering sound it made when it hit the wall.

“She said after, you were badly burned and in some sort of catatonic state and in a care facility,” Stiles braced himself as Peter aligned his erection, teasing over his nervously clenching entrance. “And?” He lunged forward, punching a groan from the teenager. Incapable of speech while his body adjusted to the violent intrusion, Stiles just shook his head against the pillow to indicate nothing else, panting and cringing as excess lube seeped out of him. Peter’s eyes had never stopped glowing crimson, burning eerily bright in the dim room.

“Nothing else?” Peter prompted.

“No,” Stiles croaked, “just that she became the alpha.”

“You’re lying,” Peter snarled, thrusting so hard that Stiles skidded several inches up the mattress.

“I’m not,” Stiles panted, indignant, but also very, very afraid. “I don’t know anything else.” He
levered his hips, trying to accommodate Peter’s aggressive rhythm, but each time he tried, Peter would move in a different way.

“So she didn’t tell you how she abandoned me? Left me to rot in a hospital—left behind a part of her pack?” Peter growled, slamming into the teen under him. Stiles shook his head, trying to move in any way that he thought could lessen the strain on his body.

“No,” he finally croaked. He realized with both horror and hope that Peter, in the same state as his dad was in now, had known when he got left behind. So maybe his dad was still in there, could still get out of...

“How did you—” Stiles question was cut off with a groan.

“How did I get better?” Peter replied, face grimacing between pleasure and twisted amusement. One hand slipped around the back of Stiles’ neck, cradling his head.

“I’ll show you mine if you show me yours,” Peter teased with a wicked grin. A bolt of fear rippled through Stiles nervous system when he felt the prick of one razor sharp claw against the back of his neck before it punctured the skin. Stiles could feel his back arch as pain crested over him— and that was the last conscious thought he had before he grew cold.

Stiles came back to consciousness in layers; one sense at a time. He was uncomfortable, his entire body ached, but his head and face hurt, tiny pinpricks of pain all over. He inhaled sharply at the realization that he was alive, only to cough and sputter at the smell of earth and gravel, rotting leaves, his mouthy gritty with it all. For a few horrifying seconds, he thought he’d been buried alive. His head absolutely pounded. It felt like his brain was swollen, pressing against his skull, thudding against his eardrums with every beat of his heart. He wanted to be sick. He couldn’t coordinate his limbs, could barely lift his head. So he lay very still, just breathing… until he felt a rumbling, shaking his prone body. His ears perked up, searching out sound beyond the pulse in his head. It took several seconds longer than usual to place the sound; tires crunching on gravel. Stiles’ eyes flew open the second he realized he was on the ground, face pressed against gravel, and about to get run over. His senses seemed to go from practically comatose to overdrive in half a second. He was instantly blinded by the too bright, too close headlight of an oncoming black car… or it looked black, it was hard to tell in the glare of the headlights. Every single brain cell seemed to devote itself to moving and Stiles’ hand managed a weak twitch, his mouth a gasping sound.

The tires crunched roughly and abruptly to a stop, spraying gravel inches from Stiles’ head. Out of the corner of his eye, he detected movement of a car door being thrown open, but he didn’t hear it close. The crunching sound of gravel under foot came and he instinctively tried to coil in on himself. Stiles swivelled his head, just barely. Whoever it was, they were completely silhouetted in the headlights, all Stiles could tell was that they were tall, broad and male.

“Hey,” the voice was low, smooth, but also distressed, yet maintained an aura of calm. All the mattered to Stiles was that it was definitely not Peter, and not a cop. It was all his brain needed to know. His heart pounded harder, making his brain feel even more confined in his skull.

“Help,” he tried to say. It came out as a garbled whimper that he wasn’t even sure was intelligible. The person dropped to their knees quickly, reaching out to touch the side of his face, and like a switch on a lamp, Stiles flickered out of consciousness.
“Stiles.”

The teenager groaned, opening his eyes at the sound of his name, afraid of retribution if he didn’t.
His eyes settled on a placid blue wall, an instrument cart set against it.

_I have been abducted by aliens and I’m about to be probed_, his brain supplied, followed by; _don’t be an idiot, aliens aren’t real_, and then, _that’s what you thought about werewolves._

“Stiles,” the voice repeated. It was strangely familiar. He sought out the sound, trying to turn onto his
side. He was cold. _Naked_ his brain supplied until the fingers of his right hand told him otherwise,
twitching against the fabric of his pants. Okay, so he was shirtless, that wasn’t exactly optimal either.
He groaned, trying to sit up but his head still throbbed. He closed his eyes again.

“Easy,” the soft voice commanded, “let me help you.” Someone’s hand was on his side, the other
grasping his left hand, gently tugging him to a seated position. Even temporarily blind, Stiles felt the
room spin.

“’m gonna puke,” he whined.

“It’s okay,” the voice said sympathetically. There was the squeal and scratch of something on wheels
protesting as it slid across the floor. “Derek pass me that– thank you.”

Something was set between Stiles legs– a plastic waste bin. He opened his eyes, not wanting to miss
his target. He breathed roughly through his nose– a mistake– he gagged at the sudden, nauseating,
overwhelming smell of hospital and wet-dog. He heaved, but nothing came up. It made sense, he still
hadn’t eaten anything since Peter…

What the fuck had happened?

“Stiles?” the same voice asked. And finally, _finally_ Stiles could focus enough to look. Sitting in front
of him, face kind and calm, was Alan. As in _previous client_ Alan.

“Wha’ happened?” his own voice sounded slow.

“I’m hoping you can tell me,” the man replied, expression concerned, earnest.

“Where am I?” There, that sounded clearer. Apparently it was.

“You’re safe. A friend brought you to my office. I’m a veterinarian,” he explained, gesturing to the
room, the instrument stand.

“That explains the smell,” Stiles rasped, noise wrinkling as he realized he’d just insulted his rescuer.
“I meant the office– not you,” he added hastily. But Alan was already smiling softly.

“I take it you don’t remember how you got here?”

“No,” Stiles replied. At that, Alan looked past him, and Stiles felt the prickling sensation of being
watched. His head snapped back to look over his shoulder and despite the fact that he’d fully
expected someone to be there, he still jumped.

Lounged against a counter that took up the corner of Alan’s office, was a stranger. Or at least, the
stranger _was_ lounged against the counter, until he jumped forward just as Stiles felt the teetering,
dizzy sensation pitch him sideways enough that he started to fall from the metal examining table.
Firm hands grabbed him roughly by the biceps and righted him. When Stiles’ gaze connected with
the other man’s, he could feel the static in the air. The guy looked to be in his twenties, his black hair
looked as bed ruffled as most of Stiles’ clients when he was done with them. He had a closely trimmed—well Stiles guessed he’d call it a beard—definitely too much hair to call stubble—that emphasized a masculine jawline and soft looking lips. Stiles’ eyes flitted up, connecting with clear, sea green eyes, gazing at him intensely. His expression overall was completely reserved, unreadable.

“Dizzy?” Alan asked, and Stiles glanced back at him, nodding, as the stranger slowly released him, and stepped back to his previous place at the counter. The guy looked on edge, despite his lounged position. He was dressed in dark jeans and a deep grey Henley, the sleeves shoved up to his elbows, his arms crossed over his chest.

“Thanks Derek,” the vet said, addressing the other man in the room, who nodded, jaw tight. Something in the back of Stiles’ brain seemed to shift restlessly at the sound of that name again. Stiles was distracted as Alan coaxed him into repositioning himself so that he sat on the metal gurney, legs hanging over the edge.

“Stiles, I need you to think, what do you remember about tonight?” Alan prompted gently.

Stiles fidgeted for a few seconds, before brushing a hand against the back of his head. He winced at the awful the second his fingers brushed over the wound on the back of his neck, which seemed to ignite, both electric and burning like the worst science experiment gone wrong. Instinctively, he wanted to lie, knew that what Peter had done to him—whatever it was—was not something to explain to just anyone—lest he get carted away to Eichen House.

“I don’t know,” Stiles replied, settling on a half-truth, “I was out, uh…” he was careful not to make mention of his and Alan’s relationship in front of the other guy—Derek. “I was out working and then there’s this big chunk of nothing. The next thing I knew, I was waking up to a car about to run me over.” He glanced at the other guy.

“I guess that was you?” he added sheepishly. Derek stared at him for several seconds before turning to Alan.

“He’s lying.”

Stiles heat skidded to a stop. How could he know that? Was a cop or something? Don’t be ridiculous, what kind of cop would take you to a vet instead of a hospital?

Alan’s face remained calm.

“Derek, I think perhaps it would be best if you go take a seat in the waiting room for now,” he said calmly, but firmly. He had an air of authority to him that Stiles couldn’t quite understand. There were a few seconds of tension where the guy just stared, challengingly at the vet before pushing off from the counter and leaving through the door almost directly across from Stiles.

Derek. The name kept pushing at something in the back of Stiles’ brain, distracting him.

“Do you know who picked you up?” Alan asked softly, like he didn’t want to risk the other man hearing despite the fact that he was rooms away.

Stiles nodded. He could confess that much without putting himself at risk.

“So he was a regular then?”

“You could say that.” Stiles heart pounded at the thought of Peter. He hadn’t given much thought to the man until now. God what had he done to him? His fingers traced the air above the sore, burning wound on the back of his neck.
“Do you think he could be the reason you were found lying in the parking lot on the northwest end of the preserve?”

At that, everything started to fall into place and Stiles started to feel cold.

“Why was Derek out there?” he asked softly. He already knew the answer to that question.

“I’m not sure I’m the one that should tell you that,” Alan replied hesitantly. “Stiles, is there something you’re not telling me?”

“It’s Derek Hale,” Stiles breathed. There was a noise from the doorway and Stiles looked up.

“How do you know that?”

Derek’s jaw is set in anger, but his eyes show he is also… scared maybe?

“Derek–” the vet tried to placate, but to no avail.

“No– he knows who I am and I want to know why,” Derek growled stubbornly.


“What do you mean knew?” Derek asked, voice aggressive, but tinted with anxiety.

He didn’t know. He suspected, but he didn’t know.

“I’m sorry,” Stiles said hoarsely.

Derek’s expression was tight, he nodded.

“I had a feeling,” he mumbled as he sagged onto a stool by the door. Stiles felt tears sting at the corner of his eyes. He knew loss all too well, the black hole that seemed to rip open inside of a person and consume them from the inside out. The first time he’d heard ‘I’m sorry’ from a person had been uttered from a doctor’s lips when he was a kid, right after his mom had died. He had been with her at the time, listened to her last, faltered breath, had known she was gone before the doctor had said so. He didn’t bother hitting the nurse call button because he’d known there was nothing they could do. He’d heard it again from doctor’s with his dad but had refused to let go. But with Laura, there had been no ‘I’m sorry’ it had happened right in front of him, someone ripped away from him, one second so alive and vibrant, the next just… gone, a broken and empty shell.

“Another wolf did it,” Derek said roughly, leveling Stiles with a questioning gaze. Alan looked at him sharply, like he had lost his mind. Stiles, before he could stop himself, was nodding.

Alan exhaled roughly.

“Derek, how do–”

Stiles watched as Derek’s eyes glowed, a familiar, surreal blue. A chill ran through him, he’d seen that before– Peter– before he became the alpha.

“That is how I know.”

Several moments passed, all three men suspended in an awkward tableau. And Stiles was sure that any second, the vet was going to reach for the old style rotary phone on the wall and ring up Eichen House to reserve a couple of beds. To be honest, Stiles was starting to think he wouldn’t mind having Derek as a roomie.
“Stiles, I think you need to start at the beginning,” Alan stated. That was not what Stiles was expecting.

“Me? I think you have some explaining to do too,” he retorted. “Like explaining why Derek would bring me to you instead of a hospital. And why you’re not, you know, freaking out about werewolves right now.”

The older man sighed.

“Yes, I suppose that I do owe you an explanation,” he replied. He stood, walking over to one of the cabinets above the sink in the corner. Stiles’ gaze settled on Derek who was staring at him intensely. He felt a flush rise across his skin, suddenly self-conscious. No, definitely not because of his body—he’d spent enough time fucking men for money to know he was attractive enough. There was something about the way Derek stared at him that was much more unnerving. Almost like he knew things already without Stiles having to explain them. He squirmed and then suddenly felt ill again.

He didn’t know if Peter had bathed him before he’d redressed him or not. He wondered if Derek could smell Peter on him… in him.

“Here,” Alan offered, handing Stiles a soft, blue lump of fabric. As he unfolded it, he recognized it as a shirt from a set of medical scrubs.

“Where’s my shirt?” he asked. It was Derek who pointed towards the soiled linen bag in the corner. There, peaking over the edge was his t-shirt, a startling amount of blood soaked into it.

“I can give it back to you once it is washed, but I highly doubt you’ll want it,” the vet supplied. “Your hooded sweater is in much the same shape, I’m afraid.”

“Fuck,” Stiles muttered. He’d have to go to the thrift shop again and with a week’s worth of earnings lost, he knew the month’s bills were going to be tight. He sighed and pulled the shirt over his head.

“I’ll get this back to you,” he replied softly. Alan shook his head.

“Don’t worry about it.”

Again, awkward silence.

“Derek knows me because I was the Hale pack’s emissary,” Alan explained. When Stiles gave him a puzzled look, he continued. “An emissary is a sort of guide or mediator for a pack, usually human who helps advise the alpha in decisions, relations with other packs, things of that nature.”

Stiles nodded his understanding.

“So, like Yoda,” he couldn’t help but quip with a smirk. Alan, thankfully, got the reference and smiled, nodded slightly.

“So when Laura became the alpha, were you hers?” Stiles questioned.

“We discussed it,” Alan replied. “But ultimately we decided that I would remain here, in Beacon Hills, while she and Derek connected with a pack in New York. For all intents and purposes, I retired but with the condition that if ever the Hales needed me again, I would be here.”

“And now they need you.”

“It seems that way, yes.”
Stiles cleared his throat after a few seconds of silence passed.

“I guess this means it’s my turn to talk?”

Alan nodded and Derek seemed to take more interest, sitting up straighter in his chair, leaning back, appraising and Stiles knew right away he’d be under scrutiny the entire time. He squirmed and fidgeted, not knowing exactly where to start.

“How about we begin with tonight? What do you remember?” Alan coaxed. Stiles throat suddenly felt dry. For all he knew, Derek knew nothing about his uncle. What if he didn’t believe what Stiles had to say? What if he loved his uncle? What if he was just like him?

“I… I went to a motel with one of my… customers,” he began, for the first time in a long time, embarrassed to talk about his current profession. At that, Derek frowned, eyebrows furrowing in the middle of his forehead as if he was trying to figure something out. Alan nodded stiffly.

“We… uh,” Stiles swallowed. “We were in the middle of things when he…” Stiles trailed off, pointing to the back of his neck. Derek’s jaw dropped slightly. Obviously he’d put two and two together and figured out what Stiles had been alluding to.

“What happened next?” Alan asked at the exact same time that Derek spoke;

“Who was he? What did he look like?”

Stiles took a deep, steadying breath, expecting the worst before he set his eyes on Derek.

“It was your uncle. Peter.”

Derek blinked several times before he seemed to twitch into motion.

“He can’t– he’s…”

“Most definitely not where you and Laura left him,” Stiles retorted. Derek looked from Stiles to Alan.

“He’s not lying,” he said, voice pale with disbelief. Stiles took the opportunity to answer the former emissary’s question.

“When he… clawed me, I just remember going really cold and then… nothing. I sort of woke up in the preserve parking lot, just in time to almost get run over. I passed out again and woke up here.”

“I still feel like something is missing Stiles,” Alan replied, but Stiles ignored him. Derek was standing up.

“Wait, where are you going?” Stiles asked frantically.

“To find Peter,” Derek replied harshly. He stepped into the room and moved towards the counter– where a black leather jacket was slung over the sink.

Blind terror tore through Stiles and he dropped from the gurney to the floor clumsily, stumbling towards Derek.

“No– no you can’t do that!” he cried. He imagined Peter’s wrath, the path of destruction he would leave in his wake. What he would do to Scott, Lydia… Stiles’ dad. He put himself between Derek and the door, even though the guy was built enough that Stiles knew even if he hadn’t been a werewolf it wouldn’t be a fair fight.
“Why not?” Derek replied indignantly. He tried to shoulder past Stiles, but the teen quickly moved into his way again.

“Stop!” he tried to order, pushing against the broader man’s chest, trying to keep him in the room. Derek’s glance moved from Stiles face, to the hands on his chest and back to his face again before he tried to press forward. Distantly, Stiles could hear the sounds of dogs whining, beginning to bark at the fuss he and Derek were making.

“Stop!”

Alan’s voice was sharp, sharper than Stiles thought he was capable of. When he turned to look at him, the vet was standing up, no longer casually seated on his stool.

“Derek, your mother entrusted me with the safety of the Hale pack—”

“And look at where that got us!” Derek growled. “My sister is dead and my uncle out there. None of this makes any sense.”

“Precisely!” Alan replied, equally heated. “And you found Stiles left in Hale territory– I believe deliberately– marked by another wolf. So do you not think that this warrants some sort of discussion before I fail again?”

The effect was instantaneous. Everything fell silent, even the dogs barking somewhere off in their crates. Alan collapsed back onto his stool, head in his hands. Derek glanced down at Stiles fists– Still against his chest.

“Sorry,” Stiles muttered, dropping his hands to his sides. “I’ve… it’s been a bad…” ‘day’ seemed to be the understatement of the century so he simply trailed off. He turned to go sit back on the metal gurney, suddenly feeling very tired, not just very tired, physically and emotionally exhausted. His thoughts quickly spiraled into a nightmarish play-by-play of the entire week. He closed his eyes, trying to shake his head of the image of Laura, her wild hair flipping back over her shoulder as she told him to run, he could practically feel her blood splatter across his face. He cringed, thinking of the blood on Peter’s hands, the mineral feeling of the water washing the blood from his skin exactly one week ago. He staggered, not hearing a word Alan said as he rose from his stool.

“Shit,” he managed to curse, as his vision blackened around the edges. He wanted to add “not again” but the feeling of warm, strong arms around his middle distracted him. Safe, something in the back of his head suggested. You’re safe.

He blacked out before he hit the floor.

Chapter End Notes

We have a Derek!
When Stiles blinked awake once more, he wasn’t surprised to find himself still lying on the metal gurney in the veterinarian’s office. What he was surprised to find was that said vet was nowhere to be seen. His company sat close by, in a chair that looked like it had been pulled in from the waiting room. Derek was studying his face, eyes flitting over his features restlessly. He didn’t look angry, he looked… concerned. It made his face look like a confused puppy. It was kind of adorable. Stiles smirked at the thought.

“Hey handsome,” the teenager greeted drowsily, voice rough. Derek blinked a couple of times before the corner of his mouth lifted for a few milliseconds. He quickly recovered into a scowl.

“Where’s the doc?”

“Went out,” the werewolf replied. “He got some sort of call from the sheriff’s department. He said it’s probably something small he can treat at the scene— or a false alarm.”

“Oh,” Stiles replied. He shifted, and realized he’d been covered in a wool blanket that mostly smelled like laundry detergent, but still smelled faintly of wet dog. A few seconds of awkward silence passed.

“Thanks for helping me narrowly escape a head injury,” Stiles quipped after a second. His eyes flitted to Derek’s muscled forearms, revealed where his shirt sleeves were pushed up. They were nice arms.

“Well, you’re no use to me concussed. It’s hard to tell if you are lying if you’re brain injured.”

“What is with you and the lying thing?” Stiles sat up too fast, wavered and gripped the edge of the table. Derek’s posture immediately went from relaxed to on guard, then relaxed again when he realized the teenager wasn’t going to fall off the table. Derek sighed as if trying to explain a concept to a profoundly stupid individual for the fourteenth time.

“Humans have tells when they try to lie. For example, your heartbeat changes when you are trying to cover a lie, speeds up a little, or even just skips a beat. Very few people can lie to a werewolf and get
away with it."

That was a little disconcerting. It also explained Peter’s ability to know when he wasn’t telling the truth, beyond Stiles’ original theory of the man simply being an adept investigator.

“Yeah, well, I haven’t lied to you yet dude.”

“I know you haven’t meant to– but you’re hiding something.” Derek sighed. “And I still don’t know whether I can trust you.”

“I guess I understand that,” Stiles supplied, surrendering to his body’s need to lie back down again. He closed his eyes for a few seconds, willing away the dizziness.

“What do you want to know?”

“Why were you with my uncle in a motel room?”

Stiles mouth went dry. He seldom talked about what he did. With anyone. The exceptions were Gloria at the health clinic, his Dad, and Lydia who had barely managed to get an explanation from him the first time he’d stumbled out of one of the motel rooms at the Comfort Plus. It wasn’t like it was something to be proud of. The fact that life got hard and his solution to the problem was to get on his knees on a regular basis wasn’t exactly a source of pride, but when he was confronted with the awful truth, when he had to explain it in the harsh light of day…

“Crossword puzzles,” he answered blandly.

When all Derek answered with was a near expressionless stare, Stiles swallowed hard, felt tears gather in the corners of his eyes.

“Come on man, don’t make me say it,” he said, a near whisper. Derek frowned before his expression softened, shocked and saddened and he nodded, a single, slight up and down motion of his head.

“But you’re a kid,” he finally said. Stiles made an immediate sound of derision. He didn’t want his pity.

“Dude, I haven’t been a kid for a long time,” he retorted. He sat up properly, ignoring the dizzying sensation it brought. He was done, he’d walk back to his Jeep– assuming it was still where Peter had left it. He’d sleep a few hours but only because his body was demanding it and he couldn’t afford not to. Derek was opening his mouth to say something but he cut him off.

“I fuck older men for money. There, I said it; the nasty, disgusting truth comes out,” Stiles tried to stop talking, he really did. The words coming out of his mouth were like pure acid. “And yeah, that includes your uncle. And your emissary.”

Fuck. He should not have said that.

Derek’s eyes burned bright blue, his jaw tight. He closed his eyes before opening them again, thankfully to calm, sea green again.

“Didn’t hear me lie that time, did you?” Stiles challenged, voice shaking enough to rob his words of any real strength.

“Why?” the werewolf questioned softly.

“Because I don’t have a choice!” Stiles’ fist smashed down on the edge of the gurney. He felt…
untethered. Abruptly it was like the outside world was pressing in on him, with all of its needs and responsibilities and he just needed it to stop. He knew ignoring it wasn’t going to work, he had to face everything or let it fall apart.

He kicked at the blanket until it slipped free of his legs, climbed off the table awkwardly, basically spilling to the floor as much as landing on it. It was getting cold outside so, despite the blood stains on it, he retrieved his hoodie from the soiled linens bag and started to pull it on.

“Where are you going?” Derek demanded.

“I have shit to do.” Stiles had meant it to come out hard and determined. Instead, he just sounded tired.

“No,” Derek retorted. He stood up, strolled casually to the doorway between the exam room and the short hallway that led to the waiting room and fucking lounged in the doorway. Stiles rounded the exam table, hands curled into fists.

“Get out of my way,” he demanded. He could feel the rising panic in his chest. He needed to check on his dad, maybe even find Lydia– then, try and search the preserve for Scott. “I mean it.”

Derek stayed completely still. Stiles stood eye to eye with him, now almost toe to toe.

“Move,” he demanded lowly.

“I can’t let you leave,” Derek replied.

“Fuck off, you’re not my parent,” Stiles spat viciously. When the werewolf before him didn’t move, Stiles defaulted to a favored manoeuver from McLean. He took a step back, let his shoulders sag, looking like he was giving in.

And swung.

When his fist connected with Derek’s jaw it was like hitting a wall of concrete.

“Holy fuck!” he cried out, knuckles and wrist throbbing, tears stinging his eyes. Derek didn’t even bother rubbing at his jaw, but he did move, almost immediately.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” he cursed, picking Stiles up from where he’d crumpled to the floor.

“Me?!” Stiles cried incredulously, “You’re made of fucking granite or something. God, I think you broke my hand.”

“Let me see,” Derek demanded.

“No I’m not letting you see, you fucking broke me!” Stiles replied, flapping his hand up and down uselessly, trying to make the blood flow back out of his rapidly swelling knuckles.

“I didn’t break you– you’re the one that took the swing.”

“You’re the one that–”

A shrill ringing interrupted their argument– the telephone against the wall. Derek held Stiles’ gaze for several seconds before standing slowly and grabbing the receiver from its base. Who the hell phones a veterinary office at– what time was it anyway? And why was Derek answering?
“Hello?” Derek was silent for a few seconds as he listened. His eyes roved over to Stiles again, watching him stumble into the chair the werewolf had previously occupied. “Wait what?”

Now Stiles’ curiosity was piqued– especially when Derek hung up the phone.

“He hung up on me,” he remarked in a daze.

“Who?”

“Deaton.”

“Who?”

“Alan– the vet.”

It wasn’t surprising that Stiles didn’t know the last name of one of his clients– at least not to him. As a rule, he generally tried to learn as little as he could about them, though the longer he tended to have a relationship with someone, the more he ended up knowing.

“We have to take off, the sheriff department’s call actually ended up not being a false alarm and he’s bringing something in.”

Stiles nodded, stood up. It hadn’t occurred to him until now that he had no idea where he was. For all he knew he could be looking at an hour long walk back to the preserve.

Derek reached past him and grabbed his leather jacket.

“Come on, I’ll drive you.”

Stiles stared after him for a few seconds as he took a few steps, not towards the doorway to the waiting room, but towards a door on the opposite side of the room Stiles hadn’t really taken much notice of until now. He stood up from the stool quickly, following Derek through a double set of doors to what appeared to be a loading dock kind of area, probably for larger animals. Derek lifted the heavy looking garage door one handed, letting the night air rush in. Stiles immediately felt goose bumps rise on his skin and he shivered as he stepped out into the night.

It was still dark, but he still felt completely disoriented, with no idea of the time to tie him to reality. He looked around the near empty parking lot for any indicator of where he was when his eyes caught on a sleek, black Camaro. He twisted sharply to look at Derek, but he was already crossing the lot, the lights on the car flaring to life as he deactivated the car alarm and unlocked the doors with the remote in his hand. After a beat, Stiles followed.

What’s the worst that can happen?

The sad reality was, right now, he had a hard time thinking of anything. He ducked into the passenger seat when Derek prompted him with a simple; “Get in”.

The interior of the car was, of course pristine, sleek and black. The instrument panel glowed to life as Derek turned the key in the ignition and the engine purred– to life. He kept his eyes on the road as he pulled out of the lot.

“Where to?” he asked.

“Just uh… back to the preserve is fine, I can make my way from there.” Never mind that making his way meant hiking probably half an hour or more into the woods to his Jeep– if it was even there. He
glanced at the dashboard clock; nearly 2:00am. Great.

Derek nodded, turned out of the parking lot and onto the road. They drove for several minutes in silence.

“How’s your hand?” he asked as they turned onto one of the roads Stiles knew led out to the preserve. But he was heading in the wrong direction…

“It’s fine,” Stiles replied distractedly, stomach clenching nervously. “Hey where are we going?”

“I’ve been awake for almost twenty-four hours. I need a coffee or I’m going to crash my car,” Derek explained. “I’ll drop you off at home after.”

“Okay,” Stiles conceded, not about to correct Derek’s gross overstatement with the use of the word ‘home’. “There’s a diner up here somewhere on the left—”

“I know. Is it still called Ruby’s?”

Stiles stared slack-jawed for a few seconds before remembering that Derek had grown up in Beacon Hills. Of course he knew where Ruby’s was.

“Yeah, that’s the place,” Stiles muttered. He leaned back against the car’s seat. It was plush and smooth in every way that his Jeep’s was hard and lumpy. Now that his attention had been brought to it, his hand absolutely throbbed in his lap. He hoped that he still had some of the painkillers the pharmacist had given him a few weeks prior. He’d probably need them.

When they pulled into the diner’s gravel lot, there were only two other cars there; probably the waitress or cook and a customer. The restaurant glowed like a beacon in the dark of the road.

“Maybe you should leave that in the car,” Derek said once they both stood in the parking lot. He was gesturing at Stiles and that was when he remembered he was still wearing his bloody hoodie.

“Oh, uh, right,” he opened the Camaro’s door, frowned at the seat. Though he was sure the blood was completely dry, he didn’t want to risk it. He threw the sweater on the floor of the passenger seat.

The diner was completely empty, save for one man sitting at the end of the counter, hunched over a newspaper, squinting at the print through thick glasses. Stiles followed Derek to an empty booth about three quarters of the way down the length of the restaurant and sat down across from him.

Despite its age, the Ruby’s was in good shape. The booths were still the same bright teal and cream vinyl they’d always been since Stiles was a little kid. The formica table tops smooth and silver-white. The only things that ever seemed to show age were the menus and the people who worked at the diner. But it wasn’t a bad thing.

“How’re you all doing tonight?”

Stiles looked up as a menu was set in front of him by a waitress who looked to be in her mid-thirties, black hair cut like Bettie Page, lips bright red, old cat-eye style glasses. Her name tag read ‘Kitty’. She didn’t seem to look twice at the fact that Stiles was wearing medical scrubs or that his knuckles were scabbed and swollen. Stiles could understand why, her eyes were completely fixed on Derek. Derek, who cast her a charming smile so completely unlike his personality (as far as Stiles could tell) that Stiles blinked several times in disbelief at what he was seeing.

“We’re good,” Derek replied, friendly enough. “We’ll start with couple of coffees, but if you can
give us a few minutes with the menus, that would be great.”

“Sure thing doll,” the waitress replied, then flounced away. Stiles squirmed uncomfortably. All his money was in his Jeep—if Peter hadn’t touched it. He didn’t think the man would but…

“What’s wrong?”

Stiles looked up sharply from where he’d been staring at the menu blankly.

“Nothing… just…”

Derek sighed.

“It’s not like I expected a kid I found in a parking lot to have his wallet on him, don’t worry about it—I think your night has been shitty enough.”

The waitress reappeared quickly, setting a steaming mug in front of each of them.

“What can I getcha?” she asked, pen poised above her pad of paper.

“I’m fine with the coffee,” Stiles replied. She raised an eyebrow but said nothing, turning to Derek, who snapped his menu closed.

“Can I get a burger and fries please?” he replied.

“Everything on it?” she asked. Derek nodded and the waitress turned back to Stiles.

“You sure you don’t want anything?”

“Yeah, I’m sure,” he replied, letting her walk away after a beat, worn menus in hand.

“How’s your hand?” Derek asked once more as Stiles dumped what was probably an alarming amount of sugar into his coffee. He shrugged. It was still sore, but it didn’t feel like anything was broken.

“I’m sorry I punched you,” he muttered.

“It’s fine.” He gestured at Stiles’ hands, now clasped around his coffee mug. “How did you do that? You didn’t get in a fight.”

“How do you know that?” Stiles exclaimed indignantly, pausing with the mug halfway to his lips.

“Because when you hit a person, usually your knuckles bust open, it doesn’t leave scrapes.”

Stiles mouth hung open for a second before it sputtered into action.

“I’m not even going to ask why you know that.”

To that, Derek shrugged. Stiles drank his coffee, closing his eyes in pleasure as the warm, sweet liquid slid down his throat.

“So are you going to tell me why you were hitting brick walls?”

“No.”

Derek’s jaw clenched and he stared out the window beside them at the empty parking lot, his hands wrapped loosely around his own coffee mug. And for the first time, Stiles thought about what the
man in front of him must be feeling, thinking. His older sister had left him a voicemail one week ago from across the country, saying he needed to come to Beacon Hills– the town where most of his family had died, that he had left behind because of that. Then, to make matters worse, he must have tried calling her back over and over again, only to get nothing. Stiles glanced out the window, sure enough, the plates on the Camaro were from New York State. So Derek must have gotten worried enough about his sister that he’d driven across the country to find her. Instead, he’d found Stiles lying in the middle of the preserve parking lot and taken the teenager to someone he thought could help, only to have said teenager wake up tell him his sister was dead, his uncle had probably done it and that he knew about the existence of werewolves.

“Why are you doing this?” Stiles asked suddenly. Derek turned his head slowly, frowning for a second, his face clearly showing his exhaustion.

“Doing what?”

“Look, all I am saying is, this is pretty fucked up. You found a teenaged prostitute lying in the parking lot of the preserve. You could have just left me there—”

“No I couldn’t have.” Stiles opened his mouth to protest but Derek persisted. “You were marked by another werewolf, passed out in Hale territory.” Derek stopped talking, as Kitty sashayed over to the table and, with an exaggerated bend, dropped off the condiments for his burger.

“Food should be up in a minute,” she said cheerily– way too cheerily for the time of night it was. Derek waited until she walked out of earshot.

“Then you wake up, tell me my sister is dead, that my uncle did it, and that he’s been fishing around in your head.”

“What?” Stiles blurted. The pick-up bell rang from the window behind the counter. Stiles watched over his shoulder as the waitress grabbed a carafe of coffee from the burners under the window, and the plate of food. The waitress flounced over and dropped the burger and fries in front of Derek.

“Anything else I can get you?” she glanced from Stiles to Derek and back again as she refilled their coffees. It seemed like this was the first time she’d noticed the fact that Stiles was wearing medical scrubs and khakis and that the combination was kind of odd outside of a hospital… or just in general. She looked Stiles up and down, appraisingly, clearly coming up with no reasonable explanation he’d be dressed the way he was.

“No thank you,” Derek replied politely, smiling until she walked away. Once she had, he shoved the burger across the table towards Stiles.

“Eat,” he ordered. Stiles stared down at the plate. He hadn’t seen food in a week and the burger and curly fries looked fucking delicious, were his kryptonite on a good day, let alone now. All he wanted to do was wolf down the entire thing. Pun intended. He shoved the plate back in Derek’s direction.

“I can’t.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Derek replied, sounding exasperated. “I ate on the road. Just eat the burger. You look like you’ve had it kind of rough lately.”

Stiles resolve crumbled quickly. The food just looked too good to resist any longer. He picked a fry of the edge of the plate, kept his eyes on the ring of coffee left on the table top from the waitress’ over pour.

“Thanks,” he mumbled and glanced up after a second.
“Don’t thank me yet– I don’t think you’re going to like what I have to tell you.”

“About Peter messing around in my head?” Stiles offered. “He’s already been there.”

Derek winced.

“The wound on the back of your neck– it’s a way we have of gaining access to someone’s memories– or if we have to, sharing ones of our own. It’s far more accurate than any kind of recollection someone could give in a conversation– more like watching an entire experience like a movie.”

“Right,” Stiles replied, picking another fry off the plate in front of him. “So what would Peter want with me?”

“That’s what I was hoping you could tell me.”

“I don’t know,” Stiles muttered. He chewed slowly at the fry in his hand, stomach churning with anxiety. He couldn’t think of anything Peter could possibly want to know that he couldn’t just make Stiles tell him anyway.

“You’re afraid.”

“Have you met your uncle?”

Derek was silent for a beat.

“What is he doing to you?”

Stiles stomach flip-flopped. Because right there, in Derek’s voice, was something telling– that he knew what Peter was doing, and knew something was very, very wrong.

“You already know the answer to that question,” Stiles muttered. He picked at another fry.

“Is he making you?”

Stiles paused, the fry part-way to his mouth.

“He’s keeping me safe,” he replied, uttering the propaganda Peter had been feeding him, feeling hollow as he did.

“So let me get this straight,” Derek replied, voice low. “You’re telling me the man that murdered my sister is keeping you safe?”

Stiles looked up, meeting Derek’s eyes, which somehow, despite their cool colour, seemed ablaze with something.

“Yes,” Stiles replied after a beat, voice completely flat.

He knew Derek could hear the lie.

“Eat,” Derek urged after several seconds of sustained staring and silence. Stiles picked up the burger, took a massive bite, chewed, swallowed.

They sat in silence for what felt like forever, Stiles devouring massive chunks of burger, hurting his throat and his stomach as he forced the pieces down. He’d be lucky if he didn’t puke later, but he couldn’t stop.
“How do you know Peter did it?”

Stiles set down the burger, three quarters finished.

“Because he did it right in front me.”

Derek winced, hand extending shakily to grab at his coffee. It was the first time that it really seemed that he registered that Laura was gone.

“When I got her message, I didn’t think anything of it. I thought I’d call her in the morning, but something kept nagging at me. So I tried calling her back—did it over and over again…”

Stiles vision swam and he gripped the edge of the table. All of a sudden he was thrown back into that night. Laura’s phone ringing just feet away from him as he lay covered in her blood in the back of his Jeep with Peter on top of him. Inside of him.

“Stiles…” Derek sounded concerned.

“I’m fine,” he croaked. He grabbed his coffee, took a scalding gulp. “What else do you want to know?”

Derek shook his head, exhaled and shoved his hands through his hair.

“I think we’ve both been through enough tonight,” he sighed. “I need to crash, figure out what to do.”


Derek stared at him for several seconds, jaw working.

“Peter is pack,” he finally said, after what seemed like an internal war.

“Peter is a psychopathic—no sociopathic—murderer.”

“And rapist.”

Stiles stared at Derek pointedly, fingers scratching against the back of his coffee mug.

“You’re what, sixteen years old?” Derek asked.

“Seventeen. What difference does it make?”

“Peter is thirty-four.”

“If you are about to give you the argument that I’m a minor and therefore I can’t give consent, I’m going to stop you right now by saying that the court didn’t seem to think that way when they put me in a detention centre for six months. It could have been worse—I’m emancipated and as I was reminded by several law enforcement officials, they could have tried and sentenced me as an adult, so trust me when I say, I know exactly how fucked I am.”

Across the table, Derek was silent, his jaw clenched like he wanted to say something but was biting his words.

“I can’t just leave,” he finally replied. Stiles was thankful there were no words of pity, no questions of why. “Peter is still pack,” Stiles would have reeled had it not been for Derek’s next words; “and
sometimes out-of-control pack members need to be brought under control. That’s part of an alpha’s job.”

“You’re forgetting something— you’re not the alpha,” Stiles replied pointedly.

“No, but my sister was, and the least I can do for her is take back what Peter stole.”

“You’re going to kill him,” Stiles said skeptically, voice flat, not shocked so much as disbelieving. After all, Laura hadn’t succeeded. While it was true Peter had gotten the jump on her in a way, it had still been two against one in the end, and she had lost. Stiles’ stomach twisted into a knot of anxiety at the thought of another member of the Hale family meeting the same fate. Derek raised an eyebrow.

“I have no choice,” he replied, his only explanation.

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They sat in the parking lot of the preserve, staring at the spot where Derek had discovered Stiles just a few hours before.

“You sure you want to do this?” Stiles asked.

“Do what?” Derek was looking at him puzzled, and not for the first time that night. The teenager beside him had been a mystery when he’d found him, neck bleeding from a wolf’s botched attempt at messing with his memories, and he’d only become more of an enigma as the night went on. Something in Derek told him that Stiles was important, not just a puzzle piece but a sort of key. There was a reason Stiles had been acquainted— intimately acquainted even, with the other two members of his pack and Derek needed to find out why.

“Let me go.”

Truthfully, Derek wasn’t sure, but what could he do, force the teenager beside him to stay? Then he’d be no better than he suspected Peter was.

“No,” he replied truthfully, “but I’m going to do it anyway. I’ll be able to find you easily enough.” He regretted his choice of words at the sound of the teen’s heart suddenly up-ticking. Lucky for him the kid (could he even call him that?) seemed to calm himself quickly.

“Well uh, thanks for the ride,” he replied, fingers clasped around the door handle. “I’ll see you around?”

“Yeah,” Derek replied, and just like that, the passenger door had opened and closed. He watched Stiles shuffle to the edge of the parking lot, his slouched posture doing little to hide his height, instead emphasizing his slim physique. Fragile, Derek’s mind supplied. He snorted. Somehow he got the sense the kid was far from it. He waited several minutes, until he was absolutely positive that Stiles was out of earshot, then stepped out of the car. He tried to tell himself that he wasn’t following the teenager, he was investigating his sister’s disappearance.

Even though it had been years, the paths and trails of the woods felt like an old friend to Derek; The darkness as a comforting blanket? That was a more recent thing. He couldn’t hear Stiles footfalls anymore and couldn’t help but wonder where the kid slept— maybe one of the old coyote dens in the area? Or maybe your old house. As he got closer to the ruins of his childhood home, Derek could smell wet ash. To this day, a handful of visits to the condemned building later, he still couldn’t be
sure if the smell was real or a figment of his imagination. He stood, hesitating at the treeline as the
dark, jagged shape rose up in the moonlight in front of him. He stared so long, he actually took a step
back when the battered front door swung inward.

Stiles emerged with a fat bundle of something clutched to his chest. Even from across the property,
Derek could hear his thundering heart. He was crossing the former front veranda quickly— to the
point of stumbling. Derek frowned, seconds before a wall of panic, all manic heartbeat, rushing
blood and sickly sweet sweat hit him. Whatever was in the house invoked a reaction in Stiles not
entirely unlike his first visits. He tracked Stiles movement to a faded blue Jeep, watching as the kid
pulled impatiently at the tailgate a handful of times before jerking it open, shoving the bundle he’d
been holding inside. He was obviously completely unaware he was being watched. He ran his
fingers through his hair absent until they encountered the wound on the back of his neck and
dropped away with a flinch. Stiles leaned into the Jeep’s cab, bending to arrange the lump of cloth— a
sleeping bag Derek realized. Partway through the process he abruptly stopped, dropped to the
ground behind the rear passenger wheel and started to shake. He folded his arms around himself, as
if trying to keep from flying apart. Derek’s heart pounded— after everything he’d heard that night—
the ambivalent, even defiant attitude the teenager seemed to have about his own life, this was too
much. He was watching something that was just too deeply personal— a private unraveling that made
him feel like the most perverse of voyeurs. He was torn between wanting to go to him and help, but
knew he didn’t know him well enough yet and had no choice but to respect his privacy— not scare
him.

Suddenly, Stiles looked up, eyes unmistakably pointed in the direction of the treeline, right where
Derek is standing.

“Scott?” he called out, voice quaking and hoarse.

Derek shifted and ran.

Chapter End Notes

I figure now is a time to note that the Derek I envision for this story is much closer to
season 3 Derek than season 1 Derek. First off, some of you may have been paying super
close attention and realized that he and Stiles are the ages they are in season 3. Therefore
when writing them, that’s what I envision they look like, act like, make decisions like.
Some people of course, are going to argue that the events of season 1 and 2 in canon are
what led to the Stiles and (more specifically) Derek we see in season 3. However, since
this is an AU, my counter-argument to that is that a different set of circumstances have
made both their personalities what they are.

Also… fantasy world where Derek didn’t trade in his Camaro for a mom car— because
no matter what anyone argues, the Camaro still suits him.
Lost and Found

Chapter Notes

Again, thank you so much to everyone who has been reading so far. This update took a little longer than usual just because of a busy real-life, but I’m back on track!

Stiles stared out of the back of his Jeep into the woods for what felt like hours. His sleeping bag smelled like ash and rotting wood. He’d been sick from eating that stupidly delicious burger from eating too fast and though there was nothing left in his stomach, he felt like it could easily happen again. Even though the blood had been cleaned away, the Jeep aired out—maybe even cleaned—Stiles felt like he was breathing Peter in, soaking up his invisible presence through his skin. He slipped into a light daze just as the sky was beginning to go hazy with the first signs of morning light.

Stiles blinked awake to sun streaming in on his face, too bright. Something felt wrong. He wasn’t alone. He squirmed in his sleeping bag, quickly becoming aware of arms around his waist, stronger than he would ever be.

“Shhhhh,” an all too familiar voice soothed. Stiles sat bolt upright— or tried to. He was naked, Peter unmistakably inside him. He had to wonder what was wrong with him, how he had not noticed being penetrated in his sleep. Had he been drugged? He struggled against Peter’s hold, hands slipping across the other man’s skin, slick. Peter’s grip shifted to his forearms, pulling them up his chest, like he was going to pin him down. When Stiles struggled, was when he noticed that his hands were covered in blood—hot, fresh, not yet tacky from the air. He screamed. Peter chuckled and allowed Stiles to sit up. He scrambled away, kicking and freeing himself from Peter’s limbs. He threw open the back of the Jeep and the second he had, he really wished he hadn’t. The rear of the Jeep framed the horrific scene in front of him. Littered across the forest floor, scattered like breadcrumbs, were the bodies of Scott, Lydia and his dad, torn to pieces, just like Laura. Stiles twisted to stare back at Peter, who was still lounged casually against the backs of the front seats.

“What did you do?” he demanded. And Peter laughed. He fucking laughed.

“What did I do?” his tormentor returned. “My sweet boy, the blood is on your hands.”

Stiles woke up screaming and kicking, sleeping bag tangled around him, sticking in places to his sweat-soaked body. It wasn’t until he spilled out of the back of his Jeep and landed in a heap on the ground that he dazedly looked around and realized that the forest was peaceful and quiet, grey in the early hours of what was looking like a rainy day. There were no bloody, dismembered bodies strewn around his Jeep like broken dolls. His fucked up brain had come up with that one all on its own. He let out a sob of relief that echoed through the woods.

It took longer than it should have for Stiles to change out of his clothing from the night before, and even then, he didn’t feel clean, his clothing clung to his skin where he couldn’t wipe the sweat away. He couldn’t decide whether paying the community centre entry fee was worth it considering it was a Friday and he’d be busy anyway, or whether he should just risk sneaking into the high school later,
or hope someone took him back to a hotel and he could sneak a shower there. He had more important things to worry about than that though. His life was falling apart at the same break-neck speed he’d felt it falling apart before and he was terrified, because it couldn’t get any worse. He wouldn’t survive if it got any worse. He’d had Laura and Scott right there, a path beginning to lay out in front of him that actually went somewhere instead of going in circles… and Peter had taken it all away. Last Thursday night was very close to being labeled the night that his life descended into hell. He didn’t have a choice but to come up with a plan, move forward.

First, he still needed to pay the bills– and now thanks to Peter, he was behind. An entire week being trapped in the basement of the Hale house meant he was going to have to do one of two things; take more work, which meant being more exhausted and more disgusted with himself, or take the kind of work he’d learned really early on not to; higher risk stuff like threesomes, letting clients tie him up, niche fetishes that may have the potential to harm him. Otherwise, he’d be clawing back to the top from the bottom for weeks.

Naturally, next on his list were his friends. Lydia had been to court, and Stiles didn’t know what the outcome of that was going to be, but he wasn’t optimistic. Still, he at least owed her the courtesy of asking how it had gone. Then there was Scott. Somewhere his best friend was at best, disoriented and confused and terrified at the loss of his mentor– his alpha. At worst, he was under Peter’s thumb, in a way even worse than Stiles, if that was even possible.

Then there was everything that had happened the night before. The entire week felt like it had happened in a dream, especially the night before. Derek just didn’t seem real. He had pulled into the parking lot of the preserve with the kind of timing that only happened in fiction. Then there had been the bizarre mix of old school chivalry at the diner, which had been preceded by, at best, standoffishness and at worst, aggression, at Deaton’s office. Derek was surprisingly similar to Laura in some ways, drastically different in others and just like with Laura, Stiles didn’t know what to think of him. Something told him that the siblings were not always the most law abiding of citizens, and somehow, that made Stiles trust Derek more, that little tenuous thread between his personality and Laura’s.

But Derek wasn’t Laura, and that was and wasn’t the problem. He didn’t know anything about Scott. He didn’t know Laura had tried to help Stiles. He wasn’t the alpha, and therefore probably not a target for Peter– unless he made himself one– and that looked like something he planned on doing.

Shit. Stiles was already responsible for one death at Peter’s hands. He didn’t want to be responsible for anymore. Which meant he was going to have to find Derek again, and he had no idea how to do that.

One thing at a time. First, find Lyds.

When Stiles pulled up to the Comfort Plus, he was relieved to see no sign of Peter’s car anywhere. He had thought about what he would do on the way– drive off if he saw it. If Peter saw him… well, probably the same thing. He checked his watch– it was just about 8:00am.Lydia would be at work any minute depending on the bus. Sure enough, the second Stiles glanced to his rear-view mirror, he could see Lydia approaching stomping across the parking lot in her uniform and a pair of towering heels. She stopped the second she recognized Stiles’ Jeep.

“Now or never,” he muttered to himself, opening the door and stepping out onto the pavement. When he turned, Lydia had frozen in place, staring him down. He opened his mouth to say something, but she beat him to the punch.
“Where were you?” she demanded, voice low and angry. Her eyes flitted over him, pausing at the marks on his knuckles, the scrape across the top of his cheekbone that he’d discovered that morning—most likely from the gravel parking lot of the preserve.

“Lyds…”

“Do not ‘Lyds’ me!” she cried angrily, before she closed her eyes for several seconds, took a breath in. “What happened to you?”

“How did court go?”

“Don’t answer my question with another question.”

The silence that stretched between them felt like a chasm.

“I went with someone I shouldn’t have,” Stiles finally said, because it was the closest to the truth that he could give.

“It was the same guy again wasn’t it? The one who–” Stiles didn’t feel like having the entire motel hear his business, so he nodded somberly, hoping it would keep Lydia quiet.

“You look awful,” she replied, arms crossed over her chest as she took a few steps closer. She wrinkled her nose, sighed at glanced around. “I’m going to go get the keys from the office, find out which rooms are on the list– and which one you can sneak a shower in. Stay here.”

The hot water felt incredible. Stiles didn’t think he’d ever been so grateful for the Comfort Plus’ seemingly endless supply of cheap all in one body wash shampoo in his entire life. He definitely owed Lydia for this. She was busy cleaning the rest of the room and had made it pretty clear he owed her some answers when he got out of the shower and stopped smelling like a homeless person. She’d given him a look when he had pointed out that he was homeless and told him to cut the shit and get ready to talk. Now he stood under the steady stream of water, trying to think of what to tell his friend. There was no way he could tell Lydia the entire story.

When Stiles left the bathroom with a towel around his waist, Lydia had already made the bed and was aggressively vacuuming, practically assaulting the flooring with her violent movements. She killed the power as soon as she noticed Stiles standing in the threshold.

“Sit down and start talking,” she demanded in the ringing silence left in the wake of the vacuum. Stiles sat on the corner of the bed.

“Where were you?” Lydia asked softly.

“I– it’s complicated,” he replied, still trying to come up with a believable angle to tell Lydia without actually lying.

“Let me ask you a simpler question then. Who in their right mind even talks to someone who assaulted them, let alone lets said person do it again?” she snapped. Stiles sighed and said the only thing he could think of that she could possibly buy.
“I needed the money,” he replied. “Things got a little carried away.”

Right, in the way that murder is somehow comparable to a misplaced bar brawl punch.

“I’m sorry I missed your day in court,” he murmured, trying to divert attention from himself back to Lydia. She was bending to wrap the cord around the vacuum, saying nothing.

“What? Are you so mad at me you’re not going to tell me–”

“We lost.” Lydia’s reply was even and unemotional.

“I’m sorry,” Stiles replied almost instantly. He couldn’t imagine what would have happened if he hadn’t been granted his emancipation.

“Are they going to make you go back to living with your parents?”

“They tried,” Lydia replied. “Until Marin—my guardian ad litem—argued that it would not be to my benefit. The judge conceded that I could continue to live on my own and Marin could continue her guardianship in legal matters.” She stalked over to the door, opened it and retrieved a stack of fresh towels.

“Now stop avoiding telling me where you were on Tuesday. I looked for you in all the usual places. Danny told me you hadn’t been out the entire weekend. I would have called the cops but…” she trailed off into a shrug, “I was afraid if I called them that would be more trouble for you in the end.”

“They wouldn’t have been able to find me anyway,” Stiles supplied as he pulled his t-shirt over his head. He stood, and as if on cue, Lydia turned away while he shed the towel and pulled his boxers over his hips. “He was keeping me at his place for safekeeping.” It was a half-truth.

“And…” Lydia prompted, arms crossed, turning around whether he was ready or not.

“And what?”

“You expect me to believe you stayed without being ‘convinced’?” her air quotes were so exaggerated her entire body swayed with the motion. Stiles sighed.

“I’m fine,” he replied dryly. “He didn’t do any permanent damage and I’m free to be out on the town for one of my busy nights so its fine.” He bent and pulled on his jeans before he crossed the room, still in his bare feet. He pressed his forehead against his friend’s and she rolled her eyes.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you on Tuesday,” he murmured before pressing a soft kiss to the alabaster skin of her forehead for a brief second before pulling away.

“What’s the plan now?”

Lydia’s lip curled up on one side. Stiles knew that look all too well.

“Let me guess—you have a plan?”

“As a matter-of-fact, I do,” she replied smartly. “Marin is working on a different angle. I told her it was especially important since it turned out I really needed to live with my friend in order to keep tabs on him.”

Stiles smirked.

“How you managed to get emancipated is beyond me,” Lydia bitched.
Stiles quirked an eyebrow, smirking, watching her stop dead in her tracks.

“You–”

“Have a very particular set of skills?”

Stiles was rewarded with a smack to his chest with a pair of rubber gloves and a bottle of cleaner.

“Yeah, well go put some of your other skills to good use and wipe down the shower, I’ll be in 216 when you’re done.”

Stiles bristled at the mention of his and Peter’s usual room and forced himself not to react.

“Sure,” he replied, strained.

By the time he left the motel, Stiles knew things were okay between him and Lydia. She was still pissed, but the worried kind of pissed that would dissipate in good time. In a move very atypical of her, Lydia refused to let Stiles know exactly what she was dreaming up. Truth be told, he was kind of glad– the more he knew, the more he dared himself to hope. It was better this way.

“Lydia’s been looking for you.” Stiles glanced over his shoulder to see Danny approaching from behind him. He was either just arriving to the bus stop or had just come back from a job.

“I found her,” Stiles replied. “She was a little pissed I hadn’t been in touch, but we’re good now.”

Danny nodded, settled himself beside Stiles.

“So where the hell have you been?”

“Was laying low for a little while,” Stiles lied, inwardly groaning as he realized what a horrible pun he’d just made.

“That’s probably a good thing,” Danny replied. “Last weekend they rounded up a bunch of us. As luck would have it, I had just finished with a frat boy and spotted the cop car before he dropped me off. We went to Denny’s instead.”

“You play’a,” Stiles joked. Danny wrinkled his nose.

“Not really, he looked kinda like Jackson, so… that was awkward.”

“Aww, are you still after unrequited love Danny-boy?”

Stiles’ teasing was good-natured, but he knew that the Hawaiian looker did have a crush on the jock douchebag. “You know, I will never understand what you see in that asshole.” Stiles shook his head, Danny shrugged.

"The heart wants what the heart wants?” he suggested.

“Yeah, well, your heart could do better.” Stiles refrained from telling Danny exactly what Jackson had done to him to save his own ass in juvie. “Speaking of Jackson, heard anything from him?”

“Yeah– I went up to see him last week since Friday night the cops busted everyone and I knew that Saturday would be pointless.” Danny’s shoulders heaved. “He doesn’t look so good, had a split lip and a black eye.” Stiles would have felt bad for the guy had he not spent six months basically being whored out by him in an effort to protect his own ass.
“Yeah well, Jackson’s a big boy, I’m sure he can handle himself,” Stiles replied. The approach of a car, pulling up to the curb effectively killed the conversation.

“You’re up,” Danny declared, “Careful though— that car’s been circling awhile, and for whatever reason, nobody has taken the bait yet.”

Stiles nodded, took a deep breath and stood up. In the beginning, he’d only been able to stomach blowing guys who were in college. Push came to shove and he’d moved on to letting them fuck him. Then guys who were a bit older, pushing thirty maybe. Then business men in their thirties and forties. One could easily get the picture of where the pattern was headed. And while Stiles wasn’t keen on offering his services to men who could be his grandfather, he wasn’t exactly in a position to be picky either.

The white SUV was perfectly clean, a mid-range model but it looked like it had the highest trim level, Stiles could have bet from ten feet away that it was something that someone’s rich daddy bought instead of actually spending quality time with their kid. His suspicions were confirmed when the window rolled down revealing a young guy, brown hair, blue eyes, designer t-shirt and leather jacket. Beside him was practically a carbon copy but blonde.

“Hey there,” Stiles greeted from the curb. “You lost?”

In retrospect, coming from being held captive by Peter for a week and jumping straight into a threesome probably wasn’t the greatest idea. Nonetheless, Stiles found himself in the backseat of the rich kid’s Escalade or whatever stupid giant vehicle it was under the Court street bridge, once again regretting his life choices.

“You ever done this before?” the brunette— Matt— asked as he climbed into the back seat to join Stiles with the blonde, who, in lieu of introducing himself, was already sucking a hickey into Stiles’ collarbone and palming his dick through his jeans.

“Cute,” Stiles snarked with a flirty smirk. “Do you use that one on all the boys?” He was defaulting to sarcasm, something he always did at the first signs of anxiety. The last time he’d had sex with more than one person at a time had put him in the hospital wing of McLean. He tried not to think about that, but couldn’t help it. His heart rate ticked up, palms growing clammy.

Matt’s eyes twinkled mischievously.

“I guess it would be naïve to think you haven’t been spit-roasted in the back of a car before.”

Stiles flinched at the euphemism, stomach twisting into a knot. He had an astonishing amount of high denomination bills in his jeans’ pocket. He was getting paid and it would be almost enough to put him in the black again… and he still wasn’t sure he wanted to do this.

“Yeah,” he muttered distractedly.

“Come here,” Matt beckoned, grabbing the back of Stiles’ neck to seal their lips together.

Even in the monstrosity of a vehicle, with the seats folded down, the back was crammed with three people in it. It added to Stiles’ suffocating feeling of regret. Things were moving too fast. The two college students were over-eager, clearly horny at just the thought of what was going to come, and despite his best efforts to slow them down, Stiles found himself almost naked way too soon—
something he tried to avoid when fucking in cars because of the higher likelihood of being caught by
the cops. His shirt had been thrown somewhere towards the front seats, his jeans and boxers yanked
down and still wrapped around one foot. He was trapped between them, all three standing on their
knees, heatedly making out. Well– both guys were lavishing attention on Stiles, but not each other.
Somewhere in the back of Stiles’ mind, he recognized at least a part of this as a pubescent fantasy,
but in reality, it was playing out all wrong. He swayed to the side, thigh muscles clenching as
someone’s fingers breached him– probably the blonde’s. He flinched. Not enough lube.

“H–hey guys, haven’t you ever heard of foreplay?” he quipped, fingers tangling in Matt’s curly
brown hair, trying to pull him away from where his teeth were latched to Stiles’ shoulder.

“How about I put on a show for you, and you two sit back and watch?” he purred at his best attempt
at sounding seductive. Really he felt too hot, his skin too tight. He needed space. “Maybe you two
can get warmed up?”

Behind him, the blonde laughed.

“If we wanted to do each other, we wouldn’t have picked you up,” Matt replied with a low chuckle.

“Besides, who is paying who?” the blonde added, pressing another finger in beside the other two
suddenly enough to set Stiles off balance. His hands flew out, grabbing at Matt in a way he
knew would be misinterpreted.

“How about you blow me, that counts are foreplay right?” Matt suggested. Stiles bit back the ‘stop
that threatened to spill from his lips. He needed this too much. It’s not going to last long, just suck it
up. He nodded and let Matt guide his head down, effectively positioning him on his hands and
knees. He reached back, fingertips grabbing at his jeans to retrieve a condom from the pocket. But
Matt didn’t seem to care, was already guiding Stiles’ head towards his erection despite their previous
negotiations which included using condoms. Stiles shook his head.

“Wait,” he protested, raising a hand to push at Matt’s hip for a few seconds before reaching back
again to attempt to retrieve a condom from his jeans pocket. His friend didn’t seem to like Stiles’
wriggling around, grunted and grabbed Stiles hips.

“Hold still,” he muttered, his erection bumping dangerously close to Stiles’ entrance. He jerked away
at the same time that Matt’s fingers tangled in his hair. Stiles squeezed his eyes closed,
panic fluttering up through his stomach, settling in his chest. He couldn’t breathe.

Everything happened at once; Matt pulled Stiles face down into his lap, choking him, hands rough
and commanding, the other guy was fumbling in Stiles’ jeans for a condom (surprisingly) when
suddenly the rear door was ripped open.

“Get out of the car.” The voice was glacial. Stiles felt his insides shrivel up with dread, with
mortification, he wasn’t sure. Matt’s grip on his head had slackened enough that he was able to pull
away and turn in the direction of the voice. He blinked. He’d been expecting a police officer, instead
his eyes met those of Derek Hale’s.
“Who the fuck are you?” blondie demanded. Derek’s response happened in phases. His jaw clenched infinitesimally, one eyebrow elegantly arching as if to say ‘are you serious?’ before he moved, fast enough to be reflex, arm snapping very suddenly into the back of the SUV’s cab to grab the blonde, ripping him from the vehicle and tossing him bare-assed onto the pavement outside.

“Get out of the car,” he repeated, this time his sights set on Matt.

“It’s my fucking car!” the college student replied indignantly. “Who the fuck are you? His pimp?” Derek’s face was the perfect embodiment of barely contained rage. Matt actually fucking laughed, a light, cocky sound that Stiles knew he would soon regret.

“No wait, you must be the boyfriend.”

Derek reached into the car and grabbed him, dragging and tossing him to the pavement with even more force than he’d used on his friend. He turned back to Stiles. His voice softened, but his expression was unreadable.

“Put your clothes on.”

Stiles face burned. He scrambled to pull his jeans and boxers back up, feeling around the floor, partially blinded by unshed tears. It been so easy to tell Derek exactly what he did to make ends meet last night, but actually having the man see it was so much worse. Outside, the two college students were scrambling to get up, both angry. Derek leaned against the SUV, watching them casually, not at all bothered by the fact that they both looked positively murderous when they finally stood. Stiles finally managed to snatch his t-shirt off the floor and yank it over his head, swiping his hoodie before he scrambled clumsily out of the vehicle.

“What the fuck man?” the blonde guy demanded.

“Get in the car Stiles,” Derek ordered without taking his eyes off the two college students as they stood, clothing damp in places from landing in the puddles on the damp pavement. Stiles glanced over his shoulder, back into the SUV, confused.

“Look man,” Matt was saying, as he stood, brushing himself off, an air of cocky bravado emanating from him. “Stiles here was offering a valuable service, one we’ve already paid him for. So how about you back to fuck off, and let us finish our transaction.”

Derek nodded, lips turning down at corners, expression one of mock consideration. He pushed off from where he was leaned against the vehicle.

“I think he’s done for the night,” Derek remarked casually, tone too light, too nonchalant to mean anything good.

“Then he can give us a refund,” Matt demanded, but instead of moving closer to Derek, he moved in Stiles’ direction. Stiles stumbled back, almost nutting himself on the trailer hitch of the truck before sitting awkwardly on the edge of the open trunk.

“Yeah, I don’t think that’s going to happen,” Derek replied with equal bravado, stepping closer to Matt. He tilted his head. “I think you’re going to get into your car and drive away. You want to fuck someone? You brought a friend.” He gestured to the blonde. “Stiles is going to take the rest of the night off.” Matt’s eyes stayed trained on Stiles.

“No I don’t think that will work,” he replied.

Derek sighed.
“Okay.”

Wait what?

A beat passed before Matt was on the ground, holding his face, blood gushing out of his nose. His friend rushed to his aid. Derek grabbed Stiles elbow.

“Come on,” he ordered tightly, “you’re off for the rest of the night.” Stiles stumbled, stepping awkwardly over Matt’s sprawled form as Derek pulled him along until they reached the Camaro a few yards away. When Derek opened the passenger door, Stiles slumped in easily enough, but kept his eyes fixed ahead of him.

“I should give them back their money,” he said the second Derek got in, chancing a look over at him. The older man leveled him with a look as he started the engine.

“You are seventeen years old.”

“What’s your point?” Stiles retorted, pulling on his seatbelt as Derek set the car in motion. Stiles watched Matt and his blonde buddy slowly move into the distance in the side mirror.

“That if you are feeling shitty for taking their money, you should consider the fact that they were paying an underage kid for sex,” Derek bit out. “You need to get your priorities straight.”

Stiles whipped his head around

“I do have my priorities straight,” Stiles snapped angrily. “My priorities are paying the hospital bill each month so that they don’t pull the plug on my dad.”

“So you put yourself in situations like that to do it?! What would your dad think of that?”

“Oh fuck you.”

Silence spread like a sheet of ice between them as Derek drove.

“How did you find me anyway?” Stiles asked when it got to be too much. Derek took his eyes off the road for a few seconds and his expression was open, soft. Stiles couldn’t help but notice his two front teeth were slightly longer than the rest of them, bunny like, making him look a lot less intimidating.

“I followed you,” he replied, almost like he was ashamed.

“For how long?” Stiles asked quietly. Derek sighed, ran a hand across the back of his neck.

“Long enough to know you live in your Jeep.”

“You followed me last night.”

“Yeah.”

Another long stretch of silence passed between them.

“Where are we going?” Stiles finally asked because a tiny part of him, as ashamed as he was to admit it, was afraid that Derek could be exactly like his uncle.

“Deaton’s,” he replied.
The parking lot at the veterinary clinic was completely vacant, save for Alan’s familiar sedan parked in front of a neat row of hedges at the front of the building. Stiles tried not to think about how he knew who that car belonged to.

“So why are we here?” he asked, exasperated. Even though he had a decent chunk of cash in his pocket, he definitely needed to keep working. Then again, he couldn’t exactly safely go back to the stop that night, there was no telling what would happen if the two tricks thought they’d been ripped off enough.

“Don’t know, Deaton told me to bring you with me though,” Derek replied, killing the ignition and stepping out of the car. Stiles followed.

“How did he know you’d be able to find me?” Derek stared across the roof of the car.

“He thought I took you home with me last night,” he replied, expression looking slightly… guilty? And Stiles… he didn’t really know what to say to that.

Deaton was there to greet them at the door, ushering them into the waiting area of the clinic quickly before locking the door behind him. Stiles couldn’t help but notice the way the man now kept his distance, stepping back, body arched away from Stiles as he held the door open.

“What’s going on?” Derek asked.

“I know you are in the midst of setting your sister’s affairs in order,” Deaton replied carefully, his expression revealing the double entendre of his words, “but there is something I need to show you. You too Stiles.”

“Me?” he squawked. The vet nodded, his expression weary before tipping his head in the direction of the hallway that led to the back of the clinic.

“Follow me.”

Stiles glanced at Derek, and to his surprise, felt a light shove to the middle of his back with one big hand. Right, moving. He followed the vet around the corner, but instead of heading back into the exam room from the night before, they headed for a door on the right. He stopped sharply, Derek almost running into him from behind, one hand shooting out and grabbing at Stiles hip, the other bracing on the doorframe. Stiles felt a twinge of something in his stomach right before Derek’s hand dropped from his hip like he was on fire.

“Last night, I got a call from the Sheriff’s department that there were reports of a wolf wandering the
woods, aggressively attacking anything that came near.” The vet unlocked and opened the door in front of him, revealing a flight of stairs to a basement Stiles didn’t know the clinic even had. Deaton stood at the top of the landing for a second.

“He’s completely harmless, I’ve got him–”

Scott. It made sense– if Deaton was the Hale pack’s emissary, Laura had probably been in touch with him at some point, at least told him about Scott.

“Shit! Scott?!” Stiles called frantically, bounding forward and down the stairs blindly, barely paying attention to the fact that as he descended the stairs, the lights came on behind him. He jerked to a stop at the foot of the stairs, head snapping to the side as the room illuminated, one row of fluorescent lights at a time. The room wasn’t very big. Stiles stood across from a camp bed tucked into the corner, neatly made and a counter not unlike the one upstairs with a sink and cupboards above it. But what caught his attention more than anything was the giant cell that caught his eye over his left shoulder on the other side of the room where a brown wolf lay curled into the corner on a mess of blankets, sleeping, looking impossibly small in the large cage. Stiles ran towards the cage, but the wolf didn’t move.

“Scott!” he shouted, and despite himself, shook at the bars of the cage. He knew it was the obnoxious kind of thing that little kids pulled at the zoo, but some irrational part of his brain thought it would rouse his friend.

“I had to give him a mild form of wolfsbane to sedate him.” Alan’s voice came from behind Stiles. He turned to see the vet and the other werewolf standing behind him.

“You what?!” His blood thundered in his ears. Alan had poisoned his friend. So needless to say, it was surprising to him when Derek spoke in the vet’s defense.

“Stiles, calm down Scott is going to be fine, his heart rate is normal, he’s only sleeping. Alan’s telling the truth.”

Stiles let the information sink in, stepping back from the cage, clenching and unclenching his fists.

“Peter,” he breathed. Peter had done this. God, had Scott been like this the entire time Stiles had been in the Hale basement?

“The question is how,” Deaton supplied. “There are very few werewolves who can fully transform into a wolf, and they are never bitten wolves. Derek your–”

“Mother was one, I know.”

“So what is he an anomaly or something?” Stiles asked. Deaton shook his head slowly, expression sad.

“Stiles… he’s– he can’t transform back right now. I’ve tried everything that I can think of to try and trigger the change, but nothing has worked. He knows who I am, and I think he knows where he is– he has spent many a full moon here with Laura, locked in overnight by his own choice when nights get difficult.”

“I’ll kill him,” Stiles breathed, shaking with rage. He was so enraged with Peter he was surprised he even noticed Derek. The older werewolf’s gaze was flickering between Stiles and Scott as if trying to figure out a puzzle.

“He’s your missing piece Derek,” Deaton supplied softly. “And I sense more than just that... I’m just
not sure how everything fits together yet—aside from their friendship.”

“What happens when he wakes up?” Stiles asked abruptly, derailing the other conversation before it could begin. He couldn’t help but think back to the night Laura had died, how it had seemed so easy for Scott and Peter to rip her apart. How would bars and brick stand up to a creature with that kind of strength?

“Mountain Ash,” Deaton supplied. “My entire practice’s foundation is laced with it. The mortar of the bricks even, the bars on this…” he grimaced, “cell. It is an extremely powerful magical substance when in the right hands. It creates a boundary that many supernatural beings cannot cross, that humans can. There are only a few breaks in the line, which is why Derek can even stand next to you—but if I wanted to keep him out, I could. Very useful sometimes in my line of work.”

“As a vet?” Stiles quipped. Deaton smiled softly.

“This is why Laura was staying so long—the pack business she had to attend to,” Derek murmured.

“I’m surprised she didn’t tell you,” Deaton remarked quietly. Derek just shook his head.

“I’m sure there are a lot of things Laura didn’t tell me,” he murmured, eyes cast to the floor, one hand absently rubbing at the back of his neck. It was a gesture that made Stiles heart warm just slightly—he knew he did the same thing when he was thinking something over.

“So what are the options?” Stiles interjected. Deaton’s expression was serious.

“As far as I can see, there are three and each of us has a role to play. I can continue to try my best to bring Scott back to himself, but the problem with that is that Scott’s control is too tenuous—Peter can easily do this to him again,” Deaton began. He turned to Stiles. “Or we can convince Peter to give the boy his freedom, if not that, at least convince him to act somewhat like an alpha and train Scott in the art of control.”

Stiles snorted.

“What makes you think I am capable of getting Peter to do anything that I want? What’s the other option?”

The room was utterly silent for a couple of seconds.

“We kill him,” Derek supplied evenly. “I take over the position of alpha and help your friend… if I can.”

“Can’t we just skip right to plan C?” Stiles suggested, glancing back at where Scott lay in the corner, curled up on a mountain of giant dog beds and old blankets.

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Derek exhaled roughly when they stepped out of the clinic and into the night air. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Stiles watching him apprehensively.

He’s your missing piece Derek. Deaton’s words hung in the air around his head. He was relieved Stiles hadn’t seemed to notice. He cast a sideways glance towards the teen. It was hard to believe this
skinny, defenseless kid was something—someone incredibly important. And at the same time, hard to believe he didn’t seem know it. Things weren’t adding up.

“So… what now?” Stiles asked, raising one hand absently to chew at a fingernail. Derek sighed. The air was shifting. He could smell the dampness rolling in, the rippling ozone of lightening in the air.

“Head home I guess. It’s going to piss rain soon,” he replied. Stiles squinted at him before shaking his head.

“I’m guessing you know that because of some sort of freaky werewolf thing;” he replied before groaning theatrically. “Do you mind giving me a lift back to the other side of town? I gotta get back to the preserve, park my Jeep and tarp it. He leaks in a few spots and if I want a hope of ever turning my radio on again…”

“Of course it leaks,” Derek muttered. He nodded towards the Camaro, decision made. “Come on.”

They crossed the parking lot and Derek’s nerves sung. He had no idea how Stiles was going to react to his plan. At least the drive to the theatre where the Jeep was parked would give him time to formulate the specifics.

“Last time I left the Jeep untarped I woke up with a puddle in my passenger seat and a radio that only seemed to want to tune into 70s music or bust,” Stiles explained as he got in the passenger seat. “It took weeks before the thing to dry out enough to get some of the rock stations back. Still doesn’t work right. But honestly, I don’t care so much about the radio– it’s the heat I worry about going next.”

Derek started up the engine knowing he had made the right choice.

You’re a good person, but sometimes-- no pretty much all the time-- you suck at the delivery, Laura’s voice echoed in his head. It was true, but the funny thing was, Derek couldn’t pinpoint exactly when that had started to happen. He knew he used to be charismatic, if his high school yearbooks told him anything, the scattered memories that were safe enough to keep. The funny thing is now-- now he could do it if he needed to fake it. It had been the one thing he’d picked up from Kate Argent. But when it came to being honest, to actually needing to communicate with someone about something important, Derek never knew what to say anymore, so usually he just got to the point quickly and efficiently and often, tactlessly-- according to Laura. It was why she had been the natural next in line for the alpha position. And as horrified as Derek had been that day, he’d also been relieved. He didn’t know if he could have withstood that kind of pressure.

They drove in silence for several minutes before, unsurprisingly, Stiles broke it.

“I’m at the movie theatre, but somehow, I think you knew that already,” he directed quietly. Derek just nodded. Better to not open his mouth just yet.

“Oh… you know you are starting to go silent serial killer on me over there so… something to try and convince me otherwise would be appreciated.”

“I’m not a serial killer,” Derek offered.

“Thanks for clearing that up,” Stiles replied dryly. They travelled the rest of the way in silence, until Derek pulled into the parking spot adjacent to Stiles’ jeep. This close, Derek now understood why the thing probably leaked. It was an ancient CJ-5, probably older than Stiles was. Hell, it could have been older than Derek was. Despite its age, the Jeep didn’t have a spot of rust on it, save for the license plate, and the hard top looked to be in good shape, albeit a little faded.
“Well uh, thanks,” Stiles said, moving to get out of the car.

“Wait.” Derek’s hand shot out, grabbing Stiles by the wrist before quickly withdrawing again. The teen glanced from where their limbs were connected to Derek’s face and back again, his jaw slack.

“I have somewhere you can put the Jeep,” Derek explained. “It’s going to start raining before you ever make it back to the preserve and you’re going to get stuck out there.” Stiles just stared at him for several seconds, until Derek finally loosened his grip on the kid’s arm, realizing his approach was probably a little… intense. He unlocked the power door locks and got out of the car, Stiles following his lead.

“Okay,” the teenager reluctantly agreed. Derek felt some of the tension inside of him dissolve— if only minutely.

“Do you know where Parker Street is?” he asked, knowing full well that as a Beacon Hills native, Stiles would. It was right off of the older downtown area and Old Main Street, an area now called ‘Old Downtown’ and home to various trendy, independently owned shops.

“Yeah?” Stiles replied, waiting for instruction.

“If you follow me there, I’ll show you where to stash the Jeep for the night.”

“No way man!” Stiles exclaimed, and Derek could feel his hackles rise at the unexpected reaction. “Downtown is run by uptight yuppies now— the same hypocritical, uptight yuppies who are frequent customers by day. My Jeep will get towed like, five minutes after I park for being an eyesore.” Derek withheld comment.

“No it won’t, it will be on private property,” he replied instead. And there was that slack-jawed look again. No wonder men pick him up so readily– even Deaton. Derek closed his eyes as if the action would stop the onslaught of inappropriate thoughts about Stiles’ mouth and the strangers it entertained.

“My dad used to own a bookstore—”

“I know,” Stiles interrupted softly. “‘Artifact’– at Parker and Main.” Derek nodded, slightly surprised that the teenager already knew. Then again, a large part of his family history had become public record after the fire.

“Well you can park there– we still own the building so you won’t get towed.”

An ominous crack of thunder sounded through the air and Stiles jumped, glancing up at the sky, brow furrowing as he looked back to Derek.

“Okay, lead the way.”

The drive over went by all too quickly. Derek ran over what he was going to say over and over again in his head. Just four words. It was just four words: You can stay here. But it wasn’t the words that were the problem; it was what he felt, why he was asking, that was. It made him feel… he couldn’t pinpoint it as anything more than an undeniable feeling of tension between right and wrong because it was too hard to decipher which was which.

He could play it off as just being nice, giving a homeless kid a place to stay. But he didn’t do nice. He liked being alone– with the exception of pack, which for a long time, had pretty much been
synonymous with Laura.

*He’s your missing piece Derek.*

Deaton’s words were haunting. Derek *knew* Deaton hadn’t just meant the piece of the puzzle that was currently the clusterfuck that was Derek’s life– he’d meant it at a more universal level. And as the Hale emissary, Derek knew he should trust him but…

Stiles was *seventeen.*

*One year older than when you met Kate.*

*But you aren’t Kate.*

*But he is still a kid.*

Derek almost missed his turn, flipping on his signal just in time to turn down Parker Street. It had started to mist at some point on the way over, it wouldn’t be long until the rain started. Stiles seemed to follow with his Jeep just fine, the large vehicle swinging around the corner with surprising grace. The small parking lot had only about six spaces, but they were all empty at this time of night. Derek put the Camaro in the corner closest to the back door leaving the two spots that were covered by the balcony that extended from the back of the apartment above empty. He watched Stiles carefully pull into one of the spots and kill the ignition. He was really, actually going to do this. He took a deep, steadying breath.

He hadn’t been able to sleep at the hotel he had decided to crash at the night before. With everything that had happened, his mind was in overdrive and the lingering scent of strangers on the sheets had pushed him into sensory overload. He’d ended up checking out in the early hours of the morning and driving to the bookstore. The building, like most on the street, was a renovated relic. At one point it had been some sort of corner store, at another time, a printing press. When his dad and mom were alive, it had been the bookstore, but when they passed, Derek and Laura had needed to find someone to take over. Luckily it had been easy and the new store owners had wanted to keep the spirit of the old store– had even kept the old name.

The building also housed a one bedroom apartment above the shop. Once the previous tenant had left, Laura and Derek had made the decision to keep the apartment empty in case either of them needed it. The rent from the shop alone carried the building and having a tenant wasn’t going to make or break them. So it wasn’t surprising to Derek to find that when he got to the apartment, there were unmistakable signs that Laura had been staying there; a freshly made bed, a towel hanging on the hook in the bathroom, a single toothbrush on the counter. It was both haunting and comforting. Now instead of Laura’s ghost keeping him company, Stiles would be there and he wasn’t sure what to feel about that.

They stepped out of their cars at the same time and Stiles circled the back of his Jeep almost frantically. He lifted the truck’s gate open at the back, leaning halfway into it and riffling through the back for something, limbs flailing. Derek stepped around the Camaro and everything hit him at once:

The acrid stench of bleach with coppery undertones of blood and the musky smell of sex. The air around him seemed to ripple with electricity and Derek felt the hairs on the back of his neck rise seconds before there was a horrendous crack of thunder and the skies opened up.

Stiles jerked away from the inside of his Jeep empty-handed, the curse word on his lips swallowed by the sound of thunder. He moved to crawl into his Jeep and that was it. Derek moved forward quickly, grabbing him by the back of his hoodie and yanking him backwards. No way was he letting...
him spend the night in there, even *if* it was covered. The second his hand made contact, Stiles looked at him, gaze wide and questioning.

“Come on– inside,” Derek practically yelled over the sound of the rain. He didn’t give the teen a chance to protest before he dragged him towards the door, pausing only to let him close the back of his Jeep and lock it up. They sprinted the short distance to the door at the back of the building and after fumbling with the key for a few seconds with damp fingertips, Derek shoved the door open so they could duck inside.

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It was a shock to the senses to go from the deafening symphony of raindrops bouncing off of every surface to the relative quiet of the old building. Stiles blinked as his eyes adjusted in the dim light. He nearly jumped out of his skin when he felt a warm palm momentarily rest against his lower back, gently applying pressure.

“Come upstairs.” It wasn’t a request, but there was a pleading quality to Derek’s voice that put Stiles at ease. Like he was just as unsure about all of this as he was. Stiles climbed the old wooden stairs first, the floorboards creaking under his feet, echoing under Derek’s. The stairs spilled out into a cozy landing in front of two doors. It was clear that this part of the building had been renovated at one point, the floor was in good condition, both doors painted a fresh, clean white, one marked with a simple “1A”, the other blank.

Stiles stood to the side automatically when Derek put the key in the lock and pushed the door in.

“Wait– you live here?” he sputtered, suddenly concerned they were breaking into someone’s apartment. There was no way– Derek had just driven across the country.

“Laura and I own–” Derek winced, “I own the building. Laura was staying here…” *before she died* hangs heavy in the air between them. Derek stepped across the threshold and Stiles reluctantly followed. It was strange to be in someone’s home. He felt foreign, alien the longer he looked. They stood in a small entry way, a closet to the left. Derek ignored it in favor of an antique looking coat rack in the corner where he tossed his leather jacket before flicking on a light. Stiles watched as the werewolf impatiently toed off his boots and left them on the matt at the front door. It was oddly endearing. He hesitated until Derek started into the hallway and glanced over his shoulder to see if Stiles was following.

“Come on,” he coaxed. “I won’t bite.” His eyebrows raised and his mouth twitched ever so slightly at the corner.

It was fucking adorable.

“Did you just try and make a werewolf joke?” Stiles exclaimed, unable to hide his grin. He toed off his own worn sneakers, leaving them on the matt next to Derek’s boots. He just barely caught the flicker of a smile on the other man’s face before it was quickly replaced with his signature neutral cum surly expression.

“You know, I’ve been waiting to bust out a few of my own,” he replied, padding across the floor softly as he moved towards Derek hesitantly, still unsure of how much distance he should keep. The wolf raised an eyebrow. A challenge.
“But maybe I’ll break them out later maybe after the smell of wet dog dissipates a bit.”

Derek’s face instantly hardened into stone. Oh fuck, Stiles thought but before his brain could coordinate an effort to run, Derek reached out and grabbed him around the biceps. Stiles was just about to beg not to have his throat ripped out when…

Derek shook his head violently from side to side, cascading the entire vicinity with water droplets as they flew from his hair and skin.

“Arg!” Stiles protested, eyes squeezed shut, squirming in the other man’s grip. “Fuck! Gross!” He opened his eyes just in time to catch Derek’s satisfied smirk.

“Have any more jokes?” he quipped, letting Stiles go.

“Funny,” Stiles grumped, wiping the rain from his face.

“Come on,” Derek nodded towards the space where the hallway opened up. He tapped a door on the way past. “Bathroom is in there, there are towels under the sink if you want to dry off.”

The hallway opened into a decent sized, open concept kitchen and living space. It was sparsely furnished; a worn out leather sofa propped against the far wall, an old tube style television set on a beat up console, a small glass coffee table. The windows directly across from them revealed the main street through the raging storm outside.

Stiles didn’t realize he’d stopped moving until Derek brushed past him.

“I’ll get you a change of clothes,” he offered, giving Stiles no chance to protest as he disappeared through a doorway on the right which Stiles assumed was a bedroom.

“You don’t have to do that,” Stiles called.

“Oh yes I do,” Derek called. He emerged a few seconds later clutching a pair of track pants and a t-shirt. “You smell kind of like wet dog.” Stiles snatched the clothing from Derek’s outstretched hand.

“Laugh it up,” he retorted bitterly. “Jesus, what happened to the sourwolf from earlier tonight?”

“Sourwolf?” Derek repeated in disbelief and Stiles was beginning to wonder if there was such a thing as communication by eyebrows. Derek shook his head and closed his eyes. “Just go and change,” he instructed, gesturing towards the bathroom. “And shower if you want. You’re kind of stinking up my apartment.”

Stiles groaned.

“Okay, I get it, no more dog or wolf jokes,” he replied before heading for the bathroom. This time, he caught it; the tiniest trace of a smile.

Stiles leaned against the bathroom door once it was closed behind him, head spinning. The last 48 hours had been insane. He stopped to take inventory: Derek had found him in the preserve and taken him to Deaton, found out his sister was dead, that Stiles had something to do with it. He’d let him go anyway, then he had basically stalked him before his bizarre Twilight-esque bullshit earlier. Then again, a visit to Deaton only to uncover more Peter bullshit and Scott in trouble again…

His life was a shit show– but so was Derek’s. At least he wasn’t alone.

“What the fuck am I doing?” he muttered aloud, letting his head fall back against the door with a
dramatic thunk. He debated turning around, going back out to the living room and telling Derek ‘thanks but no thanks’ but the rain was beginning to soak through his clothes, chilling him to the bone and a shower was all too tempting.

“Fuck it,” he declared. He set his borrowed clothing on the closed lid of the toilet seat and turned the taps on to warm up the water as he stripped off his wet clothing and tossed it in the sink.

The water felt amazing. Stiles stayed under the stream until he felt like he might be taking advantage of Derek’s good will. He reluctantly turned off the taps, but not before taking advantage of the bottles of shampoo and soap to quickly wash the smell of college douchebag off.

He stumbled out of the shower, a little light-headed and shaky-legged and made quick work of toweling off. He wrinkled his nose at the realization that his underwear was more than a little damp and he was faced with the choice of either putting it back on again or going commando— in other words, physical discomfort or mental at the thought of his naked junk being against someone else’s clothing. He was pretty sure that was not what Derek had had in mind when he’d loaned him the clothes.

When he emerged from the bathroom, Stiles felt slightly self-conscious. Derek’s clothes were warm and soft, worn in. The maroon Henley fit well enough on its own. The pants were a little loose around the waist, but thanks to the drawstring they fit well enough, still they could have been made of cellophane for all Stiles cared— he felt like he had a giant neon-sign above his head advertising that he had absolutely no boundaries when it came to appropriate decorum for clothes-borrowing. He rounded the corner from the bathroom with his own damp clothing in his arms, just as Derek emerged from the bedroom pulling on a deep blue Henley of his own. Stiles felt like he’d been punched– the feeling came up so quickly. For the first time in a long, long time, Stiles mouth dried out, his jaw slack as he took in the sight. It was only a few seconds, but it was enough time for Stiles to catalog the planes of the other man’s abs, the dip of his iliac furrow where it disappeared under his waistband. He felt a flush creep across the back of his neck as he realized what he was doing– saving the image for later, either in his spank bank or more likely, to pull out when he needed it.

Like with Peter.

And fuck if that wasn’t a disturbing thought worthy of some sort of prize. What was the equivalent to the Fields Medal or the Pulitzer for psycho-sexual fucked-up-ness?

Probably something to do with Freud.

Chapter End Notes

Hey look, a tease of Sterek. But unlike Jeff Davis, I actually plan for this to go somewhere!
I Heard Your Heart Beating

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Stiles emerged from the bathroom just as Derek was tugging a dry shirt over his head. He made a point of not looking at him—until he couldn’t anymore. Fresh out of the shower Stiles looked…Derek had expected him to look young, but instead he just looked like Stiles. He was seventeen, he had too much on his plate for someone not yet an adult and he carried that burden in his stance; his shoulders turned inwards, his back curving in a slouch either brought on from the continuous stress in his life, or some need to appear smaller. But his shoulders were broad, toned arms extending towards large, long-fingered hands. He looked slightly more relaxed, but still appeared tense, uncomfortable even.

“Let me take those,” Derek finally offered, extending a hand and gesturing to the bundle of wet clothing Stiles held slightly extended from his own body. This close, he could hear the thrum of the teenager’s heartbeat rushing under the surface of his skin. Nervous. He didn’t say anything, instead went to the closet door at the side of the kitchen that housed the washer and dryer and opened it, shoving the clothing inside. When he re-emerged, Stiles stood in the same place in the hall, one hand running over the back of his head as he glanced around the room uneasily.

“It’s getting late. The rain isn’t looking like its letting up any time soon.” Derek began, trying not to make his deep, steadying breath too obvious, “I’ll take the couch, you can have the bed.” He gestured behind him at the bedroom. When Stiles didn’t immediately object, Derek kept talking. “Let me just uh, grab a pillow, blanket…”

Stiles laughed, crossing the room easily and flopping down on the couch.

“Dude, I sleep in the back of a Jeep that is older than I am, in a sleeping bag that smells like a moldy basement. If you let me sleep in that bed—” he gestured through the open bedroom door, “I might never leave.” He bounced experimentally on the couch. “This is fine– this is more than fine.”

Derek’s heart ached because that wasn’t okay, not by a long shot. He couldn’t help but feel guilty for the one night he had let the kid sleep in his Jeep.

“Well at least let me pull it out–”

Stiles stopped bouncing abruptly.

“It’s a pull-out?! Woah man, I don’t know what the hell I am going to do with all the room. You might as well join me.” He spread his arms out across the back of the couch and his mouth quirked up in the corner. Was he flirting? It was hard to tell if he meant anything by it. On the one hand, the kid’s heart was pounding, but that may have just been the hot shower, on the other hand…

Derek reminded himself that he wasn’t Kate. He wasn’t going to use the situation to his advantage, even if Deaton had framed things a particular way earlier that night.

“I’ll get you a pillow,” he murmured, quickly fleeing to the bedroom. He shut the door, smacking his head against it in frustration.

“What the hell are you doing?” he muttered to himself. He couldn’t believe how quickly things had emotionally escalated for him. He’d met Stiles yesterday and now the kid was sleeping in the same apartment as he was– the apartment that had been occupied by Laura before she’d been killed. Derek
hardly knew this kid and yet, it felt like he’d known him for awhile—probably because of the knowledge that this teenager was somehow intrinsically tied to the Hale pack. And Derek wanted to know why and how. Before he got too deep again and couldn’t pull himself away. He needed to know exactly how much this boy could hurt him.

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Derek emerged from the bedroom with a plush looking pillow in hand, a set of worn looking floral sheets, and a striped wool camp blanket. He set them down on the end of the couch opposite the side Stiles sat on, then, much to Stiles’ surprise, flopped down next to him. He leaned forward, elbows resting on his knees, head in his hands. Stiles stomach flip-flopped as Derek stared ahead and long seconds passed. Finally he turned to face him;

“I need you to start at the beginning,” he finally declared. Stiles swallowed the lump in his throat. He’d told Derek a lot in the past 48 hours, but he knew it was all pieces—like throwing a puzzle into the air and watching each fragment fall without any idea of what the big picture was supposed to look like. Stiles’ big picture wasn’t pretty.

“Which beginning?” His voice sounded like he’d swallowed gravel. His stomach twisted as he prepared himself for Derek’s answer.

“The one that ultimately put you in the position of being Peter’s pawn.”

Stiles exhaled roughly, because really, that was a loaded answer, an unfair expectation. Without really meaning to, he mirrored Derek’s position, stared at his hands when he answered; “It’s complicated.”

“I have nowhere to be.” Stiles watched as Derek shifted, moving back in the seat, folding himself up against the end of the couch, one foot drawn up beside him, the other hanging off the edge of the couch. For the first time, Stiles noticed he was in his bare feet, and for some reason, that set him slightly more at ease. Derek looked patient, calm, like he could wait the whole night, but would leave Stiles be if he waited long enough. But Stiles had nothing to gain by not telling Derek anything, but a nearly microscopic amount of pride. Slowly, he sat back against the butter-soft, sagging cushions, leaned back and took a deep breath.

“Towards the end of my freshman year, there was a— an incident at the police station. Everybody there died—except for two deputies out on a call and my dad,” he began. “They found my dad in the back of the station, he’d been trying to free the people in the holding cells. He was on the ground, already in a coma by the time the paramedics got there.” This part of the story was familiar, it was the part he was okay with telling people. He’d done it before, and he’d do it again with the same sense of detachment he always forced himself to take. It was either that or become a basket case, and he couldn’t afford the latter. Stiles glanced up to make sure Derek was listening. He was completely still, focused.

“You listening for a lie?” Stiles prompted.

“No,” Derek replied softly, “I know you wouldn’t. Not about this.”

Stiles mouth suddenly felt like he’d swallowed glue. He cleared his throat, kept going.

“My dad never really woke up—when he regained consciousness it was into this… catatonic state.
The nurses and doctors had no idea what was going on. He didn’t recognize me, seem to hear me, nothing.” His stomach clenched at the memories—some he wasn’t very proud of, like the first (and not last) time he’d screamed at his dad to wake up out of frustration. “He never did come out of it—in fact he slipped a few times, suddenly in a coma, needing machines to help him breathe, keep him alive. Eventually the insurance company said they couldn’t keep paying for all of his care. They agreed to a subsidy—the sheriff’s department managed to negotiate that, but I had to somehow come up with the rest.”

Derek frowned.

“But you were what, fourteen? Fifteen?”

Stiles nodded.

“So my options weren’t exactly great. I tried, I really did. If I’d been smart, I’d have sold the house and got a shitty apartment instead of trying to keep up. But I didn’t because I was stupid enough to think that any day now, my dad would be well enough to take home, and I didn’t want to take away the one thing we had left of mom. It took about four months for me to lose the house. And that was with Scott’s mom trying to help me out. Before she left to look for him.” Stiles remembered just… walking away. He let the bank move in, sell the house off to some wealthy investor to flip and hand him a lousy cheque which he used to catch up on medical bills he was behind on.

“Didn’t you have any family that could help? What about your mom?” Derek asked softly.

“My mom died when I was nine. My dad’s only family is an aging uncle somewhere in Poland,” Stiles replied. “It would have taken me forever to find him and then what? Move to Poland?” He sighed. He was used to people thinking that the most simple solutions were the easy ones.

“I lost the house and knew I couldn’t work at a fucking gas station or diner or both and still go to school and still have my dad. Something had to give. In the end, everything did… but it didn’t matter. As long as I had Dad it didn’t matter.”

“But what would possess you to even consider…” Derek looked supremely uncomfortable at just the thought of finishing his sentence. Stiles shrugged.

“It’s not like I didn’t try everything else first. But when the hospital basically tells you that you have a week to come up with almost a grand of unpaid medical expenses just to keep them from pulling the plug—nor even to get caught up—you start thinking in ways you never would have thought before. My first plan had been to rob one of the wealthier houses in the west end, but when I got there I chickened out, decided it was too risky and I’d never be able to get enough money fast enough. I was walking back to my Jeep, ready to just… give up completely when a guy pulled up beside me and asked if I’d be interested in a ride around the block.”

Derek looked like he was going to be sick.

“Don’t look at me like that,” Stiles muttered. “I knew what he wanted. I knew exactly what I was doing.” He still couldn’t erase that night from his mind, no matter how hard he tried. He exhaled roughly, kept talking, hoping to keep away from the gritty details of his deflowering later that same night.

“I figured out pretty quickly what people—men—wanted. I tried not to think about it, and got into a routine. Wake up, fuck, sleep, eat, pay the bills, repeat. If I hadn’t been smart, I would have thought of it earlier—auctioned my virginity off on craigslist or something.”
At that, Derek visibly winced.

“If you don’t like that part, you really won’t like the next part,” Stiles replied, mouth twisting into a sick version of a smile. “I was this close to being able to get out of it all.” Stiles help up his hand in the familiar gesture. “And then of course, I figured I’d take a couple more jobs… which is when I got into the car with a fucking undercover cop.” His insides writhed as he thought of that night. “Solicitation and resisting arrest– six months in a youth correctional facility. All the money I had managed to save– fucking gone, just to pay the hospital bills while I was away– a friend took care of that for me. I got in a fight while I was in there because I had this crazy notion that even though I sold sex for a living, I should still get to choose who I had it with– got another month tacked on, which passed fine because I was in the hospital wing for most of it. I got out about eight weeks ago, and of course, one of the first people I picked up had to be your crazy uncle.”

“What did he do?” Derek’s question was practically a growl.

“He didn’t do anything that someone else hadn’t done before.” Derek leveled him with a blank stare. Stiles sighed, slumping slightly. His heart hammered. He closed his eyes, unable to look at Derek when he spoke next. “He hurt me– not enough to make me try to leave at first but…” he grimaced “By the end I knew he was dangerous and that I’d never go anywhere with him again. I thought.” He chanced a glance in Derek’s direction. He looked just as uncomfortable as Stiles felt. He sat eerily still, lips slightly parted, exhaling what looked to be steadying breaths.

“The next week he found me, which really isn’t that hard. There are only a couple of places in town where… well you followed me, you know…” Stiles trailed off. “I told him to fuck off.” Stiles made sure he looked at Derek. He needed him to believe him. In turn, the wolf nodded infinitesimally. “I don’t know why I got into the car with him. I think that maybe even then I knew that he was dangerous and it would be stupid to run…”

“It would have been,” Derek replied softly. “He would have chased you until he caught you.” Stiles nodded.

“So I got in the car.” His heart was pounding. “That’s when I found out he’s a cop–”

“He lied to you,” Derek growled. “There’s no--”

“Trust me, if I knew him before I knew he was a cop, I wouldn’t believe me either, but he is. He knows things about me…shit that happened before. He has just shown up around town in a freaking cop car. Like it or not is an officer of the law.”

Stiles could see it the second that the whole picture snapped together for Derek, the sick, almost guilty expression on his face.

“He’s blackmailing you.”

Stiles nodded.

“I never know what I’m walking into every week. Sometimes he makes it easy– I show up, we fuck, I go on with my night.”

“And other times?” Derek’s voice was low.

“Other times it’s more complicated.” He can practically feel the burn of the belt on his skin. See flashes of blood.

“Complicated how?”
“The sadistic kind.”

Derek looked like he was going to punch something. His hand clasped around the arm of the couch, leather creaking under his grip. When his gaze flickered back to Stiles, his eyes burned bright blue at the edges. After long moments passed, Derek exhaled, an exhausted kind of sound. Stiles had been dreading this moment, what he had to say next.

“Laura is dead because of me.” He didn’t wait for Derek to respond in any way before plowing forward, “I met her just after Peter, she’d been looking after Scott. The night she died, we were meeting at your old house. I was supposed to meet with Peter, but Laura and I were too long talking about everything. She knew some of what was going on, but not that it was Peter doing it. I didn’t want to go before I saw Scott and I figured that I was safe with Laura around.” He swallowed around the lump in his throat. “But Peter came looking for me. Laura figured it all out and then Peter took it all away from me. He hurt Scott– made him feral again somehow so that he attacked Laura. When Scott gained control of himself, Peter punished him– and finished Laura off himself.

“That’s not possible,” Derek replied in utter disbelief. “Laura was the alpha. Peter had been in a coma. Then he went missing– the police found his body– or thought they had. I know what he did but I don’t understand how. How could Peter, a beta, gain the strength to kill his alpha?”

“I don’t know,” Stiles replied, wishing he had the answers for Derek. “But he did. He tore her apart, right in front of me. He hurt Scott so badly he couldn’t help Laura fight.”

“That was the night she called me,” Derek breathed. “She said she needed me in Beacon Hills. I’d been on the subway and didn’t get her message until I stepped off the train. I tried calling her back, but she didn’t answer.”

Stiles was immediately assaulted with the memory of Laura’s shrill ringtone, shouting out into the darkness, unanswered– never to be answered again as Peter assaulted him. He started to shake, because here he was, sitting on her couch in her apartment, telling her own brother what had happened to her.

“She was already dead wasn’t she?” Derek asked softly.

Stiles nodded.

They were both silent for a long time, which of course, allowed Stiles’ never ending stream of thought to veer into unpleasant territory like a jack-knifed tractor trailer into a ditch. The longer he sat, the more guilt he felt because Laura being dead was his fault. He was the one who had orchestrated it. He’d made conscious decisions both to involve her in the shit-show of his life and to defy Peter by not showing up for their weekly meeting. He tried to temper his negative thought process by trying to convince himself that he couldn’t have known at the time that Peter was a werewolf or that he would try to find him. But he had, and that was what mattered. He moved to stand up.

“I uh… I should go.” He stood up, not looking forward to spending a wet night in the Jeep, but not seeing another option. “Being here doesn’t feel–”

Derek managed to unfold his limbs, arm shooting out to grab Stiles’. He didn’t pull, simply held on with an iron grip that Stiles knew he’d need to break his arm to get out of.

“Don’t,” he ordered. He waited until Stiles sagged back down on the couch, next to him. “Laura’s death wasn’t your fault.” Stiles glanced up sharply.
“How is it not?”

“You couldn’t have known Peter would come after you…” Derek began, tone placating.

“Of course I could have,” Stiles retorted. “If he could find me at a laundromat on the shitty side of town in the middle of the night, why couldn’t he find me in the woods? Especially if he has ever followed me before.”

At that, a cold thrill raced down Stiles spine so shocking in its intensity that it left him speechless. No, not speechless– airless.

“You didn’t know he was a werewolf, that he would be capable–” Derek abruptly stopped talking, sensing the change in the air.

“Oh my God,” Stiles wheezed. “I don’t know how long he’s been following–” His throat suddenly grew too tight– constricting. He couldn’t breathe.

“Stiles?” Derek’s voice sounded urgent, scared even. Stiles swivelled his head in response, unable to get his mouth to work beyond attempting to suck in air.

“Stiles breathe,” Derek ordered calmly. Stiles shook his head, trying to communicate ‘I can’t’. How long had Peter been following him? Did he know exactly who he was picking up practically all along? Had he watched him at all tonight? His vision started to grow dark around the edges. No! He had to warn Derek that Peter could have followed them.

Derek’s hand was warm on the back of his neck, pressing down with only enough force to guide Stiles’ head between his knees before slipping away, then hesitantly reconnecting in the middle of Stiles’ back to rub up and down in a barely there touch. Long moments passed and the tide of panic gradually retreated, still licking at Stiles’ insides, but not strong enough to pull him under again. Shakily, he pulled himself up from his slumped position, propping his forearms up on his splayed thighs. He could feel the heat blossoming across the back of his neck; embarrassment, guilt, renewed panic.

“I used to have them too.”

Derek’s voice was soft. He seemed to understand that the intensity of his gaze would be too much so he simply stared ahead at the coffee table.

“After my first girlfriend died when she was given the bite by an alpha I barely knew because I knew my mom would say no.” He took in a long, shaking breath. “They got worse after the fire. I started having nightmares– still do.”

Stiles remembered Laura’s story– the one about some humans rejecting the bite.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured apologetically.

“It was a long time ago,” Derek replied somberly. “And you know what they say– time heals all wounds.”

“I wish that were true,” Stiles retorted, slowly sitting up straight again, finally looking at Derek.

“Me too,” he replied.

Stiles sighed heavily.
“So now what do we do? What if Peter followed me here?” he asked, envisioning Peter staring up at the apartment window from the street down below.

“He didn’t,” Derek replied confidently. “If my uncle had followed you, he would have made his presence known by now.”

“He is kind of a jealous creeper,” Stiles replied with a snort. “No offense,” he added hastily at the sight of Derek’s raised eyebrow. The older man exhaled noisily.

“None taken,” he replied, sounding both exasperated and amused. “Frankly, I’m surprised he lets you…” he made a vague gesture with his hands, “…do what you do.”

“Me too,” Stiles replied truthfully. “I mean, he has his rules… I can’t be with any— never mind. I shouldn’t be talking to you about this. When Laura put things together it was bad enough.”

“Why was her knowing so bad?”

Stiles looked at Derek incredulously for so long it prompted him to ask “What?” which Stiles figured wasn’t a common occurrence.

“Just trying to figure out if you have amnesia or something. You do remember where you found me tonight… right?”

Derek exhaled roughly before his answer.

“I didn’t forget,” he replied. “I can’t… I can’t get it out of my head.”

***

Derek wanted to rip his own tongue out of his skull. He couldn’t believe the words that had just come out of his mouth. He’d meant it to sound horrified or disturbed, instead he sounded…

*Like a predator.*

*Like Kate.*

He closed his eyes.

“I didn’t mean it like that.” His voice sounded choked.

“Like what?” Stiles asked softly.

“Like I’m a pervert that likes underage boys,” he replied, pained. He chanced a glance at the teenager who, miraculously, didn’t look completely horrified. In fact, the kid gave a lazy, one shouldered shrug.

“You wouldn’t be the only one,” he replied. He smiled softly. “Relax, I know you didn’t mean it that way.” His smile slowly spread across his face, teasing. “Besides, sometimes I’m into older guys.” Was he…?

“Don’t,” Derek almost barked, but managed to soften to bitten off whisper before it came out. The playful smile dropped from the teen’s face.
“Why?”

“Because you don’t actually want me.”

“You don’t know that.” A challenge. A challenge that, if Derek was a better man, would be easily rebuffed, but his resolve was crumbling.

“Fine,” he bit out, “But you shouldn’t.”

“Why?” Stiles retorted almost immediately. Derek could feel his blood singing through his veins. He wanted. And Deaton was right, he could feel it, the force of it, pulling at his wolf. But he wasn’t an animal. He had enough human rationality to know that there was a line here and he shouldn’t cross it. He knew Stiles was not unlike a wolf—once he’d sunk his teeth into something, he wasn’t going to let go easily. So he was ready to use the force necessary to push Stiles away. It was better— for everyone.

Don’t be stupid. Laura’s voice was clear in his head. He ignored it.

“Because,” his eyes bled blue, “I’ve killed people.”

“How many?”

God, you could tell this kid was the son of a cop.

“Eight.” Paige, his girlfriend when he’d convinced her to take the bite, only to have her body reject it. His mother. His father. His little sister Cora. His aunt Suki and Uncle Corbin, their children. All of them lost in the fire.

Stiles sat back against the couch, his eyes trained on Derek, gaze completely unrelenting as he asked; “How?”

“Paige because I convinced her to take the bite and she rejected it.”

Stiles made a noise of protest.

“You couldn’t have known that would happen.”

“My entire family except Laura and Peter—”

“Okay that— that was definitely not your fault,” Stiles protested vehemently. “You were sixteen years old. You weren’t even home.”

Derek shut his eyes. He was about to reveal his darkness to a complete stranger for the first time.

“But it was my fault,” he growled. “I was young and stupid, but still responsible. I’m the one who led the hunters to our door.”

“Hunters?” Stiles voice was soft. Derek nodded, realizing that for all he did know, Stiles was still new to the world of the supernatural.

“There are people out there who hunt our kind. For the most part, we have treaties in place— usually that we won’t harm the people of a given community, but there are extremists who do not honor those treaties.” He took a deep breath. “When I was sixteen, I met one of them. Her name was Kate. I didn’t know what she was at the time. I was still getting over Paige. People at school still treated me differently. I was the guy whose girlfriend had died. Kate was older than me, attractive… into me. We kept our relationship a secret from everyone because she was so much older than I was. She
didn’t want to get in trouble and I didn’t want her to get in trouble either. The day of the fire, Laura and I were fighting. She’d found out about me and Kate. I was upset because I was insecure. I had a hard enough time believing that someone like Kate wanted me. When Laura told me that Kate was a hunter, that she was using me, I didn’t want to believe her.” He took a deep breath, glanced at Stiles—his expression wasn’t one of pity like he’d dreaded it would be, instead it was open, curious, attentive.

“We were out of the house to pick up pizza for my cousin’s birthday. Laura had volunteered us in order to get me alone. She was threatening to tell our parents about Kate if I didn’t. I will never forget the moment we got to the car… the smell of smoke in the air— even downtown— the look on Laura’s face a few minutes later when her eyes burned red for the first time.” Derek closed his eyes. Every time he thought of it, he could feel the burn of ash in the back of his throat, smell the tinder. “When we got to the house the fire trucks were there. Everyone but Peter had died—and he was in no shape to tell us what had happened. Eventually the police said it was an electrical fire, but Laura and I knew better—Kate and her merry band of murderers had done it.”

“Derek,” Stiles breathed, “that was not your fault— you were a kid. She was older than you, took advantage of you—”

“And I let it happen,” Derek interrupted sharply. “If I hadn’t met Kate, my entire family wouldn’t have—”

“You don’t know that!” Stiles interrupted with a force all his own. “You didn’t know what Kate was any more than I knew who Peter was.” He stopped talking and gesturing so suddenly it was like he was a puppet whose strings had been cut.

“I’m sorry,” the teen apologized quickly, “that’s not even close. I mean you lost your entire—and I just—”

“Stiles it’s okay” Derek interrupted softly, watching Stiles hands wring at the air in aborted movements until they seemed silenced by his voice. A few seconds of quiet passed.

“My dad was the one who reopened the case,” Stiles finally said. “He didn’t believe for a second that what happened to your family was an accident. I know it was eventually ruled arson, but I never heard anything after that.” It wasn’t a leading statement. Stiles didn’t attach any expectation to his words.

“Kate’s actions created friction in the Argent family,” Derek explained. “Especially after her father—the craziest extremist of all of them—died. His son Chris started to have his doubts about their ‘code’. But his wife Victoria, was almost as insane as her in-laws. She was determined to extinguish the pack. At first, Laura and I thought she had killed Peter… then she came after us. She waited until Laura was back in Beacon Hills. Her and Kate attacked, but Laura was ready. She and Deaton not only thwarted the attack—Laura killed Victoria. Kate got away.”

Stiles’ expression was contemplative, like he was working through a particularly difficult problem.

“Is she still out there?” he asked.

“Yes,” Derek replied. “Somewhere. But the Argents who are left—Chris and his daughter— they’ve pretty much shunned her.”

Stiles’ exhale was long and low.

“And I thought I had problems. At least there isn’t someone out there who wants to kill me.
Suddenly blackmail doesn’t seem so bad.”

“I’m not the big game Kate wants anymore. She’ll want to take down the alpha first– weaken me. She’ll be gunning for Peter.” He snorted at the thought of it. “She may actually do us a favor, taking him out.” Stiles chuckled wryly for a second before he abruptly stopped and paled.

“She’s coming after you no matter what,” he replied hollowly. “If she kills Peter, she’s going to move on to you. If you kill Peter, she’s just going to shift targets right away.”

“And?”

“I watched Laura die,” Stiles replied shakily. “And I know you don’t know me– hell I don’t know if you even like me or are just doing this out of some sort of obligation to her but I can’t… I can’t have the blood of the wrong Hale on my hands again.”

“So what are you saying?” Derek asked incredulously, stomach twisting and heart pounding as he anticipated the answer.

“I’m saying we have to let Peter live.” Stiles voice was soft, nearly a whisper. Defeated. “I’ll convince him to let Scott go… I’ll… I can keep our arrangement going…”

Derek wasn’t one-hundred percent certain that the growl his wolf was fighting to let out didn’t escape, at least in part.

“No!” he bit out sharply. He could feel his wrought iron grip on his control slipping. He couldn’t believe how little it had taken to push him this far. How fate had been so cruel as to place this boy right in front of him– no, dangle him there, and dare Derek to do nothing. Because he was damned if he did and damned if he didn’t. If he didn’t, he would have to live with the guilt of having done nothing to help someone who was living a life he wouldn’t wish on his greatest enemies. But if he stayed, if he did act… what did that say about him? Because he knew very well why he would be staying in Beacon Hills. It wasn’t just some left over obligation to Laura, it wasn’t inherent goodness– it would be to serve a need in him he was too weak to deny.

“Why?” Stiles snapped back. “I don’t see any other options.”

“Because I can’t stand what he is doing to you!” Derek replied. He raked shaky hands through his hair. “Don’t make me say it. Please don’t make me say it.”

Chapter End Notes

So it is just a bit over one year since I started writing this fic. I can’t believe I’ve hit almost 100,000 words, over 20,000 views (that’s almost 1000 hits a chapter!) and so many people love this story so much. But what really made me fall over? Discovering the statistics tool and seeing that 693 people are subscribed to this story along with the 200+ people who have it bookmarked.

What in the what?! To say I am overwhelmed is an understatement. Thank you all for your dedication- I am so lucky to have such committed readers and for so long. It’s been an amazing year, hopefully it doesn’t take me a whole other once to finish this up!
Stiles own words tumbled out from Derek’s lips. His heart was pounding. He’d never felt something like this, a strange electric kind of sensation pulsing, a current threatening to break loose and either destroy or create. A spark.

“Say what?” Stiles managed to ask slowly, his voice a croaked whisper. When Derek’s eyes met his again they were wide, tinged bright blue around the edges. His bottom lip quivered just slightly.

“I…” he started, snapped his jaw shut, closed his eyes, battening down for something.

“You what?” Stiles asked urgently. He could feel the thrum of energy at the base of his spine, radiating out through his limbs. He wondered if Derek could feel it too. When Derek said nothing, he reached out, fingertips dancing just above the curve of Derek’s shoulder and bicep.

“Stop,” Derek all but whined, his voice sounded hoarse.

“Why?” The amount of times Stiles had asked that question in the past several minutes made him feel as though he sounded like an annoying child. He didn’t care, he needed to hear it.

“Because I’m not going to be able to stop,” Derek replied. He opened his eyes to look at Stiles again– they burned bright blue. The colour reminded Stiles of one of his mom’s oil paints, back when he was a little kid.

“Then don’t,” Stiles replied with a sift shrug. A beat passed. Two.

They crashed together. The kiss was not sweet, not soft, not tentative. It was a desperate clash of lips to lips, Derek’s hand at the back of Stiles’ neck, cradling his head, pulling him closer. While similar in structure to many kisses Stiles had shared with a few tricks, it was completely different in nature. Stiles heartbeat rabbited in his chest. He barely had time to think about what he was doing before Derek started to pull his lips away– but not the hand at the back of his neck. Stiles chased after the werewolf’s lips with his own, crushing them together, mirroring Derek’s position, bringing his own hand up to the back of Derek’s neck. This time the kiss was messy, a mash of lips and teeth before they both seemed to develop a sort of rhythm, even still it was sloppy, desperate even. Stiles felt like he was torn between trying to yank Derek closer and climb into his lap. He knew they should stop, somewhere in the back of his mind this was not the ‘safe, sane and consensual’ situation they had always preached about in school and at the clinic. Then again, this was sadly probably the safest, sanest, most consensual interaction he’d had in a long time. So naturally, fate wrecked it.

The dryer’s buzzer sounded through the apartment with the effect of an air raid siren. The two men jumped apart, staring around disoriented until they each placed the sound. Derek stood up abruptly.

“You are seventeen,“ he muttered, striding towards the kitchen area to where the washer and dryer were concealed behind a set of closet doors. He pulled them open and just… stood there, scrubbing his hands through his inky black hair.

“And if you are in any way inferring that because of that, I can’t give consent, might I remind you of our previous conversations– I sleep with older men for money,” Stiles retorted calmly. “I know the difference between doing that and…” he gesticulated between them, “this.”
“Do you?” Derek replied, eyebrow raised. “Or do you feel obligated because I’m giving you a place to stay? Because you don’t feel like you have a choice?”

“Don’t patronize me,” Stiles all but snapped, “I do have a choice. It’s not like you are holding me here, keeping me from getting in my Jeep and heading back to the preserve.”

Derek took a deep, shuddering breath.

“I’ve been without a choice before,” Stiles said softly. “And this…” he shook his head. “This is not one of those times.” Derek stared at him for several seconds, standing in limbo between him and the washing machine before taking a faltered step back in the direction of the couch. He crossed the room slowly before slumping down again.

“What the fuck am I doing?” he muttered, leaning against the back of the couch, head tipped back, eyes on the ceiling.

Stiles stomach twisted. Maybe Derek was regretting offering him a place to crash for the night.

“I should go,” he murmured, moving to stand. He really didn’t want to white-knuckle it through another night in the Jeep. So when Derek’s hand shot out to grab his forearm, he sagged against the couch in relief.

“Don’t,” the older man said softly. He swallowed hard, opening his eyes and sitting up, his movements slow, like he was trying not to spook a cornered animal. Like the first time Stiles had met Laura. It was right there that he could see some of the many ways Derek and Laura were so similar, yet so different.

“I’m not Laura,” Derek said after a few seconds, as if reading Stiles’ mind. “She always knew what to do. She played the long game. It doesn’t come easy to me.”

“You should take up chess,” Stiles offered– it had been one of the first suggestions of his therapist when he was a kid to help control his hyperactivity, teach him to focus his energy. Derek snorted, raising an eyebrow as he regarded the teen.

“I did,” he replied lightly. “It’s one of the many things Laura taught me.” His face darkened. “I think that secretly, she was always prepared for this and wanted me to be too.”

“Just because you were prepared doesn’t mean you were ready,” Stiles replied. “I was prepared to do what I had to in order to pay the bills, but when it actually came to getting into a guy’s car for the first time, I wasn’t ready.” He winced. This probably wasn’t the best case for comparison, but he’d shied away from using the death of his mom as an example. It felt like some sort of tragic one-upmanship neither man needed.

“How do you…” Derek trailed off. “Like those two guys tonight. I couldn’t stand just watching, let alone…” he made a vague gesture with his hand. “Never mind, I shouldn’t have…”

“It’s okay,” Stiles replied, and for the first time, felt compelled to answer beyond ‘It’s what I have to do’. “I just… try not to think about what I’m doing. Or I think about the mechanics of it. The problem comes when a guy actually expects me to get off. I don’t– not anymore. So usually I try to think back to porn I’ve seen… that kind of thing and hope it does the job.” He let out a humorless laugh. “I’m seventeen and I have trouble getting it up when I should have trouble keeping it down.”

Derek, predictably enough, reacted with an equal lack of humor.

“And with Peter?”
Stiles exhaled shakily. He’d known that one was coming.

“He messes with my head,” he replied matter-of-factly. “I never know what he’s going to do—what kind of mood he’ll be in. When this started, I told myself I was doing it to keep my dad safe. Now…it’s bigger. I don’t just have to worry about being put away for not doing what Peter wants because I know he can do much worse—*has* done much worse.”

“I followed you—your Jeep last night, in the preserve.” Derek’s confession is delivered to his hands, steepled between his knees. Stiles immediately stilled. It was moments like this that he was acutely aware of his need to constantly fidget and move—when something shocked him still. He shouldn’t have been surprised that Derek had possibly witnessed his meltdown at the prospect of spending the night in the back of his Jeep. The only thing that had forced him in eventually was the cold.

“The night he killed Laura, what did Peter do to you?”

Not possibly, definitely then. And if seeing Stiles break down the night before hadn’t said it, his biological response would absolutely give him away right now. His breath was coming in quick pants. He felt sick.

“Stiles?” Derek’s voice took on an almost urgent tone—distressed.

“He raped me in the back of my Jeep,” Stiles confessed softly. “Then he left me in the basement of your old house for a week before he came back and took me to the motel where he always takes me. You found me after he was done.”

“You were going to sleep there tonight?” Derek asked incredulously, looking profoundly disturbed by the idea.

“It’s not like I have many other options,” Stiles muttered. “I’ll get over it. Things are only triggering if you let them be.” He scrubbed a hand down his face, chucking, the sound disjointed and dark. “God do I ever sound like a melodramatic teenager. Scratch that, I probably am.”

“You’re not,” Derek replied seriously. Once again, silence consumed them. Stiles could tell Derek was thinking through something—probably the giant shit show that was Stiles’ life and how to get away from it.

“It’s getting late,” Stiles finally said, though he hadn’t looked at the time. “We should get some sleep.”

“Yeah,” Derek acquiesced. He stood up. “Need help making up the sofa?”

“No, I’m good.” Stiles replied, standing to do just that. Derek nodded, moving to the kitchen to turn off the remaining lights while Stiles made his bed for the night.

“I’ll leave the door open,” the werewolf said, pausing between the living room and the bedroom. “If you need anything just wake me up. Unless it’s for food—take whatever you want from the fridge. Knowing Laura though, I can’t promise you that you won’t find month-old Pad Thai.”

“Avoid the Pad Thai. Got it!” Stiles replied with a smirk. He turned serious again. “Thank you— for letting me stay.”

Derek shook his head dismissively

“Have a good sleep,” he replied before heading for the bedroom. He closed the door two-thirds of
the way behind him. Stiles sat in the dark, listening to the other man move around until he heard the creak of a mattress– Derek getting into bed– and decided to try and get some sleep as well.

Stiles glanced at his watch, squinting in the dark. It wasn’t that late for him, all things considered– 2:00am. Go figure on one of the rare occasions he had somewhere comfortable to sleep, he couldn’t get any. Still, he felt relaxed. The apartment was warm and dry and the sound of the rain, beating against the windows and roof was calming– rather than Stiles’ usual paranoia for his Jeep’s well-being whenever it came to the rain. It had been an hour, maybe two, he guessed, since they’d turned out the lights. It had given him some time alone to think.

He hadn’t been a big believer in any sort of higher power since his mom had died– despite his dad’s best efforts to convince him otherwise. His belief in fate had been on pretty shaky ground in recent years as well but he couldn’t help but feel something was at play lately and that certain events were happening because they were meant to.

*I’ll show you mine if you show me yours.*

It had only been a little more than twenty-four hours since Peter had said those words before digging a claw into the back of Stiles’ neck doing… whatever that did. Stiles could only assume he shown his– whatever it was– and now it was Peter’s turn. So how was that going to work? Stiles didn’t have claws, wouldn’t know what he was doing if he did. So it had to be something Peter was going to do to Stiles… again. He reached back and gingerly pressed against the still fresh wound on the back of his neck. It stung when he applied enough pressure, the newly knitted flesh pulling and threatening to break open again. He could see his next meeting with Peter going only one of a few different ways. The first, Peter gave him nothing. The second, what Peter gave him was useful (not likely) and finally, the last, what Peter gave Stiles, served only to benefit himself– the most likely. Stiles sighed. He didn’t want to think about it. He pulled his hand away and resolved to empty his brain– an exercise in futility he tried just about every night that he wasn’t exhausted enough to collapse into sleep.

Naturally, his thoughts drifted to Derek. He could hear him in the other room, breathing shallow and steady– asleep, or if he wasn’t, nearly there. Either that or he was doing a great job at faking it, which all things considered… was a distinct possibility.

He exhaled roughly, cycling back to thoughts of fate. There had to have been something at play that had brought Derek to the preserve parking lot Stiles had been dumped in– by his uncle– at the exact right time, before anyone else could discover him lying there. Then there was the fact that Derek had been following him. He should be at the least, creeped out, if not completely terrified based on how Peter behaved, and yet he wasn’t. It wasn’t even the fact that Derek was Laura’s brother, there was just something about him…

That electric feeling from earlier– it wasn’t gone, merely tamed; a low hum of attraction Stiles couldn’t shake. It went beyond the physical because Derek, there was no denying he was beautiful, and Stiles knew he didn’t do too badly in the looks department either– though he had more of a niche market than Derek’s more universal appeal. There was something about Derek that had been there with Laura on a different level. It was some sort of conviction, working beneath the surface, a cosmic force that said *trust this.* Maybe it was the fact that Derek seemed more human than Laura. While Laura had swept in to save the day, Derek had his own share of problems to work through and if anything, Stiles was only complicating things… and yet Derek wasn’t running, in fact if anything, he was pursuing.

Stiles sat up in the dark, swinging his legs over the side of the couch as quietly and smoothly as he
could. He stared at Derek’s door for a few seconds before resolutely standing and turning to the kitchen. It wasn’t so much he needed anything there, but usually when he felt like this—like he couldn’t turn his brain off—he went for a late night run in the woods. But since he wasn’t sleeping in the woods, a wander into the kitchen of the small apartment would have to do.

He stood in the middle of the kitchen, the only light coming from the street lamps outside, refracted through the rain soaked windows. He closed his eyes, listening to the rain, tried to run through his agenda for the next day—but now even the every day was infinitely more complicated. He definitely had to visit his dad because he hadn’t done that before—secretly afraid of falling apart in front of him again. That wouldn’t be a problem—it was everything else that would be. If Derek hadn’t liked what he was doing tonight, he definitely wouldn’t approve of anything Stiles was going to have to do tomorrow. He scrubbed a hand over his face. What was he going to do? Say ‘hey, thanks for letting me crash for the night, I have to go put myself in compromising positions for a few hours, I’ll see you around’ and then high tail it out of there? Then what? He couldn’t run from this. He and Derek were just too tied together now whether he liked it or not.

He stared around the kitchen, as if looking for answers. It was the first time he had been in a kitchen since his brief stint at the group home a couple of months before, he barely stifled his laughter as ‘one of these things is not like the other, one of these things just doesn’t belong’ chorused through his head like an episode of Sesame Street. He was definitely the thing that didn’t belong. He traced over the kitchen faucet. The apartment had clearly been renovated at some point—Stiles knew the buildings on the main street were in many cases, a century old. The apartment above the old bookstore looked to have brand new kitchen cabinets, creamy white, warm, a greyish purple backsplash of tiles covering most of the wall space Stiles could see. Now that he was in the room, he could see the set of wooden accordion doors that held the washer and dryer. The kitchen wasn’t completely clean—a tell-tale coffee mug sat in the bottom of the sink, a couple of random pieces of cutlery—evidence that Laura had been real, had lived, and now was gone.

He wandered, moving towards the refrigerator. Remembering his mom; ‘I know I shouldn’t, but I always like sneaking a peak in someone’s fridge when I’m over. It says a lot about a person’. It was after his mom had gone to see an open house down the street just before she got sick. His dad had teased her about it when they got home, calling her nosy. She had pointed out that he was the police investigator. As Stiles opened the fridge, he supposed the apple really didn’t fall too far from the tree. The refrigerator’s contents looked even more scant when set against the pristine white interior. Clearly Laura wasn’t much of a cook. There were a few beers on the fridge door, a carton of milk on the shelf next to a few take out containers of various origins. Of course his curiosity got the better of him and reached in, grabbing a Styrofoam container with a hinged lid. He opened it—left over Indian food by the looks of things, but not the smell—it hit him on one big wave of disgusting. His stomach churned almost before the smell had even registered and he gagged, unable to clamp the lid on the container fast enough in order to stuff it back on the fridge.

“Told you there’d be month old Thai in there.”

Stiles jumped at the sound of Derek’s voice quiet voice behind him, elbow smacking into the beers on the fridge door, causing them to rattle against one another lightly. He turned and closed the door as quickly and quietly as he could, half due to the smell, half out of guilt for being caught red-handed snooping.

“Indian actually—I think—or it used to be,” he replied, through a grimace, the smell still clungly present in the air, tears stinging at the corners of his eyes.

“Well, I warned you,” Derek replied with a smirk. He stood on the other side of the small kitchen island, dressed only in a pair of worn looking sweats, and Stiles had a feeling he’d only pulled those
on for decency. He seemed like a sleep naked kind of guy. His hair was askew, and he had the look of someone just roused.

“Sorry if I woke you,” Stiles apologized quietly “I couldn’t sleep.” Derek shrugged.

“I couldn’t really either.”

“I have that effect on people,” Stiles quipped, with a lopsided smirk, his black sense of humor as present as ever

“You do,” Derek replied. His tone wasn’t accusing or rude, but soft and contemplative. Stiles picked at the edge of the countertop, unable to look at Derek’s intense gaze.

“You had no idea what you were coming back to when you came back to Beacon Hills, did you?” he said. He looked up when Derek didn’t immediately say anything. The older man was moving closer. He shook his head.

“No, I didn’t.”

“There is something going on,” Stiles pushed. “A reason for all of this…”

Derek nodded again, took another step closer, and Stiles’ body began to take notice. The hair on the back of his neck stood on end, goosebumps spread over his arms. He could feel that prickling of current pick up at the proximity of an identical beast– its reflection.

When Derek reached out, it was hesitant, slow, giving Stiles every chance to back away. He didn’t. Instead he watched Derek’s hand approach, fingers twitching slightly as he reached for Stiles’ hip until they settled there slowly; first a feather light touch before settling heavier, gripping. He took a deep, stuttering breath, chest heaving with the motion.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized, stepping closer. Stiles’ eyes were on the hand on his hip. He could feel Derek’s hesitation in his grip. He knew one word and the other man would back away. It was a feeling he’d never known before. Choice. Control. He closed his eyes, trying to curb what he was pretty sure was more than just raging teenage hormones, but he could still feel low grade arousal beginning to flood his senses.

“For what?” he finally asked, eyes flickering to Derek’s face. This close, he could see every single hair that made up Derek’s closely trimmed beard.

“For not being able to stay away.” Derek’s voice was a croak, broken almost.

“Don’t be,” Stiles replied softly.

This time when their lips met, it was much softer, more deliberate. Stiles closed his eyes and for the first time in– God he didn’t know how long– let himself enjoy the experience. Derek’s lips were soft and warm and Stiles could feel him holding back, keeping the kiss chaste… but not for long. As Derek’s fingers flexed at his hip, Stiles parted his lips, an invitation, a dare. Derek was reluctant to take the bait, and released a frustrated puff of air from his nose…

And parted his lips.

Stiles Luckily had enough self-control not to surge forward, instead letting Derek come to him, opening his mouth slightly more…

Stiles knew when he was being given an invitation. His tongue traced along Derek’s lower lip and
was met almost immediately with the other man’s tongue, inviting him in. The power shifted then, Derek taking control of the kiss, free hand cupping the teenager’s head, pulling him in closer. Stiles let him. He felt drunk, stupid with lust the second their tongues brushed against one another. Somewhere in the back of his mind he frantically screamed orders at himself to put your fucking hands somewhere other than the counter dumbass. His right hand snapped to Derek’s side, just under his ribcage, his left grabbing clumsily at the other man’s hip, thumb brushing against his iliac furrow. With a sudden jolt, Stiles remembered that Derek was shirtless, his heated skin completely bare under Stiles’ fingers. He pulled the werewolf closer, opened his mouth wider. Derek responded in kind, tongue no longer at all tentative, tangling with Stiles’ own. He turned them, Stiles stumbling backward, sandwiched between the island counter top and Derek’s body. When Derek moved to pull away, Stiles attempted to follow, only to abort the movement when Derek’s lips latched onto the stretch of skin on his neck, just below his ear. Two could play at that game, his twisted his head to the side, latching his lips to the space between Derek’s shoulder and neck, grazing his teeth against skin that tasted crisp, like the rain outside, but also warm, earthy.

Several seconds ticked by before the sounds of harsh breathing and rain tapping against the windows registered with Stiles. He moved to connect his lips with Derek’s again, arching up into his body when the other man responded in kind and, holy shit he was starting to get hard from doing something with another person and it wasn’t just a reflex. He hadn’t had that happen…

Since Peter. Fucking Peter and his tricks. He pulled his lips away from Derek’s, wanting only to take a break long enough to rid his mind of Peter’s image. Their foreheads rested together, both of them breathing raggedly in the dark kitchen. Stiles’ had his eyes closed, but opened them just in time to see Derek’s register something, before he started to pull away.

“Don’t,” Stiles protested, fingers instinctively gripping Derek harder. “I’m fine, I just need a second.” The other man looked skeptical, but nodded once, forehead still rubbing against Stiles’ own. He closed his eyes again, listening to the rain. After a few minutes, Derek spoke, his voice sounding raw.

“Are you okay?”

Stiles nodded. This was the most okay he’d been in a very long time and he did not want it to stop.

“Talk to me?” Derek murmured. Stiles finally pulled his head back enough to look the other man in the eye.

“I haven’t,” Stiles paused and cleared his throat, trying to rid his voice of the thready, wrung out quality before speaking again. “I haven’t done this in a while…” He realized what the sounded like, and rushed to clarify. “I mean I haven’t wanted to do this in a while.”

“What do you want?” Derek’s voice was so soft, cautious.

“I want whatever you’re willing to give me,” Stiles replied truthfully.

“That’s a dangerous thing to say,” Derek replied, green eyes wide with concern. Like he thought he was reason enough to be concerned. Stiles slowly shook his head to the side.

“I know it’s not.”

He moved slowly, dropping his hands from Derek’s sides, but never ceasing to touch him. Derek took a step back, letting him move, and Stiles’ fingers tickled across the palm of his hand before taking it lightly, leading him back to the living room– the site of the first time they’d collided. For a few seconds, Derek looked incredibly uneasy and Stiles moved to let him go. His heart pounded, he
wasn’t sure if he could take the rejection now. Already his fingertips tingled electric at the loss of contact.

Derek seemed to sense his growing insecurity and moved to fill the void it created, lips gently brushing against his once again. His grip tightened on Stiles’ hand and he took the smallest half step in the direction of his bedroom. When he pulled back from the kiss, his expression was soft, questioning and the slightest bit fearful– just as insecure and lost as Stiles had felt seconds before. Stiles followed.

The bedroom was a surprising size considering the rest of the apartment– or it may have been the scant furnishing that made it appear that way. There was only one nightstand, a dresser and the bed set up against the back wall. The room was surprisingly illuminated, and it took Stiles a few seconds to realize that the light was coming from a window to the left that led out to a fire escape. The comforter on the bed was rumpled, kicked to the side already from where Derek had been sleeping.

“We don’t have to do anything,” Derek said from behind him, releasing his hand in order to move in front of him. His expression was one of concern, hesitation.

“Same to you,” Stiles replied. Derek waited a beat, two, before nodding, the motion practically infinitesimal. Stiles was almost surprised that Derek was the one to close the space between them this time, but he welcomed it. Their third kiss was slow and languid, promising in its own right without Derek stepping backward in the direction of the bed. His hands were back on Stiles; two heated weights anchoring him at the small of his back and the back of his head. Stiles had grown restless though, his hands wandering, fingertips tracing over the warm flesh under his skin; Derek’s toned back, his soft, black hair. When Derek’s fingers twitched just under the hem of his borrowed t-shirt, Stiles couldn’t help the sharp intake of breath he took through his nose so he didn’t have to sacrifice his mouth for something so trivial like breathing. Derek moved to pull away.

“I want you to,” Stiles murmured against his lip, trying to reassure the older man that he wasn’t taking advantage. He pulled back enough to look Derek in the eye.

“It’s an arbitrary line,” he said seriously. “One that the law plays with all the time, at will. Like when I was emancipated and became an ‘adult’ but was still sentenced as a youth when I was arrested.” Derek looked so resigned; not broken but… more like something that had been– and glued back together.

“This–” Stiles removed his hand from Derek’s back to gesture between them, “does not make you like her.”

And that was all it took. Derek closed his eyes, shifted slightly in place.

“I know,” he replied, voice gravely, but not resigned or defeated sounding, more… relieved. Stiles smiled softly. Progress.

“So do I,” he whispered, then slowly moved in for another kiss.

After a few more seconds passed in which their lips never really parted, Derek’s fingers slipped back under the hem of his shirt, tickling across Stiles’ hip, his stomach, paused, as if to ask; Is this okay? Stiles responded by pressing his hips forward; keep going. He took a half of step back, releasing Derek from his hold and offering him enough room to slip both hands under his t-shirt and peel the fabric up. Stiles lifted his arms compliantly, catching Derek’s heated expression; lips parted, eyes dark, watchful, before it momentarily disappeared behind a layer of cotton.
So uh… that escalated quickly. Sorry for the blue balls and frozen waffles.

Inevitably I’m going to get someone who comments that this is unrealistic, that nobody who has been through what these men have been through would be so quick to hop in the sack. I urge you to go read this post on tumblr before you comment.

Stiles makes some dismissive remarks like “things are only triggering if you let them be” and I definitely don’t share that point of view.
I got Derek history and feels all over the place and I'm not even sorry.

The second the fabric of Stiles’ t-shirt slipped away, and right or wrong, Derek felt the rest of his reservations slip away as well. The moonlight painted a swath of lightness across Stiles’ skin. He stood out from the rest of reality now, everything else just background. Without half of his clothing on, Stiles no longer looked like a gangly teenager and the moral right fighter in Derek that had vilified him as a monster from wanting this was forced to mute its cries to a dull murmur, more easily ignored. Stiles had the body that was unmistakably that of a man, not a mere teenager. His shoulders were broad and his torso muscled, not bulky in any way; long, sinewy muscles, like a swimmer or a gymnast. His stomach was toned, abdominal muscles, lightly defined at his narrow waist. There was a smattering of dark hair between his pectorals, a few scattered moles across his abdomen that Derek wanted to drop to his knees and trace with his tongue. A faint trail of dark curls disappeared underneath the waistband of the sweats he was wearing.

And his hands–Derek had noticed those before– the long bony fingers and sturdy knuckles, but now they were attached to bare arms and a bare chest that Derek was looking at with intent, not in passing. They matched the rest of Stiles. They were long, strong, capable.

He wanted to say something, anything to tell Stiles how he felt at this moment, but his brain-mouth filter was even more on alert than it usually was. He’d always chosen his words carefully, but now it seemed he had difficulty choosing any at all.

He was still trying to figure out how all of this had happened. It had literally been just over twenty-four hours since he’d found this kid lying on the ground, bloody and nearly unconscious, mere hours since they’d traded life stories– something Derek had never done and now… now they were about to get into bed together.

Of course Derek had realized he’d felt a pull to Stiles before Deaton had said a word. But he had attempted to ignore it; writing it off as misplaced attraction. Deaton had sent him into a tailspin though. He’d never felt so out of control as he did when he’d first kissed Stiles. It had scared him; how right it felt, though every rational thought in his head told him why it shouldn’t. He’d gone to bed terrified of himself and what he’d do– but also wanting. After the fire, after Kate, he’d gone a little off the rails. In New York, nobody knew him like they had in Beacon Hills. He spent his days sleeping to avoid the guilt he felt whenever he looked at Laura, spent his nights in bars, frequently going home with men, women, sometimes more than one at once. He took drugs– though true to the tales his parents had already told him, they did nothing. He continued down the same destructive path for a few months before Laura sat him down and told him– not asked, but ordered– to get his shit together.

It took a few tries before he found a therapist he could connect with– if you could call Hannah that. She was a retired pack emissary old enough to be Derek’s grandmother, but she was brash and blunt when she needed to be and it worked. He appreciated her sometimes brutal honesty. As destructive as he’d been, she had reassured him it was normal. Lying in bed, staring up at the ceiling that night,
one of their conversations floated to the surface….

“I don’t know why I do it.” Derek sat in Hannah’ living room– she didn’t have an office, he didn’t know if she ever had. They’d been seeing each other going on three months now, and a level of comfort Derek hadn’t felt in a long while had developed. She’d finally got to the harder questions, including why he thought he went home with random men and women despite self-professed ‘trust issues’.

“Do you want to know what I think?” the older woman offered, aging hands wrapped around a chipped coffee mug that held jasmine tea. “Of course you do,” she answered herself dismissively. “You don’t just come for the tea. I think it’s because you don’t care what happens to you. I think that because you believe what happened to your family was your fault, you go out there to tempt fate, hoping that some higher power is going to finally punish you for what you did.”

Derek snorted with derision, ever the insolent teenager.

"If I wanted to punish myself, there are easier ways.”

One grey eyebrow lifted; test me.

“I could step out in front of a subway train, I could combine wolfsbane with… fuck you name it–”

“Sure, if you wanted to kill yourself,” the older woman replied with a shrug, “But you don’t want to do that. You want punishment– fate to deal out what you deserve– but have you ever thought that maybe you’re getting that already? That you torture yourself enough?”

Derek was silent for a long time because he didn’t believe her.

“People who have been sexually assaulted or abused–” Derek opened his mouth to protest, not because he was defending Kate, but because he refused to be a victim. He was silenced with one raised and wrinkled finger. “People who have been sexually assaulted or abused generally experience periods of abstinence and periods of promiscuity during their recovery.”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Derek replied incredulously. “The promiscuity thing I mean.” Hannah tilted her head to the side, grey eyes questioning.

“How so?”

“Why would someone even want to be touched by another person after that?”

“Various reasons. Maybe they blame themselves, maybe they don’t recognize it as abuse in the first place, maybe they want to feel power in some small way, or maybe– and this I find to be much more prominent now– they have such ill regard for the act that it means very little to them anymore.”

“And that’s what you think I’m doing now,” Derek sneered. “I’m not ‘promiscuous’ because I was ‘abused’. I like having sex. It feels good. I’m seventeen for fuck sakes– of course I’m going to enjoy myself.”

“But are you?”

“Am I what?”

“Enjoying yourself?”
“Yes!” Derek’s response was a growl, his eyes glowing bright blue, his control beginning to slip. Hannah didn’t even flinch.

“I think we’re done for the day,” she replied calmly. Derek stood up, one foot out the proverbial door. “But Derek– I want you to think about what you’re doing. I mean really think about it, think about why.”

“Thanks for the tea,” Derek muttered, and was out the door.

It took weeks to sink in and when it did, it hit hard, a lead weighted punch to the gut while he was at the apartment of a guy Peter’s age, below him, being pounded into the mattress. It didn’t feel good. He was punishing himself. It was what he deserved… or was it?

A forty minute subway ride later, he arrived at Hannah’s apartment, no less sick and distraught than he’d felt when he’d pushed the guy off of himself, scrambled for his clothes, leaving his older bedfellow angrily calling after him. Hannah opened the door dressed in a nightgown and fluffy pink robe. Her eyes swept over Derek quick, astute, as if she hadn’t been sleeping at all.

“Come on in,” she greeted softly. “I’ll make some tea.”

It took time, but Derek had managed to set himself to rights again– well, as right as someone with his history could be. He’d spent much of his college years focused solely on getting his degree and had pretty much maintained abstinence until his final year, then had a couple of casual rounds in the sack with friends, nothing more. He hadn’t had anything he could call a relationship since Kate– and he was alright with that.

Lying in bed, with Stiles in the next room, he’d realized that for the first time in a long time, he wanted someone. It wasn’t just mere want either. It was a need that ached in his bones; something was hardwired in him that had to respond to whatever it was about Stiles that was calling. He selfishly wanted Stiles not to punish himself, but for himself. The hardest thing to wrap his head around was that Stiles wasn’t him. Despite an absolutely horrific introduction to young adulthood, Stiles seemed to understand himself in a way Derek had never managed when he was a teenager. In the end it wasn’t Stiles’ laying himself bare in any physical way that pushed Derek to get out of bed– it had been the way he’d told Derek everything– not because he had nothing to lose, but because he had someone to listen.

“What?” Stiles voice was soft in the dark, there was a trace of doubt in his voice, a tint of fear in his scent. Derek reached out softly, fingers tracing across the skin of Stiles stomach, just above his navel, his fingers navigating a path up Stiles chest until he reached the side of his face, cupping his jaw.

“You’re perfect,” he murmured. And he meant it. Perfect for him. Perfect because he wasn’t. He pressed his lips gently to the younger man’s, trailed his hand back down one perfectly muscled arm to take his hand.

“I am far from perfect,” Stiles replied wryly, as they staggered together, lust drunk, towards the bed, “but as I said before; I’ll take what I can get.”

“Would you prefer I call you beautiful?” Derek teased as he slowly backed towards the bed. Stiles pulled a face, his heartbeat changed ever so slightly. Enough to make Derek pause.
“It’s just that…” Stiles other hand rubbed over the back of his head, “clients call me that sometimes,” he muttered.


“Don’t be,” he replied casually. “As I see it, whatever this is, we’re going to fuck it up a little at some point.”

No, Derek was not a sixteen year old girl, but goddamnit, his stomach fluttered like he was at Stiles’ inference that this was more than sex– or whatever it ended up being– for him as well.

“I hope not too much,” he replied softly. He reached up, pulled Stiles in for another soft kiss. It didn’t take long before he felt the teenager smirk against his lips. Suddenly he pitched off balance, breathlessly weightless for milliseconds before he spun, free-falling before catching himself on one elbow and one hand to stop from crushing the man under him. Both of them groaned, erections grinding together subtly in their next position. Stiles may have been lean, but he knew how to use his body weight and long limbs, and damn, man handling was a kink Derek had never really got to explore as a werewolf, but it did it for him. Stiles’ head was thrown back, lips quirked at the corner, hooded eyes sparkling mischievously. But Derek couldn’t take his eyes off his neck. The long, pale column of flesh corded with muscle, but also delicate arteries was a perfectly presented feast for Derek. He couldn’t help himself– he latched his lips onto the space just below Stiles’ jaw and sucked and was rewarded generously. The younger man’s moan sounded punched out of him, the stuttering sound in stark contrast, yet in perfect harmony with the downright erotic, slow roll of his hips. His hands shot up to Derek’s sides, long fingers holding him in a bruising grip so that he could grind against him. This close, Derek could acutely feel the size and shape of him, the swift beat of his heart. The realization made Derek’s jaw tighten, apply pressure with blunt, human teeth before he could stop himself, still, he managed to pull away at the sound of a sharply taken breath.

“Sorry,” he mumbled in apology, hastily soothing the skin with a gentle press of lips. Long fingers twisted into his hair, pulling just slightly, directing his gaze to the face under him.

“Do it again.” The order came in a voice hoarse with want. Stiles’ face was flushed, the heated shade spanning down his neck to his chest. Derek blinked almost in disbelief as Stiles pulled him down and sank his teeth into the flesh of his shoulder at the crook of his neck. Derek groaned, nervous system alight at the perfect combination of pleasure and pain. He obeyed, mirroring the gesture on Stiles, eliciting the same reaction as before– if not even more enthusiastic.

From there, everything unraveled, a spiral of lust manifested in teeth and tongues, exploring hand. Derek let himself get lost in it, finally releasing just the smallest amount of control. Because he wanted this. He was allowed to have this. Then there was Stiles’ voice, a strained whimper;

“Derek.”

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Stiles wasn’t sure what the etiquette for borrowed clothing was. He was pretty sure he’d violated it in some way by going commando, but coming in someone else’s pants was where he drew the line. He hadn’t been this turned on in… well, if he was truthful, ever. He was so used to being an object of pleasure for someone else, but the way Derek had reacted each time he discovered a new erogenous zone of Stiles’ was like a kid who’d been told he could hit all the elevator buttons as many times as
he wanted too.

“Derek,” he gasped, trying to draw the older man’s attention away from the probably appalling hickey he was leaving on his shoulder blade. The first hickey that Stiles would walk around with not wishing it wasn’t there. Derek rolled his hips, seemed to suck harder. Stiles bit his lower lip, squeezed his eyes closed.

“Derek,” he repeated, before the situation became dire. The older man pulled back, his expression soft.

“We can stop,” he said quickly, the haze of lust clearing from his eyes rapidly. He moved to roll to the side but Stiles’ stilled the gesture, bringing his left hand up to stay Derek’s movement.

“That is the last thing I want,” he replied through labored breaths. “But if we don’t stop trying to fuck each other through our clothes, I think I’m going to cum in your pants.” Derek blinked in surprise before a subtle smile spread across his lips. “Okay, so the situation might not be that dire, but…”

Derek shifted his weight, rolling slightly to the side and let one large palm glide down Stiles’ side slowly, fingers bumping over Stiles’ ribcage, one bone at a time, leaving Stiles skin to dimple in its wake, and the sudden coolness that came from their bodies separating the slightest bit.

“How dire is it?” Derek’s voice was hushed, but amused. Stiles mouth opened to make some sort of smart remark, but his throat dried up as Derek’s fingers traced along the waistline of his borrowed sweats, even now, hesitating, waiting for Stiles’ consent. Stiles’ breath hitched as Derek’s ring and middle fingers dipped just a fraction of an inch under the elastic. He lifted his hips ever so slightly, letting Derek’s hand slip further down.

“Dire enough,” Stiles replied, panting, “that you’re going to take them off, and not touch me… for like, five minutes.” He should have been embarrassed for being that dangerously close from kissing groping and grinding– with clothing on– but he couldn’t bring himself to be. Derek moved in and pressed his lips chastely against Stiles’.

“There’s no rush– I haven’t done this for a while,” he confessed softly. Stiles blinked, then squinted.

“Define awhile…” he asked slowly. Derek was… beautiful his brain supplied with chagrin. He had these incredible clear green eyes, and masculine jawline that looked even more sculpted with the carefully trimmed beard covering it, but then he also had adorable ears that were just slightly small and his two front teeth were just a touch larger than the rest, the minor imperfections somehow making the man more endearing. Sure he could be a little surly or scary even, but not this close. Maybe he didn’t usually let people this close though.

“College,” Derek replied. Stiles did the math in his head relatively quickly. Derek was six years older than him… even accounting for some delay going to school because of the fire…. His jaw went slack because if he was doing the math right, it had been about a year since Derek had been with anyone.

There had to be a reason. Suddenly he had an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach.

“Am I rushing you?” he asked quickly. Derek’s expression softened, he leaned in for another gentle kiss.

“No,” he breathed against Stiles’ lips, voice warm. “I want this.” He sounded honest, and for the first time Stiles wished he was a werewolf, so that he knew for certain Derek was telling the truth. The
older man seemed to sense that— and he let his hand slip down beneath the fabric of Stiles’ sweats, palming his hip.

“O-okay,” Stiles stammered out.

“How where were we?”

Stiles took a deep, steadying breath as Derek very slowly moved away, using both hands to peel the sweatpants down his hips and toss them somewhere beside the bed. They landed softly on the carpet somewhere close to the bed.

The werewolf stared long enough that Stiles could feel his skin flush.

“Wha–”

Derek’s eyes flitted to the crest of marks at Stiles’ hip, the scabbing wounds left behind by Peter’s claws.

“I’m fine,” Stiles dismissed quickly. “I just–” His heart thumped in his chest. Fucking Peter, if he managed to ruin things without being in the room…

“Peter,” Derek breathed– almost growled. Stiles nodded. Fingertips brushed gently over the healing wounds.

“Your turn–now,” Stiles ordered, not wanting Derek to dwell too long on where the marks had come from. Derek reluctantly pulled his hand away from Stiles’ hip. Stiles couldn’t help it; his eyes drifted to where Derek’s sleep pants were just as tented as Stiles’ had been when he’d still been wearing them. He nodded enthusiastically, pulled himself up onto his elbows, watching as Derek’s hands moved slowly to the waist of his own pants. Stiles felt his cock twitch at the first hint of movement and watched as inch by inch, more and more skin was revealed. Stiles could just see the base of Derek’s dick, nestled in a patch of dark curls, when the older man pulled away, stepping off the end of the bed, temporarily blocking Stiles’ view as he shoved his pants the rest of the way down and kicked them away.

“Holy shit,” Stiles breathed out before he could stop himself. He closed his eyes, not sure he could deal with the visual for the time being. When he opened them again, Derek was cautiously climbing back onto the bed. Stiles tried not to be too obvious as he took in Derek’s body. He shouldn’t have been as awestruck as he was, but he couldn’t help himself. He didn’t know what he expected—obviously the rest of Derek’s body was going to match what he’d already seen, but somehow he couldn’t believe what he was looking at. Derek’s legs were perfection, long and muscled and covered in a layer of dark hair, not as carefully groomed as his chest hair was. Stiles’ gaze swept quickly up and down before he finally steeled himself, hoping Derek wouldn’t judge him too much for staring. Derek’s dick was uncut, and in Stiles’ semi-expert opinion, larger than average– not the scary kind of proportions that made one wonder about dick size to asshole radius proportions, but big enough to prompt the thought that limbering up was probably a good idea.

“Shut up,” Derek muttered, though he was smiling softly, his own eyes continuously wandering up and down the length of Stiles’ body. He tentatively reached out, grasping Stiles’ hip lightly.

“We don’t have to do anything, we can stop right here;” he said seriously, offering one last out. His green eyes held Stiles’, so intense and so honest. And Stiles knew he would stop. If he said the words, Derek would and that would be it.

He didn’t want to stop.
“I know,” he replied. He moved in for a slow, gentle kiss, which Derek responded to in kind. With Derek on his side, it was easy enough to urge him to lie back without having to say a word. It was about time he leveled the playing field—he didn’t know how the other man was managing to hold up so much better than he was. He kind of figured that the whole, ‘I have sex for a living’ thing combined with Derek not having had sex since college would have equalized things, but apparently not. He swept a hand down Derek’s torso, fingers traveling down between his ab muscles, a slow meander until he reached the trail of hair below his navel. The werewolf’s lips stuttered against his, and he suddenly sucked in a breath, and Stiles was relieved to know he had the same effect the other man as he had on him. When he wrapped a hand around Derek’s length, the other man stifled a groan, hips canting up into the sensation. He grabbed for Stiles’ hip, and despite his better judgement, Stiles let him. He was careful to keep his body lifted away from Derek’s when he straddled him. He focused his attention on Derek—and now, with so much flesh to explore, he took his time to catalogue every inch of Derek’s skin; and every sharp intake of breath, every twitch and all out groan. He indulged him in a few deep kisses before moving down the length of his body.

“What do you want?” Derek breathed softly, watching Stiles’ descent. Stiles shut his eyes at the onslaught of images his very vivid imagination supplied for what he and Derek could be doing. But despite the current situation, how quickly things had evolved, he knew they shouldn’t—couldn’t—have sex. For one, he was still sore and traumatized by Peter’s activities. He wasn’t one-hundred percent sure he wouldn’t fall apart halfway through simply because he could, because it was safe to with Derek.

“I want to make you feel good,” Stiles settled on replying. He nuzzled the space where Derek’s thigh and groin met and a spark of arousal shot straight to his dick. God he smelled good; like soap and maybe a bit of fabric softener, but most predominantly, the distinct musky scent most men had in some form or another. Derek’s intake of breath was sharp and shuddered out of him.

“Stiles…” he breathed out, at the exact same time that Stiles licked straight up his cock and closed his lips around the head. He bobbed his head, reveling in the feeling of giving pleasure to someone who expected nothing and was so clearly into him. Rather than moving to his tried and true basket of tricks, he closely catalogued Derek’s reactions and made his choices based on that. When Derek tentatively brushed his fingers through Stiles’ hair, he moaned, sucked harder.

“Stiles,” Derek repeated softly, fingers gently tracing over his cheekbone, “come back up here.” Stiles reluctantly pulled away, using the back of his hand to wipe at his mouth. Derek’s face was flushed and hair askew. He hesitated before heaving in a breath;

“You ever sixty-nined?”

Stiles was pretty sure that every single brain function except the vital ones stopped. He sat between Derek’s knees, heart thumping and dick throbbing at the implication of what Derek wanted. He’d tried it a handful of times, but usually found his partner was significantly less invested than he was in the act and it had never been satisfying for him. In recent months, the prospect had actually not been all too enticing—since it meant he couldn’t easily hide his lack of arousal. Which apparently was not going to be an issue at all this time.

“Turn around,” Derek prompted gently, a request, not an order, “…please?”

Stiles scrambled, suddenly all legs and arms, trying not to accidently elbow or knee Derek in the process of changing positions. When he’d successfully repositioned himself facing the footboard and the partially opened door to the rest of the apartment, he took a deep, shuddering breath to steady himself. This was hands down the hottest thing that had ever happened to him and they hadn’t even gotten there yet.
“You okay?” Derek asked from behind him, gently caressing his hip.

“Trust me, I am more than okay,” Stiles reassured, voice croaking around the flood of saliva suddenly in his mouth. Derek’s hand closed around his hip, gently tugging him backwards.

“Then come back here a bit.” Stiles nodded, though he was pretty sure Derek couldn’t see the movement, and shuffled backwards on his knees. The adjusted position put him in the perfect place to just lean forward and suck, so that was exactly what he did, drawing Derek’s erection back in between his lips. Derek’s hands were gently moving over his hips and ass, all rough palms and kneading fingers. Stiles tried to breathe evenly, but the anticipation of contact had him so on-edge, he could hear his breath nosily leaving his nostrils. Derek leaned forward, lapping at his balls, teasing and Stiles moaned around the flesh in his mouth.

He knew what was coming a split second before it happened. Derek’s massaging hands gently parted the globes of his ass and his mouth left Stiles’ balls. A gust of heat was his final warning before Derek put his mouth on his hole, warm tongue licking gently into him. A shock of pleasure jolted through Stiles’ nervous system because though he hadn’t been expecting that and it felt so fucking good. He pulled his mouth off of Derek quickly, not wanting to bite down accidentally as he grit his teeth in an unsuccessful attempt to clamp down on the sound that burst from his lips as he moved his head to rest on Derek’s thigh.

“Oh my God,” he managed to whine breathlessly before he remembered this was supposed to be to both their benefit. Derek moaned against his skin, pressing his face closer as Stiles swallowed him down again. Stiles’ left hand was clasped around the older man’s calf in a death grip. This wasn’t going to take long, for either of them. He could already feel his own orgasm pooling in his gut as Derek’s face pressed closer; his stubble the perfect amount of dry scratch in contrast with the soft wetness of his tongue. He had a near-bruising grip on Stiles’ hips, and his tongue alternated between gentle licks and sucking and pushing persistently against Stiles’ entrance, fucking him messily, enthusiastically, his reaction urging Derek on. In turn, Stiles sucked harder, moved faster, used more tongue, mouth flooding with saliva as he became more determined to make Derek feel as good as he did. His hand fondled Derek’s balls– now pulled up tight to his body, blood hot.

Now it was a race to the finish– who could get the other person off faster. Stiles was aware that he was grinding backwards, practically sitting on Derek’s face, but he couldn’t stop himself, and Derek was practically holding him there anyway, even if he’d moved to get away. The sounds of wet, heavy breathing and smothered moans filled the room. Stiles’ senses were completely flooded. He couldn’t concentrate on any one thing and it was becoming harder and harder to hold himself together. When Derek’s fingers drummed against his hip, he couldn’t be sure he hadn’t missed the signal the first time, but he was definitely paying attention now– especially when Derek pulled his mouth away to rasp;

“Stiles, I’m close,” while rubbing a thumb over the teen’s twitching entrance. And apparently, Stiles had developed a hair trigger overnight because suddenly he was right at the edge, senses sharpening to a fine point. He moved faster, ready to move at the last second, just vaguely registering that the reason Derek had warned him was the absence of a condom. But he was too blissed out to be upset at his carelessness and the thought passed as unobtrusively as noting the weather. He moved to wrap his hand around the base of Derek’s erection ready to finish him with a few well executed strokes, fumbled when Derek’s mouth returned, but his thumb didn’t leave and instead pressed inside. Stiles felt his orgasm prickle down his spine before racing like lightning.

“F–uck.” The sound punched out of him in two syllables as he came. He nearly collapsed from the force of it, accidentally kicked out, smacking the headboard into the wall. Instead of using any sort of finesse, his hand clamped down on the other man’s erection and he jerked once, twice, barely lifting
his head enough to move out of the way when Derek groaned and shot his load, painting Stiles’ neck and chest with it.

For several seconds, both men lay panting. Derek had collapsed boneless against the mattress, and without the heat of his mouth, Stiles felt exposed, the cool air hitting his wet skin. He could barely hold himself up on his elbows and knees. When his limbs started to shake, he flopped over to the side, collapsing on his back next to Derek. The second that he did, the other man surged up, and with more grace than was fair, moved over Stiles, hands cupping his face to draw him into a wild kiss; deep and urgent and perfect. It didn’t even cross Stiles’ mind to pull away, despite where Derek’s mouth had been moments before. When Derek pulled back his expression was warm, tender. He didn’t say anything, but his eyes flitted over Stiles’ neck and chest. Stiles did the same, mentally chiding himself when his dick offered a valiant twitch in response to the sight of his own ejaculate painted across Derek’s clavicle, chest and fuck– even stomach.

“That was…” Stiles exhaled, not quite sure how to describe exactly what had happened.

“I know,” Derek replied, voice hoarse.

Somehow, they managed to make it to the shower. While Derek walked smoothly but lazily, Stiles legs felt noodley and uncoordinated. They managed to stand under the stream of water and just wash– albeit with a few lingering kisses and some wandering hands, teetering on the edge of starting something again without actually doing it.

On the journey back through the living room, Stiles paused at the still made up couch– unsure until Derek very gently tugged on his hand. Stiles glanced at him and he looked… anxious. His heart melted at the uneasy look and he followed. Back in bed, they sprawled out together in the dark in easy silence. Whatever force had brought them together was satisfied enough for the night.

Chapter End Notes

Whomp there it is.
Wow, I apologize for the length of time between updates. But I’ve found everyone on Ao3 to be incredibly understanding when it comes to real life interfering with the writing process, so thank you all for your patience! Rest assured I am still writing away on this fic and I haven’t abandoned it- life just got busy.

Stiles woke up warm and content, sun streaming in through the window, the fire escape casting an intersecting pattern across the carpeted floor. He blinked a few times, trying to decide if the images from last night were in fact memories or just fantasies. He half expected to blink and find himself back in the preserve in his Jeep, but as the minutes passed as his surroundings remained the same and his nerves calmed. He rolled onto his back to find the mattress beside him empty, sheets rumpled, but before he could panic, he heard the sounds of someone– Derek– in the kitchen, opening and closing cupboards.

For the first time ever, he was experiencing the morning after. He sat up abruptly, an uneasy feeling pooling in his gut. He had just met Derek– knew that their situation was complicated and had complicated it more by fucking around– without a condom. Reckless. Dangerous. He heaved in a breath, trying to channel the calm and rightness he had felt just a few moments before. He pulled one knee up, resting his forearm against it, cradling his head in his hands like that would keep it from flying off his neck for all that it was spinning. What had he done? What was he doing?

“I had a similar freak out this morning.”

Stiles nearly jumped out of his skin at the sound of Derek’s voice. He jerked his head up to see the other man standing at the doorway of the bedroom, expression unreadable.

“I wasn’t freaking out,” Stiles lied reflexively before he remembered werewolf. Derek raised an eyebrow. “Okay, maybe I was.”

“Why?” Derek asked softly. He took a tentative step into the room.

“Because I–” His mouth felt dry. Had Derek not noticed the problem with what they’d done.
“Because we didn’t use condoms. I noticed– at the end, but I wasn’t thinking. I should have stopped.” Derek’s expression softened just slightly. He looked… relieved almost.

“I’m almost twenty-four and I slept with a seventeen year old,” he replied. “I should have stopped, but I didn’t want to.” Stiles winced, took a deep, shuddering breath.

“We moved too fast,” he declared quietly. He watched Derek’s jaw clench and unclench.

“Do you regret it?” he asked, not really looking at Stiles, instead looking at a spot on the floor, miserable. Stiles stomach rolled. He had made Derek feel like that.

“No,” he replied honestly. Derek’s head snapped up, eyes scrutinizing– like he was looking for a lie.

“No,” Stiles repeated. “I’m fucking selfish and I don’t regret it.” Derek looked like he was chewing on his words.
“Neither do I,” he replied. His shoulders dipped, sagging just slightly enough to betray just how tense he had been before. “I went for a walk this morning and picked up some stuff for breakfast, come join me?” Derek looked so hesitant, the tension returning as quickly as it had left. Stiles smiled softly.

“Yeah– just let me uh…” He glanced at the pair of sweatpants still heaped on the floor beside the bed and Derek got the picture, nodded, and ducked out of the room. Stiles inhaled slowly, let it out just as slowly. Things were going to be okay. They were.

When Stiles emerged from the bedroom, Derek was sitting on the couch, hands clasped around a take-out coffee cup, an identical cup sitting on the coffee table in front of him, along with two lumpy packages, wrapped in red and white checked paper that Stiles recognized in a heartbeat.

“Oh my God you went to Peretti’s,” he moaned dramatically. Derek’s head snapped up abruptly.

“You know Peretti’s?” he asked in surprise. The delicatessen down the street was a hidden gem, tucked around the corner and about the size of a shoebox– and had the best bagels around.

“Of course I knew Peretti’s– they are the only place you can get a decent bagel in this town,” Stiles replied. “A little pricy, but that’s from a homeless person’s perspective… but once in awhile I spring for lox on everything with their garlic herb cream cheese– I used to let Dad go there for roast beef if he’d been good once every other week.” Derek raised an eyebrow.

“Heart condition,” Stiles explained with a shrug, to which Derek nodded.

“Peretti’s was a deciding factor in Laura choosing between moving to Seattle or New York,” he replied. “She found out the owners had a cousin in Brooklyn who ran a shop using the same recipes and that’s what made the decision. Both packs in the area would have welcomed us.”

Stiles wanted to laugh, but the memory of Laura was just too fresh. Instead he flopped down on the couch next to the older man.

“Thanks by the way,” he offered, grabbing the coffee on the table hesitantly. He blushed. “For the coffee, not the sex.” Oh.My. God. “I mean, not that… holy shit, shutting up now,” he trailed off in a mumble. He took a giant gulp of coffee, absolutely scalding the roof of his mouth. It was still black– he hadn’t noticed the cream and sugar packets sitting beside the packages on the table. But it was so worth it for the startled laugh Derek let out before promptly putting down his coffee to slap the middle of Stiles’ back. By the time Stiles stopped choking, black dots were sparkling on the periphery of his vision.

“You’re welcome,” Derek replied blandly and Stiles groaned, a flush creeping up the back of his neck as he took the lid off of his coffee and started to dump creamer and sugar packets into it.

“I got one lox and one roast beef, which one do you want?” Stiles stared slack jawed for a few seconds at the choices. “Or we could split them both?” Derek offered, completely oblivious.

They ended up sharing the sandwiches lounged lazily on the couch, sipping coffee, not talking about the night before. Stiles was torn between circling round the subject first and trying to ease into things when Derek spoke.

“Your heart is racing.”

Stiles just about choked on his bagel.
“You know this whole ‘another person can hear my heartbeat’ thing is going to take some getting used to.”

“Sorry,” Derek replied, expression slightly wary. “So what are you thinking?”

Stiles took a deep breath.

“You should probably get yourself tested,” he muttered. Derek’s critical expression softened.

“Stiles, how much did Laura tell you about werewolves– our healing factor?”

“She said you can bounce back from a lot– gunshots even,” Stiles replied. He frowned, putting some of the pieces together. “Wait, are you saying that even if you caught something you’d what? Metabolize it or whatever?”

“Something like that,” Derek replied. His expression darkened, he looked hesitant before speaking again; “When I was a kid, I got myself into trouble– after the fire. I did a lot of things I shouldn’t have done. I probably could have gotten pretty sick, even killed myself a few times over had I been human. Werewolves can’t get drunk, or high unless they put something in whatever it is to impair the healing factor. And we can’t catch most diseases…”

“I have my most recent test results in my Jeep,” Stiles replied, maybe more to convince himself rather than Derek that he wasn’t completely irresponsible.

“And it’s good that you take care of your own health,” Derek replied. Stiles snorted.

“If I really took care of my own health, I’d stop sleeping with strangers,” he replied. Derek’s expression fell and Stiles figured out a millisecond later that he’d just rammed his foot in his mouth for a second time.

“I didn’t mean the way that came out,” he blurted urgently. “I didn’t mean you– God you’re the first good decision I’ve made in a long time.” Derek’s expression warmed. He inched closer, fingers twitching on his knee before he hesitantly, carefully, reached out and cupped Stiles’ chin and pulled him closer.

“Me too,” he murmured over Stiles lips. This time their kiss was softer, more controlled, though that same current of energy still hummed as strong as ever under Stiles’ skin. Reality reared its ugly head soon enough though. Happiness and contentment were suck fickle emotions– Stiles always felt like he was grabbing for a ghost– in view, but too intangible to touch, let alone hold for any length of time.

“This doesn’t change anything,” Stiles nearly whispered, a sick feeling pooling in his gut. “I wish that it did, but it doesn’t. I’m still going to have to…”

“I know,” Derek replied softly. Stiles took another sip of coffee, unsure of what to do or say, deciding it would probably be something stupid, so he should do something with his mouth to keep it busy.

“Stay here again tonight,” Derek offered. Now it was Stiles’ turn to raise an eyebrow.

“What? Just, go out, suck a bunch of dudes off and come back here?” he asked incredulously. Derek winced.

“I’ll think about it.”
The older man seemed to accept the answer readily enough.

“Okay,” he nodded, though he looked like he was itching to say something else. He didn’t.

They sat in silence for a few awkward minutes, eating.

“Derek, what did Laura do back in New York?” Stiles asked cautiously when the silence became too much. Really, he wanted to know what Derek did, but was too afraid to ask. Derek, who had a mouth full of bagel made a surprised expression before chewing and swallowing.

“She was a social worker—worked at a shelter for awhile, worked on getting at risk kids out of gang involvement, stuff like that,” he replied. He blew out a huff of air and Stiles knew exactly what he was thinking; what about those kids?

“It makes sense,” Stiles replied warmly. He paused for a beat. “Did you call the police, file a missing persons report?” He pulled his legs up under himself on the couch, facing Derek, grabbed his coffee. He had to slow down on the eating or he’d feel as sick as he had after eating the burger the night before.

Yeah, in New York, after she made that phone call and I couldn’t reach her. The police told me I had to wait at least twenty-four hours before filing a report, but I knew something was wrong, could feel it.” Derek swallowed hard, Adam’s apple bobbing up and down. “I think I knew she was dead before I even got here.”

“I’m sorry,” Stiles apologized lamely.

“There was nothing you could have done,” Derek replied.

“I could have just stayed away—” At that Derek laughed wryly.

“No, no you couldn’t have. There was no way Laura would have been willing to let you away so easily. She worked with kids like you– had even been fired from jobs for crossing lines, getting too close,” Derek replied with a shake of his head. “She’d finally found a place that seemed to be a good fit, appreciated her brand of… persistence.”

“God, what are they going to do without her? What is Scott going to do without her?” Stiles lamented. Even though he was starting to feel it lessen, guilt still rotted in the pit of his stomach.

“Scott’s got you, Deaton… me.”

“You?” Stiles asked softly.

“He’s your friend– he’s pack,” Derek explained with a shrug, as if it really all was that simple.

“What happens when you have to go back to New York?” Stiles asked, stomach falling, because that was reality. Derek had a life, a job, on the other side of the country. Stiles couldn’t leave Beacon Hills— and it wasn’t like Derek was going to move back.

“We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it.”

Stiles pulled a face.

“Don’t you have a job?” he asked incredulously.

“I do,” Derek replied with a nod before taking a bite of his bagel. He chewed and swallowed, then seemed to figure out that Stiles was expecting some sort of elaboration. “I took some time off— told
them I had a family emergency.”

Family. Stiles had to see his dad. Between when he’d woken up and going to see Lydia and then trying to find some work, he hadn’t got there– which made him feel even more guilty than he’d felt in a long time.

“I should go see my dad today,” he admonished. “I haven’t seen him since… since Peter.”

Derek nodded.

“I understand. Go see him, do what you have to do,” he replied. “I’ll be around here most of the day.” So come back was implied.

“Thanks for breakfast– and clothes… and everything,” Stiles replied awkwardly.

“No problem,” Derek replied. “Thanks for the sex.”

Stiles stared for a beat, two, before the side of Derek’s mouth twitched.

“Asshole,” Stiles snarled, reaching out to playfully punch the werewolf’s shoulder– much more careful this time than the last time to keep the movement playful. Derek smiled, easily rebuffed the blow.


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Derek stared at the back of the apartment door, staring at the smooth, painted surface after Stiles left, unease pooling in his gut. He tried to focus on the fact that Stiles was going to visit his dad, and that was a good thing. But all he could think about was the various other men Stiles was going to see. The danger he was potentially going to put himself in because he thought he didn’t have a choice. And Derek had been too afraid to say what he really wanted to; that Stiles could stay here, with him.

He hadn’t known Stiles long, but in that short time, he’d learned enough to know that Stiles was not about to take a handout from anyone. Worse yet, he would think Derek was offering a place to stay in exchange for sex, which was the last thing he wanted him to think. It was for that reason, and only that reason, he regretted their actions the night before. Now, unless he timed things perfectly, and said things perfectly, his intentions would be misunderstood. In short, he was fucked. He sighed, turned away from the door and shuffled back to the living room.

He’d been communicating with the police on and off for the past week. They definitely weren’t happy that he had decided to drive across the country instead of staying put, and had called over to Beacon Hills to communicate about the case. Derek stopped in his tracks so sharply that he had to throw a hand out and catch himself on the doorframe to the bathroom.

He hadn’t thought anything of it when the New York PD had said they were going to call over to Beacon Hills because at the time, he didn’t know Peter was in Beacon Hills.

In Beacon Hills, playing cop.

If Peter didn’t know he was in Beacon Hills, he soon would.
Stiles trudged to his dad’s room. Being in the hospital reminded him of all of the things he hated thinking about. Like how he hadn’t been there in an entire week. And all the sick things he was going to have to do just to stay afloat and pay the bills. And the fact that with that, came a tremendous amount of guilt for what that would mean for… whatever it was he had with Derek.

The moment he had said goodbye to Derek less than half an hour ago, he’d felt the world crumbling around him. He was dreading tonight because of Derek. Because Derek had ruined him. With Derek it hadn’t just been sex. Something had started between them long before the clothes came off, before they’d even kissed. If Stiles was honest with himself, he recognized that some sort of force had pulled him and Derek together the second the other man found him in the preserve. The night before, he’d actually felt something for the first time in a long time. He hadn’t wanted to just pay attention to the mechanics of it all, he’d wanted to feel it all, make Derek feel good. And the experience had shattered what sex had always been for him. And it was this violent juxtaposition of what sex could be, and what it almost always was for him, that made him nauseous at the thought of another night on the street. The very thought of the bus stop gave him a sinking feeling.

He was still trying to shake that feeling when he rounded the corner into his dad’s room, half in his own world. So he didn’t immediately notice Allison, sitting in the corner beside his dad’s bed, reading a book until she softly greeted; “Hi Stiles.” He jumped, smacking his elbow on the doorframe as he flailed dramatically. He just barely clamped down on the startled yelp on his lips by some miracle.

“You scared the crap outta me,” he breathed, one hand on the doorframe. He frowned. It was just after one o’clock in the afternoon.

“Aren’t you supposed to be in school?” he asked with a raised eyebrow, stepping into the room. He noticed Allison wasn’t wearing her usual red and white candy-striper apron over her street clothes that she typically had on when volunteering. She set down her book on the side of his dad’s bed.

“If you won’t tell, I won’t tell,” she replied with a shrug, brushing a lock of hair out of her face to tuck it behind her ear as Stiles took the other seat in the room.

His dad looked as he always did; like he was taking a nap. His face was as tanned and age-lined as it had always been. Stiles didn’t know why, but he’d almost expected him to look different. The week he’d spent trapped in that basement and at Peter’s mercy seemed like it had been an eternity.

“Seriously though, why have you chosen to hang out in my dad’s room instead of Mr. Harris’ chemistry class?”

At the mention of Beacon Hills High school’s most hated teacher, Allison laughed.

“How did you know?”

Stiles groaned.

“Man, that guy hated me the second he laid eyes on me,” Stiles lamented. “I get why you’re skipping.” Allison laughed.

“He seems to like me well enough,” she replied. “I think that’s why I can get away with the
occasional missed day.”

“So what gives? Why are you spending a valuable afternoon away from school, visiting my dad?”

“I hadn’t seen you for a few days,” Allison said with a frown. “Which I know isn’t unusual because you sometimes come when I’m in school… but I heard a nurse talking about how you hadn’t been here– nobody had seen you– and I figured… your dad might get lonely, so I thought I’d come see him.” She grimaced. “That came out wrong. I didn’t mean you’d been–”

“A shitty son?” Stiles offered. Allison’s cheeks reddened and Stiles rushed to repair the damage. “I’m only joking,” he added quickly. He offered a half smile. “Thanks, for keeping him company.”

“So where were you?” Allison asked. It wasn’t accusatory, just curious. “I mean, you’re usually here every day. The nurses were talking about you being uh… picked up again?”

Stiles stomach twisted into a knot.

“I’ve had a couple run-ins with the law,” he mumbled in reply.

“Was that what happened this time? Are you okay?” Allison asked urgently.

“No… it’s not what happened this time– I’m fine I just… had a bad week.”

“I get it,” Allison replied softly. “But I’m pretty sure he missed you.” She stood up, grabbed her book from the bed and tucked it into a canvas backpack she had slung over the back of her chair.

“You don’t have to go,” Stiles protested. Allison smiled– that adorable, dimple besotted expression, bright and happy and everything Stiles needed to see at that moment.

“I am going to go and wisely spend my afternoon off,” she said brightly. “You enjoy the rest of it with your dad.” She paused at the doorway and turned around, stepping into the room, closing the door behind her.

“Look… I know you don’t me very well,” she started. “But I… the nurses talk. So I know more about you than maybe I have a right to. They were talking about how you may have been picked up again…” She bit her lower lip, looked at the floor. Not wanting to say it. Stiles’ stomach dropped. It had been nice to talk to Allison without her knowing what everyone else in town already seemed to. Stiles was thrown back into the memory of Lydia discovering what he did; by him leaving one of the rooms of the motel, just after his forty-something business man client. He’d walked out of the room, and practically right into her maid’s cart. He remembered the look on her face the second she clued in. The look of shock, rapidly followed by pity. Allison just looked supremely uncomfortable.

“Is it true? Do you–”

“Yes,” Stiles replied evenly, eyes holding hers, challenging her for her pity, her questions of why. They didn’t come. Instead she merely nodded minutely.

“Does he know?” she asked, eyes cast towards his dad’s prone form. Such a simple question, but one nobody, not even Lydia, had ever asked. Stiles shrugged.

“I’ve told him,” he murmured. “But I don’t know if he knows…”

“If you told him, I’m sure he knows,” Allison replied softly.

“Then why doesn’t he wake up?”
The question fell from Stiles lips before he could stop himself and he immediately regretted it. Because there it was: pity.

“I don’t know,” Allison replied softly. She paused a few seconds. “Maybe he’s trying,” she offered, taking a few tentative steps forward. “We don’t know what’s going on in there.”

“That’s what I tell myself,” Stiles replied. “That and, one day he’ll wake up. One day, he will prove everyone wrong by waking up and everything I’ve done will be worth it.”

In a way it was comforting, to know someone else thought that one day his dad could wake up. Most of the nursing staff humored him, pretending to have hope, but Stiles knew it was out of sympathy more than it was out of any sort of positive prognosis. Allison cleared her throat softly.

“What I wanted to say is… if anything happens– if you ever do get picked up or anything– call me. I’ll take care of your dad, make sure he is getting visited.”

Stiles turned to study the girl– no, not just a girl he saw at the hospital once in a while– a friend. She twisted her backpack around, fiddled with one of the pockets on the front until she produced a pen and a cutey notepad– one with Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen on the front. The kind of movie souvenir you wouldn’t expect most high school seniors to be walking around with. Allison spotted Stiles staring and blushed.

“It’s a bad joke from my friend Kira,” she explained with a shrug, “but hey, sometimes it’s useful.” She clicked her pen and scribbled something down before tearing the piece of paper out of the book to hand to Stiles. He glanced at the paper quickly– enough to know it was her phone number.

“If something happens, just call me, that’s my cell,” she supplied. “I mean, only if you want to. I know you hardly know me but if our positions were switched, I’d want someone to do the same for me.

“Thanks,” Stiles replied honestly, pocketing the paper. “But what is your father going to think of you handing out your number to a homeless hooker? He isn’t going to use his ample access to firearms to take me out is he?”

Allison giggled, the action creating deep dimples in her cheeks, adorable. If Stiles had teased Scott for having dimples that could cure cancer, this girl could give him a run for his money.

“Trust me, you have nothing to worry about, he has a strict code,” she replied.

“I’m guessing the non-daughter touching kind of code,” Stiles replied, “and if that is the case, he has nothing to worry about– no offense, but you’re not really my type.”

No, your type is older, stubbled, somewhat cranky and scalding hot werewolves.

“Don’t worry, you’re not mine either,” Allison replied with a wink before slinging her backpack over her shoulder once again. “I’ll see you around Stiles, enjoy your visit with your dad.”

“Thanks,” Stiles replied, watching Allison go, door softly closing behind her. He turned back to his dad and sighed. What did he tell him? Where did he begin? Did it even really matter?

“Hi Dad,” he whispered softly, reaching through the bed’s guardrail to grab his hand. He inhaled shakily, memories of that horrible night just over a week ago fighting their way to the surface, playing across the back of his closed eyelids. He clamped his jaw shut, didn’t say a word aside from, “I’m sorry I was away.”
Stiles wrapped his arms around himself. It wasn’t that he was cold, the night was definitely cool, but he knew better than to think his shaking came from the temperature. His knee bounced up and down, up and down, over and over, tapping against the cracked concrete inside the bus shelter. He scanned the street for activity; interested parties or cops. Part of him prayed for the cops to show up just so he would have an excuse to not do this. Danny was already gone, which meant Stiles was up next. He couldn’t afford not to be. He’d done the math. In order to pay the bills and have enough money to not be in the same position next month, he’d have to take at least six normal customers… that or a few calculated risks with some less savory work.

Ten minutes passed and a deep blue sedan pulled up; clean but not perfectly gleaming, slightly tinted windows, license plates behind plastic covers. On a weeknight Stiles probably would have pegged the owner as a sexually frustrated office worker, wife optional, on his way home from work. This was why Stiles hated Saturdays. Being able to gage a customer by his car wasn’t the exact science it was during the week. The driver within could be exactly as described– desperate enough to leave his home and pick someone up, or he could also be a myriad of other things, could be anyone and into anything.

Stiles stood up on shaky legs and walked towards the car, leaning over it just as the passenger window rolled down. The guy inside didn’t look too bad. Standard really. Early forties, decent looking, jeans, plaid shirt over some sort of t-shirt, leatherjacket. Trying to be the cool Dad, Stiles assessed.

“I only have an hour and a half before my wife and kids come back from my mother-in-laws,” he said before Stiles could even ask him what he wanted. Stiles glanced around, looking for signs of trouble as he asked;

“What do you want?”

“A blow job– but I want to finish in your ass.”

The standard then.

Seeing nobody around Stiles nodded.

“Put your money on the dashboard,” he replied hollowly.

“Shit,” the guy cursed from the other side of the bed, “is that really the time?”

Stiles glanced at the bedside clock– he was surprised that the Palisade even had beside clocks. Then again, it was rented by the hour– someone had to have some way to tell time. He glanced at his watch– two minutes off of the clock’s time, before replying with a bland, “yeah” as he pulled his t-shirt over his head, scooped his hood up from the floor. ‘Cool dad’ or Mike as he’d called himself, proceeded to scramble around the room for the rest of his clothes. Stiles knew what was coming before it came.

“I’m really sorry, but I can’t drop you back,” Mike apologized. “I’ve gotta go.” He was shoving his feet into his sneakers, shrugging his jacket back on.

“It’s fine,” Stiles replied with a shrug. Really, it was shitty, but it also wouldn’t be the first time. Generally, Stiles avoided the rundown motel because sleazy didn’t even begin to describe it. The bathrooms weren’t even equipped with towels or soap– you had to ask for them at the front desk...
ahead of time, and most people weren’t that forward thinking. But Stiles’ biggest concern— beyond what diseases he could catch from the sheets— was the amount of attention the place got from the police. Special interest groups had been trying for years to get the place shut down, but to no avail. Police routinely visited, hoping to find the owner involved in some of the activities so they could finally close the place down, but he remained clean behind the bullet-proof plexi in the office, as far as Stiles could tell.

“Thanks,” Mike replied, coming around to Stiles’ side of the bed, he awkwardly leaned down, kissing Stiles’ forehead, “You were great. I’ll see you again sometime.” He reached into his back pocket and pulled out his wallet, fishing in it to produce another ten.

“So you can get a cab,” he supplied.

“Thanks,” Stiles mumbled, taking the money and shoving it into his hoodie pocket as he watched Mike go. He wasn’t about to waste it on a cab, he’d walk the relatively short distance back, it was only about twenty-minutes if he cut through the park. And what Mike didn’t know wouldn’t hurt him. Stiles sat on the edge of the bed. He’d done it— ripped the bandaid off fast, so to speak and gotten back on the bike.

And he felt like he’d been taken apart and put back together wrong– a broken vase– never the same again. He swallowed hard, biting back the bitterness that threatened to spill down his cheeks and choke out of his lungs. With a deep, shaking breath, he stood up, ignoring the faint ache in his ass, and started back to his post.

He kept his head down and hands jammed in his pockets on his way through the park. The police were known to make their rounds there as well and he didn’t want to draw any undue attention to himself. The park was also a common spot for men to go cruising. It had originally been planned as the park for the middle of a middle-upper class housing development, but when that development collapsed– as everything else in this end of town had– the park had fallen into ruin, surrounded by the shells of incomplete houses on the eastern side that a number of homeless kids, including Danny, called home. Stiles was about halfway through park, on his way to the end that emptied out onto the far end of Lawrence Street when he noticed a black Audi, slowly circling. Very few people risked driving a car like that into this neighborhood– not because it would get stripped or anything, but because the cops would know instantly what they wanted. The car reminded him of the first time Peter had picked him up. He shivered.

He wasn’t the only one in the park but he could feel the prickling sensation of being watched. He glanced over his shoulder and that seemed to be enough. The car accelerated just beyond a walking pace, and Stiles heaved a sigh, pulling his shoulders back, slowing his gait to a casual stroll. He waited until the car pulled up to the walk beside him and the window rolled down before he took one last look around slowed even more, moving half a pace closer to the road. The window rolled down the second he moved in the car’s direction, one fluid movement, almost all the way down. The car kept pace at his side.

“Hey there, can you tell me where Abraham and Lawrence is?” a smooth, masculine voice with a slight British accent called out. Definitely not a first timer, yet also a car Stiles had never been approached by before. Stiles turned sharply to get a look at the driver and his stomach clenched nervously. Good-looking, mid-thirties, with sandy hair, clean shaven, affluent, confident. Everything about him reminded him of Peter… and told him to run. He had to hope that as shitty as his luck was, lightning wasn’t going to strike twice.

“Yeah, I was just on my way back,” he replied, moving close enough to the car that he could get a clear look at the driver, go through his checklist of safeguards; looking around the car, double-
checking his surroundings for potential police.

“I could drive you,” the man offered, “this isn’t a safe place for boys your age.”

“And how safe am I going to be if I go with you?” Stiles retorted with a raised eyebrow. The other man threw his head back and laughed softly.

“You’re not as naïve an innocent as you look,” he replied. “Get in the car— I promise I’ll drop you off where you asked if you don’t like what I have to say.”

“Put your money on the dashboard first,” Stiles demanded. If the guy didn’t do it, it was a no go. The other man raised an eyebrow, but undid his seatbelt, reached into his breast pocket, and produced a plain leather wallet. He withdrew a neat stack of bills, placed them all on the dashboard.

Stiles felt sick to his stomach. There was enough money there to put him back in the black, which could only mean one thing.

“Jesus, what kind of sick shit are you into?”

The man smiled, would have looked charming if Stiles didn’t know better. He was like Peter reincarnated— just more upfront with his motives.

“Let’s discuss that in the car,” he invited. Stiles swallowed the lump in his throat, took one last look around, and ducked into the passenger seat.
Derek startled awake, the apartment dark and silent around him. He groaned, and sat up, the couch creaking underneath him. It didn’t take long to adjust to the darkness, and when he did, he immediately sought out the time. The kitchen clock read just after 12:30am. He swallowed, mouth dry. Stiles hadn’t come back yet. Derek had done everything he could to distract himself while the teen was gone. He’d gone downstairs to talk to Mae and Patrick– the new owners of Artifact– and let them know what he could about Laura– that he’d come out to investigate her disappearance, and that the police were involved and they would probably come talk to them. It turned out that they had already reported her missing as well since she hadn’t been around for several days. They offered their sympathies, and to look normal, Derek stuck around the bookstore to talk to them for about a half hour, even though he was horrible at small talk. By the time he left, he couldn’t help but second guess whether he looked like his reaction to Laura being missing was normal or not. After all, how normal could it look when he was faking being concerned because she was already gone?

He’d felt agitated all night. It was like he could feel other men’s hands on Stiles body, which he knew was ridiculous and was likely all in his head. Nonetheless, Deaton’s words kept haunting him. The reality was, he hadn’t ever felt like this about another person. Had never felt a pull so intense in his life to anyone– including pack. Compared to Stiles, his relationship with Paige, though it had been a long time ago, felt superficial and every bit the adolescent relationship it had actually been. He looked back at what he’d done– asking Peter to help him find an alpha to bite Paige– and felt even more remorse at his selfishness and the life he’d wasted.

Peter.

Derek felt enough anger and bitterness itching under his skin to make the change twitch alive in him, the wolf chomping at the bit to get out and destroy. There was more than met the eye here. Derek could sense it. There had to be a reason Peter had plucked Stiles from a street corner and started all of this. For as long as Derek could remember, he’d known his uncle to be clever– no cunning. Peter had always seemed to be one step ahead of everyone, had always been able to talk his way out of anything– or into anything; Like he was always playing one giant game of chess. The reality was, if Peter didn’t know Derek was in Beacon Hills already, he would soon. He may even have had this planned all along. With a sinking feeling, Derek realized he was just going to have to wait and see what his uncle– his alpha– had planned. Step one was figuring out what he wanted with Stiles– which meant he needed to keep Stiles close enough to figure it out.
“Fuck this,” Derek muttered. He stood up, heading for the door. He’d found Stiles easily enough the first time, he’d find him again.

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Stiles hands shook as he reached for the keys to his Jeep. All he wanted was to drive back to the preserve, pop half a dozen of his leftover pain pills and fall into oblivion alone. No, what he really wanted was a shower, the comfort of Derek’s bed, and Derek’s warmth. But he couldn’t go back there— not like this.

Deucalion, as he had called himself— Stiles had no idea if he was telling the truth or not— had many of the same proclivities as Peter. The only difference was he’d been willing to pay for the chance to practice them. He’d been honest in the car; as he’d put it, he liked to ‘beat and fuck beautiful brown-haired boys’. What he hadn’t told Stiles was that they were going back to a high-end hotel where he’d prepared by bringing every conceivable sex toy, restraint, and torture device one could fit in a Gucci carry-on.

And a video camera to record it all that Stiles had said no to. Until the older man reached into his wallet and produced another few bills and shoved them into Stiles’ front pocket. Enough to make Stiles swallow his pride because what difference did it make if some old pervert kept it for wanking material later?

It had almost broken him though— physically and mentally. His John hadn’t been kidding when he said he liked to beat the boys he picked up— torture was more like it. By the time Deucalion had dropped him off at the movie theatre— because there was no way he’d get there otherwise— Stiles had been gone for several hours. He was pretty sure he’d spent a chunk of that time only semi-conscious. He couldn’t remember how he’d gotten half the marks on his body. Hidden under his jeans and the sleeves of his hoodie were rings of rope burn around his limbs, welts from an assortment of implements. His jaw ached from being held open with a ball gag when it hadn’t been busy with other tasks. He could acutely feel lubricant leaking out of him, a disgusting undertone to the aching, used feeling the rest of him felt. And the utter filth that had come out of the man’s mouth— the things he’d made Stiles say when he wasn’t gagged…

He shuddered, the motion wracking his frame enough for the grip on his keys to slacken. They clattered to the pavement loudly, noise ringing in his ears.

“Shit,” he whimpered, pressing his forehead against the cool metal on the door of his Jeep. Tears of frustration welled in the corners of his eyes and he squeezed them shut as he shakily bent, one hand braced on the side of his Jeep, to retrieve his keys. He opened his eyes at the last second, to track his hand across the pavement, but before he could successfully snag the keys from the ground, another hand scooped them up, too quickly for him to identify who it belong to. His mind raced. It could be the hand of a stranger… or a cop… or Peter. Even the thought of the werewolf made him recoil in terror— and nearly fall over. In fact the only thing that stopped him was one warm hand steadying him at the waist. Whoever it was hissed, a sharp intake of breath right in Stiles ear.

“Jesus Stiles what did you do?”

A chill ran down Stiles’ spine at the sound of the familiar voice. He turned sharply, and caught the
sight of a stubbled jawline, ink black hair.

He moved to jerk away but the werewolf wouldn’t let him. His other arm—keys clutched in hand crossed over him, closing over his chest, pinning his left arm down to his side. Hot tears of humiliation boiled over and spilled down Stiles’ cheeks. He could just imagine how he smelled right now.

“Let me go,” he rasped.

“No,” Derek replied simply. He straightened slowly, loosening his arms and Stiles pulled away, turning to face the other man. His face was drawn in concern, not disgust. His eyes roamed over Stiles’ body and the teen knew he was searching out the damage.

“Did you follow me again?” he asked incredulously.

“No,” Derek retorted softly.

“Then why are you here?”

Derek sighed and looked off across the parking lot, then down at his feet.

“Why didn’t you come back?”

“I just got back from a job,” Stiles retorted. He stared at Derek, held his gaze challengingly, daring him to call him on the hiccup in his heartbeat that sing-songed ‘that’s not the whole story’. Derek raised his eyebrows and somehow managed to keep his expression soft; the ‘there is something you’re not telling me’ expression of a therapist. Stiles bit his lips, trying not to give in to the silence that stretched between him. The therapist at McLean had used this trick on him before and he fell for it almost every time. Not this time.

“Can I have my keys?” he muttered, fidgeting in place under Derek’s unwavering stare. The other man blinked before looking down at the key-ring clutched in his palm and back up to Stiles’ face.

“No,” he replied calmly.

“Give me my keys,” Stiles demanded, unhinged, his voice getting louder.

“Why? So you can spend the night in the preserve in the back of your Jeep?”

“Yes!”

Stiles was furious with himself. He mashed at his eyes with his fists but it did nothing to stop the dams from finally breaking. He tried to remind himself that he was in public, and that made it even worse.

“Is it me?” Derek asked softly. “Do you just want to be away from me?”

“Yes,” Stiles replied with way more volume than necessary. “It is you. You wrecked this for me. You fucking ruined me. I was doing fine before you came along.” His voice ran out of steam, cracking on his last words, breaking them down to a whisper: “I don’t want to be away from you.”

Derek moved cautiously, slowly, one foot in front of the other until he’d closed most of the space between them; until he could reach out and tentatively pull Stiles closer to him, tugging his arms away from his face, enough that he could draw him to his chest. Stiles swayed and winced. Even under Derek’s gentle grip his skin felt like it was burning, his bones too close to the surface.
“Let’s go,” Derek murmured into his hair and Stiles nodded against him. “I’ll drive,” the wolf added.

It was a testament to just how exhausted he was that Stiles didn’t protest to someone else driving his baby– or even question where Derek’s car was.

When they pulled into the parking lot behind the bookstore, Stiles was surprised to see Derek’s Camaro in the same spot he’d left it the night before, but he didn’t comment, nor take the energy to figure out how the other man had been getting around. Derek killed the ignition and everything fell into echoing silence.

“I am not looking forward to those stairs,” Stiles commented earnestly, breaking the silence that had rested between them since Derek had pulled out of the movie theatre parking lot. He chanced a glance over at the other man and was taken aback by the deep furrows in his brow; revealing his concern.

“I’ll help you,” he grimaced, “…if you need it.”

“I’ll be okay,” Stiles replied. He released his seatbelt, preparing for the worst when he remembered that he still had a few tablets of the extra strength pain killers the pharmacist had given him.

“Do me a favor?” he implored.

“Yeah, what do you need?”

“Can you grab my bag from the back seat?” because if I try my skin is going to rip off and I might throw up an internal organ.

“Sure,” Derek replied, glancing into the backseat, movements slowing to half speed when he seemed to realize that on any other day, where the duffle rested against the back of the driver’s seat, would be easier for Stiles to reach than him. He grabbed the bag and hauled it over the seat one handed, careful to keep it from jarring Stiles on the way by.

By the time Derek paused to unlock the apartment door, Stiles could feel beads of sweat travelling down his spine. He braced himself with a hand against the wall until Derek shoved the door open and stepped to the side, ushering Stiles in ahead of him. Stiles toed off his shoes and moved out of the way in the small entrance to give Derek room. A dull thunk behind him told Stiles that Derek had set down his duffle. Stiles couldn’t blame him– it was one of those monstrously big army surplus bags. He’d picked it up at a thrift store one day for ten bucks and had soon found out that in addition to storing all of his stuff, it made a great pillow, the canvas soft and worn with age. Derek reached out in the dark, broad hands with thick fingers finding Stiles’ hand effortlessly. Stiles followed as Derek tugged him along, pace slow and easy until they reached the bathroom door. Stiles felt his skin burn in the dark, shame bubbling up inside of him, heating his skin to crimson. Still, in a way, this was better than having to ask to take a shower.

Derek flicked on the light beside the door and Stiles was temporarily blinded with the stark whiteness of the room. Stiles could feel it in the air again– that crackling static of the night before that he’d nearly mistaken for lust, but it wasn’t lust. Not then, and not now either.

Derek was studying him, watching every little movement, eyes flitting from place to place, cataloguing. Stiles realized they were still holding hands. He stared and stared at their fingers; a two-toned tangle of bony knuckles and chewed fingernails. He stared so long, so transfixed on that little
detail that he started when fingers tickled at the hinge of his jaw. He leaned into the touch—this was not the false tenderness of one of his clients, it was genuine, cautious, because Derek *cared* if Stiles pulled away. And Stiles knew that. He closed his eyes when Derek leaned in, pulling him in for a kiss. Stiles turned his head at the last second, resting his head just below Derek’s chin.

“I need to brush my teeth,” he confessed hoarsely. Derek squeezed his hand gently.

“Okay,” he replied, voice soft. He released Stiles’ hand and he teenager turned around, staring in mild disbelief at the toothbrush he’d used last night, still perched upright next to Derek’s in a drinking glass.

Behind him, Derek turned on the taps in the tub, fiddling with them for a few seconds before pulling back. The sound of running water splashing against the bottom of the tub filled the room. Stiles watched in the mirror as Derek moved behind him, careful to make eye contact when Stiles caught his eye in the reflection of the mirror. So Stiles wasn’t entirely surprised when he felt the hesitant graze of fingers, just barely slipping under his hoodie and t-shirt, pulling the fabric away from his damaged flesh, slightly up. Derek only broke eye contact with Stiles’ reflection to glance down at the stretch of skin revealed by his hand. He didn’t touch, which Stiles was thankful for, instead he let the fabric drop, and turned towards the tub again. Stiles twisted around, resting his hands against the sink to watch Derek twist the cold water tap on a bit more. His stomach flip-flopped at the tenderness that tiny gesture showed.

He started to shrug his hoodie off, skin feeling too tight as he moved. Derek backed away from the tub, satisfied with the temperature of the water, and watched Stiles struggle to gingerly shed his hoodie for only a few seconds before wordlessly coming to his aide. He gently tugged at the sleeves while Stiles wriggled and eventually the garment dropped. Derek’s fingers eased under the hem of Stiles’ t-shirt, barely skimming his abdomen, like he was afraid to touch him. Stiles lifted his arms as far as he could manage—which really wasn’t past shoulder level and Derek got the signal he needed. His hands bunched the fabric into his fists, so that he could slowly peel the cotton over Stiles’ head. And Stiles couldn’t help but close his eyes at the memory of Derek doing the exact same thing under much different circumstances the night before. And under *any* other circumstances, he’d probably have the world’s most awkward boner right now. When he pulled his head free of the neckline, he watched Derek’s eyes track his arms, realized he was studying the irritated bracelets of reddened flesh around his wrists—rope burn from being tied up.

“I’m okay,” he tried to reassure lamely. Derek looked extremely skeptical, but it didn’t stop him from tenderly cradling Stiles face and claiming his lips in a surprisingly possessive kiss. His tongue swiped along Stiles’ lower lip almost immediately, begging for entrance and Stiles’ granted it. In a strange way, it was a relief, to know that they could pick up where they had left off, just as connected as they had been the night before—more. Derek pulled away after several long moments.

“Don’t want to flood the apartment,” he excused, pulling back to turn towards the tub. The bathroom fell into silence seconds later, save for the dripping of water from the faucet. Derek shuffled awkwardly in place for a few seconds before moving towards the door.

“I’ll go get a towel,” he murmured before he was out the door. Stiles stood leaned against the sink for a few seconds, listening to the water dripping into the tub. It occurred to him that he had no idea where he and Derek stood. It made his stomach twist with anxiety.

He suddenly felt gross in his own skin. He could acutely feel excess lube leaking out of him, the sweat drying, making him cold, making his skin itch. He inched out of his jeans, wincing as he bent to push them down his legs and pull his socks off. As sore as he was now, he knew enough from Peter that he would be way worse tomorrow and the next day. He was grateful for the warm bath
that awaited him and the bottle of pills tucked away in his bag. He stripped off his boxer briefs— and was just stepping into the tub when Derek returned, knocking softly on the door.

“Come in,” Stiles called. When Derek stepped into the room he froze and quickly averted his eyes, keeping them fixed on the worn, striped towel in his hands.

“I promise it’s clean— Laura and I didn’t keep much here,” he defended needlessly as he entered. Stiles snorted as he carefully lowered himself into the tub.

“If you think I have a problem with old towels, you obviously have not thought through the whole ‘homeless’ thing. I’ve used those brown paper towels that start to smell the second you get them wet in a pinch,” Stiles retorted.

“Well, I’ll uh—” Derek was clearly looking for a place to set the towel down where Stiles could reach it.

“Stay,” Stiles prompted softly. “It’s not like you haven’t seen everything already.”

Derek looked unsure until Stiles lowered himself the last few inches into the tub, hissing when the water met his damaged skin. Derek moved forward quickly, hand darting out to pull Stiles from the water.

“I’m f-fine,” Stiles stuttered out breathlessly. Once the initial pain subsided, the water was actually nice, Derek slowly sat down on the lid of the toilet seat, towel on his lap for lack of anywhere else to put it but the floor.

“You look anything but fine,” Derek grumbled softly. “You should see your back.”

“Believe me, I know,” Stiles retorted. “It probably looks a lot worse than it feels.” Okay, so that part was a lie. He picked up the soap in the dish set into the wall, slowly lathering it between his hands, rubbing it up his arms, carefully rinsing. It was strangely intimate to have Derek witness this and yet he didn’t want him to leave.

“Have you ever thought about what is going to happen when your dad wakes up?” Derek asked after several minutes had passed and Stiles had washed every inch that he could reach. He smiled softly at the note of optimism he hadn’t expected.

“Every day,” he replied honestly. He knew what Derek was getting to: what would the Sheriff think, knowing what Stiles had been doing to keep him alive. The truth was, Stiles didn’t know what he would do. If his dad had heard him in any of their one-sided conversations, he’d know the truth, if he hadn’t… Stiles didn’t know. The reality was if his dad woke up one day, he wouldn’t likely be good as new. He’d need rehab or some level of care and Stiles had no idea what the insurance company would do— likely find a reason not to pay for any of it. Stiles wouldn’t be able to stop what he was doing and probably wouldn’t be able to hide it either. He’d be faced with telling his dad that they’d lost the house, that they had almost nothing. It was something he tried not to think about.

He grabbed the soap from the dish in the wall once again, lathering it between his hands. There was an open wound on his shoulder that he knew was just out of reach.

“What will you do?”

Stiles shrugged, reached for his injured shoulder.

“I don’t know. Truthfully, I don’t usually think that far ahead.”
Derek’s touch was feather light when he stilled Stiles’ hand.

“What the hell did this guy do?” he muttered in disapproval, “It looks like he took a garden rake to you.” Stiles grunted his derision as Derek plucked his hand away.

“Frankly, I think that would have been more comfortable.”

Derek’s hand returned, and in it, a soft wash cloth by the feel of things, gently wiping away the blood Stiles was sure was there. He groaned at the soft touch.

“You’re surprisingly gentle Big Bad,” he teased, eyes closed as he leaned into Derek’s touch.

“Very funny,” Derek muttered, though Stiles could swear he could hear the smile in the man’s voice. Stiles opened his eyes when he heard Derek shifting, abandoning his spot on the toilet seat to kneel beside the tub. His hands continued to move, squeezing water from the washcloth out over Stiles’ back most of the time, only actually letting the cloth touch him in places that Stiles suspected were open wounds.

“I can’t do this.”

Derek’s words made Stiles’ heart plunge, like an anchor was dragging it down to the bottom of the blackest sea. Derek was close enough that Stiles could feel the gust of his breath as he exhaled roughly.

“I can’t watch you do this to yourself.”

Stiles swallowed. He got it, they’d sort of tried. This wasn’t going to work, better to move on before getting in too deep. He moved to get out of the tub. As nice as it would have been to stay the night and share Derek’s bed one more time, he just couldn’t do it. He needed to make this a clean break.

“But I can’t walk away either.” Derek said before Stiles could make a move. He paused, Adam’s apple bobbing up and down. “I want you to stay here. With me.”

Stiles was pretty sure his heart stopped. He shrugged away from Derek, practically plastering himself against the back side of the tub. He was breathing hard, not quite panic-attack level, but labored enough. The heaving motion set his back on fire.

Derek, for his part, somehow managed to stay calm– at least he looked it. He moved slowly, reaching out to gently grasp Stiles forearms and pull him closer, the water under him easing the way.

“Stiles, calm down... please,” Derek implored, “please listen to me.” His eyes gave it away— wide with distress. It was the first time Stiles noticed that they weren’t really green so much as hazel— they had a golden ring around the iris; a core of warmth. He tried to calm down.

“Somehow I don’t think this is a conversation we should have with me naked in your bathtub,” he replied hoarsely. Derek didn’t quite smile, but his expression moved from tense and worried to accepting, calm. He stood up slowly, grabbed the towel from the seat of the toilet and unfolded it, opening it as Stiles stood up on shaky legs. He stepped into Derek’s open arms and the soft, worn towel, relishing Derek’s perfect heat, closing his eyes.

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When Stiles emerged from the bedroom, he was dressed in a pair of sweats and a very worn looking black t-shirt, baggy enough to fit someone with fifty pounds on him. Derek couldn’t blame him—the brutal red welts all over his back, the deep red marks he knew would develop into sickening bruises—not to mention some of the open wounds looked unbearable. Derek had almost blown it, this chance, just from being impatient. He was determined to pace himself this time, choose his words carefully—like he usually did. Stiles just managed to undo something in him that made him feel untethered.

“Feeling better?” he managed to ask timidly, afraid the wrong words would send Stiles running.

“Somewhat,” Stiles replied with a vague gesture. He looked exhausted and for a second Derek debated waiting until morning to have this conversation, but he was just so afraid that Stiles would disappear before then. And he knew he would sleep better with the teenager next to him.

“I’m just going to get a glass of water, take this,” he held up his hand, fingers closed over what Derek could only guess was some kind of pill.

“Yeah, sure. Let me get you something to eat.”

“I– okay.”

Derek had gone grocery shopping to distract himself. It was just the sort of mindless activity that gave him time to think, but wouldn’t allow him to think too much. The entire time, he’d kept thinking that Peter was going to pop out from around a corner with a cryptic “hello nephew” despite the fact that he’d gone shopping an entire town over. When had life become so complicated?

Stiles stayed in the kitchen with him, sipping his water, watching as Derek put together a couple of sandwiches.

“You said you wanted me to stay here with you,” Stiles said out of nowhere. Derek froze as he was laying cheese down over one of the sandwiches. He looked up, Stiles was staring at him, expression playing at neutral, but Derek could see, or maybe just thought he could see the anxiety just under the surface.

“Yes,” he replied honestly. No sense beating around the bush. He had never really been good at that one anyway.

“But you want me to stop working.” It really wasn’t that simple but…

“Yes.”

Stiles put his water down on the counter, pushing it away from him softly.

“I can’t,” he croaked. “Why don’t you understand that I can’t?”

Derek stopped what he was doing, put both hands on the counter. He hadn’t planned on having this conversation in the kitchen, but really, it didn’t matter.

“Stiles listen to me,” he replied steadily. The teen looked like he wanted to say something, he even opened his mouth to do it, before letting it close once more. He just looked so tired. The overly large t-shirt made him look like a skinny, defenseless kid, not the capable and determined man he was growing into.

“I’ve made arrangements to stay for awhile, the police are going to want me around anyway.”
“They know you’re here,” Stiles replied, like he wasn’t even conscious of his reply. His eyes betrayed the fact that he was deep in thought about something else.

“Yeah– the police in New York weren’t exactly thrilled that I trekked across the country to California.”

“They suspect you,” Stiles replied flatly.

“They can’t do anything but bring me in for questioning,” Derek replied. “Not until they find a body.”

At that, Stiles heart rate notably picked up so fast it was like pressing down on the gas in the Camaro while in neutral. His hands braced against the countertop.

“Peter,” Stiles gasped out.

“I know,” Derek replied calmly. He’d already thought about it, analyzed every course of action he could in his head and come to two conclusions. One, he was determined to somehow keep Stiles safe, the other; that he had to let Peter think he was the one in control.

“I can’t say here,” Stiles replied. “I can’t. If Peter finds out–”

“He will,” Derek replied with a shrug. Thankful that Stiles couldn’t hear his heartbeat. “And I’d rather you be safe here with me than out there alone.” He nodded towards the window.

“He’ll be angry,” Stiles replied, voice hoarse, “either because he’s actually jealous or he is crazy.”

“And if you’re here, he’ll have to go through me first. He needs me Stiles. An alpha is nothing without his pack. He needs me…especially since right now, he doesn’t really have Scott.”

Stiles moved his arms, letting his elbows rest on the counter so that he hunched over it, dropping his head into his hands.

“What do you want from me?” he whined. Derek stepped around from the other side of the counter, brushed a hand down Stiles’ back, deliberately drawing out some of his pain. He watched the veins in his forearm darken to black, felt the strange tension, the faint burn of Stiles pain enter his body and quickly diffuse.

“Come sit down,” he replied. “Sit down and eat and I’ll tell you. And you can stay or go. I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

Added tags/Explanations:
Minor Character Death/ Original Character death: I should have had these in from Laura's death onwards and didn't. Bad author! Fixed now, also covers some possible future deaths.

Filming: Dub-con in nature, does not actually occur 'on screen' but is referenced by Stiles.
Gag: Again, dub-con in nature, does not actually occur 'on screen' but is referenced by Stiles.
Negotiations

Chapter Notes

So I just finished writing a MASSIVE section of this story which will definitely result in a double update for you guys down the line! Yay for writing kicks! Next step, actually determining how many chapters this son of a beech is going to be.

They settled in the living room, food in front of them. Stiles was clearly trying to hide being hungry, but he’d already practically inhaled half of his sandwich.

“I’m not good at this,” Derek started.

“What talking? I don’t know what you’re talking about, your conversational skills are outstanding.”

Derek would have frowned at the liberal use of sarcasm if the teenager didn’t have a completely valid point. Instead he awkwardly plowed on.

“I would do anything to have my family back,” he started. And Stiles winced but didn’t say anything. “But I can’t make that happen. Insurance covered a lot. Laura and I were the beneficiaries of our parent’s life insurance policies. We also got an insurance payout on the house. It was…” he exhaled roughly thinking about the seven figure amount that hadn’t fully seemed real until now, “a lot of money. I let Laura handle it after the fire. I didn’t want it, felt like, by not accepting it would somehow bring my family back. At that time in my life, I was a mess. If I’d actually had much access to that money, I probably would have shot a good deal of it into my veins.”

Stiles head snapped up, eyes squinting in an expression Derek was beginning to recognize as his ‘taking it all in’ look, like he was sizing him up for the truth not unlike Derek did when he listened in on people’s heartbeats. He swallowed hard under the scrutiny and continued.

“I got myself together… eventually. I went to school. I got a job and one day, Laura just handed me a cheque. She’d invested the money for me and told me that she knew I had my life together, and it was my choice what to do with it. I’d just finished school and I used a bit to tide me over while I found work but… I didn’t really need to dip into it for long. I found a job and I get paid enough, to be comfortable. So Laura took me to her investment guy and I put it in a few different investments.” He took a deep, shuddering breath and braced himself because he already knew how Stiles was going to react. He just hoped he could get enough of what he wanted to say out before Stiles shut down.

“I make enough that I can afford to rent you this apartment without actually renting you this apartment. Enough that I am pretty sure I could pay your dad’s medical bills for at least the next six months. And I know that won’t give you time to go to college or anything but it will at least give you options.” Derek was about to go on when he noticed that the colour had completely drained from Stiles’ face. He looked like he was scarcely breathing, but his heartbeat was slow, firm, almost too hard.

“W-why are you doing this?” Stiles stuttered, barely audible. His voice was far off, as if he was still waiting for the words to reach him. Of course, the second they did, he pulled away just as Derek suspected and feared that he would. Stiles scrambled up too quickly. Derek could smell the rising
panic and pain, souring the air. He reached out to touch, but Stiles jerked away sharply like he was a marionette, an invisible puppeteer jerking his strings like an experimental child.

Both men scrambled up at the same time, but Derek being a supernatural creature, had the advantage of being significantly faster. He moved quickly, putting himself between Stiles and the hallway that would take him to the apartment door. And really he didn’t have an answer, at least not one that wouldn’t sound absolutely insane, even to himself.

“I want to–”

“Do NOT say that you want to help me!” Stiles yelled, and if the bookstore was still open downstairs, Derek may have been worried. He was too shocked at the sudden outburst to even interrupt.

“Nobody ever ACTUALLY wants to help me!” Stiles continued, hands shaking in front of him. But his voice was losing stream rapidly, breaking at the end.

“I do!” Derek retorted, barely using his training to get a reign over his emotions and, shockingly, his shift, and not flash his eyes at Stiles, or match the teen’s tone, instead, keeping his voice level, “I want to try.”

Stiles was shaking, no vibrating with rage.

“No– you don’t get to say that. You’ve already fucked me.” Derek flinched as every doubt he’d held about the night before flooded back, black with regret. “You’ve already gotten what you want and now you feel like you have to pay for it somehow.”

The words clawed and prickled like stinging nettles in Derek’s ears. Because that wasn’t the way it was, and the one thing he could think to say would only do more damage. So he bit his tongue. Which was a mistake, because Stiles posture changed it in an instant. He sagged, and yet his limbs seemed to radiate tension; tired, defeated. He moved towards Derek, towards the hallway.

He was in his bare feet, a t-shirt and a pair of sweats. His duffle bag was in the bedroom and he was going to leave everything he owned behind because Derek had somehow fucked this all up. Stiles was brushing past him and here he was just standing there. At the last second he twisted, grabbing the teenager around the waist, hauling him away from the hall, slightly too rough. He siphoned some of the pain away, waiting for Stiles to stop fighting his hold, to just stop and listen. Waiting to gather his own thoughts to say something, anything to fix how badly he’d fucked everything up.

***

Stiles was going to be sick. All he could hear was the blood pounding in his own ears. His fight or flight instinct kicked in and for once he chose the smart route. He moved to leave. It didn’t matter that literally everything he owned minus his Jeep was in his duffle bag in Derek’s bedroom. It didn’t matter what he felt. That electric current between him and Derek could easily just be him clinging to the one person he thought could help him, because he was related to the one person who tried to before.

But you know that it’s not.

But he was still moving, brushing past Derek, feet carrying him to the door, desperate to get him out.
And then what?

In the moment of hesitation, some unstoppable force changed his course, pulled him back. Derek. It was Derek’s arms wrapped around his waist, hauling him into the living room. It was like he’d just been plucked from the air, and before the pain of the movement could even register, it was gone. Stiles knew it had to have been there, if only for a second, but he didn’t feel it. He struggled against Derek’s arms, but he wasn’t scared or even that angry. Just overwhelmed. Because how could someone he didn’t really know care this much? The intensity of that scared him. Not Derek.

He continued to struggle for a few more seconds? Minutes? He wasn’t sure, but when he stopped, Derek’s hold on him was much more embrace than restraint. Stiles was curled into his chest, arms at his sides, limp, exhausted.

“I will never touch you again if that’s what it takes for you to trust me,” Derek finally promised, voice soft, arms loosening their hold ever so slightly. Stiles moved his head so that his forehead was resting on Derek’s shoulder.

“I don’t want that,” he confessed, words sounding like they were being dragged over gravel on the way out. Derek seemed to make a point of not relaxing too much. He stayed very, very still. “But I want you to tell me the truth.”

Stiles could feel it, Derek’s entire frame expand and contract as he took a breath.

“Okay,” he replied, practically a whisper in Stiles’ ear as he slowly let go, arms very gradually releasing their hold, as if afraid Stiles would try and leave again.

They stood about a foot apart for a few moments, staring at one another, until Derek retreated to the couch first. Stiles followed, collapsing onto the comfortable sofa, wincing only slightly at the jarring movement. Stiles felt a little lightheaded, knew he was teetering on the edge of something big.

“I don’t understanding any of this,” he finally said after a few seconds. He couldn’t help but think about Laura. What would he have done if Laura had offered the same thing– minus, you know, the sex. He’d like to think he would have politely declined, but really, he knew he couldn’t have– and it wouldn’t have been near as complicated because his relationship with Laura had been completely platonic. His relationship with Derek? Not so much.

“I– I’ve never really been able to have a functional relationship with anyone.” He paused, corrected himself. “I’ve never had a relationship with anyone,” he snorted. “If I was still in high school, I’d probably still be a virgin trying to get laid.” His heart stalled as he realized how everything he’d just said could be interpreted. He looked up from his hands to see Derek gazing at him intently.

“Shit–I–I didn’t mean it like that,” he scrambled to explain. “I meant– I mean I don’t know if this is a thing that normal people do.”

“It’s not,” Derek replied softly. He’d been so still, it was like watching a statue come to life– jarring, world altering for a few seconds as Stiles’ brain righted itself. But even more jarring was how nervous Derek looked.

“Is something wrong with me?” Stiles asked quietly. Derek shook his head.

“With you?” Stiles offered. There was a slightly longer delay before Derek shook his head. “Then what?”

“Last night… that current of energy,” Derek began– and that grabbed Stiles attention because he had never said anything about it, and yet it so acutely described the feeling. “That wasn’t just lust. It isn’t
love either…” Stiles stomach clenched, his throat going tight before Derek kept talking. “It’s more than that, runs deeper than that. I just… I need you to trust me.” And Derek, he looks downright scared, like a little kid confessing some horrible wrong to his parent. “Something pulled me to the preserve on Friday night. Something wouldn’t let me rest until I’d gone there first.”

The confession was unsettling, eerie. Stiles’ skin prickled, but not out of fear– more like an answering thrum. Finally an explanation for the way he felt around Derek– that inescapable pull towards the wolf was echoed by him.

“You’re not telling me everything.” Because there was no way that this was all– that this was the reason Derek wanted him to stay. Derek knew what this was.

“No, I’m not,” he admitted softly, eyes closed. “I can’t yet, just please… trust me.”

And as stupid as it may have been, Stiles did.

“Okay,” he replied, so quietly, he would have been afraid Derek didn’t catch it– if it weren’t for the fact that the other man visibly relaxed. “I just… I don’t know how we’re going to do this.”

“What do you mean?” Derek implored.

“Me staying here… with you.”

“But you’ll stay?” Derek’s voice was soft, so vulnerable that a lump swelled in Stiles’ throat, a sudden surge of emotion choking him.

“Yeah, I’ll stay,” he breathed out shakily around the lump. He didn’t know how it was going to work, but he’d try. He knew Derek wouldn’t force him to stay and that was enough for him. Derek exhaled roughly.

“Thank you,” he replied. He twitched, a slight movement towards Stiles before he stopped himself. He moved slowly, closing the distance between them. Stiles moved to close the rest, movements stiff, but he couldn’t help himself.

Kissing Derek felt like home.

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Fast asleep, Stiles looked every bit the seventeen year old kid that he was. His jaw was slack, lips slightly parted, his breaths steadily lending a lift and fall to his torso. Once in awhile, his breath would hitch and he’d move to readjust in his sleep, uselessly attempting to find comfort. And every time, Derek would draw a hand down the teen’s back, feather light, siphoning off some of the pain. By the time they’d called it a night, it was pretty late. Derek had planned to give Stiles his bed and take the couch, but when Stiles had grabbed his hand loosely and tugged him towards the bedroom, he didn’t stop him.

Derek stared into the darkness, trying to think ahead. Normal everyday life was manageable. He’d already made arrangements to take a leave of absence from work; the reason he provided being perfectly legitimate– Laura. They didn’t need to know that there were other factors. He could arrange paying the hospital bill for Stiles on Monday. Then there was Peter.
For as long as he’d been old enough to understand, Derek knew Peter to be smart, manipulative. Now that he thought about it, Derek wasn’t actually that surprised that Peter had managed to worm his way into a position of authority.

_They key to a good backup plan is, never let it be known that it is your backup plan._ It had been something his uncle had told him when he was a kid. But something about that statement was important now. Peter had chosen this career path with purpose. It gave him three of the things he loved most; access to information, power over others, and the ability to keep those who could catch him in his nefarious activities close enough to manipulate.

It dawned on Derek then. Rising through the ranks of the sheriff’s department was plan B. And being the master of plots that he was, Derek was sure his uncle had seamlessly integrated plan B into plan A. Derek had figured out a portion of the long game, but he knew enough to know Peter needed some sort of more immediate gratification while he worked towards loftier goals. And that those loftier goals definitely included Stiles and his friend Scott, and whether one or both of them had been an afterthought, Derek didn’t know.

He was in over his head. Normally his instinct would have been to defer to his alpha— but his alpha was gone and he refused to recognize Peter as such in anything other than title. That meant his only other potential source of help, was Alan Deaton. He knew the former emissary was trying to piece together what was going on but he had his reservations about the masquerading vet. As much as he tried to put it out of his mind, he couldn’t ignore the fact that he had been a _client_ to Stiles before all of this. And though there seemed to be some sort of unspoken acknowledgement that the arrangement was over, Derek still regarded the man differently than he had before. _Why? You’re crossing the same arbitrary line,_ a voice in the back of his head, not unlike Kate’s, reminded him. It was like seeing Stiles together with Derek, and then again with Scott too, had provoked Deaton into stepping into his role as emissary again, and honestly, Derek still trusted him in that role. He just had a hard time dancing around the elephant in the room. He blew out a huff of air. He was going to have to get over it.

For now, he was content to have Stiles somewhere safe, where he could keep tabs on him— and he couldn’t deny the part of him that was pleased that, for now, he got him all to himself. Derek didn’t really know where he’d gotten the six months idea, other than wanting to give Stiles a realistic financial number. In reality, he could support Stiles a lot longer than that. The future was so uncertain though— it was like staring into a fog so thick that even vague shapes and forms could not be seen. He felt like he was feeling blindly in the dark, and he didn’t like that feeling. The lack of control just didn’t sit well but for now, until Peter made some sort of move, a sound in the dark, it was all Derek had.

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When Stiles woke up, he was sore. His skin felt three sizes too tight and he could feel a bruising ache under his skin, deep in his muscles. And yet, he was grateful, because instead of waking up in a lumpy sleeping bag in the back of his Jeep in the middle of the preserve, he was waking up under a warm duvet on an actual mattress. And he could probably stay there all day if he wanted. He gingerly rolled over, not entirely surprised to see that Derek wasn’t in bed with him. He could hear him out in the apartment moving around, the muted sounds of the television in the background.

The memory of the night before seemed cloaked in a hazy fog, so surreal it could have been a dream, but Stiles knew it hadn’t been. Because with it came the weighty, substantial decision he had made;
He had six months to sort his shit out. Of course, there was this nagging apprehension about what he had agreed to. After all, he didn’t know Derek, not really. And yet… he felt like he did. It was like something inside of him, a long dormant consciousness recognized Derek as kin—trustworthy by default.

He recognized that Derek was taking a huge risk. If the police got too involved, they would find Derek staying in Laura’s temporary digs with Stiles— an under aged hooker— one that most of the precinct knew, and not necessarily because of his dad. They’d think the worst immediately. Especially if they looked at Derek’s bank account and saw payments to the hospital there.

Stiles sat up, gazing around the room sleepily until he spotted his duffle bag in the corner of the room. He didn’t really get changed so much as he put on a new pair of boxer briefs before wandering out into the rest of the apartment.

He was immediately hit with the smell of something sweet and the salty-smoke smell of bacon. Derek stood in the kitchen at the stove, clad in sweats and a grey t-shirt, prodding at something in a frying pan.

“Let me guess… cook?” Stiles greeted. Derek looked up, quirking an eyebrow in question.


“Nobody in their right mind would hire me as a chef,” he replied with a soft smirk before changing the topic. “How are you feeling?”

Stiles saw no point in lying to a werewolf.

“A bit sore, but I’ll live. Sleeping in a bed definitely helped so uh… thanks for that.”

Derek nodded, then gestured towards the couch.

“Go sit down, this will be ready in a minute.”

“And what is that?” Stiles enquired, standing on his tip toes for a second, straining to get a better vantage point before giving up.

“Bacon pancakes,” Derek replied. Stiles groaned dramatically at the mention of one of his Ruby’s café favorites.

“Those are my dad’s favorite,” Stiles replied, “He used to get so mad at me when I wouldn’t let him get them every damn time we went.”

“I don’t blame him, they’re delicious,” Derek called over his shoulder as Stiles awkwardly made his way to the couch, trying not to show all of his aches and pains in the movement. He knew he’d done a shitty job when he caught sight of Derek tracking his movement across the room.

“Yeah well, Dad has a heart condition,” he replied with a shrug, “come to think of it, that’s probably part of the reason he’s in the state he is now. Bacon and butter and loads of sugar were on my list of foods Dad could only eat in moderation— and all three in one dish? No way.”

Derek left the kitchen balancing one plate on his forearm, the other in his hand, and in his free hand, a bottle of syrup. The low table in front of the couch already had two mugs of coffee and some mismatched cutlery on it.

“I’d guess server, but there is no way you could afford to pay my dad’s medical bills for six months
on that kind of wage,” Stiles said casually. “Unless you’re one of those secret millionaires or something that just does it for kicks.” Derek raised an eyebrow, set the plates down a little too roughly.

“You were watching what your dad eats?”

Stiles shrugged.

“I was a little paranoid– didn’t want to lose both my parents. Mom died when I was nine and I got pretty scared about losing my dad. I started thinking about all the awful things that could happen to him… got more and more paranoid, started having anxiety attacks. It was so bad that my dad started having Scott and Scott’s mom, Melissa, come stay over whenever he had a night shift.”

“I’m sorry about your mom… and your dad,” Derek replied softly.

“Well… we have that in common in a way… I’m sorry about what happened to your family too,” Stiles answered sympathetically. It was oddly comforting, to have that kind of shared history.

“Well… let’s eat,” Derek declared gruffly after a few, all too quiet, seconds passed while they just stared at their plates.

They sat closer than they had ever dared before, eating in companionable silence. Derek may not have been a chef, but Stiles had to give it to him, he could certainly get by in the kitchen just fine.

“So, what now?” Stiles asked after a few minutes.

“What do you mean ‘what now’?” Derek replied. “It’s Sunday afternoon and you’re a teenager. What would you normally do?”

“Before or after I became homeless?” Stiles quipped. He felt bad when Derek’s expression immediately became akin to that of a deer in the headlights, he had a feeling the man didn’t wear it often. “Before? Do the homework that was so boring I procrastinated on all weekend because it was boring. After? Go see my dad or my friend Lydia if she’s around. Do laundry.” He specifically avoided the other thing he normally did on Sundays… and every other night.

“Is Lydia going to be worried about you?” Derek asked as he forked another mouthful of pancake into his mouth– his third giant pancake.

Stiles shrugged.

“I just checked in with her, so it’s safe to say no more worried than she usually is.”

Derek seemed to accept that answer. He gestured to Stiles’ empty plate.

“More?”

Stiles hesitated.

“There’s still batter in the bowl…” Derek offered, voice light, almost teasing.

“Oh twist my rubber arm,” Stiles acquiesced. He moved to stand up but Derek casually flung out an arm to stop him, broad hand landing in the middle of Stiles’ chest.

“I got it,” he explained, grabbing both their plates. “You’ve got the dishes later,” he called over his shoulder, clearly intending it as a joke, but Stiles didn’t want to take advantage.
“That’s fair,” Stiles called back, “but you’ll have to let me digest my food baby first.”

Over the course of the afternoon, a sort of game developed between them as Stiles attempted to guess what Derek did for a living. They could be in complete silence watching television, curled up on the couch, or in the middle of a conversation and Stiles would just randomly interject with a profession.

“Architect?”

“No.”

“Graphic Designer?”

“No.”

“Mechanic?” Stiles asked while they were washing the breakfast dishes together.

“No,” Derek replied, setting a plate on the counter after drying it, “but that is probably your best guess yet.”

As Stiles got frustrated, his guesses swung between realistic and ridiculous.

“ Astrophysicist?”

“Do I really look that smart?”

“Male model?”

Raised eyebrows.

“Hit man?”

“If I told you, I’d have to kill you.”

“Billionaire CEO?”

“No thank you.”

“Television repairman?”

“What?”

“You said I was close with mechanic,” Stiles explained. “Mechanics fix things. So do television repairmen.”

“Fair enough, but no.”

At around ten o’clock, Stiles started to feel antsy. He was supposed to be out. He was glad he wasn’t. Aside from the general unpleasantness of spending the night in the back seats and rented rooms of older men, the view from the apartment windows revealed a windy, cool looking night. Stiles and Derek were both reading on the couch, Derek with something he’d pulled out of an end table and Stiles with his latest—now probably way overdue—library book. He had his feet propped up on Derek’s lap, originally meant as a joke, but the other man hadn’t seemed upset by it, and Stiles
had ended up just leaving them there.

“Porn star,” Stiles offered casually, peaking around the edge of his book, smirking. He needed a laugh to take the edge off. Instead, he was met with a stony expression as Derek set down his book very slowly.

*Shit, did I offend him?*

“What… the hell?” Derek trailed, blinking and shaking his head.

“Look, you are as hot as the sun, clearly make decent money, and *definitely* know how to fu–”

It was at that moment that Stiles concluded that Derek’s eyebrows qualified as having a language all their own.

“You’re close,” Derek deadpanned. Stiles just about fell off the couch from his spastic flailing.

“How the hell is that close? You said I was close when I said mechanic,” Stiles retorted incredulously. “What are you? A proctologist– a butt mechanic?!” Derek stifled a laugh by biting on his lower lip, but his crinkling nose and closed eyes, the way his chest and shoulders heaved, gave him away.

“It starts with a ‘p’, that’s why it’s close,” he replied and Stiles really did admire his ability to so quickly recover into a straight face.

“What the fuck? This isn’t Sesame Street,” Stiles blurted in frustration. “Just tell me, it’s *killing* me.”

“Paramedic,” Derek replied with a shrug.

“A paramedic,” Stiles deadpanned. “How in the hell is that like a mechanic?” Derek shrugged once more.

“Mechanics fix cars, I fix people.”

Stiles groaned. It was really no less valid than his previous guess of television repairman.

“Seriously?” Stiles retorted. Derek nodded.

“When you are a kid that is also a born wolf, you get hurt a LOT. And I am not just talking little cuts and bruises. There is a sense of invincibility that comes from watching cuts knit themselves closed in seconds. So you get more and more reckless; break bones from doing stupid things– and yeah it hurts, but… it heals in minutes. It definitely makes you less squeamish. Then there’s the enhanced senses; I can tell before any human if a person’s pulse is fading, if they are going into shock, internally bleeding… and if it is too late, I can at least take some of the pain.”

It made sense, the more Derek talked. Eventually, Stiles started to laugh.

“Oh man,” he said as he sat up properly, holding his aching stomach, “You must get like… repeat customers.”

“What?” Derek’s confused face made him look like a puppy. It was adorable.

“If I got hurt and needed an ambulance and their paramedic who came to fix me looked like you, I’d be devising ways to maim myself on a weekly basis.”

Derek blinked a few times before groaning.
“You have the strangest way of flirting,” he replied, shaking his head in a ‘how on earth did I get stuck with this idiot?’ kind of way.

“Hey, it’s working isn’t it?” Stiles asked, as Derek slowly moved closer.

“Yeah, sadly it is,” he grumbled.

Stiles didn’t have long to frown before Derek’s lips met his, soft and sweet.
When the pawn hits the conflict

Chapter Notes

Surprise! Happy Moonday everyone. So, for the first time ever, I've updated in under a week. I feel like some little indicator should drop down saying "Achievement Unlocked; It ficking figures" or something. If you are new around these parts, don't get too used to this, I usually take a week or two.

Chapter title from Fiona Apple's second album title. See the whole shebang on my tumblr.

Waking the next couple of mornings next to Derek brought mixed emotions for Stiles. He was struggling to come to terms with Derek’s generosity and the guilt he felt for basically accepting a handout he had no way to ever pay back. Then there were the already intense feelings he had developed for the other man that he was afraid to act on, afraid Derek would misinterpret it as Stiles feeling like he owed him. He just couldn’t understand why after being kicked while he was down over and over again by the universe, he finally got to have something nice. Truthfully, he was waiting for the axe to fall. He just hoped it would only hit him on the way down, not cause a slew of collateral damage like every other time life decided to kick him in the balls. He didn’t think he’d have to wait long. Thursday was coming, and that meant his weekly appointment with Peter. He hadn’t really talked about it with Derek at all, but there was this unspoken understanding that Peter was the one exception to the rule when it came to Stiles staying off the street.

“You should go spend time with Scott…” Derek said Wednesday night as they stood in front of the sink, washing dishes together, despite the fact that Stiles had volunteered to do them on his own. Stiles glanced over at him sharply. He already felt guilty for not spending more time with his friend, but at the same time, when he had gone to see him only a couple of days ago, he seemed out of it, sleeping in the corner of the big cage in the basement of the veterinary clinic. Despite all of the arguments he tried, Deaton wouldn’t let him get into the cage with Scott. It was simply too ‘dangerous’.

“I did– on Monday– he’s the same…” Stiles retorted more to the dishwater than to Derek. He scrubbed at a plate absently.


“Before Peter,” Stiles deadpanned, pausing his movements as a chill rolled over him.

“He’ll smell me… all over you.”

Stiles felt his skin begin to flush. The way Derek said it seemed so illicit, though they hadn’t touched each other that way since the first night they had spent at Derek’s.

“You think that’ll do it– me spending time at Deaton’s?”

“I hope,” Derek replied. “It helps that the whole place smells like wet dog and medicine. Peter will think he knows where you’ve been…”
“And if he’s been watching me the whole time?”

Stiles watched Derek’s hands tighten around the lip of the counter and his gaze travelled up, meeting Derek’s.

“I’m scared,” tumbled from his lips before he could stop it. He grit his teeth, angry at himself for letting the words slip out.

“I know,” Derek replied softly. His hands released the counter and he reached out and pulled Stiles away from the sink, into him.

The entire week, Stiles couldn’t stop thinking about what Peter had said last time, just before sinking a claw into the back of his neck;

_You show me yours, I’ll show you mine._

All Stiles knew was that he’d ‘shown’ Peter something, as Derek and Deaton had explained. It was his turn now, and since Stiles didn’t have claws, he could only assume the same thing was going to happen again.

“Wonder where he is going to dump my body this time?” he mused into Derek’s shoulder. He felt the werewolf’s hands tighten infinitesimally in the fabric of his t-shirt.

“I could follow you… stay a safe distance away…” he offered after a few seconds. Stiles shook his head.

“You wouldn’t be able to handle it– I wouldn’t be able to handle it. And if Peter figured it out…” he shuddered. “I don’t know what he would do…”

“So what am I supposed to do?” Derek asked. He didn’t sound angry, or exasperated… just resigned– this was the way things were and he _hated_ it. Stiles shrugged in Derek’s hold.

“Maybe that weird ‘something’ will make you find me again?” he offered. “Or maybe if I ask really nicely, Peter will just leave me somewhere more convenient.”

Derek’s hold tightened around him for a few seconds before loosening.

“Come on, I’ll finish these in the morning, we should get to bed… I don’t think either one of us is going to sleep well.”

Stiles tried to sit upright, eyes flying open to utter darkness. He couldn’t breathe, couldn’t see, felt like the entire world was pressing in on him. He could smell earth and soot, blood and bleach, taste it all on his tongue, feel the grit of it making its way down his throat, into his lungs.

*I’m trapped. I’m trapped under the Hale house and it’s caving in on me. Did I hallucinate everything? Did Peter just leave me here to die?*

He opened his mouth to scream and air seemed to rush in so fast, so thick that he couldn’t actually inhale. The longer he went without breathing, the more panicked he felt. His chest hurt, felt like someone was sitting on it. He struggled to move, to push the pressure off of him, and was met with nothing until–

He felt like he was falling, felt his entire body coil in a flinch before he hit the ground. His eyes
“Stiles.”

Derek’s voice was calm and level, pressing steadily through the darkness. It took several seconds for Stiles’ eyes to adjust, to see Derek’s concerned face looming in front of him.

“You’re okay, it was just a dream. Take a breath in, through your nose,” Derek commanded softly, demonstrating, “and out through your mouth,” an exaggerated exhale. Stiles breath stuttered in, half through his nose, half through his mouth, filling his lungs maybe a quarter of the way.

“Again,” Derek ordered, modeling the same steady in and out. Stiles did better this time, barely, but still better, enough that he could pay some attention to his surroundings. He was in Derek’s bed, not buried alive. Derek was sitting up, straddling one of his legs, slightly hunched over him, hand on his chest, a warm, soothing weight.

The minutes passed and Derek slowly moved off of Stiles and to the side. Stiles sat up slowly, shakily, the nightmare, panic attack, whatever it was, still reverberating through his limbs.

“Jesus,” Stiles muttered, rubbing at his eyes, trying to scrub the sleep from them, surprised to find his face wet.

“Are you okay?” Derek asked softly.

“Yeah,” Stiles croaked, like he actually had swallowed a bunch of dirt. He shifted back to lean against the headboard and Derek moved next to him, “just a nightmare I guess.”

“Peter?”

“In an unrelated way… probably,” Stiles replied. “I think I thought I was in the basement of your old house and it collapsed on me.”

Derek’s hand found his, fitting across his palm to squeeze.

“I used to have nightmares that I was trapped in the house while it was burning. I’d wake up the same way, gasping for air, breathing in smoke that wasn’t there.”

Stiles shuddered at the thought, their unfortunate shared history with the house. He glanced over at Derek, who was staring straight ahead, clearly wrestling with something. Whatever Stiles was expecting, it wasn’t what came next.

“You knew the man they found in the park, didn’t you?”

It really didn’t come across as a question.

Stiles took a deep breath. He should have known better than to think he’d successfully hidden his reaction to the news that his trick from Saturday night—the one who had reminded him so much of Peter—had been found dead in the very same park he’d picked Stiles up in.

After abandoning the dishes, Derek and Stiles had curled up on the couch and somehow ended up watching some news channel. Derek’s hand had just been twitching for the remote when Stiles’ Saturday night client’s photo was splashed up on the screen.

“Investigators were called to Milton Park on Monday evening upon the discovery of the body of a
white man in his mid-thirties, now identified as thirty-eight year old Deucalion Edgecomb, a British expat now living in Cedar Ridge…”

Before he could control it, Stiles’ heartbeat had ramped up faster than Derek’s Camaro could ever have hoped. Holy shit. He didn’t know what to think. One the one hand, he was extremely creeped out, and on the other, this was a man who had beaten him mercilessly for his own pleasure. That kind of person couldn’t have been involved in anything good. Beside him, Derek had been completely still, hand beside the remote.

The reported had recapped the case from the beginning: Deucalion— Stiles had known him as Duke—had been found in the park with ‘significant injuries’ to his torso and throat and yet, it didn’t appear as though he had been murdered there. Just placed in the park for discovery. Stiles thoughts had immediately leapt to the other time he’d seen injuries like that:

And despite attempting to clamp down on every nerve in his body, he’d shuddered.

Derek waited until the report ended to turn off the television.

“You knew him.”

“Uh, that really wasn’t much of a segue,” Stiles replied shakily. Derek leveled him with a serious gaze. “Yeah I… I knew him.”

It was actually kind of a relief to have Derek ask, because for the briefest time, Stiles had entertained the thought that maybe Derek had followed Stiles that night– and killed Deucalion later.

“He was the one that…?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Derek asked quietly after a few seconds.

“If you’re thinking that Peter did this because he’s been keeping tabs on me then yeah,” Stiles replied softly. It felt like there was ice in his veins. Because if Peter had been keeping tabs on him that closely, there was a pretty good chance he knew about Stiles and Derek.

“Yeah,” Derek replied bleakly, scrubbing a hand down his face. In the silence, Stiles could hear the rasp of stubble scratch against the other man’s palm.

“There is something else you need to know though… another reason Peter could have killed Deucalion…”

Stiles turned sharply, knowing the answer before Derek had a chance to utter it.

“Am I like… werewolf bait or something, because what the fuck?” Stiles whined.

“I think you were just a coincidence,” Derek replied with a wince. “Deucalion and his pack have been trying to push into Beacon Hills for a long time– but the Hales, and a pack to the north whom we are allies with, have always prevented them from making a move. He probably heard something about Laura and came here to case the joint.”

“And Peter took him out before he could make a move,” Stiles finished. Derek nodded.

“He had a lot to gain by doing it too, because with every alpha Peter kills, he is going to get stronger. If he’s lucky, he will have scared off Deucalion’s pack… either that or…”
“Or what?”

“This is about you after all.”

“It fucking figures,” Stiles muttered, closing his eyes and tipping his head back to rest against the top of the headboard. Derek made a noise of assent. Stiles could feel the rolling boil of frustration and anger in his veins.

“So what now?” he asked, a slight edge of hysteria creeping into his tone. “Because the impression that I get is that your uncle is planning *something* and as shitty as things are now, they’d be worse if he knew that we were onto him.

Derek was quiet for a long time.

“You’re right,” he finally replied, “and we’ve been playing this whole time without knowing it. It’s time to be smart…”

“Strategic,” Stiles echoed softly. Suddenly he scrambled out of the bed, causing Derek to sit bolt upright in a panic.

“Do you have a chess set?” the teenager blurted. Derek raised an eyebrow. “Would they have one downstairs?”

“Yes, I am pretty sure they have one for customers to play…”

Stiles could tell his eyes lit up by Derek’s slightly horrified expression.

“No!” Derek objected sternly, wagging his index finger in warning the second he caught on to what Stiles was thinking, “we are not stealing the chess set–”

“Dollars to donuts it is still in a box on the shelf from the last time some hipsters tried to play and decided it wasn’t edgy enough when they didn’t get it,” Stiles scoffed, “And we’re not going to steal it, we are going to *borrow*–”

“I’m not breaking into Artifact–”

“It’s not breaking in if you own the building and have a key,” Stiles replied, “it’s just… entering.”

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The compromise was that the chess set never left the store downstairs, which was how Derek found himself sitting in the darkness of the bookstore at the very back table, obscured by bookshelves, setting up the board with only the glow of the emergency exit sign to light the game, while Stiles… well, he didn’t know what Stiles was doing, but he could only hope it wouldn’t be noticeable to Mae and Patrick.

“Aha!” he heard somewhere near the counter. When he looked up, Stiles was on his way towards the table, a wad of sticky flags in his hand, a pen tucked behind his ear. He wove between the more comfortable looking couch and chair set up with a surprising amount of ease for someone obviously brimming with excess energy.

“So as I see it,” Stiles began before he’d even dropped into his seat across from Derek, “and I know
you see it this way too– Peter is playing one big game and we’re all in it.” He settled himself and pulled the pen out from behind his ear, scribbled something on a sticky note and stuck it to the black marble night on his side of the board. When Stiles’ nimble fingers released the token, it was decorated with a pink post-it flag, labeled in somewhat cramped black pen: Peter.

“So let’s put everyone on the board.”

Derek stared down at the board, the precise rows of marble soldiers, ready to march to their death or to victory, with someone else plotting all the movies. He was beginning to see why Stiles had picked the game to make sense of everything.

“Pass me the pen.”

Stiles slid both pen and stick-it notes across the table, lopsided smirk playing at his features, pleased that Derek seemed to be getting it.

He scribbled out a name, stuck it to the white king: Laura.

Stiles chewed on his lower lip, pulled the sticky notes and pen back towards himself, scribbled a new name. He seemed to hesitate a moment before picking the white king up very gently, then carefully plucked the note from the piece, temporarily sticking it to the table top. Derek opened his mouth to protest, but stopped when Stiles attached his own sticky note to the king and set it back on the board.

Derek stared at his name, scribbled in Stiles’ cramped penmanship.

“You have to think like Peter,” the teenager explained softly. “With your thinking, the game would already be over.” His hand twitched towards the board, faltered, then moved again. Stiles plucked the white queen from Derek’s side of the board, picked up Laura’s sticky note and attached it, then delicately set the piece to the side of the board.

“He thinks he has us where he wants us now,” Stiles explained, voice low. He set out three more sticky notes, scrawled three more names: Dad. Scott. Stiles; and placed them on a rook, a knight, a pawn. Derek frowned at Stiles’ game piece selection for himself in all of this; the most vulnerable piece on the board, usually one of the first to go. It made his gut twist with apprehension. Derek itched to change it like Stiles had done with Laura– but what to?

“He thinks that by taking out the most powerful piece on the board– besides the king– that he is nearly invincible. And if I’m right, he is going to try to back you into a corner, make you surrender. The queen, she is the piece everyone watches. She is the one everyone fears because she can devastate a board in a handful of moves. She is also the first one most people gun for.”

“I know that much,” Derek replied, staring at his own token, picturing it tipping, falling. His odds were depressing when set out like this. On his side he had a catatonic sheriff, a young, bitten, out of control werewolf… and Stiles.

“Do you know what happens when a pawn reaches the other side of the board?”

Derek had probably known at one point in time while his dad was trying to teach him some of the fancier strategies, but he’d long since forgotten. Then it dawned on him…

“It becomes a queen,” he murmured, and despite the seriousness of the metaphor, he couldn’t stop the quirk of his lips as he pictured a very effeminate Stiles. Stiles leveled him with a look he could have sworn was stolen out of his own repertoire of glaring facial expressions.

“I don’t have to get close enough to take him out,” Stiles continued seriously, “I just have to let him
think he is winning long enough to level up... however that happens.”

Derek reached out, swept up the pen and sticky notes, plucked a white bishop from the board and set it back down once it had been hastily labeled.

“We need to talk to Deaton.”

Because Stiles was clever and brave... and something more. And Derek needed him.

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As morbid as it was seeing everything laid out in front of him made Stiles feel more in control. As shitty as things were, at least he knew what to expect– for the most part. And with his life in the state it was in, he’d take what he could get.

Derek had insisted that Stiles head upstairs and get back to bed, promising he’d follow as soon as he had everything back to the way it was and locked up downstairs. Which left Stiles to his own devices.

They had spent the past several days conspicuously avoiding anything above PG-13 level contact. It was maddening, but what Stiles had needed at the time in order to know that he didn’t owe Derek anything. Enough time had passed.

He stood in the bedroom, staring at the bed for several seconds, blood thrumming through his veins, thinking about the first time that he and Derek had been together. He stripped off his t-shirt just as he heard the door to the apartment open and close. He knew his back was still a mess. The welts had faded, but he was still black and blue-- a few areas scabbed where the skin had split open. He hoped it wouldn't be enough to dissuade Derek from what he knew they both wanted; Nonetheless, he was just contemplating putting his shirt back on again when he felt Derek’s presence in the doorway.

“What are you doing?” Derek’s voice was cautious, low.

Stiles jumped, looked over his shoulder to see Derek standing in the threshold of the room.

“Preparing for battle,” he retorted with his usual level of snark. Derek’s expression softened and he crossed the threshold and steadily moved towards him.

“That was wittier in my head,” Stiles muttered as Derek stepped into his personal space.

“I was about to say you look like you’ve already been,” Derek replied. Stiles snorted.

“At least you share my awful sense of humor.”

Derek’s touch was so feather light, if Stiles hadn’t been looking, he would have thought he’d imagined it. When Stiles leaned back into Derek’s touch, that seemed to spur him on to move close enough to brush against Stiles’ back. Close enough for Stiles to hear and feel Derek’s shallow intake of breath.

“Stiles what do you want?”

“Well I figure... if Peter already knows what we’re doing, he’s either going to pretend he doesn’t and punish me for it... or show his hand... and punish me for it.” He felt Derek bristle behind him.
Hands hesitantly came to rest over his hip bones, the gesture unmistakably protective.

“So…” Stiles breathed shakily as a huff of warm breath gusted over his skin, “I figure, if I’m going to pay for my actions anyway, I might as well make it worth it, punch my dance card one more time if you will.” He smirked and craned his neck to look over at Derek. The other man groaned and dropped his head onto Stiles’ shoulder.

“So my sense of humor is a little… off when I’m tired, give me a break,” the teen defended. Derek’s hands slipped around his waist, the hair on his arms brushing across Stiles’ abdomen just enough to set his nervous system alight. His jaw went slack, and he attempted to huff in a breath in a completely different way than earlier that night.

“I have a feeling it’s not just when you’re tired.”

“Fair enough,” Stiles rasped. Derek’s hands were moving carefully, petting across Stiles’ abdomen gently, fingertips tracing over his ribs, his ab muscles in a slow dance, nothing overtly erotic— and it was maddening.

“What do you want?” Derek asked softly, right into his ear. Stiles shuddered, blood rapidly burning a path down to his dick. He was breathing hard already. When Derek’s lips ghosted across the patch of skin behind his ear, one of his hands slapped down, clamping onto Derek’s thigh behind him, holding him in place while he ground backwards.

“I told you what I want,” he panted.

“No… you told me you wanted to punch your dance card one more time before you saw Peter.”

Stiles realized how callous that sounded when it came out of Derek’s mouth and winced.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” he replied softly, a pang of regret in his stomach reminding him to choose his words more carefully next time.

“I know,” Derek replied quietly, into his ear. His hands stilled, resting on Stiles’ hip bones again.

“Tell me,” he prompted.

“I want you,” Stiles breathed, wetting his too dry lips. “I want you to–” he didn’t get a chance to get the words out before Derek spun him around, mashing their lips together as he steered them slowly back towards the bed. Stiles could just feel the mattress behind his calves before Derek cupped his hands just under his ass and half tossed, have pushed him back onto the mattress. He went easily, sliding backwards towards headboard so that Derek could stretch over him and neither one of them would be left half dangling off the bed. He landed with a soft “ooof”, smiling against Derek’s lips.

“You have no idea how badly I’ve wanted to do that for the past few days…” he panted.

“Oh trust me, I do,” Derek replied, grinding down subtly, making Stiles aware of his growing arousal. Stiles’ hips stuttered upwards almost of their own accord.

“You asked me what I want…” Stiles began cautiously, afraid to ask for it, afraid Derek would say no, which he had a right to, which would be fine…

“I did,” Derek replied softly. Stiles took a deep, steadying breath, and despite that, it still shuddered out of him noisily.

“I want to have sex that isn’t just about fucking.”
It was the most terrifying thing he had ever said and he flushed bright red as he said it, regretting the words almost as soon as they were out. Derek’s expression moved ever-so-slightly into a frown before relaxing into something soft and open.

“Why?” he asked, then frowned, probably realizing how it sounded, rephrased his question, “I mean why now?” The way he said it, so soft, so imploring made Stiles calm down, if only a little bit.

“Because tomorrow I’m either going to crawl back here, or you’re going to find me in the preserve parking lot… and I… I need something I can hold onto.”

The intensity of Derek’s gaze was almost unsettling, and just as Stiles was beginning to think that he would say no, that he would have to find a way to overcome that rejection in such close quarters, Derek leaned in close, and brushed his lips against Stiles’, just a graze.

“Are you sure?”

“Positive.”

His heart hammered in his chest, but not out of fear– out of exhilaration. He’d had sex probably hundreds of times, and yet it felt exactly what his first time should have felt like. Derek frowned, no doubt hearing the uptake and feeling the deep thud of Stiles’ heart.

“I can assure you my heartbeat is one hundred percent horny teenager, not scared teenager.”

“I wish you could hear mine,” Derek murmured as he moved in to press his lips to Stiles cheek softly, grazing over each one of the moles in the constellation that decorated the left side of Stiles’ face. Stiles squirmed, smiling as he threaded his fingers through the inky blackness of Derek’s hair and tugging him in for a proper kiss. Stiles lifted his unoccupied hand, gently cupped Derek’s waist, was urged on by the responding pressure of his hips. He let his fingers slip under Derek’s t-shirt, then flattened his palm against the heated skin, the fabric folded and buckled over itself as Stiles’ hand travelled north, until finally reaching its destination.

Derek’s heartbeat was a steady pounding against Stiles’ palm. It didn’t matter that Stiles couldn’t hear it, the feeling was heady enough. When Derek started to pull away from the kiss, Stiles let his hand finally release his hair, only to move it to his waist, grinding his own hips up in a slow, erotic wave of movement. Derek groaned.

“Slow down,” he murmured, “there’s lots of time.”

“I’m sorry,” Stiles panted, taking a few seconds to reason with himself. This was something to savor and as much as his dick wanted to race to the finish line, the rest of him didn’t.

“Don’t be sorry. I just– I really want to take my time with you,” Derek replied softly. “I want you to give you the first time you should have had.”

Stiles had denied himself the right to think of his ‘virginity’ as anything other than a social construct or a commodity that he’d wasted. In high school, all he’d wanted was to do was get rid of it–it was only when he’d faced his actual first time that it had felt valuable, and then felt completely squandered.

“I can’t take it back,” Stiles retorted softly.

“I don’t want you to,” Derek replied. “I just want to do this right.”

Stiles reluctantly let him pull away, had to hold back a whine when Derek slithered off the mattress.
entirely. He propped himself up on his elbows, watching Derek go fish through his duffle before he returned to the bed, setting a couple of condoms on the nightstand beside the bed.

“I thought you wanted to take this slowly?” Stiles teased to attempt to hide his pounding heart. This was actually happening– even the thought of it made Stiles’ lightheaded with the speed in which his blood flowed south.

“I do, but I don’t think either one of us wants to be scrambling for a condom and lube when the time comes– whichever one of us that is,” Derek retorted with a quirked eyebrow as he gracefully clambered back onto the bed at the same time that he stripped off his t-shirt. Stiles’ brain stuttered to a stop as he pictured Derek underneath him, head tipped back in ecstasy, moaning… calling his name.

“Wait, what? Did you just tell me I could…” he trailed off as Derek smirked, and if he thought all the blood had left the rest of his body for his dick before…

“Oh God.”

Stiles closed his eyes and leaned back against the mattress, feeling Derek’s presence hover over him for a few moments before he carefully straddled his hips. He arched his back into Derek’s touch as his broad hands swept across his belly and around his sides.

“Slow,” Derek warned, but his gaze was warm as he held Stiles’. The teen nodded, hair feeling strange as it brushed across the pillow under him.

“O-okay.”

Chapter End Notes

Come stand in a puddle of Sterek feels with me on tumblr
Derek took a moment to drink in just how truly beautiful Stiles was. It wasn’t just physical– though on a surface level, Stiles’ was somehow everything he liked in men and had never discovered before– it went beyond that. The fact that he was laid bare– now literally– before Derek was a gesture of ultimate trust. The last time they’d been together had been amazing, but rushed in comparison. Now Derek felt like he could truly take his time to appreciate what Stiles was giving him.

His skin, where it wasn’t marred with welts or deep bruises, was creamy, borderline pale, speckled with moles and freckles, his body, long and lean and toned. Somehow he felt less wrong about this, moving at a glacial pace, taking his time, cataloguing Stiles’ every reaction. It would have troubled him that Stiles’ had gone practically non-verbal, except for the fact that his every reaction, conscious or subconscious, announced his arousal and contentment. It was there in his swiftly beating heart, his panting breaths through cupid bow shaped lips, the smell of sweat on clean skin.

“Yours too.”

It took a moment for the request to register and Derek realized he was still kneeling near the foot of the bed, Stiles’ sweatpants still gripped in his right hand from when he’d peeled them off… seconds?... minutes?... before.

“Give me a minute,” he murmured. Derek took a few more seconds to appreciate the view before him; the way that Stiles’ legs bracketed his, the crests of his hipbones, the dark, neat patch of hair between his legs, and his dick– Derek had been too distracted the last time and at the wrong angle to fully appreciate it– long and thicker than he imagined someone so lean would have. Arousal throbbed, blood so thick in his veins that Derek could feel its acute pulse. After his reckless teenage years, he’d only ever topped– though he usually thought of himself as a switch. He had put the option of Stiles topping out there more as a temperature gage than anything else, but now… God he wanted– maybe not tonight, but eventually. He couldn’t help but imagine Stiles’ long limbs draped over him, sharp hipbones pressed to the backs of his thighs, and that perfect cock stuffing him full. He shuddered at the thought, levered himself over Stiles, braced on one arm and shoved and kicked at his track pants until he was rid of them.

That magnetic pull was there again, the one that wanted Stiles so utterly and completely it made his bones ache.

“Your eyes,” Stiles breathed. Derek blinked self-consciously. That ache in his bones was making him want to shift so he could bite. So he could claim. He dropped his head to Stiles’ shoulder, breathing steadily.

“Sorry, just… caught up in the moment,” he apologized, trying to blink away the bright blue in effectively, telling himself; this is good enough for now. What he is giving you is enough. Stiles let out a puff of air with his low laugh.
“I know what you mean…”

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Stiles knew, as long as he lived, he would never forget the image of Derek’s crystalline blue wolf eyes staring up at him as he kissed a meandering trail down his belly, seeming to want to trace every mole with his lips on the way by.

Stiles’ chest heaved like he was running a marathon.

_That’s right asshole, a marathon, not a sprint, no coming like–_

_A teenager?_

Stiles dragged a hand across his face with a soft groan.

Derek’s big hands were softly running over his sides, his hips, his thighs. Stiles could tell he was trying to be gentle, but every once in awhile, the tips of his fingers would press just a little harder, betraying how much both of them wanted this. He could feel some invisible force, pulling on the string of a loose seam, could feel Derek tethered there at the end. And he wanted to be pulled apart.

Derek’s breath ghosted over his erection and he shuddered, closing his eyes.

“Dude, you’d better be planning on being on the top floor tonight,” he tried to joke, but his voice sounded dry. He closed his mouth, licking at his lips, “because I’m not going to last long enough to get there…”

“Really?” Derek’s smile was equal parts evil, adorable, and erotic as he tilted his head to the side to kiss the inside of Stiles’ knee. Stiles almost whined at the loss of contact. “Is that what you want?”

It was slightly painful, the realization that nobody had ever asked him what he wanted, in anything. He’d gone from being a child to being an adult with no transition at all. From having decisions made for him, to making decisions he never wanted to make. But that was also what made Derek’s asking so tender. It broke through the haze of want, that magnetic need Stiles could barely contain. It slowed everything down because Derek was about to give him everything he never knew he needed.

Yeah,” he replied, voice hoarse, a near whisper, “that’s what I want.”

Derek’s hands were gently rubbing up and down the outsides of his thighs, expression contemplative, before apparently deciding on a course of action. Stiles admired his grace when Derek slid back down the length of the bed. His heart pounded. Was that how _he’d_ looked a few nights before? Definitely not. There was no way because Stiles _barely_ had a hold on his control right now. He bit his lip to hold back a whine when Derek leaned forward, pressing his face into the space where Stiles’ thigh met his pelvis.

“I want you so much it scares me,” he murmured, and Stiles felt the brief heat of his breath as the werewolf let out a huff of air before he inhaled. It was such a blatant display of eroticism and he could feel his blood burn at the sight. The heat crept in slowly yet all at once, flooding up his back, across his chest, up his neck, sweat dampening his brow, the small of his back. He swallowed, trying to make his mouth work enough to say ‘me too’ but Derek was too quick for him.
“Can I?” the wolf asked, one hand resting across Stiles’ pelvis, just below his navel, his shoulders already edging Stiles’ knees apart, intent perfectly clear.

“Yes oh my gosh yes,” Stiles’ slurred in response, probably a bit too eagerly. Derek’s hand glided across his skin smoothly until he swept Stiles’ erection into one large palm. He stroked, one fluid motion up and back down, and Stiles felt the same airlessness he’d felt the first night together. His eyes slammed closed and hands flailed at the first contact of Derek’s lips to his skin; hot, wet and perfect around the head of his cock. He gasped and as soon as he had enough breath, groaned his appreciation. He hands finally found the sheets to grab onto, fingers scratching through the cotton before bunching into fists around it.

Closing his eyes was a mistake, it made his singing nerve endings all barrel towards a crescendo too fast. He opened them, glancing down to see the top of Derek’s head and that was too much, especially when the older man seemed to sense him watching, and glanced up. It was like every wet dream Stiles had never had. When the werewolf pulled away, Stiles made a noise in the back of his throat that was more than a little embarrassing.

“You’re beautiful,” Derek murmured, voice hoarse, and it was different than any other time Stiles’ had ever heard it. It didn’t sound contrived, spoken just to fill dead air. He meant it. Stiles knew he was just staring, mouth agape, but he couldn’t seem to coordinate all the higher brain functions required for speech.

“I want to watch you this time– I want to watch you come apart.”

“You—” Stiles stopped, licked his lips, swallowing hard before continuing, “You have the most eloquent dirty talk—”

Derek snorted before his face softened into the sweetest expression, nose crinkling slightly before he spoke.

“It’s not meant to be dirty talk. I can feel, practically taste, what this is doing to you. I want to get you off.”

“I thought you wanted to take this slow?” Stiles challenged, eyebrow raised.

“I do. Which is why I’m going to take the edge off before we actually get to the point where I put any part of me in you.”

Stiles heart started to pound as a new wave of arousal coursed through him, and Derek quirked an eyebrow before shifting his weight.

“Put your legs over my shoulders,” he coaxed softly, already repositioning himself.

Stiles’ heartbeat was thrumming in his ears.

“I’m gonna come,” he whined. He wasn’t sure how long he’d had his legs draped over Derek’s shoulders, had lost count of how many times the older man had alternated between sucking him to the edge, pulling away just long enough to let Stiles back away from tumbling over it, before moving lower, eating him out until again, he was teetering at the edge of orgasm. It was more than just teasing; Derek seemed to know how to read the thrum of blood in his veins, every hitch of his breath, the minute shudder radiating through his limbs. Only once did he stop so close to the edge that Stiles’ had actually needed to grab a hold of the base of his dick and balls and squeeze and pull to keep from coming.
Stiles opened his eyes as he felt Derek pull away once more. He hadn’t even fully realized he’d had them closed until then. His skin was wet from the werewolf’s relentless teasing, and the tenderness of his skin– thanks to Derek’s beard rubbing against him in absolutely the right ways– only served to amplify the raw exposed feeling singing in his nerves. He quickly threw an arm back over his eyes at the sight of Derek scrubbing a hand across his mouth.

“You’re trying to kill me,” the teen declared dramatically. “Or at least give me priapism or something.”

The sound of Derek’s low chuckle was slightly infuriating.

“Calm down,” the older man soothed through his amusement, “Priapism is an erection lasting four to six hours… you still have at least three and a half to go.”

Stiles could barely stifle the frustrated whine that bubbled up from the back of his throat. Had it really been half an hour? The time felt almost meaningless, just a number thrown out there– he knew what it meant, sure, but the actual passage of time had been both torturously long and painfully slow depending on what Derek was doing. Stiles blinked against his forearm. Derek. Derek who hadn’t been getting anything in return.

“It’s been half an hour and I haven’t even touched you,” Stiles deadpanned in horror, letting his arm flail out to the side in a sudden spastic movement, jerking his head off the pillow. Derek leaned over him, playfully pinning his flailing limb to the mattress before slowly dropping his hips down against Stiles in a slow, rolling grind.

“I’m not keeping score, that’s not what this is about” he replied, voice low and soft before leaning forward to press his lips to Stiles’. The kiss was slow and easy, the pace Derek had been trying to set the entire night, and despite the electric, crackling feeling of his blood singing in his veins, Stiles felt himself relax into the mattress. It wasn’t until Derek released his wrist, fingers crawling across the mattress to pluck a packet of lube from the nightstand table, that it really registered. Stiles was about to have sex– about to get fucked– by someone because he wanted to. Because Derek was into him.

“You okay?” Derek all but whispered as he pulled back enough to balance on his elbows above Stiles. He nodded vigorously, the sound of his hair scratching against the pillow under his head filling his ears. He spread his legs as Derek moved at a glacial pace, lips tracing across his ribcage, eyes on him until he broke eye contact to tear open the packet of lube.

“Uhhh… sorry about those,” Stiles excused as he watched Derek drizzle the contents of the packet onto his fingers. “The clinic, they uh, kind of frown upon giving us a whole bottle–” He broke off in a moan as Derek’s fingers brushed over his entrance, just massaging, applying the barest amount of pressure with slick fingers.

“I’d say this does the job just fine,” he replied softly, pressing his lips against the skin stretched over one sharp hipbone, “wouldn’t you?” Derek’s index finger breached Stiles in one fluid but slow movement, not stopping until he was buried to the knuckle. Stiles bit at his lips, inhaling sharply at the feeling of being penetrated. He couldn’t help but think of the last time Derek had done this– how this was as far as he’d got before coming all over the place…

And it looked like he really wasn’t going to do much better this time either. He whined in the back of his throat, and just as he was about to beg for more, Derek seemed to read his mind and Stiles felt the blunt pressure of the other man’s middle finger, pressing at his hole. It grew and grew until Derek’s finger slipped inside, the stretch welcome and easy. He breathed through parted lips, rocked down on Derek’s fingers ever so slightly. His partner got the picture quickly and twisted and thrust his fingers
a few times— at just the right angle to avoid Stiles’ prostate, drawing out his pleasure. He moved, attempting to chase his own orgasm until Derek put a hand on his hip, stilling him. Stiles was just about to protest when the other man dunked his head and drew him back into his mouth.

“Fuck,” he moaned, finally releasing his hold on the sheets in favor of raking his fingers through Derek’s inky black hair. He’d been given head before, but it had never been about him, he’d always been an instrument for someone else’s pleasure. And now, he knew he wasn’t going to last long enough to really appreciate it. He stared at the ceiling, trying to steady his breathing in the hope that he would be able to savor the experience just a little while longer. The room was bathed in the subtle glow of stars, the warmth of the streetlight outside of the apartment, just out of view. This time of night, everything was quiet, the only sounds to be heard the soft sounds of Derek’s sucking and Stiles’ heavy breathing—and something else, a soft undercurrent of sound that Stiles couldn’t quite place. He caught movement out of the corner of his eye; the glow of the streetlight catching on Derek’s elbow. Stiles followed the line of his arm, tracing its movement along the way until he reached the werewolf’s wrist where it disappeared into his underwear—to clumsily jack himself with his off hand.

And once again, Stiles found himself right at the edge of it all, just a few metaphorical steps until he was tumbling from the cliff.

Derek knew it, he had to of, because just as Stiles came to the realization that he was going to come, Derek hollowed his cheeks and bobbed his head slower, taking Stiles in to the root this time and slowly, deliberately pressed against Stiles’ prostate. Stiles’ eyes slammed shut at the arc of pleasure that lit up his nervous system. His entire body seemed to pull inward, trying to implode, coiling tighter and tighter before he couldn’t anymore.

He flew apart.

Stiles was really only vaguely aware of everything that existed outside of sensation; Derek pulling off of him to watch him come, his release painting his own stomach and chest in warm droplets, his cries embarrassingly porno level loud in the quiet room, and then Derek withdrawing his fingers so he could surge forward and kiss him. It felt like it took forever for him to recover enough to clumsily kiss back, completely uncaring about where Derek’s mouth had been. All he cared about was the searing connection between the two of them, doing what he could to seal it.

Then Derek was pulling away, backing off the bed so that he could stand and rid himself of the tight, black boxer briefs he was wearing. He put a knee on the mattress, paused and drew back and Stiles was treated to the perfect view of his naked, shapely ass.

“I’ll be back in a minute,” he reassured over his shoulder as he strode out of the room.

Stiles lay boneless against the mattress, entire body throbbing in the echo of his orgasm, too blissed out to worry about where Derek had gone. Stiles eyes were closed when Derek returned. He felt like he was floating in the ocean on a sunny day, lost at sea and too blissed out to care. He cracked an eye open at the feeling of something damp brushing across his stomach and softly smiled at the sight of Derek wiping away his cum, before tossing the washcloth in his hand to the bedside table.

“We’re not going to want to go and get that later,” he said with a soft smile as he slid down the mattress next to Stiles.

It took some coordination for Stiles to roll partly onto his side and bring a hand up to draw Derek into a kiss. Despite having just come, he could still feel the ache of need in his bones; like what they’d just done had only been a tease. His movements were clumsy compared to Derek’s sure, coordinated ones and it didn’t take long for the kiss to evolve into a greedy give and take of tongues
and teeth and panted breaths. Stiles didn’t have enough patience to be subtle so his hand groped across Derek’s hip blindly until he could sweep the other man’s long-neglected erection into one broad hand. He was rewarded with the sound and feel of Derek’s breath as he exhaled roughly through his nose, not wanting to break their kiss, his hips stuttering forward at the contact.

“Stiles,” he groaned, twisting his head to mouth along the teen’s shoulder. His hands roamed, unfocused, and Stiles could feel the restraint through the tension in his limbs, trying to be gentle, trying not to just direct him where and how he wanted. When Stiles closed his mouth over the stretch of skin connecting Derek’s shoulder to his neck, the other man bucked forward, scrambling to push Stiles’ hand away from where he’d been steadily stroking him. Stiles obliged, let his head fall back against the pillows once more. He could feel the sweat on his back cooling, damp against the sheets.

“I’m sorry,” Derek apologized, leveraging up over Stiles to reoccupy the space between his thighs, “I want you. Need–”

Stiles got what he was trying to say instantly.

“I’m good,” he started to ramble, “I’m so good– the most good.” His refractory period had always been impressive– at least he thought so– but this was different. He needed this, needed Derek to fill in all the spaces that had been left empty for so long, and he knew that need was somehow echoed in the other man. Derek paused for a few seconds before reaching over Stiles to the bedside table to grab the condom and another packet of lube, keeping his movements slow and deliberate, so Stiles would know what he was doing. He backed off, tossing the packet of lube to the side in favor of attempting to rip open the condom. Stiles snapped up the lube, hastily skimming the packet between his fingers to push the liquid to the bottom before he tore it open between his teeth. He couldn’t help but smirk when Derek fumbled with the condom, swearing under his breath before tearing the packet open between his teeth viciously enough that Stiles had to wonder if the condom was still in one piece.

“You okay big guy?” he teased breathlessly as he smeared lube over his fingers. He hadn’t forgotten that, like it or not, size did matter and he’d come too quickly for Derek to really work him open. He hastily pressed two digits into himself, raising his knees to plant his feet on the bed so that he could get the angle right. By the time Derek had managed to open the condom, toss the wrapper aside, and sheath himself, Stiles had pressed a third finger inside his hole, pulling a knee back almost to his chest, trying to get deeper, and in the process, gave Derek a front row seat to one hell of a show.

“How do you…” Derek trailed off, jaw slack as he watched Stiles, eyes heated with lust. He swallowed, tried again, “What position do you like?”

Stiles movements stopped. *What do I like?* He’d never been asked and never really given it much thought despite his experience. He’d never really been concerned about getting himself off in any of his encounters. He knew what made his dick hard, what positions hit his prostate if he worked them just right, but in terms of actually being turned on and into what he was doing… he had nothing in that department. So he simply stuttered out a “I uh… this is good” before withdrawing his fingers with a slight, sticky sound. Derek’s eyes narrowed, scrutinizing before he leaned over Stiles, gently cupping the sides of his face to draw him in for a slow, gentle kiss. His fingers traced over Stiles’ collarbones, down across his stomach and hips as he pulled back, before finally coming to rest across the backs of Stiles’ hipbones near the small of his back.

Derek’s hands were surprisingly gentle as he shifted closer, nudging Stiles’ legs open further, lifting him just slightly, angling him. The seconds between Derek’s hand abandoning Stiles’ hip and aligning himself with Stiles’ body seemed to pass at an agonizing rate. Stiles didn’t realize he’d been holding his breath until he felt the first tentative nudge against his entrance. He exhaled roughly and
Derek paused, holding inhumanly still, brow slightly furrowed, studying Stiles’ face.

“Want you,” Stiles murmured, “keep going.” He squirmed, pressing back against Derek enough to cause his dick to slip against his entrance, press slightly off target. Derek’s face relaxed out of its former expression of concern and rearranged itself to a softer, dare Stiles even say tender, expression as he shifted closer, readjusted himself and pressed forward slowly.

Stiles mouth dropped open at the stretch, eyes falling shut as Derek sank all the way into him, curling over him, arms a warm presence framing his head and shoulders. He shuddered when Derek finally bottomed out, roughly exhaling next to his ear, and finally moaned, hands snapping up to grab at Derek’s hips to temporarily hold him in place. He hadn’t realized just how sensitive his last orgasm had left him– or maybe it was the realization that he had someone inside him because he wanted it– either way, he needed a minute. Derek pressed his lips against Stiles’ neck, murmuring a soft; “You okay?”

Stiles nodded, fingers flexing against the older man’s hip.

“Your heart is pounding.”

At that, Stiles’ eyes opened and he smirked, unable to resist.

“Because I want a pounding.”

Derek groaned, in a completely unsexy way. He pulled back far enough to look Stiles in the eye, clearly trying not to look at all amused– and failed. Stiles quirked an eyebrow, waiting for a response and he got one, just not the kind he expected. Derek pulled back almost completely and Stiles scrambled at his hips before the older man thrust back in with utterly perfect speed and force.

“Fuck,” Stiles whimpered, Derek’s smile was soft, triumphant. He leaned over Stiles, brushed his lips against his as he pulled back against, thrust in.

“You feel so good,” the older man breathed after a handful of thrusts, like he couldn’t believe what was happening. Another thrust. “So perfect.”

“Shut up,” Stiles breathed out through what was almost a laugh before Derek started to move faster, smiling as he leaned down for another kiss. Nonetheless he felt a burst of warmth at what he knew was intended to be an endearing statement.

Gradually Derek’s thrusts started to speed up and Stiles found himself levering his hips, trying to keep pace. He was rock hard again, when that had happened, he didn’t know. But he wasn’t focused on chasing his own orgasm, didn’t need to make his lover speedily reach a climax so that he could move onto the next trick. He wasn’t repulsed or apathetic. He wanted to savor every moment of this like a dying man at his last meal, because what if he never got to have it again? Derek wasn’t particularly loud, but what little sound he did make was the perfect erotic soundtrack for Stiles’ ears. His moans were quiet, more often than not obscured by panted breaths. He mouthed along Stiles’ shoulders and neck, biting and sucking and sometimes just breathing into the space between them.

Stiles tried to think about how he’d imagined his first time would be, way back when, as an innocent teenager. Somehow this wasn’t it, and yet, it was perfect. He didn’t know what he had expected for the future. He’d only ever distantly thought about what it would be like to have a somewhat normal relationship or sex. Because really, seeing his life go back to normal was an abstract concept to him. The closest he’d gotten to it was Lydia’s offer to have him move in with her– should she win her court case– and that seemed like a fantasy now. He’d never entertained the thought of dating anyone really, unsure was even capable of a normal relationship. And here it was. Reality in a way that was
concrete where it had been abstract. His life was still a shit show, but it was slightly less of a shit show. And he was having normal, consensual sex with a person he actually liked. If he was truthful with himself, it went beyond like.

Derek’s pace and angle changed and Stiles felt like his entire body tried to clench inwards at the first graze across his prostate— and judging by Derek’s resulting groan, it probably had. When the other man pulled back, changing the angle again, Stiles whined in the back of his throat, knowing this was going to be more than a mere graze. When his gaze met Derek’s though, the older man froze.

“Your eyes…”

“Don’t get sappy on me now,” Stiles teased, panting. Truth be told, he didn’t know if he could handle it. Derek’s brow creased and he leaned forward. The new angle made Stiles groan harshly at the acute feeling of being filled, at the slow, persistent press directly against his prostate. Derek exhaled harshly next to Stiles’ ear, and that was when Stiles noticed that the other man was actually leaning over to reach into the bedside table, fishing blindly through the drawer before pulling back. He fiddled with whatever it was in his hand, fingers fumbling round long enough for Stiles to figure out it was a make-up compact— the kind most women kept in their purse. When Derek finally flicked it open, he turned it on Stiles.

“They’re glowing,” the wolf panted out.

With the mirror so close, Stiles could only see part of his face, the smattering of moles across his check that he’d stared at his whole life, but his eye— the one he could see was luminous; like Laura’s had been, like Derek’s Peter’s and Scott’s were— but his were different, bright like copper instead of blue or red or gold. It was a trick of the moonlight in the room, it had to be. Because Stiles definitely wasn’t a werewolf. He grabbed the compact and snapped it shut one handed, gingerly setting it aside on the bedside table. It was hard to tell what the other man was thinking, too hard.

“Does that…” he swallowed, started again, “Do you want to stop?” He was afraid of the answer.

“No,” Derek replied quietly, still. He looked perplexed and after a beat realized maybe he should say something more. “I want to know what you are.”

“I’m human,” Stiles replied, brow wrinkling. Because honestly, if he’d been anything more than that he would have exploited it long ago to get out of his problems.

“You’re about as human as I am,” Derek retorted, but then to Stiles surprise, leaned down to gently press his lips to his. “But you don’t know that,” he continued softly, tone intrigued almost to the point of disbelief. “Your heat beat gives you away— I know you aren’t lying.”

“Always with the lying thing,” Stiles teased back, mock exasperated. Enough was enough though. He’d worry about whatever trick of the light was playing with his eyes later. He raised his legs enough to wrap them around Derek’s back, nudging him closer with his heels.

“C’mon, fuck me.”

Derek in turn, raised an eyebrow, even as he complied, pulling almost all the way out.

“Always with the impatience thing,” he parroted back, exhaling roughly as he shoved back in at just the right angle.

“Fuck!” Stiles scrambled at the sheets in shock at the intensity of the angle, the accuracy of it. And just like that, things were back to the same heated exchange as before. Stiles could feel Derek holding back, the restraint in his posture.
“Harder,” he panted, trying to shove himself down on Derek’s dick. He craved the closeness, that tantalizing press where their bodies joined. As often was the case, curiosity was one of his prime motivators. He wanted to know if he could come like this, from just getting fucked, but more than that, he wanted to know what Derek looked like when he came.

The werewolf’s hips slowed and just as Stiles was going to voice his objections, Derek all but slammed back in, his movements slow but devastatingly deep and accurate. It was enough to steal the breath from Stiles’ lungs, cause his heart to skip a beat. And Derek knew, he had to, because he repeated the movement again, slowly pulling out before firmly re-entering, gradually building speed.

Stiles felt completely disoriented, it felt like time had both slowed down and sped up when he noticed the cooling wetness on his belly—precome leaking out of his dick. He raised a shaky hand, pulling Derek down for another clash of lips and tongues.

“Stiles,” the other man groaned against his lips. One hand was clamped on the younger man’s hips, fingers pressing probably enough to bruise, the other cupped around the back of his neck. It should have made Stiles panic, that Derek’s hand was exactly as Peter’s hand been when he’d clawed him. But Derek’s grip was lax, more cupping than anything else. That and the way Derek was looking down at him; like he couldn’t believe what was happening, like he was a little terrified but willing to risk it pushed Stiles to an emotional edge.

He had developed a way of experiencing the world with a level of detachment, like he was simply floating along a rushing river; too small to resist against the current. Derek was like a damn, forcing everything to slow, creating stillness. Suddenly Stiles was heaving in breaths. He didn’t want to stop, he knew that much, but the intensity of it all was overwhelming.

“Stiles,” Derek’s tone was somehow both soft and firm. The hand at the back of his neck gently squeezed, the pace of his hips slowed. “I’ve got you.” Stiles managed to bite back his overwhelmed sob, nodding frantically instead. He closed his eyes, trying to concentrate on the physical and how fucking good he felt. A mistake. Because he went from emotional intensity to physical, zero to sixty in a handful of thrusts. He was distantly aware of Derek’s pace starting to speed up, but was more distracted by the familiar feeling of his entire body trying to implode, of the sudden spike in temperature. His arms sprang up around Derek’s shoulders just in time for him to buck wildly underneath the older man, his second orgasm twice as intense as the first.

He couldn’t be sure who was louder—him or Derek. It must have been the sudden, tight clench of heat, because in the moments that followed as he came down, Derek’s hips slowed to a roll. Stiles eyes sprang open; like hell he was missing this. He was over sensitive and shaking, would have squirmed out from under anyone else, but he wanted to watch Derek. The older man’s eyes were lidded, lips parted and slightly wet, and he was—fuck—watching himself disappear into Stiles’ body. When he glanced back up to meet Stiles’ eyes, that was when it happened. He convulsed, grabbing at Stiles’ hip, slightly too hard and let out a ragged moan before crushing his lips against Stiles’. The teenager returned the kiss sloppily, a mess of saliva and uncoordinated tongues— and it was perfect.

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Derek panted into the space where Stiles’ neck and shoulder met, inhaling at the richness of their combined scent. Though his intimate history was pretty flawed, it was nothing compared to Stiles’. He’d at least had healthy, consensual (brief) relationships and sex. This had been something on
another level. He’d had to fight to quell the urge to mark Stiles as his by sinking his teeth into the tender flesh of his shoulder. He’d settled on sucking bruising marks into his skin instead.

Underneath him, Stiles’ chest was still rising and falling quickly, heartbeat still hammering through his chest, beating against Derek’s. He’d been so responsive and genuine– right down to his pre-orgasm moment of emotional intensity.

“You okay?” Derek murmured after a few moments had passed, finally coordinating his tongue enough to speak. Stiles made a content noise of assent before nuzzling his face against Derek’s.

“’Mm good,” he murmured.

“I’m going to pull out okay?”

Another noise of assent.

Derek drew back slowly, fingers gripping the end of the condom to keep it from slipping off. The second their bodies parted and the cool air hit his skin, he realized that, despite his best intentions, the facecloth he’d brought into the room wasn’t going to cut it for clean up. Stiles’ release the second time around had been even more than the first; it was splattered across the teen’s belly and chest, drying into the line of hair below his belly button, and matted into Derek’s chest hair. He didn’t mind really, not if it meant being able to shower together before finally hitting the sack. It was like both of them had been thinking the same thing; that staying up longer would delay the inevitable– Stiles ending up in Peter’s claws again– potentially literally.

“We need to clean up,” Derek finally coaxed softly as he backed off the end of the bed. He removed the condom with a wince, tossing it into the trash can beside the bed as Stiles eased himself into a seated position, snorting as he no doubt discovered the mess on his torso.

“This is partially your fault,” he said nonchalantly, voice hoarse, gesturing to himself as he maneuvered unsteadily to the edge of the bed. He was smiling lazily though and his heart rate was steadying, even, content.

Derek raised an eyebrow, stepped closer and helped the teenager to a standing position. He wobbled unsteadily for a few seconds before seeming to find his legs again.

“You definitely helped,” Derek retorted. “Come on, let’s go shower.”

Stiles waggled his eyebrows suggestively and Derek absently noted that his eyes were back to their normal colour. Maybe it had just been a trick of the light…

*It isn’t.*

“*Just a shower,*” he retorted firmly.
Chapter Notes

Thank you everyone for your immense patience waiting for this chapter- I promise, you'll be rewarded in the near future! Life just got very busy for a time and I need to focus on adulting for a little while- I still haven't quite got the hang of that one yet. Fortunately I'm back on track with this and the update should come much sooner!

Derek stared down at the younger man in his bed and sighed. He really didn’t want to leave him alone, even for just a few minutes. Stiles was sound asleep, curled up with his arms around his pillow, half on his stomach, half on his side. His hair was still damp and askew, his lips slightly parted as he breathed steadily in sleep. Where the sheet had slipped away, Derek could see the remnants of the abuse Stiles had taken at the hands of Deucalion. He forced himself to look away, knowing that if he looked long enough, he wouldn’t be able to leave. He sighed, reached out and tentatively brushed his fingers through Stiles’ hair. The teenager made a contented sound in his sleep, but other than that, didn’t stir.

Derek didn’t bother with anything more than the basics– he yanked on a pair of jeans and a hoodie, shoved on his sneakers, and grabbed a few bills from his wallet and his keys before leaving the apartment. It was just about 4:30 in the morning and the main street was a ghost town as Derek walked, pace brisk. Though it wasn’t particularly cool, the urgent need to return to Stiles the moment he’d left was almost like a magnetic pull. He could see the flickering, intermittent glow of the convenience store’s fluorescent lights at the end of the block and silently thanked whatever force was out there that the rundown little shop was actually 24 hours like he’d remembered it to be.

He’d always found the concept behind prepaid ‘burner’ phones to be suspicious– and with good reason; the bulk of people he’d seen with them were shot up gangbangers in the back of his ambulance or doctors at various hospitals in the area that used them as a way for their mistresses to call them. Still, they had their uses outside of drug dealing and extramarital affairs– like putting a lifeline between him and Stiles.

The chimes above the shop’s door gave the saddest attempt Derek had ever witnessed at announcing his entrance, meekly singing a few off-key notes before falling silent. The clerk, a middle aged Korean man, didn’t look up from the magazine he was reading behind the counter. The fluorescent lights let off a dull hum that the clerk didn’t seem to notice, but it was one of those nerve-grating sounds that Derek had never learned to fully tune out. He weaved through the cramped isles efficiently, until he found the small display he needed; three rows of identical black flip phones in their bulky plastic housings, strung neatly from metal pegs. And now the clerk was paying attention of course, because Derek was standing in front of the highest priced items in the store. He plucked a case off one of the pegs from the middle row and moved straight to the counter to pay. The clerk didn’t utter a word, save for the total, and a “thank you” as he handed Derek a plastic bag, phone tucked inside.

Back at the apartment, Derek did his best to be quiet as he used a single claw to slice open the plastic packaging on the phone so he could plug it in and charge it while he activated it. The last thing he
did before heading back to bed, was to program the phone’s first contact: Derek. Stiles roused only slightly out of a fog of sleep as Derek slid back under the covers as if he’d never left.

“Where’d you go?” he mumbled sleepily. The werewolf froze for a moment, not having expected the teen to wake. He slipped one warm hand around Stiles’ waist, snuggling in closer.

“Out to get something for you,” he replied in a whisper. “Go back to sleep, it’s still early.”

“Whatdyagetme?” Even in his half-awake state, Stiles was a persistent shit. Derek huffed out a breath.

“A burner phone,” he replied, realizing that of course Stiles wasn’t about to give up.

“How romantic,” Stiles snorted, but he snuggled back against Derek, and it was pretty apparent that he was kidding. “Thank you,” he murmured, tipping his head back against Derek’s shoulder. He had no idea what he’d done of course, leaning back and baring his neck in one long, pale column. Derek sucked in a breath and the unwitting gesture of submission, he held back a partial shift but couldn’t resist burying his neck in the space between Stiles’ neck and shoulder. The teenager hummed, pleased. Derek wasn’t sure when he fell asleep, but he knew it was just like that.

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“Am I ever going to wake up before you?” Stiles murmured, eyes still closed. Derek’s hands were roaming across his stomach, down his bare legs, across his hips, a warm, soothing touch that made Stiles’ dick twitch with interest.

“No,” Derek replied simply. Stiles could feel his lips, curling against his neck in a soft smile. The teen groaned when those lips changed their motive, pressing against the sweet spot just under his ear.

“You’re going to make me want to go again,” he mumbled halfway into the pillow. He shuddered at the memory of the night before, combined with images of Derek crawling over him right now that his brain was rapidly manufacturing. Derek’s hands slowed to a stop.

“We shouldn’t,” he replied seriously.

“I know,” Stiles replied somberly. Fucking Peter. An involuntary twinge of fear made him wince and Derek’s arms protectively pulled him closer.

“I meant what I said when I told you to go see Scott and Deaton today.”

Stiles nodded. He needed to check on Scott anyway. He knew Deaton would have called Derek if there had been any change at all, but that didn’t mean he felt right leaving his friend at the clinic all alone. Scott had been stuck in the body of a wolf for two weeks now. Because of him. He vaguely wondered what kind of sick thing Peter would dream up in exchange for putting Scott back to… well, as normal as he could be.

“Hey,” Derek said softly, breaking Stiles out of his thoughts with a slight squeeze, “I didn’t say that to make you feel guilty. There’s nothing you can do for him.” Stiles snorted in derision.

“Oh, I’m sure there is,” he replied, “it just involves making some sort of deal with your uncle.”

“Don’t do that,” Derek all but snapped before he audibly took a breath to calm himself. “He’s dangerous. What you’re bargaining for and what Peter is negotiating would no doubt be very
“Different things.”

“You don’t have to tell me twice,” Stiles replied. I’ll show you mine, if you show me yours. As much as he didn’t want to admit it— as if it somehow made him seem complicit in all of this— Stiles couldn’t help but be morbidly curious about what Peter had meant by that. But mostly, he was just plain terrified. He exhaled roughly. “Jesus I don’t want to end up in the preserve again…”

“I found you once,” Derek murmured, “I can do it again.”

“More than once,” Stiles replied. He smirked to himself, “I should have nicknamed you Stalkerwolf instead of Sourwolf.”

“Funny,” Derek replied dryly, and though Stiles couldn’t see it, he could sense the eyebrow raise. Stiles whined when he felt Derek pull back, scrambled to face him, suddenly afraid that he’d actually offended Derek with the comment.

“I’ll be right back,” the other man reassured as he slid off the side of the bed and strolled— gorgeously naked— out to the living room. The sudden movement made Stiles aware of how sore and stiff he was. Some of it was unpleasant, like the puckered, too tight patches of skin on his back where his skin had split open while Deucalion had been whipping him. He could feel the bruises deep in his flesh. He chose to pay attention to the pleasant ache of the subtly worked muscles, the echo of being perfectly filled. He stretched carefully moaning at the satisfying ache, and the few pops of stiff joints. This was what morning afters should be like. Minus the foreboding shadow of dread lurking in the background.

Stiles was mid-stretch, eyes scrunched closed as he yawned when Derek returned. He arched up into the warm hand on his belly, wriggled back when Derek crawled in next to him.

“You’re like a big cat,” the older man commented with a smirk. Stiles snorted.

“Who are you calling a cat? I can’t be a cat— for one— not graceful enough and for another, I seem to get along with dogs just fine.” He bit his lips, trying not to laugh when Derek’s eyebrows shot towards his hairline. The older man pinched the outside of his thigh lightly and Stiles yelped.

“Okay, okay, I get it, enough with the dog jokes.”

“I don’t believe you,” Derek grumbled.

“Yeah, you probably shouldn’t,” Stiles replied with a shrug and a smirk. “Hey— is that my drug dealer phone?” He gestured to the small, black flip phone Derek held loosely in his right hand. Derek glanced down, as if he’d forgotten what he was holding.

“No, it’s your emergency cell phone,” he replied seriously as he handed over the device. His voice lowered as they readjusted their positions, once again big and little spoon. “I’ve programmed my cell in,” he explained as Stiles flipped the phone open and the screen illuminated. Stiles was totally aware of Derek watching over his shoulder as he hit the ‘contact’ button, clicked on ‘Derek’ and studied the number, trying to memorize the digits just in case. He smirked to himself and hit the ‘edit contact’ button.

“Don’t even think—”

Derek didn’t have time to get the rest of his threat out before Stiles had successfully and efficiently replaced his name with ‘Sourwolf’.
Derek’s reasoning for wanting Stiles to visit Scott was actually pretty rock solid. The clinic was the perfect place to cover up any trace of Derek’s scent before Stiles went to visit Peter. To Stiles’ human nose, the place smelled like antiseptic and wet dog, he could only imagine what it smelled like to someone with keener senses.

Leaving Derek behind at the apartment had been one of the hardest things Stiles had forced himself to do in the past few weeks. It was like it marked his surrender to the inevitable, like he was admitting defeat by caving to Peter’s will, but he also knew it was his only choice. Peter had already demonstrated what he was capable of when displeased and Stiles, though he didn’t have much, had enough on the line that he couldn’t risk making one wrong move right now. Now was not the time for risk-taking. Now was the time to at least pretend to play the game.

He sat in his Jeep in the parking lot of the animal clinic, trying to calm himself down enough that he wouldn’t immediately freak Scott out with his racing heartbeat. He closed his eyes, trying to refocus on the finite details of his goodbye to Derek less than half an hour before. He’d deliberately soaked in every detail he could before he’d left; the warmth of Derek’s arms, seeping through his t-shirt, warming his skin, the feeling of Derek’s beard, just long enough to be called that and not stubble, soft and prickly at the same time against his cheek, the way the man’s fingers twitched at the small of his back, like he was resisting grabbing and not letting go (truth be told, Stiles had been tempted to do the same), the smell of the soap from the shower, laced with Derek’s own underlying scent, like the forest floor after a good rain, earthy and dewy, the near inaudible “you’ll be okay” in his ear, the warm rush of breath the only proof Derek had uttered the words and Stiles wasn’t crazy. The only thing that had allowed him to let go from the too long hug they’d shared before he left, was the knowledge that Peter wouldn’t kill him. At least not tonight. He needed Stiles for whatever reason, and until then, Stiles was… well definitely not safe, but not dead either. He squeezed the steering wheel, took a deep breath and slowly exhaled, loosening his grip as the air left his lungs. Then he finally pulled his keys from the ignition and opened the car door.

“Stiles, how are you?” Alan— or as Derek referred to him— Deaton, greeted at the door. The clinic wasn’t closed but it was almost the end of the night and the waiting room was void of activity.

“Could be better,” Stiles replied honestly as he guided the door closed behind him so that it didn’t slam. He had a feeling that lying to the vet would be useless. The older man nodded sympathetically.

“How’s Scott?” Stiles asked cautiously, knowing better than to expect any marked improvement. He watched as Alan turned over the ‘Open’ sign to ‘Closed’ and locked the door a full fifteen minutes before the clinic was set to close.

“Restless,” he replied honestly, face drawn and tired. “I’m hoping that spending some time with you may help to soothe him. It may have something to do with the full moon’s approach, but I would have thought that would actually calm him in some ways… being closest to the form he’d be most tempted to take as a young wolf, but that doesn’t appear to be the case.”

Stiles nodded, scrubbing a hand down his face, in part to hide the tears of frustration that threatened to spill over from the corners of his eyes.

“I don’t know how much I’ll actually be able to help,” he mumbled before cursing under his breath; “Fucking Peter…”

Deaton made a noise of assent.

“Talia would be rolling in her grave if she could see what her brother has become,” Alan remarked,
with a shake of his head. “She was Derek’s mother– Peter’s older sister by several years. Laura was actually a lot like her. She was a good woman, a great alpha. Not all wolves are like Peter– but I’m sure you know that.”

Stiles looked up sharply, brow furrowed.

“Derek mentioned you’ve been staying with him,” the vet explained. His expression was soft, slightly somber. “Stiles I… I’m sorry for some of the things–”

Stiles got what the older man was trying to say immediately.

“Don’t be,” he interrupted. He took a breath to gather himself. He’d never thought he’d be in a conversation like this– ever. “For the record, you were probably one of my nicest regulars.”

“I was still wrong,” Alan murmured, staring down at the keys in his hands. Several moments passed where neither man seemed to know what to say. It was clear though, without having to be explicitly stated– their former relationship was finished now. Finally the vet cleared his throat, moving past the reception desk to the short hallway that Stiles knew led to the exam room he’d woken up in and the door to the basement where Scott was. “I’ll take you to Scott,” he supplied, brandishing his keys. “I have a surgery to prepare for tomorrow, so I’ll be up here for a while. There’s no need to rush.”

“Thanks,” Stiles replied at the doorway to the basement, one foot already on the stairs. “Just… kick me out when you need to.” The vet offered a half smile, nodded, and let the door softly close.

From the top of the stairs, Stiles could hear movement; nothing alarming– he knew Scott was in the mountain ash cage and couldn’t hurt him no matter how riled up he got– just the soft click of nails on the concrete floor. When he reached the bottom of the stairs it was still a shock to see the big, chocolate brown wolf in place of his friend, pacing back and forth in the cell against the wall.

“Scott?” he called tentatively, because cage or no cage, his instincts told him not to sneak up on his friend. The wolf in the cage stopped moving.

“Hey buddy,” Stiles greeted, stepping forward cautiously. The wolf’s ears flattened back against the sides of its head. Stiles had enough time to make another ill-advised step forward before a low rumbling seemed to emanate from deep inside the wolf. Stiles’ heart pounded against his ribcage.

“Scott, it’s me,” he said shakily before inching forward, not even picking up his feet, more sliding against the floor. He managed less than a foot before the wolf– Scott– bared his teeth and all out snarled a warning. And try as he might to recognize that Scott wasn’t himself, Stiles felt his chest tighten and a lump develop in his throat. His friend was gone. He didn’t recognize him anymore.

“Scott please,” he begged, and despite every instinct screaming at him not to, he took another, this time very deliberate, step forward. He held his hands up, palms out, the universal gesture for ‘I mean no harm’. The wolf– because this couldn’t be Scott– continued to growl. He’d managed a few more steps, just outside of arm’s reach from the cage when the wolf snarled and lunged, jaw snapping around its snarls. Stiles stumbled back from the cage, crumpling to a heap on the floor. He rubbed at the tears threatening to spill from the corners of his eyes with the back of his hand and just sat, willing himself to calm down– at least enough to be able to stand up, get up the stairs and go get Deaton if he needed to.

He wasn’t sure how long he sat, staring at his hands, trying desperately to get a hold of his emotions which swung like a pendulum between sadness and despair at the loss of his best friend as he’d known him, and utter rage and helplessness when he thought of Peter. The cold of the concrete floor had seeped through his jeans, found its way to his bones and he shivered. Then the realization struck;
the growling had stopped. He hazarded a glance up and found the wolf lying down, head resting on his paws, watching him.

“Scott?” he ventured softly. The wolf blinked slowly, tired. “It’s me– Stiles,” he continued, inching closer on his hands and knees. He stopped when his friend squirmed slightly in place, not wanting to agitate him again. This was progress, even if it was gradual. He didn’t know what else he could do, so he kept talking. “I miss you,” he continued softly, “and I’m sorry. This is my fault. I should have just… just gone to Peter that night. You wouldn’t be like this. Laura wouldn’t be dead…”

And I may never have met Derek.

Scott whined from the confines of the cage and Stiles inched nearer again. He was pretty close now, a foot or so from the bars.

“I’m going to fix things,” he continued, stomach flip-flopping as he spoke. “I have to see Peter tonight. I’m going to try and– I’ll make him change you back. Somehow.” The wolf let out a huff of breath, whined and sat up. Any trace of aggression seemed to be gone. Stiles dared to move closer.

“I miss you.” He took a deep, shaky breath and raised a hand, so, so slowly, moving in increments, closer and closer to the bars, trying to control the shaking, not wanting Scott to think he was afraid– even if he was. In the seconds before his fingers connected with Scott’s muzzle, he wondered if petting was weird best-bro behaviour. Scott didn’t seem bothered by Stiles’ clear intentions and remained stark still. Really, all Stiles wanted was to give Scott– the real Scott– a hug, but this was the best he could do. As his arm passed through the bars, Stiles couldn’t help but think that if Scott lost control again, he kind of deserved to lose his hand, after all, he’d been the one to put him here. But Scott didn’t make a move, and soon Stiles’ fingers brushed over the short, bristly hair for a few tentative strokes.

It happened in the span of a heartbeat.

It was like someone had changed the channel on a television set. One moment, Stiles’ fingers were touching fur, the next second, his hand hovered in the air in front of his best friend’s human face. Scott sat hunched and naked, arms curled around his knees. Both teens startled at the same time; Stiles smashing his elbow against the bars of the cage, Scott falling out of his hunched position, limbs flailing wildly like he wasn’t used to them anymore.

“Scott,” Stiles mouthed, voice barely above a whisper before he found his voice, “Scott!”

“Stiles,” the other boy managed, voice weak, scared. He was shaking, struggling to get his limbs in order to cover himself up again. “Stiles don’t,” he choked out, expression desperate. Stiles could hear the loud trample of feet taking the stairs two at a time behind him.

“Don’t? Don’t what?” he asked in a rush. Scott had his arms clamped around his head in unmistakable anguish. When he looked up, his eyes were glowing gold.

“Peter–” was all the other teen got out through of mouthful of unhuman teeth before he shuddered. The shift occurred so rapidly Stiles couldn’t be sure he hadn’t hallucinated the entire experience, because once again, he sat in front of a cage with a brown wolf on the other side.

“Stiles…”

He whipped around at the sound of his name to see Alan standing a few feet behind him.

“Did you see?” Stiles blurted in a rush. “Scott, he was right there–” he gestured to the wolf, who was back to pacing as close to the bars as it could. “He was human– he was–“
“I saw,” the vet replied, voice calm but intrigued. “The question is how…”

“Get him back,” Stiles demanded, voice near hysterical. From inside the cage, Scott whined. Deaton moved forward slowly, like he was approaching a wild animal– and he was– except his hand came to rest, a warm weight on Stiles’ shoulder.

“Son, I can’t.” His voice was pained. “A werewolf’s shift is almost entirely dependent on their own will to control it. I cannot make Scott return to his human form… there is only one external force that can.”

“His alpha,” Stiles supplied miserably. The vet made a noise of agreement, squeezed the teen’s shoulder.

“Stiles, I know you are upset and your first instinct is to help your friend. But it is critical that you stop and think about Peter’s motives first. Think about his mindset– who could get hurt if you push him too far.”

Dad. Derek. Lydia.

Stiles took a deep breath, mostly to try and snuff out the impending panic of just how screwed he was. He had a lot of thinking to do in a short period of time. He couldn’t help glancing at his watch. He had an hour and a half before he had to be at the Comfort Plus.

“I don’t understand what happened,” he finally said, voice hoarse and unsteady. He watched Scott pace back and forth a few more times before standing up on shaking legs.

“I have my theories,” the vet replied cryptically as Stiles stepped towards the cage and hesitantly reached through the bars to give his friend’s head a scratch. His stomach lurched when Scott backed away from his reaching fingers. Afraid.

“Don’t be offended,” Alan offered softly. “He’s scared, not in the best state of mind for human interaction.”

Stiles swallowed a lump in his throat and drew his shaking hand back, nodding in acknowledgment.

“It isn’t you he’s afraid of,” the older man continued.” Stiles snorted. “How would you feel if, for several days, you had tried desperately to shift back to your normal self– something you thought you had finally mastered– only to find that you couldn’t? That would be hard in and of itself. Now imagine, finally it happens, but you can’t control it.”

Stiles couldn’t help thinking of being left in the basement of the Hale house, being freed at last only to be at Peter’s mercy. Helpless didn’t even begin to describe that feeling. He couldn’t imagine that imprisoned feeling in his own body.

“You said you have theories…”

“I do,” Alan replied patiently.

“I want to know.”

“Then let’s go upstairs, allow Scott some time to rest, we can come back down before you need to leave for the night.”

Stiles cast one more look at his friend. The wolf was settling onto the pile of blankets in the corner. Even without a human face, his misery was obvious.
“I’ll come back in a bit Scott,” he promised.

“I apologize for taking you away from your friend,” Alan said once they’d reached the top of the stairs, “but I didn’t want to start wildly speculating in front of Scott. It would only serve to distress him further.”

“But can’t he still hear us? I mean werewolf senses being what they are…” Stiles trailed off, thinking about how Laura had always been able to tell when they were on the verge of being discovered.

“Quite a time ago, I invested in some soundproofing measures,” the veterinarian replied, “he will still catch some sound of course, but likely nothing discernable.”

They continued down the hallway to the room Stiles had awoke in almost exactly a week ago. He shivered at the memory— it felt years old instead of days. He circled around the metal table in the middle of the room, finger’s skirting its edge.

“So… you had a theory?” he asked, coming to stand on the opposite side of the table from the former Hale emissary. Maybe not former for long.

“Nothing concrete,” Deaton clarified before continuing. “But… there is something that has been on my mind since Derek brought you in here a week ago.”

Stiles looked at him expectantly; go on.

“I’ve been thinking ‘Why Scott?’ ever since it was revealed to me that Peter was the one who had bitten him. Of course, that inevitably leads to thoughts of how. How does a werewolf so injured by a fire he is rendered catatonic, suddenly recover enough, not only enough to leave a hospital, but to give someone the bite, without being an alpha?”

It was hard to picture Peter as helpless in any way, considering the formidable monster he’d proven himself to be.

“He had help…” Stiles trailed, pick up on Deaton’s trail of thought.

“Exactly. The question is who, and why?”

“I have a feeling we won’t be finding that out any time soon,” Stiles replied. “I might not know Peter well, but he killed his own niece for the sake of getting her out of the way and gaining her power.” The vet straightened up from his position braced against the exam table opposite Stiles.

“Whoever helped him ceased to be useful,” he concluded softly.

“This still isn’t getting to your theory,” Stiles replied abruptly, breaking Alan from his reverie. After all, he had a schedule to stick to.

“Right,” Alan replied, rearranging his facial expression from pondering back to collected and calm. “If Peter had help, wanted to rise back to his former glory, what would his reason be?”

“Revenge,” Stiles replied immediately, because obviously.

“Or…”

“What do you mean ‘or’? What other reason could he have?”
“Perhaps he wasn’t so immediately seeking revenge. Suppose instead, that he was seeking out something that would not only allow him to enact revenge, but would assure that nobody ever dared to harm his pack again?”

“You mean like a weapon?”

“Exactly. Stiles, I don’t think Peter was in his right mind when he escaped the care facility—”

“I don’t think he’s in his right mind now,” Stiles muttered before the vet continued.

“But I do believe he was lucid enough to keep his eye on the prize so to speak, even in an abstract way. Everything he has done thus far is connected.”

“How?” Stiles asked incredulously.

“From what I can hypothesize from the facts… you.”
Chapter Notes

This is one of the longest chapters to date, but I just couldn’t cut it short, nor was there a good place to cut it in half without making extremely short chapters. This is one of those things I have recently found out other writers also agonize about and somehow that makes me feel a bit better.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stiles exhaled loudly, hands coming up to the back of his head, fingers tangling in his hair as he crossed the parking lot to his Jeep. His head was spinning, he felt queasy. He thought he’d had a handle on things where his (very shitty) position was in the clusterfuck that was his life. The conversation he’d had with Deaton less than a half hour ago replayed in his head.

Stiles jaw dropped open and hung like that for what felt like an eternity. It was like his brain had stalled out between gears.

“What?” he finally asked. He’d meant it to come out as shocked, angry– instead it came out muted and scared.

“I believe that something about you is vital to whatever Peter has planned–”

“But that doesn’t make any sense!”

“Do you believe it was a coincidence that the werewolf who turned your best friend happened to pick you up on a street corner? That the incident at the Sheriff’s station– where your father was working– occurred the same night when Peter had just disappeared from hospital?” Deaton retorted, voice just beginning to show signs of being riled.

“So what are you saying? That Peter did all of this because he thinks I know about some kind of weapon?” Stiles cried.

“That or…” the vet looked hesitant to answer. He took a breath.

“Or what?” Stiles snapped, patience wearing all too thin.

“Or Peter believes you are the weapon.”

Stiles shoved himself away from the exam table.

“Why the hell would he think that?” he cried. Realizing right in that moment, why the vet hadn’t wanted to have this conversation within earshot of Scott. “I am 147lbs of fragile skin and bone! What about this–” he gestured wildly at himself, “says ‘weapon’?”

The vet shook his head. “I don’t know,” he replied earnestly, “but we need to find out what Peter is after, and if my theory holds any weight.”
“Well it isn’t like I can just go up ask him ‘hey do you plan to use me as a weapon of mass destruction?’ So what are we supposed to do?”

“One thing I know about men like Peter,” Deaton replied, “they are exceptionally secretive while also being prideful. He will reveal his plan in time.”

“We just have to wait it out,” Stiles concluded miserably. The vet nodded.

“Fuck.”

It wasn’t until Stiles went back downstairs to say goodbye to Scott, that Deaton really hadn’t given much explanation about what had happened to make his friend shift to human and back again in the span of seconds. But he’d run out of time to ask, due to meet Peter in under half an hour.

Stiles’ hands shook as he put the key in the ignition and started the Jeep up. There wasn’t enough time to hide it anymore– there wasn’t really a point. Peter had already made it pretty clear that he knew Stiles’ every emotion and that his efforts to hide them were perfunctory.

He drove meticulously, echoing the same rigid movements he’d used on his driver’s test. It was all he could do to keep from falling apart. As much as Stiles’ dreaded the night to come he could only imagine Peter’s wrath if he was late because he got pulled over for speeding. He focused on the road and the subtle weight of the mobile phone in his pocket– the lifeline he’d been without until now. Whatever happened tonight, he had Derek.

The sight of the Comfort Plus’ blue, orange and white sign, glowing like a beacon above the word “vacancy” beneath it made his stomach churn so violently that he felt the burning hot sensation of bile rush up his throat. Less than a mile out and he pulled over, scrambling to open his door. He did so more by luck than finesse, stumbling around the side of his Jeep, hoping to make it to the ditch in time. He did– by a hair– doubling over just beside his passenger side door and just missing the gravel shoulder. He didn’t have much in his stomach and what little that had been there hit the grass with a muted, wet splat. Unlike puking because he was ill, Stiles didn’t feel any better. He straightened up, coughing at the leftover burn of stomach acid in his throat. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and stood back for a moment, noting how crooked his parking job was in his haste to get to the side of the road. If a cop drove by right now he’d be screwed– it looked like he was drunk.

He shakily circled the front of the Jeep and got back behind the wheel. He fished through the glove compartment, finding the wrinkled package of gum that had probably been there since before he’d gone to McLean. He popped a piece in his mouth, chewing past the staleness. If he’d been able to stand it himself, he’d have let Peter deal with the taste of vomit. He pulled carefully back onto the road and drove the remaining stretch to the motel, pulling into the closest spot he could find tote flight of concrete stairs that led to the second floor.

He knew that, in all likelihood, Peter could hear him if he was listening for him so he kept his nervous pep talk in his head as he got out of the Jeep, locked the doors, and headed for the stairs.

_You’ve been doing this long enough now. You know he’s going to hurt you so why are you freaking out? Just accept it._

His feet felt heavy as he climbed the stairs, his heart thudding the heavy ominous way it typically did just before a panic attack. He shivered, the night air chilling his clammy skin. At the top of the landing, he couldn’t bring himself to take another step. His legs threatened to come out from under him at the mere sight of the numbers on the door and he twisted away, grabbing at the chipped metal rail affixed to the concrete, controlling his collapse onto the top step. He glanced at his watch. He had one minute to be in that room.
He wanted nothing more than to use his cell phone to call Derek and tell him he couldn’t do this, to please come and get him. To stop himself, he gripped the handrail, now beside his head, even harder. He resisted reaching for his phone out of the necessity of focusing on his breathing instead.

The faster you get it over with, the sooner you can go get back to Derek.

A door opened just as Stiles had steadied his breathing. He didn’t need to turn around to know it which door it was, or who was coming out of it, but he still did. Peter was dressed in a pair of dark jeans, and a deep burgundy v-neck sweater. His feet were bare as he strolled the few paces from the door to the stairs. Stiles turned away before Peter could reach him. His right hand was actually beginning to ache with the force of his grip on the handrail. He felt his entire body shrink inwards when Peter’s shadow loomed over him. He hated himself for it– for looking so weak.

“I was beginning to think I’d have to go out and find you,” the alpha said conversationally as he gracefully folded himself into a seated position beside Stiles on the steps. The teen clenched and unclenched his jaw at the familiar line but couldn’t keep his bitter retort in:

“No you weren’t.”

Peter made an amused sound and Stiles turned to see him with his eyebrows railed in an expression eerily like one of Derek’s. “You aren’t wearing any shoes,” he muttered, “I’m sure you could hear me the moment I got here.”

“Of course it does,” Peter replied mildly. “Your Jeep has a very distinctive lumber to it.”

“Before actually,” Peter replied mildly. “Your Jeep has a very distinctive lumber to it.”

“Of course it does,” Stiles replied, not in the mood for Peter’s exhausting games. He returned his gaze to the square patch of cracked pavement he could see at the bottom of the stairs, jumped when, without preamble, Peter’s hand slid up the back of his shirt, gliding over his bare skin. He shuddered uncomfortably as a particularly chilled sensation tickled under his skin before he recognized it as Peter siphoning off some of the remaining aches and pains from his encounter with Deucalion.

“Don’t,” he growled, cringing away almost enough to set his center of gravity off and pitch headfirst down the stairs. Peter’s hand stilled but he didn’t stop.

“What’s the point, if you’re just going to give it back to me again later in a different way?”

The older man chuckled lightly before letting his hand slip away. Stiles managed a few breaths in and out before he felt Peter pulling his shirt up his back, almost as if he was going to pull it off.

“What the fuck?” he cursed, finally letting go of the handrail to twist around and glare at the other man. “We’re not going to fuck on the landing,” he added. He hoped Peter didn’t detect the blip in his heartbeat and run with it.

“I was visiting Scott,” the teen replied lamely. He couldn’t help the nervous flip flop of his stomach. He hoped Scott was the only wolf Peter could smell.

“I was visiting Scott,” the teen replied lamely. He couldn’t help the nervous flip flop of his stomach. He hoped Scott was the only wolf Peter could smell.

“Mmm, and how is my errant beta doing?” Peter asked thoughtfully. Stiles cringed at the feeling of warm breath ghosting across his neck and dug his fingers into his knees.
“He’d be a lot better if you put him back the way he was,” he snapped in retort, yanking his head away from Peter only to feel his shirt tighten as the other man gathered more fabric in his fist.

“I’ll consider it,” Peter replied lightly, then changed the subject. “You’re certainly looking worse for wear this evening.”

“Yeah well… leave it to me to find the one person in this town possibly sicker than you are.”

At that, Peter suddenly yanked back on Stiles’ shirt, forcefully enough to compromise the teen’s centre of balance and send him pitching backwards into the older man.

“Careful now, I might consider that a challenge,” he quipped, voice tinged with darkness. He released Stiles t-shirt in favor of gracefully pulling himself into a standing position. Stiles resolutely stayed where he was, thinking for only a fraction of a second about running down the flight of stairs in front of him.

“Shall we?” Peter prompted, nodding towards the motel room door. The weight in the pit of Stiles’ stomach surprisingly wasn’t enough to keep him rooted to the ground. He clumsily unfolded his limbs and stood, following behind Peter and feeling like he was dragging a concrete block behind him, strung from his neck, choking him, an unseen force attempting to pull him back for the few steps to the motel room door. He followed Peter inside the room, and the second the door closed, he felt that force holding him back snap, like an elastic band stretched too far. Like it knew better than to try and follow him in.

He blinked as his eyes adjusted to the relative dimness. As usual the drapes were drawn, and only the dim lighting of the lamps and single light fixture in the ceiling provided lit the room. He’d always been torn as to whether the motel did it to try and create some pathetic source of ambiance with low wattage bulbs, or if they were just cheap. The room felt like a cave. He stared hollowly at the spot on the floor where Peter had fucked him just last week, could remember the stale smell of cigarettes permeating his nostrils, the fibers burning against the skin of his knees and elbows. He’d barely made a step towards the bathroom when Peter cleared his throat and fixed him with a pointed gaze.

He chewed on his lower lip to keep from muttering some smartass remark before bending to yank off his shoes and toss them near violently to the side. He stripped quickly and efficiently, eyes on Peter the whole time, glaring, hoping that the faster he did it, the higher the chances he would get a few more minutes alone in the shower.

The way Peter stared at him once he’d slipped off his briefs was unsettling. He broke eye contact, knowing he’d give away just how unsettled he was, apprehensive about starting anything Peter could interpret as a game. He moved casually towards the bathroom, which meant passing Peter who sat in the tacky upholstered chair where he normally set his bag, watching Stiles with too much interest, head swivelling so his gaze could follow after the teen.

Stiles winced at the feeling of cold tile on his bare feet as he blindly slapped at the light switch and shoved the door closed behind him. The motel had one good thing going for it; the water pressure was good and the temperature was never an issue either. He was fiddling with the taps when he realized something; Peter hadn’t made his usual pithy remark about hurrying up. His skin crawled at the realization and, right on cue, the bathroom door opened. He pulled viciously at the switch on top of the taps to divert the water to the showerhead before turning around.

“I’m seventeen years old, I know how to take a shower,” he spat. Peter raised an eyebrow, smirking before his expression disappeared behind the fabric of his sweater as he stripped it off. Stiles felt the urge to violently kick something.
“I’m sure you do,” Peter replied, fingers deftly flicking at the button on his jeans. “But I figured you may need a little help with the hard to reach places.”

“If by ‘hard to reach’ you mean my ass, and by ‘a little help’ you mean your cock, no thank you,” he replied, pulling back the shower curtain to step under the stream of warm water. On the other side of the curtain, Peter chuckled.

“Who are you calling little?”

Stiles closed his and eyes and smacked his head lightly against the shower wall. The handful of seconds before Peter ripped back the curtain were semi-blissful. The heat of the water cascading over Stiles’ shoulders working to relax his tense muscles. The soothing sensation dropped away almost completely as Peter gracefully stepped in behind him. Immediately he was reminded of the first time they’d been here together, Peter’s over-eager touch, followed by their most recent interaction– foggy in every detail except the terror he’d felt. He moved to turn around, not trusting the man behind him. One broad hand settled across the back of his hip, stilling the motion.

“I need soap,” he protested lamely, but didn’t dare move. Peter didn’t say anything, simply readjusted his grip, reaching back to the soap dispenser with one hand while the other stayed on Stiles, wordlessly commanding him still. After a few seconds, he slowly removed his hand– not for long though– it returned seconds later along with the other, lathered with soap, rubbing smoothly over the teen’s shoulders. His touch was surprisingly gentle. Stiles knew it wouldn’t stay that way. It happened quickly enough. One second Peter’s fingers were working the soap into his shoulders gently, the next, his thumb pressed viciously into a nearly closed wound on Stiles’ shoulder blade, effectively reopening it. Stiles hissed in pain.

“What you need is to understand one thing: werewolves are very possessive creatures.” The hand on his injured shoulder slipped away, fingertips tracing a path down his back, over his ribcage and slowly up the middle of his chest before flattening against his wildly beating heart, then travelling upwards. Peter’s hand came to rest on his throat, fingers splaying and exerting just enough pressure on Stiles’ mandible to force his head back. Stiles closed his eyes against the stream of water cascading towards his chest, keeping the water out of his eyes. He swallowed thickly, the motion nearly choking him.

“So when you come to me littered in the marks that some other man– or men– left behind, what do you think that makes me want to do?” Stiles shook his head as much as Peter’s hand would allow.

“Think,” the werewolf prompted before fitting his mouth over a mark at the juncture of Stiles’ shoulder and neck. One of Derek’s. He loosened his grip at the exact moment Stiles got the picture.

“Mark me,” he replied hoarsely. Peter made a sound of affirmation against his skin and began to suck. And Stiles’ stupid, traitorous body hummed to life with misplaced arousal. He squirmed, actually feeling Peter’s lecherous grin against his skin before the man mercifully pulled away.

“The next time you come to me like this, I will strip the flesh from your hide myself. And when you finally heal, I’ll give you the bite so that you never forget me again, so that no matter what you get up to, you will always look like mine, always be reminded that you are mine.”

Stiles’ heartbeat thundered in his ears loud enough to make the sound of the water in the small room nearly fade from existence, but not so loud that he didn’t hear Peter’s, “Do you understand?”

He nodded frantically before realizing his head didn’t have much leeway.

“Yes,” he croaked out.
“Good,” Peter replied lightly, releasing his hold so suddenly, Stiles stumbled and slid for a moment, untethered, until Peter wrapped an arm around his waist before he could brain himself on the tiled wall. “I’d rather keep you human– for the time being.”

The prospect of being a werewolf didn’t terrify Stiles near as much as the prospect of being bitten by Peter, of the man owning him so completely that he would literally be changed forever– quite literally– if the mood suited the alpha. It also brought about a black, oily feeling of sickness at the pseudo-incestuousness of his complicated relationships with both Peter and Derek. How would that work? He’d be in a pack with Derek… and both of them would be under Peter’s control. He didn’t know much about Peter and Derek’s relationship, but he knew nothing good would come of him being bitten and forced into a pack with them.

Peter’s hands returned to their previous state of false gentleness, rubbing possessively over Stiles’ stomach and chest, moving down towards his flanks. It made his brain feel slow, weighed down.

“Why didn’t you just bite me from the start?” he asked almost a full minute later. He dreaded the answer because what if Deaton was right? What if Peter really did intend to use him as some sort of weapon and needed him to be human for the cause?

In less than a blink of an eye, Peter had yanked him close, pinning Stiles’ arms to his sides with one arm around his middle, the other hand jerking Stiles’ head to the side by his hair, exposing his neck. Peter leaned in close, breath gusting across the delicate skin, lips brushing against it as he asked;

“Is this your way of asking me for the bite?” voice all mock surprised and mildly threatening. His grip on Stiles’ hair grew lax enough to allow the teen to jerk his head away– but the grip around his middle ensured the teen stayed close.

“No,” Stiles yelped as he yanked his head as far away from Peter as he could manage. His heartbeat thundered in his chest. His theory had been wrong and he was stupidly baiting Peter. The wolf probably looked at it as some sort of elaborate game of chicken.

“Are you sure?” the alpha asked, showing no signs of exertion as Stiles struggled to free at least one of his arms. He moved closer again, mouth dancing over the pulse point of Stiles’ throat. The teen struggled harder, bones in his right arm creaking as he tried to yank it free. Realizing he was fighting a losing battle, he changed tactics, letting his legs give out from under him, hoping at best, to slip out of Peter’s arms, at the least to just drop like a dead weight, temporarily out of reach.

Naturally, Peter released his grip and let Stiles crash to the bottom of the tub. He grazed his forehead on the metal tap on the way down, cringing at the flash of pain.

“I didn’t give you the bite when I met you for various reasons,” Peter said calmly. He stepped backwards as Stiles clambered at the side of the tub, pushing himself up on the slim ledge in the corner. “It’s not a decision we take lightly.”

Stiles snorted, getting to his feet and twisting around to face the other man. He didn’t trust having his back to him.

“Right, because you put so much thought and consideration into biting my best friend,” he replied, voice dripping with sarcasm, hand rubbing at the sore side of his head. Peter almost lazily, raised both eyebrows.

“Are you implying that I didn’t?” he replied, expression morphing into something much darker. The coldness Stiles was already all too familiar with; The one that had been there all those weeks ago when Peter had beaten him and kept him overnight, or more recently, the night Laura had been
killed. Stiles inched backwards, chest starting to heave. He realized, belatedly, that it wasn’t just Peter—his subconscious was rearing its ugly head, reminding him of everything awful about showers—the confined space, the echoing sounds, the vulnerability. Peter moved forward slowly, almost like he was testing Stiles to see if, given an opportunity, he would actually try to run. He was baiting him.

“I’ve given a lot of thought to biting you.” The alpha stalked forward another step. Stiles stepped back. He wasn’t quite up against the wall, but close. The water beat down against the back of his neck and shoulders, spraying haphazardly out to the sides where it overshot his shoulders. Peter raised a hand and cupped the teenagers jaw, thumb brushing over his lips.

“For one thing, that mouth—it could entertain me in more ways than one—and I’d never get tired of it.”

Stiles wanted to snap his jaw down on Peter’s thumb and tear it off, instead he slowly ground his teeth down on his own tongue. The older man’s fingertips danced across the back of his neck lightly, before suddenly digging in hard.

Peter’s lips crashed into his, force almost biting. Stiles’ hands sprang up to push him away, landing on the other man’s hips before he aborted the movement, afraid of the consequences. Of course, Peter mistook the gesture—or he chose to. He softened the kiss, using less teeth, slowing down, but it was still intense enough to force Stiles head back, make him shut his eyes against the stream of water. His hands twitched on Peter’s sides until finally, his jaw ached enough that he couldn’t keep up anymore. He pulled away, his head to the side, breathless.

“You’re stubborn,” the older man continued, as if the kiss had taken nothing out of him, “and clever, and curious.”

The more Peter said, the more Stiles started to fear that this was Peter’s endgame—to turn him—keep him tied to him, to use him until he’d fulfilled a need. He needed to make himself undesirable. And that inherently meant being self-destructive.

There was no use hiding his erratic heartbeat, but he could play it off as something it wasn’t. He let his head drop to Peter’s shoulder in mock surrender, breathing hard. This might hurt. Scratch that—this would definitely hurt because he was going to get punished. He wobbled unsteadily on his feet, shifting his weight…

He wished he could say his next move was swift or graceful, but it wasn’t. Stiles threw his weight to the side, tripping over the edge of the tub, the shower curtain ripping free from a few of the plastic rings on the rod with a series of popping sounds. He hit the tiled floor on his right shoulder, rolling to (ineffectively) diffuse the force of the impact. He collided with the bottom of the bathroom vanity, smacking into it like a pinball before landing on his stomach with a wet slap. Immediately, he started to scramble up, wet limbs slipping and sliding on the bathroom floor, the flimsy gloried towel of bathmat crumpling into a nearly useless bunch near his feet as he got to his knees—nearly. He kicked back with his right foot and managed to plant it firmly enough to start to stand.

And slammed face first into the floor, turning his head just in time to avoid a broken nose. It was the sheer force Peter used, not his weight, that flattened Stiles to the floor, the air rushing out of his lungs too quickly. His mouth gaped open as he tried to draw in air like a fish out of water. Peter moved quickly, pinning Stiles down with his weight, one palm flattened over the back of Stiles’ skull, turning his head so that he was face down on the floor, nose mashed against the tile. He kicked out when Peter leaned over him, suddenly terrified that his act of rebellion had made the wolf feel it necessary to turn him right now.
Fear. Terror. Horror. No word was good enough a descriptor to fit what Stiles felt when two, distinct, pin pricks just punctured the skin on the back of his neck. He closed his eyes so tightly, all he saw was red. The pricks of pain dug deeper and then, a rush of ice flooded through Stiles’ veins.

Stiles came to, inhaling hard, heart pounding, standing in an unfamiliar hospital room. It was the oddest sensation; like his body had been standing there a long time, but that his person had just kind of left it there to come back to. He still felt cool, but not freezing. He lifted his hands, examining himself for any differences, but saw nothing beyond the familiarity of his bony knuckles. He couldn’t remember how he got here. Tentatively, he reached up and brushed his fingers across the back of neck. The skin was smooth, unmarred. He frowned as he looked around the room.

It had the same bland, not quite pleasantness of almost any hospital room, but lacked the generic quality. This room was personal, meant for a single person, for a period of time. The bedspread was a patterned quilt in shades of blue, set across a hospital bed, one side dropped down to allow a patient to get on and off the bed easily. On the dresser, was a series of picture frames, but from where he was standing, Stiles couldn’t see what was in them. His eyes flitted around the room until they settled on a man in a housecoat, sitting in a wheelchair near the corner. Stiles jumped, slamming into the wall behind him, heart pounding.

Despite the marred, twisted flesh on the right side of the man’s face, Stiles recognized Peter instantly. But this Peter was far from the formidable alpha werewolf Stiles knew. He sat in the chair almost looking as though someone had arranged him there, hands in his lap, feet up on the foot rests of the chair so they wouldn’t drag if he was moved. He was staring right at Stiles, but his gaze was completely blank. Stiles didn’t trust it. He had just started to try and figure out an exit strategy when the door opened. A young nurse, pretty with bright red hair bustled into the room.

“Guess what Peter?” she asked pleasantly, as if the man would actually respond. “We are going to dine alfresco tonight– last night of the year before it gets too cold.”

Stiles shrank back against the wall, afraid of being spotted, but the nurse hadn’t seemed to notice him yet. She remained cheerily focused on her patient– likely with no idea what he was. That was when the nurse turned around and Stiles was caught like a deer in the headlights. There was no way she didn’t see him and yet, she showed no signs of it, she didn’t startle, didn’t so much as blink as she crossed the room and opened the middle drawer of the dresser, right beside Stiles.

That was the moment everything clicked together. Laura had told Stiles about this; Peter being cared for in a long term care centre and then going missing before they were going to move him to one in New York. Peter hadn’t bitten Stiles, he’d done the strange werewolf voodoo memory thing. I’ll show you mine if you show me yours.

So what exactly was Peter showing him? And what could Stiles have possibly had of value to show Peter?

Stiles gaze bounced between the nurse and Peter as the woman rooted through the drawer, looking for something that she seemed to know was there, and hidden. As she felt around the back of the drawer, she continued on in her one-sided conversation.

“I don’t know if you remember– I’m sure you have a lot on your mind…” she continued, “but tonight is the full moon.”

It was the way she said it that chilled Stiles to the bone. Like she knew exactly what the significance
of her statement was. She pulled her arm back from the back of the drawer, a small, round wooden container clutched in her hand. She rose and turned around, revealing the wooden vessel on the palm of her hand.

“This is the last of it,” she said quietly. “I don’t think I need to tell you it’s rare, or how much effort I’ve had to go through to procure so much. The opportunity won’t likely happen again. I hope you’ll remember that when you’re more… aware.”

Stiles crept forward, peering over the nurse’s shoulder, trying to see what was inside the container when she opened it. The liquid inside was dark, nearly black and even before the smell hit him, Stiles knew it was blood.

He gagged and backed away, covering his mouth, completely unnoticed by the nurse or the werewolf in the room. He bent double, hands on his knees, eyes clinched tightly shut, willing the smell out of his nostrils.

When he opened his eyes, he was no longer in the hospital room.

He was standing at the edge of the Beacon Hills Highschool football field. Right away, he knew what Peter was showing him. A chilled sensation starting in his fingertips and working inwards like frostbite gripped his bones. He turned his head slowly to the side to see Peter beside him, partially shifted, completely naked, chest heaving, eyes trained on something in the distance. Stiles felt his chest tighten up and it felt like he’d swallowed an entire conservatory’s worth of butterflies.

He would have been able to recognize Scott anywhere, even from this distance. The other teenager had his back to them, head down, hands in his pockets as he walked across the football field in the direction of the pedestrian walkway that Stiles knew led to the subdivision Scott could cut through to get home. It was a long walk from the hospital– about a half an hour. There was no way, even halfway home, that an asthmatic kid would be able to outrun a werewolf.

It didn’t matter that it was a memory. Stiles screamed his friend’s name out into the dark, a truly vocal chord shredding sound. And Scott didn’t even pause in his stride. At almost the same moment, Peter took off like a shot, shifting to his wolf form half way, so fast, it was almost like watching the special effects in a movie. Stiles stumbled after the wolf, feet uncoordinated, near useless as he scrambled across the field, stumbling and slipping across the wet grass, his eyes never leaving his friend. His throat hurt. He knew it was from continuing to cry out his friend’s name without avail.

Time slowed down. Scott heard something, but it wasn’t Stiles. He glanced over his shoulder, big brown eyes widening in terror. The kid didn’t even have time to scream. He’d just changed his posture, bending low to break into a run when the wolf tackled him to the ground, disconcertingly similar to images of lions taking down gazelle’s on the discovery channel. Stiles recoiled in horror, skidding to a stop for a few seconds before bolting into a run to be at his friend’s side, even if there was nothing he could do.

Scott’s cry of fear was cut off when the wolf’s powerful jaws clamped around his side. The sound choked off into a wet sob, disappearing into Peter’s growl. Stiles caught up to them then, breathless not with exertion, but with the crushing weight on his chest that came with the knowledge that this moment had altered his and Scott’s lives permanently.

He dropped to his knees beside his friend, who lay on the field barely conscious. His normally tanned face was already growing pale and clammy, eyes hooded, just clinging to consciousness. Blood was rapidly blossoming across his t-shirt, the dark stain looking like some sort of modern art interpretation of a rose. With shaking hands, Stiles reached out to pull the fabric away from the damaged skin, grimacing and looking away in the hope that would keep him from wanting to hurl all
over the place. But the second his fingers got close enough, something seemed to push him away, a
force not unlike the one a person felt when they attempted to force magnets together. He flinched
back at the strange twinging sensation in his fingertips.

He was completely powerless. That didn’t mean he was without wrath. He turned slowly towards
Peter, heart pounding at the proximity of the fully shifted wolf, despite the logical assumption that
due to his own inability to affect change in this scenario, Peter would be unable to harm him. The
werewolf’s hulking frame was heaving in breaths, warm air gusting from his muzzle and raising the
hairs and flesh on Stiles’ bare arm. He balled his hands into fists, preparing to pummel the wolf to the
best of his limited ability, had just turned, ready to throw himself into the mass of fur and teeth and
claws when the wolf took off like a shot. Stiles’ vision began to blur and tunnel as he watched the
wolf run— the memory ending because this was where Peter had abandoned Scott. He blinked and
then there was nothing at all.

Chapter End Notes

And because I am nice, next update will be, at the latest, Monday!
It might be 11:00 at night but it is still Moonday! As promised, here is the next installment. I deliberately wrote ahead enough this time to be able to post this chapter and the previous in close succession because they are so closely tied. However, next chapter will be back to the regularly unscheduled program. Thanks so much for reading!

It took longer, the transition between memories. The scene slowly illuminated like an old movie, flickering to life from a projector, gradually shifting and blinking into focus. And with the growing clarity of what he was seeing, Stiles felt a lump in his throat.

It was a quiet night at the Sheriff’s station. Annemarie was on the desk—Stiles had always liked her. She was a dark-skinned woman with her hair always immaculately styled into twists and braids. She was the perfect person for the front desk: Sweet, welcoming and friendly in both looks and demeanor… until someone started to give her trouble. Then that sweetness would drop immediately to reveal a tough lady who would take shit from nobody.

Police reports said she was likely the first to die.

The station’s low hum of activity was something Stiles hadn’t realized he’d missed until he was confronted with the memory of it. Two police officers emerged from the doorway to the left and just behind the front desk. Stiles of course, recognized both of them—Preston and Lewis— and they were in a hurry.

“Where are you boys off to?” Annemarie asked, brow furrowing at the hurried pace of the officers, their lack of greeting.

“Brechin Place,” Preston replied, jaw clenched.

“Lahey again?”

“Yeah, neighbor called it in; Domestic disturbance,” the officer replied, sounding tired. Annemarie shook her head, lips pressed into a thin line.

“Those poor kids,” she replied, shaking her head.

“It’s just the one now—Isaac. Cameron went off and joined the military,” Preston replied. “So now he gets beat on twice as much.”

“Kid could help us more if he actually told us what was going on,” Lewis muttered. Preston, the older, more experienced of the two leveled him with a look.

“Would you? If you knew that the second the cops were out of sight you’d get it twice as bad?”

Stiles felt a pang of sympathy in his gut. He remembered Isaac from school—a quiet kid, tall, skinny with a mop of curly brown hair. He’d always seemed to make every effort to just blend into the background whenever he could. Stiles had no idea his dad was an abusive monster.
Preston gave Lewis a light smack in the chest.

“This is why they always stick you with me– sensitivity training.”

The phone rang and Annemarie picked it up with the standard greeting, waving to the officers on their way out. Stiles watched the officers walk out the door, heading out on their call and he felt heart sick. This was it. This was when everything went to hell. When everyone at the station– minus Preston, Lewis, and his dad, lost their lives.

His Dad.

He went to move towards his Dad’s office, past the desk, towards the holding cells but something rooted him in place, wouldn’t let him move. He tried to step, attempting to lift his legs in turn, pulling so hard he could feel his bones creaking at the strain, and yet he couldn’t move. He couldn’t help him and he knew it, but he wanted to be there, needed to see his dad even though he knew it meant witnessing something he’d had nightmares about for months– years. A cold thrill of dread tingled at the back of his neck where Peter had clawed him, slipped down his spine, sharp and sinister feeling, like someone was tracing over his vertebrae with an icicle.

If he was seeing all of this right now, it meant Peter was already here. He twisted around, looking for any sign of either the man or the wolf and saw nothing. The seats beside the front desk were occupied by an abandoned wool blanket.

Annemarie murmured her goodbyes into the phone and hung up, scribbling something into the notebook on the desk without looking up when she began to talk. “Okay sweetheart, we’ve got someone on the way from…”

She trailed off when she looked up from the desk towards the bench with the abandoned blanket, clearly expecting someone to have been there.

“Shit,” she muttered under her breath, moving to pick up the phone again.

“I’ll find my way.”

Stiles started at the sound of Peter’s voice nearby. And now of course, he could move. He spun in place, and what he saw was a strange mix of sickening familiarity and the strangeness of something foreign.

Peter stood on the other side of the desk from Stiles, right next to Annemarie, completely naked. But he wasn’t the Peter Stiles knew. Even though he’d seen Peter’s scarred face at the care centre before, nothing could have prepared him for the damage the fire at the Hale house had actually caused. The twisted skin of Peter’s face continued down his neck, across his shoulder, arm and chest, whorls of damaged skin in varying shades of pink. It reminded Stiles of a macabre, flesh-worked version of Van Gogh’s ‘Starry Night’. The majority of his body looked distorted and ruined. A normal person would never have survived. And for the first time, for just a few seconds, Stiles actually felt sorry for him because at one point in his life, as hard as it was to believe, Peter had been a good person that had run into a fire to save the people he loved. However any vestiges of sympathy he felt all but disappeared when he thought about what sharing this memory meant.

“Sir, you can’t go back there!” Annemarie objected when Peter turned slowly and started towards the back of the station. He didn’t seem bothered in the slightest that he was naked. He was in this weird, unhinged state between consciousness and catatonic, seemed to have a singular goal in mind. Annemarie huffed out a breath of frustration and slowly pushed back her desk chair and stood. And Stiles wanted to reach out and grab her, pull her back down to her chair and stop her from making
the mistake that would end her life.

Finally, Stiles was able to move. He cut through the area behind the front desk— something his dad had always given him shit for when he was a kid— and emerged just as Annemarie set her hand on Peter’s arm. It all happened almost too quickly for Stiles to comprehend, in fact, he didn’t really figure out what had happened until the officer dropped backwards, collapsing to the ground without even a scream. Stiles looked down at her face, eyes vacant and open where she stared past him, head at his feet. Four, deep, bloody, gouges, steadily leaking blood, every pulse making them gush more, extended across her shoulder, through her neck. Blood pooled thick and fast around her, rapidly spreading across the green tiled floor to Stiles’ feet. Which were bare, for whatever fucking reason his subconscious or Peter’s had decided. He stepped back as Peter rolled his shoulders, cracking his neck, fangs and claws bared. He didn’t look back, just ambled forwards.

Closer to the back of the building.

Closer to Stiles’ dad.

Stiles tripped forward over Annemarie’s outstretched arm. Flinching at his own blatant disrespect for the dead.

Then a door opened on his left— two before his dad’s. One of the doors to ‘the pen’ as they called it, where most of the deputies worked. Stiles’ heart leapt into his throat. This was the moment when everybody died.

The officer took one look at Annemarie’s body, another look at Peter, and reached for his sidearm. He managed a single shot at Peter, the bullet grazing over the werewolf’s shoulder to bury itself in the wall behind him, before the werewolf turned fast as lightning and swept a one clawed hand up in a significantly deadlier version of a left hook.

The officer went down much like Annemarie had, this time face down, but his gun had alerted the rest of the station that something was awry. A flurry of activity that Stiles could hear, but not see began in the pen; papers and pens dropping off desks, chairs behind shoved back, officers standing and shouting. Stiles flattened himself against the hallway wall, scrunching his eyes closed, not wanting to watch the carnage he could hear beginning to unfold in the room across the hall. He felt his way down the familiar wall, the chair rail digging into his lower back as he slid, hands outstretched behind him. When a door slammed open, he opened his eyes.

He was face to face with his father.

And instantly he recognized the look of grim determination with a sliver of fear. He knew if someone held a mirror up to his face, that he probably wore the exact same look every time he had to walk into a night with Peter.

“Dad,” he sobbed out, reaching for him as if he could stop the events of that night from ever happening. Of course, his dad didn’t even acknowledge his presence, because Stiles hadn’t been there. It didn’t stop him from reaching forward and shoving, trying to push his dad back into his office to keep him safe. And again, he was met with that same irritating, cosmic push away, making his limbs rebound before they could even make contact.

“Dad no!” he cried, against all reason. He scrambled around in front of his dad even as the man turned, attempting to reposition himself, to put himself between the most important person in his life and the one who could take it all away. His stomach rolled when he realized, in one way or another, he’d always be doing that when it came to Peter.
His Dad started towards the pen, Stiles sobbed, beating at his chest with ineffective fists, screaming at him to stop. When he finally did, Stiles jerked back in surprise. Had he actually managed to change something?

A low growl behind him, told him he hadn’t. He turned, plastered himself against his father– or as close as he could get. Peter stood framed in the doorway of the pen, half transformed, blood matted into his fur, smeared into his skin, staining the divots and creases the burns left behind, making him look even more monstrous. Blood and… God… bits of flesh dripped… (slid?) from Peter’s claws and dropped to the green and off white linoleum.

Stiles knew the he blood would never come out of the floors; The night had permanently stained it. The department had never replaced the floors; funding the hiring of an entire department of new officers had been more important. Stiles remembered being brought in and booked for solicitation, remembered staring at the ground and thinking he had to be imagining that the floor looked slightly brown, like old blood.

He now knew he hadn’t been imagining things.

“Peter,” he pleaded, tears stinging at the corners of his eyes. Movement out of the corner of his eye caught his attention. And something behind him too. In front of him, an officer, one of the younger ones, newer– and foolish– was hovering behind Peter with his weapon drawn. But he was staring down the hallway, past the Sheriff, past Stiles. Stiles reluctantly stepped away from his dad, succumbing to malicious darkness in the back of his head that had been telling him since he’d realized this was just someone else’s memory, that he couldn’t change the past. He flattened himself against the wall again, between his Dad’s office and the pen. That was when he noticed the officer at the end of the hall, just before the holding cells. Howdon, his name was. Older, not far from retirement. He’d likely been keeping an eye on the drunk tank. His hands were at his sides, one in a fist, the other at his side, fingers splayed, gradually snapping back into a fist: a countdown. Peter was oblivious, but it wouldn’t matter. Stiles already knew their fate. The second his index snapped back into his fist he shouted;

“Sheriff, get down!”

Stiles watched his father duck down, scrambling for his office before a shot rang out. Stiles felt the arterial spray hit him– and how fucked up was that– from the bullet entering Peter’s skull at close range. It was enough to bring the wolf to his knees, but the bullet had ripped through his cheek, merely slowing him down.

The werewolf reared around blindly, grabbing the younger officer’s head in one massive, clawed hand. He lifted him off the ground, and threw him over his shoulder, claws doing so much damage, he all but ripped the young man’s head right off. Stiles didn’t even have time to gag before the officer down the hall stupidly– no suicidaly (was that even a word?) charged towards Peter.

Stiles didn’t bother to look behind him. The sounds of growls and tearing flesh and screaming painted him a vivid enough picture. Instead his eyes fixed on his dad, scrambling to his feet, racing towards the holding cells, slipping and sliding across the floor until he righted himself. And wow, so that was where Stiles got his particular brand of coordination by luck, not finesse. He raced after his father who entered the holding area.

It contained only three cells, two of which were empty that night, the other, holding a drunk that now stood gripping the bars of his cell, yelling to be let out. If only he knew– he was safer inside.

He watched helplessly as his father’s shaking hands reached for his keys, attempting to match the right one to the cell beside the drunk. Because he hadn’t been letting people out– he’d been trying to
lock himself in.

Stiles felt like he was going to shit out his insides just from watching his Dad fumble for the keys. He couldn’t breathe around his own hoarse cries of warning that went unheard. When Peter’s form filled the doorway, he collapsed to the floor by the wall, shaking and sobbing, but now thoroughly conditioned not to reach for his dad. It wouldn’t do anything but make him more distraught.

Peter stood in the doorway, chest heaving, low snarls leaving his mouth. The shift started to recede, revealing his human face, which was even more unsettling.

His eyes glowed nearly white. His head tilted to the side and then he shook it, shaking the abnormal colour from his irises to bring them back to blue. When he straightened up once more he looked distinctly unsettled.

“Where is it?” he asked, voice hauntingly light.

The Sheriff dropped the keys, swearing and seemed to realize that stooping to pick them up would be foolish. Instead he very slowly raised both hands in front of him, away from the keys, away from his gun.

“Now, I don’t know what you’re looking for,” he said quietly, voice steady and calm, ever the professional. “But if you tell me, I’ll see what I can do to help you.”

Peter said nothing, just took a few steps into the room, feet making a sticky thwip sound as they landed and peeled themselves from the tile, leaving a trail of bloody footprints behind him.

“I need it,” Peter replied, voice teetering on the edge of a growl. “You have it. I can smell it all over you.”

“Need what?” the Sheriff prompted, keeping him talking. Stiles was completely immobilized by fear. A small, but significant enough part of his consciousness feared the unthinkable– that somehow if he made the wrong move, Peter could alter the past and do the one thing that could make Stiles’ life completely unbearable.

At that Peter blinked, tilted his head to the side like he was pondering something.

“The spark,” he replied with a maddening grin. As if the answer was easy, ludicrously obvious. The expression stayed for all of three seconds before it turned to a frown.

Thwip. Thwip. Thwip. Three more steps. The Sheriff seemed to sense the danger, knew his only way out was to get into the cage behind him reserved for criminals– or trick Peter into it.

“Okay… okay,” he replied placating. “I’m just going to bend down and grab my keys and then, we’ll go find what you’re looking for.”

For a second, Stiles thought it was going to work. Peter remained still while the sheriff slid down the bars of the cell behind him, eyes trained on the werewolf as he blindly felt across the floor, unable to place his hand on the keys just out of reach. He took his eyes off the wolf long enough to twist and looked at the floor, sweep the keys into his hand and that was when Stiles’ world came apart.

“Liar,” the wolf snarled and in two quick paces had crossed the room. His claws were bared and it looked like Stiles’ dad was about to meet the same fate as the rest of the station when something seemed to catch Peter’s attention. He dropped his face down to the Sheriff’s collar… smelling him.

“You don’t know,” the wolf said softly, voice disbelieving, yet not malicious before it turned. “But
I’ll find it.”

Stiles wasn’t at the right angle to see it happen exactly. But his father’s head jerked back, eyes rolling into the back of his head before his entire body collapsed forward, onto his side, eyes lidded but mistakably trained on Stiles where he sat against the wall, not breathing, face streaked with tears.

“Stiles,” the officer gasped out so quietly, Stiles would have thought he’d imagined it, if he hadn’t been so used to seeing his father’s lips form his name in many ways, for many years.

“Dad,” he finally blurted, and finally moved, scrambling across the floor to his dad’s prone form. He’d just reached out to touch the soft, familiar PD browns when the entire scene cut out like the consuming darkness of a power outage.

Stiles opened his eyes and frowned at the unfamiliar sight in front of him, trying to place himself, unsure of whether he occupied reality or a memory. It felt like someone had removed his brain and replaced it with cotton batting, his head stuffed full but empty at the same time. After a few seconds, a hand came into view, reaching towards him. For a few seconds, he was fooled, leaned forward into the touch, his cloudy brain making the uneducated leap that Derek had found him, and he was already back at the apartment, safe, the night over.

It was Peter’s dark chuckle that made him realize his mistake, and when he did, he reared back sharply, jerking away from Peter’s touch like a reflex. His neck and shoulders immediately protested the movement, his shoulder muscles tight and aching, the back of his neck stinging and sore. That didn’t stop him from struggling to a seated position, sparing a hand for the back of his neck before he should have. He pitched backwards, almost toppling off the edge of the motel room bed– would have– had Peter’s hand not shot out to grab him by the arm just as his balance went past the point of no return. A few, tense seconds passed before Stiles attempted to jerk his arm free of Peter’s grasp.

“It’s not bleeding anymore,” the werewolf reported calmly, eyes flicking down to the white bath towel between them on the mattress, a few alarming patches of crimson burning bright against the sea of white. This time when Stiles jerked his arm free, Peter let him and he managed to remain steady. His fingers brushed over the wound on the back of his neck, prodding at the open wounds just long enough to confirm that no, they weren’t bleeding anymore, and yes, they fucking hurt.

Slowly, Stiles took in his surroundings. While he’d been out– and he had no idea how long that had been– Peter had stripped the bed of the bland comforter and, no surprise really, brought Stiles to bed with him. His stomach churned. He didn’t know how long Peter had to have his claws in him for the memories to transfer, if they passed in real time or if they transferred in seconds, leaving Peter time to do what he wanted.

“Relax, I find you much more entertaining when you’re conscious.”

At that Stiles flopped back against the mattress, eyes closed. He had a headache– no surprises there– like he’d felt when he woke up in the preserve. He swallowed the sudden flood of saliva in his mouth that usually would have signalled he was going to puke. He knew this one was a false alarm because really, there couldn’t be anything left in his stomach.

“Leave me alone,” he muttered when his head hit the pillow and he felt Peter’s shadow hover over him. When the other man didn’t move, he opened his eyes, about to muster the best glare he could give with his head pounding, when Peter reached out a hand and touched a hand to his forehead. The veins in his arm went black as he pulled the tension and pressure from Stiles’ head and shoulders until it was all but gone.
“Why did you do it?” he breathed, voice cracking on the way out. Stiles fully expected him to play coy and say something lame about his headache, but for once, Peter didn’t make it a game of ‘you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours’.

“Which specific event are you referring to?”

“Any of the ones where you fucked up my entire life,” Stiles retorted viciously, rising up off the mattress only to have Peter press him back down again, firmly, but not too rough.

“I was out of my mind…” Peter began slowly, tone quiet. He waited until it was clear the teenager was listening, before releasing Stiles slowly, sitting back against the headboard, flicking off the television across the room and tossing the remote to the bedside table, before he reached down to pull Stiles up to a sitting position. Stiles snorted, staring up at the ceiling before turning to glare at Peter.

“I was trapped in that useless body for years,” Peter growled. And that unsettling, unhinged look returned to his eyes. “Did Laura tell you what happened to us? Why she turned tail and ran away with my nephew?”

Stiles willed his heartbeat not to stutter at the mere mention of Derek. He knew he didn’t get away with it when Peter looked at him sharply. He had to improvise fast.

“Some of it… and the rest– I found on my own,” he croaked, hoping he was convincing enough.

“What do you know?” Peter demanded.

“There was a fire. Arson,” Stiles began. “It killed almost the entire family. It– it was the reason you were in a hospital.” He could feel a tremor race through his body, tried to clamp down on the buzzing need to move, to give himself away. Peter’s face twisted bitterly.

“It was murder,” he growled. “Hunters.” Stiles stomach clenched. There was no way he could hide what he knew. He’d give himself away, give Derek away. He had to stay on his toes, find a way to bend the truth convincingly.

“I know,” Stiles replied meekly, hoping Peter would come to the logical conclusion that Laura had told him. The werewolf stared down at him for so long it was disquieting enough to prompt Stiles to sit up, at least put himself in something close to a position where he could defend himself if he needed to.

“My nephew Derek led hunters to our door,” Peter replied bitterly after a beat, taking a visible breath to steady himself, before adding, mockingly; “all because he was in love.”

“How do you know?” Stiles asked softly. Peter cocked his head to the side, and for a moment, Stiles became paranoid he’d shown too much interest in Derek.

“Derek and I were actually closer in age than me and my sister Talia– his mother. It was so easy to figure out what he was up to, to get him to confide in me.” Peter abruptly changed tone, “He killed his first girlfriend you know? Ah, the follies of teenaged lust. He asked me to find someone to give her the bite and I delivered. Shame the bite didn’t take…” his expression hardened again. “If it had, he’d have never brought her to our door like a little boy with a puppy he wanted to keep. He confided in me that he’d found someone, maybe even the one to be his mate,” Peter continued, his voice near a snarl, barely contained rage. “This was a couple of months before the fire. Of course by that time, my very astute niece had already begun sniffing around, hunting for the truth like a little blood hound. It wasn’t long before I was able to get a name out of my nephew; Kate Argent. I’m surprised Laura never mentioned them,” Peter finished lightly. “They have a long legacy of murder.
In Europe, they were single-handedly responsible for culling the werewolf population to a mere fraction of what it used to be. Yet of course, the Hales had to create a treaty with them, long ago.”

“What was the treaty?” Stiles asked, in an effort to keep Peter talking, to keep him from focusing on paying too much attention on cataloguing his reactions. Reactions that would give away too much. Peter’s expression went bland, condescending.

“That they would not bother us on that condition that we were not to give humans the bite.” The statement hung in the air between them. Peter’s disdain for the rule was evident. “Of course, that meant, eventually the Hales would die out. You can’t keep a pack going if the Alpha cannot create them.” A few beats passed, and Peter continued.

“I told Laura about Derek’s budding relationship, and who it was with, hoping that in her usual heavy-handed way, she would seek to take out the threat with the vigour she seemed to address everything else in life. Using the biggest artillery she could find– her alpha.”

Stiles stomach twisted. Had Peter planned for his sister to get involved? He had his answer when Peter’s hand snapped out and grabbed his chin.

“Don’t look at me like that,” the werewolf chastised, his expression disdainful. “I tried to save my sister.” He released Stiles’ chin and shook his head.

“I highly doubt that Kate waited until Derek was out of the house out of some sort of misplaced sentimentality. I’m sure it was just coincidence, maybe even deliberate. She would have considered it a fun little game to hunt him down had things gone perfectly according to plan. He would have been the perfect trophy for her. Not just the final branch on the Hale family tree– but the tree itself, an alpha.”

Stiles winced. God, how different would things have been if Laura and Derek had died.

“They trapped us, with mountain ash, poisoned us with the smoke. The barrier didn’t get broken until the firetrucks arrived and some haphazard fireman tore through the line with his boot. The strain of wolfs bane they used was probably more deadly than the fire. It was the reason I couldn’t recover on my own.”

And here it was, they’d come full circle in the conversation again.

“The pretty young nurse, I’m sure you remember her, she looks remarkably like your friend… Lydia is it?”

Stiles swallowed hard and nodded, because of course, Peter had to remind him just how much power he held, even as he laid himself bare.

“She wasn’t just a nurse. She knew what I was. Revealed it to me one day when she knew I was in no position to defend myself. She told me about her family background. That her relatives were largely from France before they fled to Belgium to escape the Argents. Before you ask, no, she wasn’t a wolf… but she was… sympathetic to the cause.”

“The… the blood,” Stiles choked out around a gag, eyes watering at the phantom memory of the strong, enduring odor of copper and rot.

“Not blood,” Peter replied, “an elixir.”

“Made with blood,” Stiles replied roughly, clearing his throat, because there had been no denying that. Peter made a dismissive gesture.
“Made with something very powerful. The kind of power that makes a werewolf seem weak by comparison,” Peter replied, voice filled with reverence.

“She used it to wake you up.”

“I guess that is one way to put it,” Peter replied simply. Then Stiles asked a question he knew he’d regret.

“What happened to her?”

“I killed her,” Peter replied simply. He huffed and rolled his eyes when Stiles must have looked at him in horror. “Well you couldn’t expect me to take the risk of having her reveal who I was to anyone. She may have gotten cold feet upon realizing that she’d had a hand in the slaughter of almost the entire sheriff’s department.”

“You still haven’t answered why you did it,” Stiles replied, impatience lacing his tone.

“I’m getting there,” Peter replied glibly, raising an eyebrow as if to say ‘patience darling’.

“She was naïve. Didn’t know the power of what she’d done. At best, the poor girl was an innocent young thing who thought she was banking on some unlikely old wives’ tale. At worst, she could have been delusional, thought she had real power of some kind and thought that when I returned to my former glory that I would do something like bite her and run off into the sunset.” Based on what he’d seen, Stiles was banking on the latter.

“All of this is to say that she was playing with fire… or should I say, a spark.”

A shiver raced through Stiles’ limbs at the mention of the word, growled by the monster in his memories, now repeated by a Peter that Stiles couldn’t be sure was adjusted any better. He glanced up and frowned. Peter’s usual duffle bag wasn’t in the seat across from the bed. And yet the bag that was there still looked familiar. He stared for several seconds before Peter’s fingers dancing over his shoulder drew his attention. He cringed away.

“Sparks are incredibly rare things. Hold so much power…”

“I still don’t understand,” Stiles snapped, pulling sharply away, aiming an elbow in the direction of Peter’s side in case he dared move closer again.

“Whatever she’d been giving me was like a street drug for supernaturals. Sparks are like the heroin of the supernatural world,” Peter replied, “but human.” Stiles snorted.


“Of course you wouldn’t get the reference,” Stiles muttered, kind of ashamed that he got the reference. The werewolf didn’t seem too bothered, he shrugged his shoulders and moved on.

“Continuing on with the drug reference, whatever she’d been giving me was like some low-grade version cut several times by several dealers, and contained but a mere fraction of a measure of a spark’s power. It took until I’d ingested it all, over several weeks, combined with the pull of the moon, to rouse me, and when it did, it felt like waking up after some sort of hibernation. And like any creature coming out of hibernation or junkie coming off I high would, I wanted to go out and drink, get my fill. And I was both. I was helpless with it.” And now it was Stiles’ turn to snarl.

“You were far from helpless when you were ripping apart deputies.”
“You’re right, I was crazed,” Peter replied. “Already an addict if you will. But I couldn’t help myself.”

Stiles’ anger rose so quickly, so furiously that it came out of his mouth in a torrent of fury.

“No! You do not get to play that card,” he snapped. “I don’t give a shit what you’ve been through. You don’t have the right to say ‘poor me’, not after what you’ve done,” he nearly shrieked. And in one breath, Stiles was still seated on the mattress, in the next, Peter had yanked him into his lap, hand clamped tightly around his mouth.

“Quiet now, you’ll disturb the neighbors,” Peter chastised. Stiles struggled against the man’s hold, squirming in his lap, skin crawling as he noticed for the first time since coming too that they were both completely naked. After almost a full minute, Peter peeled his hand away from Stiles’ mouth.

“Are you quite finished?”

“Not even near,” Stiles growled. Peter raised an eyebrow, but removed his hovering hand nonetheless. Stiles kicked his legs out and tried to squirm out of Peter’s lap, but the man made it clear he wasn’t willing to let that happen.

“Just tell me why,” Stiles repeated, voice small, quiet.

“Quite simply put, power seeks power,” Peter explained. “Whatever was in my veins was looking for its brother.”

“Then why did you bite Scott? What did you go after my dad? They had nothing to do with any of this!” Stiles demanded, and this time Peter let him turn around, move back to his side of the bed and cover himself with a corner of the sheet.

“Don’t you see?” the wolf asked, voice soft.

“See what?” Stiles snapped. He was tired of this round about bullshit.

“The spark recognized traces of its kin on Scott. I bit him and felt nothing. So, not knowing why, and against all instinct to stay with the prey I’d just bitten, I went off in search of what I needed more. And why would that have taken me to the sheriff station?”

“I DON’T KNOW!” Stiles cried, exhausted and exasperated by Peter’s endless games. When he looked at Peter, he expected his gaze to be murderous for him being so loud, instead he looked… excited.

“Think it through clever boy,” Peter said patiently. It was infuriating. The teenager balled his hands into fists beside his head, fighting to urge to pull out his hair in frustration. He could smell the soap from the shower, the faint smell of his own sweat, more prominent than it normally was after a shower, the vague copper smell of blood…

His hands dropped like two lead weights, clumsily thumping into his lap, blood rushing in his ears.

“Me,” he barely breathed out. “They both smelled like me…”

""
Erasure

Chapter Notes

No new tags to look out for this chapter, but that doesn't mean nothing happens!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I’m not… It’s a mistake. You made a mistake. I’m just a kid,” Stiles protested, breath coming out in heaves. He hadn’t felt this overwhelmed and small, and fragile since he’d been handed his sentence at McLean.

“No, you’re not,” Peter replied softly, shaking his head. He looked like he’d been trying for comforting, but there was a glimmer in his eyes that made dread pool at the base of Stiles’ spine. The wolf shifted towards the teen to pull him back into his grasp. Stiles kicked out, trying to back away off the mattress, but Peter cuffed a hand around his knee.

“Come here, let me show you.”

“No,” Stiles objected. His head was spinning, losing traction in reality and the current moment. In the past few weeks his entire world view had been irrevocably altered as everything he thought about the how the world worked was proven wrong. The monsters that had only existed in myths and movies were real. They lived in Beacon Hills. And Deaton’s insane theory hadn’t been far off base. But how could he be anything other than just a normal teenager without knowing it?

“I don’t understand,” he murmured as Peter drew closer. He just wanted time to stop long enough to be able to think.

“I’ll show you.” The werewolf’s voice was soft, placating. He was just about on top of him now.

“No– just– I need to think.” Stiles crawled backwards, pitching off balance as his left elbow slipped off the edge of the mattress at the foot of the bed. Peter of course, saved him from snapping his spine in half and toppling off the bed by looping an arm around his torso. It was a testament to how much his mind felt overloaded that Stiles actually would have preferred to be fucking at that moment.

“Hold still,” Peter ordered all too quietly, and Stiles could only watch helplessly as Peter raised one hand, claws slowly extending before him. At the last second, he squeezed his eyes closed, waiting for the familiar sting of Peter’s claws.

Stiles felt like he was wavering in place for several moments before the details started to filter in. First the low buzz of constant sound, the thrum of energy that ebbed and flowed continuously, then the familiar smell; antiseptic, cloyingly clean… comforting.

“Stiles, I’m going to go and get a coffee before we go see your mom. Do you want anything kiddo?” The Sheriff’s voice was such a relief to hear that Stiles nearly cried as he opened his eyes to something familiar. The hallway that led to the long term neurological care wing at Beacon Hill’s hospital looked like any other. The only difference was, it had a set of secured doors that could only be unlocked by staff either at the desk, or wearing an electronic fob that automatically unlocked the
doors. It prevented people who couldn’t always remember where they were from wandering.

Likes Stiles’ mom.

“Can I have Reeses’ Pieces?”

Stiles watched his eight or nine year old self hop from waiting room chair to waiting room chair, the vinyl squeaking under his sneakers with each successful landing and take-off.

“You can if you get down from there,” his dad hissed in reply, looking self-consciously over his shoulder at a nurse down the hall that was giving them the stink-eye. He wasn’t in uniform for once, opting for jeans and a t-shirt. He looked so much younger that way. Stiles watched as his young self hopped down from the last chair with a dramatic flourish, arms flapping like a bird.

“I’m down,” he announced.

“I noticed,” the Sheriff replied dryly, biting his lips to hold back a grin.

“Sit, right there,” the Sheriff ordered, indicating the last chair, “and if you’re still there when I get back, you can have your Reeses.”

Stiles flopped dramatically into the chair. Clearly he was on his way through some sort of growth spurt. His jeans were too short, his t-shirt just a little too tight. His shoes were clearly brand new though—meaning his parents had definitely noticed he was growing and were trying to keep up.

“Okay,” he agreed, staring at his dad earnestly. And teenaged Stiles now knew what his face looked like when he was simply pandering to someone to get them to leave him alone.

He watched as his father backed off down the hall, watching him for as long as he could before turning to the corner, presumably to swing by the visitor’s lounge to get a crappy coffee from the machine, or if he was feeling particularly trusting of Stiles that day, swing downstairs to the cafeteria for the good stuff. The teen’s eyes shifted back to watching himself. It didn’t take long for kid!Stiles to get visibly bored. And teenaged Stiles spotted the plot before it happened.

The nurse on the desk was on the phone, murmuring in hushed tones and she typed information into a computer. A doctor, clad in green scrubs and a lab coat was headed towards the doors of the hospital wing. Stiles vaguely recognized him as one of the neurologists that had worked in the ward and consulted on his mom’s case. The doctor didn’t even slow down as he headed for the doors—meaning he definitely had one of those magic fobs that opened the door and clearly, and Stiles’ young self knew that too.

He felt some sort of tether pull him forward and watched as the doctor approached the door, pushing it open lightly on his approach. Before it had a chance to close, young Stiles had slipped quietly from his chair and followed the doctor into the wing, the nurse at the desk non-the-wiser.

The nurse’s station in the other wing was located in the middle of a ward that was shaped almost like an H. Even without his younger self guiding him, Stiles remembered where his mom’s room had been—around the back of the nurse’s station and down the hall three doors on the right. He was so distracted by the fact that nobody seemed to be stopping him as he navigated the halls to his mom’s room, that he almost ran into the tiny version of himself when he abruptly stopped in the middle of the hall. He looked around, trying to find whatever had captured his young self’s attention and spotted it: a dark haired woman about the same age as his mom, but not hospital staff, entering her room. Dressed in jeans and a crisp, pale blue blouse, shoulder bag draped over her shoulder and across her body, she was clearly a visitor, but Stiles didn’t know her. Which was strange—he’d
Stiles had always known he was a little shit of a kid. Stories about him disappearing in clothing racks at department stores, hiding for the fun of it and wandering off because something caught his eye made up the bulk of his dad’s ‘reasons why I have a heart condition’ list. And it looked as though this particular day was no exception. He watched as his younger self tilted his head, watching the woman enter the room, then quickly moved across the hall and crouched artfully behind a cart of soiled linens, peaking around the edge. Stiles followed, crouching down beside his eight-year-old self to get an idea of what he was seeing as the visitor knocked on the partially ajar door and tentatively entered.

“H-heeeey, how’s it hanging?”

Stiles didn’t know where his heart had been so far, but the force of it slamming into his ribcage at the sound of his mom’s voice almost took his breath away. He stood up straight, crossing the hall quickly, abandoning his younger self in his hiding spot and barreled into his room. Stiles mom was sitting up in her hospital bed. One look, and Stiles knew how close things were to the end. It hadn’t gotten really bad yet. This would have been about the time though that they had realized she couldn’t stay at home anymore. She’d been checked into the hospital for a few days after wandering into the woods alone at night, not returning until the morning after, and only because the Sheriff had put half the department on finding her. She was wearing hospital robes, but had her dark auburn-brown hair pulled into a messy bun on the back of her head.

God, she looks so young, Stiles found himself thinking before his mom continued talking, eyes the colour of carnelian alight and animated with mischief.

“How’s it hanging?”

Stiles heart stalled out. Maybe it was because of recent events, but that sounded suspiciously like his mom knew something that she really couldn’t have known. Either that or she was more far gone than he’d originally thought. His gaze immediately swung towards the other woman in the room. She stood with her arms crossed over her chest, one elegant eyebrow arched above her deep brown eyes, looking utterly and completely done with Claudia Stilinski’s shit. The look was strikingly familiar, and yet he couldn’t quite place it.

“Funny,” she replied wryly. “I’d blame it on the circumstances, but I know this is just another shining example of—”

“My winning personality?” Claudia interjected. And holy shit the sass. Stiles didn’t remember his mom having this much sass.

The other woman groaned theatrically, unfolding her arms to raise her fists in the air like she was going to strangle someone before she pulled her shoulder bag off over her head and collapsed into the visitor’s chair beside the bed.

“Oh you’re a winner alright,” she replied with a smirk. Stiles eyes swept over her again. He felt like she was familiar and yet… not. She was average in height and build, with a mane of thick black hair and tanned skin; Nobody Stiles recognized as a relative or in any of the albums of snapshots his mom had kept. Her expression turned serious.

“How are you?”

“About as can be expected,” Stiles’ mom replied, the mischievous light in her eyes all but gone. Her
gaze shifted to her hands in her lap. “The doctors are saying this is it. I won’t be able to go home this time. They’re looking for ‘long term placement’ for me.” She used air quotes to frame the phrase. “It’s killing John.”

“What about Stiles?” the other woman asked softly. Stiles felt a tingling sensation along his spine at the sound of his name on her lips.

“John hasn’t told him yet,” Claudia replied. “We’re not going to until they’ve found a place for me.”

Stiles glanced over his shoulder out into the hall. From this angle, he could just barely see one of his sneakers poking out from behind the laundry cart. He moved further into the room, paranoid of being noticed despite the fact that he knew he wouldn’t be. He moved until he hovered in the mystery visitor’s space, then crouched next to her. From this vantage point, he could only see the edge of the laundry cart closest to the door. His young self was completely concealed, and totally unnoticed by the two women. He stood up slowly.

“I know we’ve discussed….”

The dark hair woman nodded, sitting up straighter, looking very serious.

“You know I would in a heartbeat, if that’s what you want.”

Stiles jaw dropped open and a prickling realization started to set in.

“I know,” Stiles watched his mother reply softly, picking at her fingernails. “But… I can’t. You said yourself, there is no guarantee that it would work.” The other woman nodded, expression sad.

“I mean, you could… and I might not change. Or what if I completely lose it? What if I don’t know how to control myself and I hurt John? Or Stiles?” the fear in his mother’s voice was evident. She took a deep, shaking breath in. “At least this way, I can’t hurt them… well aside from the crushing loss of watching me slowly lose my mind I suppose…” she muttered.

Stiles felt the tears well up in the corners of his eyes. This really had been the beginning of the end. From here, the slide down hill had been rapid. His mom had gone from being able to recognize him and his dad just like an ordinary mother and wife would have to at best treating them like strangers, at worst, screaming for doctors to keep them away. But something behind those tears robbed him of his breath. They were talking in a code Stiles recognized.

“Claudia…” the woman implored softly, expression deeply saddened seeming to accept the worst, accepting that her friend was choosing just to let go.

When his mom looked up, she had tears in her eyes. She hastily wiped them away, sniffing as she scrubbed at her eyes with the back of a hand.

“There’s something else,” she said softly. “There’s another reason you’re here.”

“As always, your intuition is bang on,” the dark haired woman replied. She looked uncomfortable before she shifted in place, leaning forward so that she could better look into her friend’s face. “It’s Stiles.”

Claudia Stilinski sucked in a breath, chest expanding, shoulders rolling back, and nodded.

“I know,” she replied. “I don’t know what I’m going to do. John doesn’t know, hasn’t got a clue about anything… like this. What is he going to do if Stiles, I don’t know… if he falls out of a tree and breaks his neck and just gets up fifteen minutes later? Or picks up a dead bird because he’s
curious only to have it take flight after a few seconds in his hands. That isn’t normal…” Stiles frowned and tried to quell the storm in his gut. His mom spoke not only like that was like a legitimate concern, but like these things had already actually happened, like they could be repeat incidents. It made him feel ill. He turned towards the doorway, looking into the hall in the direction of himself, still hiding behind the soiled linens bag.

“That isn’t what I meant,” the other woman replied, causing Claudia to turn sharply towards her, scrutinizing.

“I wasn’t worried about that. We would have figured out something, some way of protecting him until he was old enough to learn about all the things he could do. But something has happened,” she replied. “And if we don’t do something, Stiles will be in danger for the rest of his life.”

Stiles heart pounded in his chest. What the hell was happening? Was this a trick? The memory didn’t seem real. Could he trust Peter? Could the werewolf have messed around with something in his head to make him believe something had happened when it hadn’t?

The dark haired woman took a deep breath and stared down at her hands.

“About six months ago, Derek asked me to give his girlfriend Paige the bite…”

Holy shit.

Stiles’ entire world tilted on its axis to the point where he literally became dizzy and uselessly reached out to brace himself on the wall. Though he’d never seen the woman before him in his life, Stiles knew exactly who she was: Talia Hale. Derek’s mom. Peter’s sister. And if he was reading the situation right, she had offered his mom the bite as a way to possibly beat her illness. Resentment, welled up in Stiles’ stomach, but made him feel ill with guilt almost immediately. His mom might have been able to change her fate by asking Talia to give her the bite, change her into a werewolf and she hadn’t done it. Instead she’d let herself die. He wanted to be angry– was– but didn’t feel right holding onto the emotion. Would the healing factor have repaired the ravaged parts of her brain anyway? Or would she have been even more unpredictable and out of control? Need to be… put down, for lack of a better phrase. He had to stay focused. Peter was showing him this for a reason. This memory, for whatever reason, was important.

“Wow, isn’t that a big step?” his mom replied.

“It is,” Talia replied with a nod, “which is why I told him ‘no’, that he needed to wait until she could really make that decision on her own. Ideally, when she was an adult.”

“Wait, is this Paige Altura?” Claudia interjected. Stiles wasn’t that surprised. Before becoming ill, his mother had been an elementary school teacher- librarian. She knew a lot of the kids that he’d grown up with– and their older and younger siblings.

Talia nodded and one of Claudia’s hands fluttered up to cover over her mouth.

“He didn’t try–”

“No,” Talia interjected quickly, her voice soft and sad. “He knows that only an Alpha can turn a human. I sincerely believed that he really loved that girl. He would never have taken such a stupid risk on his own.”

“Then what happened?”

Talia sighed.
“He went to my brother,” she replied grimly. “And, of course, Peter never seems to mind trying to shake up the status quo. As loyal as he is, he doesn’t hesitate to challenge me when the mood strikes him. He put Derek in touch with another pack and I can only assume made arrangements for another Alpha to bite Paige.”

“But what happened then?” Claudia asked softly. It was clear she already had a basic understanding of the outcome. Talia’s shoulder’s heaved.

“The bite didn’t take,” she replied heavily. “I found Derek with her. She was already gone.” She looked up at her friend and held her gaze to dissuade her from reacting just yet. “Claudia, they were at the nemeton.”

Stiles felt the hairs on the back of his neck prickle up at his mother’s reaction. She sat up very straight, looking towards Talia with wide eyes. His own similar feeling made the goosebumps spread out over his flesh as he remembered another conversation– one that had occurred between him and a Hale…

“Some people reject the bite. It happened to someone in my family once… he asked an older wolf to bite his girlfriend, so he could make her a bit more… durable I guess. She died.”

Laura had been talking about her own brother. God, Derek’s track record for relationships was heartbreakingly awful… and none of it was his fault. But Stiles couldn’t focus on that right now, because there was another conversation going on in front of him that was important somehow.

“What? How did they even…” Stiles mom trailed off, expression contemplative. With how lucid she seemed right now, it was hard to believe that she had frontotemporal dementia at all, let alone that she was gone enough to need hospitalization from now until the end of her life.

“Find it?” Talia offered. She shook her head. “For over a hundred years the Hale pack has done a great deal to perpetuate the belief that ‘Beacon Hills’ is just a name, but with that we have a documented history. All Peter or Derek would have needed to do is look and they’d be able to find it. And up until now, there really wasn’t any danger in that. But with my brother, I never bother to ask how anymore. I immediately move on to why.”

“Maybe Derek thought the nematon could have saved Paige…” Stiles’ mother ventured, one hand twisted midair as if she was grasping for something just out of reach.

“Derek had no idea,” Talia replied softly. “After… after Paige was gone, he told me everything. How Peter had been the one to find him Ennis, an Alpha from a pack east of here. How he’d stayed close when Ennis bit Paige and knew that things had gone horribly wrong when she began coughing up black blood. He called Peter in a panic and that was when my brother took them to the nemeton.”

“And you believed him?” Claudia replied with a wince, like she regretted her harsh words, but couldn’t stop them from slipping out.

“I did,” Talia replied seriously, seemingly unoffended by her friend’s inference that Derek had lied. “Now my question is why Peter would have helped Derek save his girlfriend? My brother is many things, but sentimental is definitely not one of them.”

Stiles watched his mom chew on her lower lip, long fingers drumming against her chin.
“It would depend on how much he knew about the nemeton,” she replied, pursing her lips before adding, “or how much he thought he knew.”

“I confronted him about what he knew,” Talia replied with a sigh, “And of course, he told me a half-truth under the guise of ‘bringing our records into the twenty-first century’ by digitizing everything. He told me he found some notes about a tree deep in the preserve and said he was simply trying to help and thought bringing Paige there would save Derek a lot of heartache. I told him not going behind my back when I’d refused my son’s request could have saved Derek a lot of anguish.”

“I still don’t understand what this has to do with Stiles…”

At that, Talia Hale looked pained.

“In the bestiary, we document everything. Every little rumor that we hear, confirm true, disprove,” she replied. “And that includes reference to ‘the spark’— and those known to have possessed that power, and those we suspect.”

“Wait, you’re not saying Stiles is in there?” Stiles’ mom replied, voice rough, like she was breathing around something caught in her throat. Talia hesitated before she shook her head, to which Claudia let out a premature breath of relief.

“No, Stiles isn’t,” Talia replied, “but your family tree is. Your father specifically, is.”

“Okay.” Stiles’ watched his mom reply, steadily breathing in and out, an anti-anxiety breathing technique he recognized all too well. “Okay… but even if Peter found my father, how would he know? I married John, took his last name. Stiles has his last name…” She trailed off, sounding very much like she was trying to convince herself, not the Alpha werewolf, that there was nothing to fear.

“Because the bestiary tracks your family genealogy all the way back to Poland. You’re mentioned as Welik Slonkin’s daughter, and John is listed as your spouse,” Talia explained carefully, “and there is a pattern in your family line— if one looks hard enough… and I’m sure Peter will. I think it is just a matter of time before Stiles is in a lot of danger.”

At that moment Stiles wanted nothing more to go to his mom and give her a big hug, let her know that he was okay… mostly. He vaguely wondered why his younger self hadn’t done that very thing, and when he glanced into the hall, he saw himself starting to emerge from behind the laundry hamper, clearly sensing that something was amiss in the room. Stiles glanced at Talia— if anyone was going to notice him, it was her— but she was too focused on his mom.

“So what do we do?”

Stiles had to hand it to his mom, she sounded a lot calmer than he probably would have sounded. Calmer than even his dad, a seasoned police officer, would have sounded. Talia took a deep breath.

“I’ve already taken some… actions,” she replied. “I can’t do much about the pack’s records. It is my responsibility as the Alpha to preserve them—”

“I know,” Stiles’ mom replied softly. “I don’t expect you to destroy them… you might need them.”

“Right,” Talia said softly with a nod. “So I did the only thing I could do… After everything with Paige, I sat Derek and Peter down, explained to them the gravity of what they’d done. Then I took the memories of the nemeton from both of them— and as much of the pain as I could from Derek.”

“T ook…” Claudia trailed, frowning in response. “How did you…?”
In response, the werewolf raised a single hand and slowly unsheathed the claw hidden in her index finger.

“There’s a place on the back of your neck, here,” she gestured with her hand to the exact place Peter had pricked Stiles. “I can gain access to, and remove, if needed, the memories of another wolf.”

“So… Derek and Peter no longer know where the nemeton is?”

Talia nodded.

“But you have to understand… it is a temporary fix. I’m not worried about Derek. He knows what I did and why. But Peter…” Talia’s expression looked stressed and grim. “I used my position to force him to submit and he resents it. He knows what was done, that he is now missing something. I’m almost afraid I made it worse…” she sighed heavily. “He’s back at Stanford, likely more to blow off steam and plan than to actually take the summer class he told me he’d planned to.”

“But he’ll be back,” Claudia replied. “And he’ll just find the nemeton again…”

“Not only that— he’ll try to find the spark that goes along with it. In some ways, he’s always resented my position as Alpha, and now I’ve wounded his pride. And I know my brother—he’ll want to find a way to put things into balance again, cut me down to size.”

“Do you think he’ll turn on you?”

Talia shrugged.

“Before, I would have said ‘no’, that he would do something to show just how clever he is, remind me of all the reasons he is an excellent Beta. But power can corrupt a person— even just the illusion of the possibility of it and now… I honestly don’t know. I’d feel it before he did– the breaking of the bond…”

“But… if Stiles is the spark…” Stiles’ mother trailed, sounding skeptical.

“He is,” Talia interjected firmly.

“What would Peter do to him if he found him?” Stiles’ mom winced as she asked the question, hands twisting in the bedsheet in front of her.

“I don’t know. But I don’t want to take the risk,” the Alpha replied. She took a deep breath. “And there is really only one way to fully protect Stiles from Peter. I altered our records— the bestiary. They still state where the nemeton is. They still reference your family, but I removed his name from them, so unless someone were to really dig, they wouldn’t easily find Stiles.”

“Thank you,” Claudia breathed.

“You have to realize this is just a stop gap,” Talia replied. “I… whatever happens to you… Stiles will still be what he is. He already knows he is special and that some of the special things he can do are a secret… but as he gets older, his difference is only going to become more obvious. And Peter won’t be the only one to notice.”

“So what are you saying?”

“The nematon acts like a beacon, it attracts the supernatural to Beacon Hills at an unconscious level, a pull like a magnet. Most respect that Beacon Hills is Hale territory and they leave pretty quickly. The others, we deal with.”
“You mean werewolves aren’t the only…”

“Not by a long shot– and keep your voice down.”

Stiles glanced out into the hall to see his younger self completely out from behind the cart, listening carefully to the conversation at hand, stark still, head turned towards the door.

“There is no way to change what Stiles is… but if he doesn’t know…” Talia continued, trailing off.

“It can’t hurt him…” Claudia finished softly.

“I promise you, if you let me do this, it’s reversible. One day I can give him back whatever I take. I can guide him to a mentor that will show him everything he needs to know. Help keep him safe until he can do it all his own. And trust me, he will be more than able to defend himself.”

Stiles’ mom nodded, but she was shaking, breaths noticeably wracking through her frame.

“When?” she asked without looking at her friend.

“It has to be soon.”

“Okay,” she replied, gulping in a breath, nodding. “Okay… but can you do me a favor?”

Talia nodded, expression soft.

“When the time comes, you have to take the memories of what Stiles is from me too. I don’t know what the dementia is going to make me say or do. If Peter– or anyone else– managed to track me down, I might be too far gone to realize what I’m telling them.”

Talia nodded.

“Okay, I promise,” she replied softly before her head snapped towards the door.

“John is coming.”

Stiles looked towards the door to see himself pulling a face moments before he heard his dad say; “Stiles! Thank God” and himself reply “Can I still have my Reese’s?” before everything started to slip into blackness again.

Chapter End Notes

I have been trying for WEEKS to get this sucker posted, but I have this deal with myself that I won’t post a new chapter until the one I have in progress is complete and I just could not get more than an hour at my computer at a time. It was infuriating! So if I ever take forever to post, just come poke me on tumblr!
So I'd had every intention of posting this last night, but we got hit with a huge ice storm up here in Canada Land and it knocked all the power out. If I've neglected to tag something not already tagged, please let me know!

This time, the tension in his shoulders, the pounding in his temples and the feeling that his skull had been stuffed with cotton batting was all too familiar. But this time, Stiles didn’t fight to reach the surface like a drowning man desperate for air. Instead, he felt himself float somewhere between consciousness and sleep, not really thinking or feeling much of anything except letting the world’s most basic details filter in and out around him in little ways. He could feel the sheets against his bare skin, too stiff and starched, itchy, could smell the faint combination of soap from the shower, stale dust from the mattress, and the sounds of something playing on the television in the background, muted, far away, underwater. As consciousness loomed closer, he began to mentally summarize what he knew:

Deaton was right. He was something.

He was magic… or something like that.

What he was, was a ‘spark’.

He had no idea what that meant.

His mom had known, but not his dad.

Talia Hale had known, but not his dad.

Talia Hale had most likely altered his memory so that he didn’t remember what he was.

She did it to protect him.

She’d also altered Peter and Derek’s memories.

Peter wanted him for something.

Wakefulness loomed closer and closer until he could see the glow of the light in the room through the back of his eyelids. Until the muted, tin-can sounding noise in the background became clear. If he’d been more with it he would have snorted in derision; Peter was watching porn.

He blinked up at the ceiling, hoping Peter didn’t notice his wakefulness until after he’d finished jerking off. He let his eyes slip closed again, focused on keeping his heart rate slow and steady as if he were still asleep. That was until he heard it, a broken moan, followed by an even more broken “please”. His stomach plummeted towards his feet and he sat bolt upright, disoriented and sick feeling at what he was sure was the sound of his own voice.

The television was off, blank screen glossy and dark, reflecting Stiles’ stunned expression and Peter’s amused one where he sat against the headboard, a ghost of a smile on his lips. Stiles felt his
mouth open and close a few times as he tried to figure out what to say, what was going on. If he was losing his mind.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen you so tongue tied,” Peter remarked, filling the dead air.

“I’m losing my mind,” Stiles retorted softly. Because he truly felt like it. Like Peter had been inside his head stirring things around. If it hadn’t been for what had happened with Scott earlier at the clinic, he would have been sure Peter had planted a fake memory somehow. As it was, he had a sick sense that it was real.

“What do you want from me?” Stiles found himself asking hollowly. Because he still didn’t get it. Peter was the Alpha. He had everything he could possibly want now, so what purpose could one teenager, even if he was in some way supernatural, possibly serve?

The Alpha moved closer, crowding into the teenager’s personal space in a way that felt even more invasive than it normally did. Having Peter play around in his head was twice as violating as having him toy with him physically, but the combination of the two was almost too much to handle. Stiles felt himself shrinking away, but Peter continued to crowd closer, filling up the space behind him between the headboard and his back, cloaking him like a shadow.

“I think we’ve had enough of the business side of this evening, why don’t we move onto the pleasure?” Peter remarked, placing a kiss to Stiles’ bare collarbone, not at all optimistic.

“Does that mean you’re going to let me go?” Stiles replied wearily. He could feel the wolf’s lips curve into a smile.

“Eventually.”

“Does ‘eventually’ mean I’m going to wake up in the preserve parking lot again?” Stiles asked, as Peter’s hands travelled up his sides, crossed over his abdomen. He tried to keep his eyes from straying towards the crumpled pile of fabric in the corner of the room where the cellphone– his lifeline to Derek– was tucked into the pocket on silent, but couldn’t help when they flitted that way nonetheless. The thought of the other man made his chest constrict. His stomach rolled. He’d slept with Derek the night before… and now he was with his uncle. It didn’t matter what the context was, it felt wrong and his body was rebelling against the contact.

“Hmmm,” Peter purred, feigning deep thought. His growing arousal was readily apparent, pressed against Stiles’ lower back. His expectations for the rest of the night abundantly clear. Stiles though, couldn’t have been further from the same page. His mind was still spinning with too many unanswered questions, too much apprehension about what was going to happen to him when Peter was done.

“Maybe the high school this time,” the wolf finally replied, “or one of your other favorite hang outs.” Stiles couldn’t help snorting.

“Fine, you have your pick of the laundromat, library or sexual health clinic,” he retorted sharply, in an effort to hide just how much the end of the night actually scared him. And maybe, hopefully, to give himself some sort of consolation that Peter didn’t know about where he was staying.

“Or the hospital.”

Stiles bristled at the thought, feeling all too reminded of his vulnerabilities. He froze.

“How did you get that memory of my mom?” he asked, a chill coming over him. He hadn’t remembered it at all until now. So how did he know it was real?
“All I had to do was look,” Peter replied nonchalantly. “I admit, last week, I didn’t know what I was looking for and I had to do a little… digging around. Talia may have cleaned away most of the good stuff,” Peter’s hands were on his stomach, tracing just below his navel before traveling downward slowly, “but she did leave one, little grain of something behind.”

Stiles flinched when Peter’s hand wrapped around his limp penis.

“Could you not do that while we are talking about my mom,” he hissed, trying to pull away.

“You brought it up,” Peter retorted lightly. Stiles squirmed, twisting until Peter released his soft grip.

“How do I know you didn’t make it up?” Even he could feel the blip in his heartbeat indicating that he didn’t put any stock in his own skepticism.

“You know I didn’t. Werewolves may be powerful creatures, but we don’t have the ability to construct what isn’t there” Peter replied. “You’re special, and I need you.” The older man sighed heavily, signalling he was tiring of the conversation, “And right now, I need you to do your job. Bend over.”

“Charming,” Stiles muttered, even as he moved to disentangle himself and do what Peter asked, heart pounding. Peter’s mood was even more difficult to read than usual and he really didn’t know what was coming. The other man didn’t seem like he was in a particularly sadistic mood– more like cat toying with a mouse that he would eventually let go of. But it wouldn’t be the first time the teenager had read him wrong.

Once he was positioned, propped on his elbows and knees, facing away from Peter, he closed his eyes, listening to the Peter around behind him, feeling the mattress subtly tilt as the other man repositioned on his knees.

_All you have to do is let him have what he wants, and it will all be over with. You can go home to Derek and–_

And what? Curl up in bed next to him reeking of someone else? Someone related to him.

His eyes blinked open, focused on the corner with the beat up armchair. It took a few seconds for Stiles to peg the strange feeling of ‘something isn’t right here’, seconds where his asshole subconscious sang that ‘Sesame Street’ song;

_One of these things is not like the other, one of these things just doesn’t belong, can you tell me which thing is not like the other…_

Peter’s bag wasn’t his usual nondescript black Samsonite. In fact, it wasn’t his bag at all. The bag sitting on the armchair was a black leather Gucci overnight bag. It stood out from the dinginess of the hotel room with an almost surreal quality– like a mirage. But Stiles knew he wasn’t imagining things. It was there.

He might not have been entirely with it the night he’d been stupid enough to go to a hotel with Deucalion, but he remembered that black bag, remembered thinking that it made Deucalion look like some sort of kinky, gender-swapped Mary Poppins. That was before his sense of humor left him when he realized just how much the man could make him hurt with that bag of tricks. And now Peter had it. And though Stiles had been sure Peter was the one behind Deucalion’s death all along, this confirmed it.

“You were watching me,” he breathed, trying to clamp down on the utter panic the notion that Peter already knew all about Derek and him brought. He felt Peter freeze behind him, hand stilling where
he’d been petting over the small of Stiles’ back.

“Actually, I was watching him,” Peter replied smoothly. “It’s quite bold, for another wolf to enter another pack’s territory unannounced without first seeing the pack’s Alpha. Then again, I’m sure he thought he could just stroll on in, thinking my dear niece had left the metaphorical door wide open.”

Peter moved then, lifting his weight of the bed to leave the space behind Stiles vacant as he moved to the side, stepping into Stiles’ view in order to cup the side of his face.

“Naturally, when he came across you, I followed.”

Stiles jerked away, rearing back into a sitting position, just out of Peter’s reach.

“Because you were jealous?”

“Because I was suspicious– remember, I’d just plucked that little interaction between Talia and your mother from your supple young mind. I knew what you were and I suspected Deucalion might have known the same– if only on some subconscious kind of level. I had to be ready to defend what was mine if necessary.”

Stiles swallowed hard– Peter had followed them to the hotel, and with his werewolf hearing, probably heard exactly what they’d been doing. Until now, the man hadn’t really acted particularly jealous of Stiles’ tricks, just as long as he didn’t flaunt where he’d been. Tonight marked a worrying change in Peter’s pattern of behaviour.

“Did you kill Deucalion because of me?” Stiles asked, voice hoarse as he tried to clamp down on the impending panic the question brought.

“Not entirely,” Peter replied with a shrug. “I followed you both to the hotel, and I listened, learned that, with enough persuasion, and maybe a cute accent, you’ll do just about anything.”

Stiles felt his entire body heat with equal parts shame and rage at the invasion of his privacy and the harsh truth of what he did to survive.

“Deucalion came to Beacon Hills because he sensed a vulnerability– one so gaping wide and obvious he saw no need to bring the rest of his pack with him. I’m sure he thought he could waltz right in and just take,” Peter spat the last word with distaste before his face transformed in such an unsettling way that the heat Stiles felt in his skin was instantly replaced by a bone-deep chill at the facial expression. “And what’s more, he wanted you the same way I do. He didn’t know it yet, but it wouldn’t have taken long for him to figure out. He would have called his hounds to Beacon Hills, and if you think I am unpleasant, they would have shown you a whole new level of misery.” Stiles shivered, imagining an entire group of men– and maybe women, just like Deucalion and Peter. “I couldn’t let that happen.” Peter’s expression twisted psychotically and his voice softened. “My only choice was to send a very clear message.”

“So you knew it was him that did this all along?” Stiles replied, gesturing to the marks he knew were still all over his back. “And you still acted as if it was my fault, like–”

“Like everything in life, you had a choice Stiles,” Peter replied condescendingly, “Stay or go, lies or truth, the easy road or the hard road. And you chose to go with the wrong Alpha.”

The truth to those words was more than what Peter had intended.

“So now what?” Stiles replied weakly. He really didn’t want to know the answer.
“Now?” Peter replied. “Now I’m getting tired of discussing politics.”

Stiles watched as Peter turned and unzipped the bag in the chair with a flourish.

“Let’s see here,” he pondered aloud, one hand fishing through the bag. “Deucalion certainly had some interesting toys…”

Stiles felt a frisson of fear roll though him. Peter had managed to harm him in unfathomable ways without any help, and now he had a bag full of torture devices. Stiles couldn’t even remember more than a handful of items in there, but he knew that Peter was going to make him pay for some sort of invisible wrong he’d done. He found himself inching backwards on the mattress, trying to subtly place himself out of Peter’s reach as the man searched through the bag one handed, mouth quirked into an amused smirk.

The items Peter turned around with were innocuous enough; a long length of black silk fabric that Stiles was pretty sure Deucalion had used as a blindfold, and a length of rope– the same Stiles knew had been tied to the headboard in the classy hotel Deucalion had taken him to because the rope wouldn’t ruin the beautiful wooden bedframe and wouldn’t rattle like handcuffs. Unfortunately at the Comfort Plus the headboard was already sufficiently battered, and nobody here would notice or care about rattling noises coming from the room next door.

“Now I remember you saying, ‘kinky shit’ was extra,” Peter drawled as he sauntered closer. “How much extra is it for me? Especially with all that I have so generously shared with you this evening?”

Stiles glared at Peter until he realized he did have one currency to work with:

“I’ll do what you want if you let Scott out of his wolf.”

For once in his life, Stiles had nothing to say. There was nothing he could say that would get him a reprieve so he was devoid of any witty remarks, mouth full of grit.

He thought about Derek.

When Peter started to use the length of rope to bandy Stiles’ arms behind his back, folded with one hand gripping each elbow, he reminded himself that Derek didn’t hate him for this– he hated Peter. He tried not to think about how all of that could change when they reunited later, Stiles reeking of someone else’s skin. He’d been holding together just fine until Peter slipped the rope around his neck. He flinched away violently, almost pitching straight forward onto the mattress from his position balanced on his knees in the middle of the bed, a hoarse “don’t” falling from his lips.

Peter of course, effortlessly caught him around the waist, large hand pressed flat against his belly. Without a word, he replaced the rope where it had been. Stiles shook with what he would have loved to label anger, but knew firmly rested in the category of terror. He realized what Peter had done the second the man’s hands fell away.

If he struggled too much– which really wasn’t much at all– he’d choke himself.

When Peter lowered the piece of silk over his eyes, Stiles’ entire being was focused on not having the panic attack waiting in his periphery. If he panicked, he’d try to run, and if he tried to run, he’d probably strangle himself and either make Peter angry, or amused– neither of which would bode well for him. In the back of his mind, Stiles was sure that one small misstep tonight would lead to Peter changing his mind about whether to bite him or not– especially since he had too readily agreed to allowing Scott some modicum of freedom again. It made him think there was some sort of catch.
For several seconds, Stiles wobbled unsteadily, just waiting for Peter to do something. After several seconds of just feeling Peter lurk behind him, the werewolf used the trail of rope connecting Stiles arms to his neck to push him forward, guiding his descent to the mattress until he was face down, all of his weight on his shoulders, ass in the air. The silence was almost too much for Stiles; like he’d been almost completely sensory deprived instead of just blindfolded and bound.

He could hear Peter shuffling behind him, the weight of the mattress shifting underneath him. It jostled his shoulders, made them ache, and he found himself trying to compensate for the discomfort by shifting his own weight, trying to hold himself up with his stomach muscles. He’d get tired quickly and he knew it.

When Peter’s hands rested on his ass, he took a deep, shuddering breath and braced himself. He felt his skin heat, his face and chest no doubt becoming red. Peter seemed to relish the reaction, if the slowness of his movements was any indication. When the werewolf leaned forward and licked one long path over Stiles’ entrance, he felt revulsion well up inside, a sick torrent that felt a lot like nausea, but without the inevitable end that the feeling normally brought; sickness and eventually relief, just perpetual torture.

Several long minutes passed before Peter abruptly stopped, and pulled away. Stiles felt his entire body tense, preparing for the same brand of pain Deucalion had dealt the other night, the pain he knew Peter was capable of inflicting, but it never came, instead, one of Peter’s hands groped between his legs.

“What’s the matter? You appeared to be having fun in Deucalion’s little amateur film when he was doing this to you.”

It took several seconds for Stiles to parse what Peter had said. He realized first that, for once, his normally disobedient body actually realized how sick his situation was and he wasn’t hard. The second realization would have killed any hint of physical arousal he had shown– Peter had been watching the tape Deucalion had. Which meant Peter had video of Stiles…

His first instinct was to try and move, and again that night, Stiles found himself proud of his mind/body separation.

“Yeah well, anything would probably have felt like ‘fun’ compared to being whipped repeatedly for twenty minutes first,” he settled on retorting instead, voice hoarse and weak, barely mustering the level of snark he was going for. His mind was too busy reeling with the thought that Peter had watched him. He’d told himself that night that nobody was ever going to see that tape anyway, that it was just some old pervert’s spank bank material… but now it had changed hands. He knew Peter– this wouldn’t just be something for the man to keep as a momento– it was a weight to hold Stiles down with.

Peter chuckled.

“Well maybe that’s the trick then? Replace his marks with some of my own?” Before Stiles could object, he felt Peter rise from the mattress.

“Peter please,” he croaked, trying to lift himself from the mattress with more and more urgency as he listened to the other man sift through the contents of Deucalion’s bag.

He’d always been able to take whatever had happened to him– sometimes barely– out of lack of any other option. He’d had nowhere to land at the end of a night other than the peace and quiet of the preserve where he could lick his wounds in the back of his Jeep, take the time to rest when he needed to before promising himself not to be so stupid again. It was how he’d managed to create all
of his rules. And then he’d met Peter. And thus far, he had always somehow crawled away amazed
he’d made it. But maybe even more damaging, was Derek. Because Derek had given him the one
thing he’d resigned himself to never having; someone who cared about him. And he was going to
throw that back in Derek’s face by coming back to him a damaged, beaten shell. By pushing him to
the very edge of their newfound relationship right away. And if Derek walked away– like any sane,
normal person would do– Stiles wasn’t sure he could come back from that.

“What do you want?” he asked, tired, exhausted even.

“I want to know what’s wrong with you tonight,” Peter retorted.

“You want to know what’s wrong with me?” Stiles asked incredulously. “You have me tied up and
blindfolded on a dirty motel room bed. You have hurt me almost every time I’ve been near you, and
you want to know what is wrong with me? Why I can’t get a fucking boner? Do the math.”

For several seconds, maybe even as long as a minute, Peter was completely silent. When he moved,
Stiles was expecting something sudden, some sharp, stabbing reminder of where the power balance
was, but it didn’t come.

Instead came a click, and a low humming sound.

“Maybe the trick is to put something on to put you in the right mood?” Peter offered lightly. It took a
moment for the sound to register in the teenager’s expectant ears; traveling out of the television’s
shitty speakers and filtering through the room as if coming from inside a tin can, but when it did, Stiles recognized his own whimpered begging, punctuated by unabashed cries of pain, and
Deucalion’s murmured praise. He wanted to shield his ears from the sound, but his body had other,
less rational plans. Like trying to get up so he could utterly destroy whatever it was Deucalion had
recorded him on and Peter now had. Of course, that meant he struggled, and in doing so, moved his
arms enough for the rope to press into his neck just under his Adam’s apple, brain so focused on its
search and destroy mission that it took several moments for Stiles to coordinate the effort to stop.
When he did, despite behind blindfolded, black spots dotted his vision and he was lying on his
side… and the tape played on.

“Turn it off,” he finally demanded, voice sounding like he’d swallowed gravel– no force to it. He
was surprised Peter didn’t just laugh and retort, “no”– and nervous when the other man didn’t seem
to do anything at all.

Suddenly there was a dip in the mattress again and Stiles was choking, struggling as Peter lifted him
and manipulated him into a new position sitting between the other man’s legs, back and bound arms
to chest, before using one hand to yank the blindfold off and toss it aside.

“I’ll make you a deal,” Peter purred in his ear, warm breath too hot and smothering, “I’ll turn the tape
off if you make a little effort to entertain me. As you have pointed out to me on numerous occasions;
you are a teenager. And with your vocation, I’m sure you have no shortage of material to work
with… if you catch my drift.”

Stiles eyes were fixed on his on-screen doppelganger, hands bound in front of him and tethered to
the headboard. The camera was in a fixed position– Stiles couldn’t be sure whether it had simply
been left on a dresser or whether Deucalion had brought a tripod. At that point in the night, he’d
been too out of it to understand much of what was going on. The frame showed Stiles’ entire body
and most of the bed, a view from the side, but for the most part, Deucalion was only visible between
his knees and shoulders. It didn’t appear he had framed things in such a way in a deliberate attempt
to hide his identity, so much as he’d clearly intended the tape to be for his own consumption later and
had little interest in himself.
Stiles watched as Deucalion—shirtless but still wearing his black trousers, tossed aside the belt he’d been brandishing. It landed with a dull thunk outside of the frame and Stiles knew what was coming next, but in the frame he barely stirred—shoulders sagging slightly—probably in misguided relief.

“If you want, maybe I can assist…” Peter prompted, fingers dancing over the back of Stiles’ shoulder before the feeling of flesh morphed into the chilling sensation of a single claw extending, tracing a path to the tender, damaged flesh at the back of Stiles’ neck. “I’m sure I could find just the right material to help you along.”

Stiles snapped his head forward so forcefully, he almost vomited at the smothering choke of the rope around the front of his neck. Because if Peter dug through his memories with the intent of finding something erotic, Stiles wouldn’t be able to stop him from finding Derek. And if Peter had been jealous of Deucalion (even if he wouldn’t admit it) and it was clear Stiles hadn’t enjoyed himself with the man, Peter would be downright murderous to find out what Stiles’ memories revealed about his time with Derek.

“No?” Peter questioned all too playfully, but Stiles still felt the single claw dull back down to a blunt, human nail once more before the man pressed impossibly closer, crushing Stiles’ arms between them, straining his shoulders. “Then I suggest you start thinking pleasurable thoughts,” Peter concluded before sealing his lips directly over one of Derek’s marks.

Stiles was exhausted. His shoulders ached from bearing most of his weight for so long and his wrists, elbows and neck were rubbed raw, not so much from struggling to free himself as struggling to keep his balance against Peter’s demands. After replacing the blindfold, Peter hadn’t been particularly rough, if he had been, Stiles was sure he wouldn’t have managed to both conjure the few, fleeting memories he dared and fight off the revulsion that he felt while doing so.

But now Peter’s pace was punishing and Stiles had his eyes squeezed closed, mouth open, panting in air, trying to hold back the noises of exertion that threatened to fall from his lips and satisfy Peter all too much. He was losing his erection, unable to split his focus enough to keep it in spite of Peter’s rough play. And that didn’t escape the werewolf’s notice. He slowed his pace, curling over Stiles’ back, the shift in weight becoming enough that Stiles finally groaned out his protest, shoulders and neck screaming at the strain.

“You know, werewolves can actually be ideal lovers,” Peter remarked in Stiles’ ear. “Our heightened senses let us read our partners’ bodies like a book.” He pulled away just enough to change his angle slightly and thrust to perfectly hit Stiles’ prostate and wrench a groan of a completely different variety out of the teen. “We can feel your heartbeat more acutely, even hear it. I know what makes your heart race with exhilaration, or fear. I can hear it trip and stumble along when you’re in pain.” Peter paused, hands tracing over Stiles’ arms.

“Do you want me to untie you?”

Stiles felt his own heart pound with the prospect of being released, and would have tried better to fight against giving Peter the satisfaction of being right if he’d had the energy to.

“What do you think?” he spat instead, sheets muffling his retort. Behind him, Peter chuckled softly.

“I think, that you look beautiful in those ropes, but that you’re nearing having had enough.”

In one quick movement, Peter must have severed the rope connecting Stiles’ bound arms to his neck. He could instantly breathe easier, the rope slack, slipping away. The relief was so intense, Stiles
almost didn’t feel Peter withdraw from him; The feeling was completely secondary to the rope around his arms being loosened, blood rushing back into the limbs only to sting with pins and needles as his limbs prickled into wakefulness once more.

Stiles hands dropped uselessly down at his sides, numb and rubbery. He winced as he struggled to get them under his torso, limbs too weak and shaky to allow for anything more than pulling himself onto his elbows, and even then he wasn’t sure how long he could last.

“Better?” Peter queried, sounding all too self-satisfied and amused.

“Just finish already,” Stiles groaned in frustration. He didn’t care anymore about what could be taken as an act of submission versus subordination. His arms shook tellingly and he finally gave them the rest they deserved, shoulders aching as he pulled his forearms up far enough to be able to cradle his head before attempting to flop down onto the mattress.

Several seconds passed in which Stiles just lay still and breathed steadily in and out before he realized Peter wasn’t in bed with him anymore. He thought about shoving the blindfold off but decided that seeing what Peter had in store for him wasn’t going to help him do anything but panic and do something stupid. When Peter’s touch returned, it was impossibly light, a single digit tracing over Stiles’ calf from ankle to knee, a slow, meandering path.

“You submit so sweetly,” Peter marveled, voice low and soft, lacking its usual arrogant drawl.

“It’s not submission,” Stiles retorted, but his words made him feel small; every bit the stupid, rebellious teenaged stereotype. “It’s playing the odds.”

“Odds?” Peter chuckled, and though Stiles couldn’t see, he could practically feel Peter’s eyebrow raise.

“Yeah– the odds of you beating the shit out of me significantly lower if I just let you do what you want.”

“It took you awhile to learn that lesson,” Peter replied, as if surprised Stiles had managed to figure it out even this early in the game.

“Too long,” Stiles muttered.

“I like you Stiles,” Peter replied and Stiles snorted. “I like seeing how far you’ll bend for me without breaking.”
The Broken Limb on the Family Tree

Chapter Notes

So wow long update wait. Let me explain; Like a lot of fic writers, I typically work ahead by a few chapters at a time, and I have this personal rule where I only allow myself to post when the chapter I’ve just concluded writing is done. Of course, this was the month I scrapped everything partway through that chapter and started again. Because reasons.

Anywho: Never in a million years did I think it would take me 32 chapters to get to the scene at the end of this chapter. Like so much of my writing, this scene happened in a dream and ended up snowballing into one giant verse that finally made its way out of my head and developed into this story. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Derek sat on the edge of the bed—Stiles’ side—and stared out the bedroom window at the fire escape, something inside him reeled tight to the point of almost breaking. It was rare that he’d ever felt this way in New York, and on the rare occasion that he found himself so tense and distracted that he couldn’t sleep, he usually went for the kind of run that lasted so long he’d be too bone tired and weary by the time his feet found home again to even bother showering. The last time he’d felt like this had been when Laura stopped answering her phone and instead of run, he’d drove across the country.

He wasn’t going anywhere. He’d spent half of the night actively avoiding looking at the only two clocks in the house—the one in the kitchen and the alarm clock in the bedroom. A few times, early on, he’d slipped, only to realize Stiles was still safe, with Scott at Deaton’s. That was when he’d decided he needed a distraction, one consuming enough to keep him from constantly looking at the clock, but one that would also keep him in the apartment so that when Stiles came back, he was ready.

His distraction came in the form of a question.

What is Stiles?

Granted, Derek’s experience with various supernaturals was relatively limited; most kept to themselves to avoid too much attention from humans, so he didn’t have much of a frame of reference to work with, but he’d never seen or heard of anything with eyes that glowed the same shade of liquid copper that Stiles’ had. He was never going to get the image out of his mind; Stiles head thrown back against the pillow in pleasure, eyes closed until they flew open, revealing eyes that glowed like a wolf’s but in a colour Derek had never seen.

In any other circumstance, he’d have immediately stopped and run, as far as he could. He’d had enough experience with people pretending to be something they weren’t. But Stiles was different. He hadn’t even known. That in itself hadn’t been enough to trust Stiles’ completely. Any creature who knew enough about werewolves knew how to evade their innate ability to lie. What had stopped Derek from pushing Stiles away had been the feeling that had come over him when he’d stared into those eyes—hell, when he even thought about them—the overwhelming feel of warmth that emanated from them. Basking in the glow of Stiles’ eyes was like all of the best things; Wrapping yourself in
towels straight from the dryer, rich hot chocolate waiting for you after shoveling snow, or an exhilarating hike in the woods, your favorite food after a long time without it.

They hadn’t talked about it. There had been too many other, much more pressing concerns at the time. But now Derek was couldn’t ignore the pressing need to know. He knew his uncle well enough to know that he would have chosen Stiles for a specific reason— and he wouldn’t have acted on a gamble, he had to have known something, if not about Stiles specifically, than about the type of being he thought Stiles was. And there was only one place Derek knew of that Peter could find something like that: The Hale Pack Beastiary. He just hoped Laura had thought to bring it with her to Beacon Hills and that she’d left it behind at the apartment the night that she died.

At one point in time, the Beastiary had been kept in one large, leather bound book that had been bound and rebound dozens of times over, if the variations in paper were anything to go by. But someone in the last couple of decades had digitized the volume— a fact Derek found unusual considering that his mother had been one of the most technology abhorring people Derek had ever known. In some ways, Derek thought it was a smart idea— this way if anything happened to the book itself, at least they had a copy. This also made Derek uneasy, after all, the original copy had managed to survive without losing a single page for hundreds of years, and one little computer file could so easily fall into the wrong hands. Laura had kept the file on a non-descript black thumbnail drive attached to a lucky rabbit’s foot keychain. She’d never kept that a secret from Derek, just in case— ‘In case you ever need it. In case I can’t help you.’

Derek stood up. It stood to reason that the Beastiary was somewhere in the apartment, so he may as well start looking. At least it would take his mind off of what Stiles was doing.

It didn’t take long to find anything in a one bedroom apartment really. And Derek and Laura had always kept their lives fairly simple since the fire. Derek found Laura’s laptop under the bed, Netflix still queued up to play ‘Pitch Perfect’. He snorted, picturing Laura laughing her characteristically obnoxiously loud cackle while sitting in bed, let out a shaky breath when he realized he’d never hear it again. Then he set the laptop on the bedroom dresser for safe keeping. The thumb drive? That took a little longer, and when Derek did find it, almost an hour later, a thrill of uneasiness tickled across his shoulders, dipping down his spine to settle in a tense mass.

Laura had never been a paranoid person, yet Derek found the drive hidden like she was– taped to the back of a drawer of one of the living room end tables. The only reason that Derek had even found it was that he had knocked the remote control off of the table, bent to pick it up and just caught sight of a tuft of fur at the back of the table, right near the wall.

He stared at the drive, attached to the worn rabbit’s foot keychain, marveling at how tiny the thing was. It was hard to believe that this had replaced one giant book. He went back to the bedroom and retrieved the laptop before settling in on the couch to do some research. He closed out of Firefox and for good measure, disconnected from the free wifi Laura had been mooching off of from downstairs.

“Guess paranoia’s contagious,” he muttered aloud as he plugged in the thumb drive. When he opened up the PDF Laura had labeled “CrazyCatLady_memoire”, it opened some forty or so pages in. Ordinarily Derek would have skipped past whatever Laura had been reading, but this time, he paused, one heading jumping off the page: Healing Factor. He stared for several seconds as pieces of the puzzle slowly started to fit together.

On the page was a fairly comprehensive list of all the various ailments and injuries that could befall anyone— werewolf or otherwise, and beside each, various notations and anecdotes about how the
healing factor in werewolves worked– or in some cases, what its limitations were. In any other circumstance, the book being left open to this page would have been insignificant. It was a section that had aroused a lot of morbid curiosity in Derek when he was younger, but now Derek knew Laura had likely had a purpose in looking there. His eyes lingered on one subsection: Burns.

As difficult as it was, Derek moved on. Peter had miraculously made a full recovery– he could figure out why and how later. For now, he needed to focus on Stiles.

Whoever had digitized the Beastiary had done a rudimentary job. Derek supposed even that was a lot of work. Each large page had been scanned into the computer to maintain all of the original notes and languages– but that also meant that Derek couldn’t simply enter “glowing eyes” into Acrobat’s search field and find anything– he’d have to go page by page and read, or at least skim, for relevant information.

Derek lost himself in his research until very abruptly, he couldn’t focus any longer. He tore his eyes away from the computer, his hearing sharpening, trying to detect a threat that wasn’t there. The apartment was quiet, but not suspiciously so, with only the usual level of noise from the refrigerator running and the few noises that managed to filter in from the street below. As Derek’s eyes swept over the kitchen and spotted the time, it dawned on him: Stiles would be meeting up with Peter now. Instead of his subconscious calming now that he’d found the source of his disquiet feeling Derek could all but feel his nervous system readiness a fight response– except there was nothing for him to fight, no outlet for the growing desire to find the thing that had provoked such a feeling and destroy it. Normally, he would have gone for a run, but he didn’t want to leave the apartment, in part because he was afraid Stiles would return before he could, and in part because he knew without a doubt that if he left the apartment, his feet would carry him to the motel where Stiles was and he would rip Peter to shreds.

Except he couldn’t because Peter was the Alpha– and therefore stronger than him. He could easily do the same to Derek that he’d done to Laura and that would leave Stiles even more vulnerable than he had been before.

He exhaled roughly, pushing the laptop aside in favor of leaning back against the couch, hands behind the back of his neck, eyes closed. As much as he wanted to believe that the sudden onset of malcontent was because his subconscious had filled away the information about where Stiles would be and when, he couldn’t help but feel there was something more to it than that. He swallowed down the lump in his throat from a feeling that was stinging familiar: helplessness. It went against every instinct he had to be patient, to sit and do nothing– but he had to. He sighed before dragging the laptop closer again.

Derek was distractedly scrolling through the Beastiary, not really reading so much as skimming. He’d ordered enough Thai food for him and Stiles and tucked Stiles’ in the fridge for later. His own sat in a takeout container, half eaten, chopsticks sticking almost straight up in the pile of noodles. The feeling of unease Derek felt hadn’t subsided in the slightest but Derek had resigned himself to the fact that there was nothing he could do and focused on distraction instead.

He had just leaned over the to grab the takeout container once more, his left hand tapping the keyboard as he scrolled absentmindedly when something caught his eye. The Beastiary was quite text heavy, but it also contained detailed illustrations, some better than others. But even the best paled in comparison to the extraordinary detail of the one Derek found himself looking at now. It took him several seconds to realize that whoever had drawn the highly detailed image of a tree hadn’t drawn it on a small, letter sized piece of paper, but a much larger piece that at one point must have been
folded and tucked into the Beastiary, if the creases were anything to go by. Derek frowned, realizing that there were things written on the page, and clicked to zoom in as he brought a mouthful of Pad Thai to his lips.

He was looking at a family tree— an incredibly detailed, multi-generational record that looked to go back to the 1700s. He scrolled, fascinated because he knew it wasn’t his family’s history. His father had largely Irish and Welsh history, his mother Icelandic and Navajo. But the names on the tree were most definitely not in line with this. As he scrolled, looking at more recent generations he should have known if the tree was of his family, Derek began to recognize some Czech and Polish.

“Why would we have someone else’s family tree?” he muttered to the empty apartment. He set down his food and pulled the laptop closer, panning across the image. Under each name was a birth, and for many, a death, along with a location for both. There were various notations and symbols too, none of which Derek understood. He zoomed out, looking for some sort of a legend but found nothing. Frustrated, he clicked back in, zooming close enough that the words ‘Beacon Hills, CA’ jumped out at him close to the edge of the screen. He was in the upper portion of the tree now, the more recent generations, with birthdates all within the last hundred years. He could now see why the tree had ended up in the Beastiary— the Hales had lived in Beacon Hills almost as long as there had been a Beacon Hills and they had always kept tabs on supernatural occurrences and beings that passed through their territory. Derek could only venture a guess that the symbols near certain names had something to do with that.

Whoever the family was, they were dying out. At the top of the tree were only a few names; One made reference to a death in Poland over fifteen years ago, another about five years ago. Derek’s eyes settled on a name— Claudia Waliczek, born in Wroclaw, Poland in 1975. Died in 2011— just 36 years old. She was the only name with a direct line connecting her to someone else. Derek’s eyes followed it to Johnathan Carter Stilinski, born in Beacon Hills, 1972. There was no death.

Derek felt like he’d been hit with a tonne of bricks. As several pieces of information hit him at once, because how common of a name could ‘Stilinski’ be?

Sheriff John Stilinski, the man who had been a deputy the night that Derek lost almost his entire family. He still remembered the man’s face, wavering between grim determination, anger, and sympathy as he tried his best to comfort Derek and Laura at the station.

Sheriff John Stilinski as in Stiles’ dad.

Derek frowned. He knew he was right— the John and Claudia on the tree had to be Stiles’ parents— but according to the tree, they were childless. He zoomed in closer on the image— as if that would help, and that was when he spotted it: two tiny, almost undetectable details. This close, there wasn’t just a single line between Claudia and John’s names. It was the tiniest mark, barely noticeable, but it was there— the beginnings of a vertical line that should have led to John and Claudia’s offspring— to Stiles. On its own, the line would have been unremarkable, easily mistaken for a speck of dirt on the scanner from whomever had taken the time to digitize the tree, but above the line and to the right, almost blending in with the foliage of the tree, was a symbol. It looked like a diamond with a circle enclosed in the center, a cross bisecting the entire thing.

Derek zoomed out, and spent the next several minutes scanning the entire page, counting the amount of times the symbol appeared. In all of the many generations, going back hundreds of years, that particular symbol appeared only eight times, the most recent being Stiles’ maternal grandfather. He zoomed into the place where Stiles should have been, and finally noticed a slight repetition, an odd smudging in the pattern of the paper’s grain. Someone had gone out of their way to remove Stiles from the family tree— and Derek wanted to know why.
Stiles felt as though someone had opened him up and hollowed him out like some macabre human jack-o-lantern. The worst part was recognizing the feeling. He’d felt that same way after Peter had retrieved him from the Hale house not all that long ago. He never knew what to expect from Peter, but the side the wolf had shown was possibly even more cruel than usual. He’d set about proving his previous point about werewolves being ideal lovers and Stiles’ stupid, traitorous body had eventually fallen for it— but not without a fight. He felt some satisfaction in knowing, for the first several minutes, Peter hadn’t been very successful, unfortunately he’d figured out all too quickly what stimuli Stiles’ brain was able to filter out as unwanted, and what it couldn’t ignore being associated with pleasure.

It was all too much like the first night and Stiles had waited for the axe to fall, for Peter to flip that switch Stiles knew he possessed and turn aggressive again. In a way it would have been a relief; to know that Peter was doing this just to torment him, but he wasn’t sure what the man was doing anymore. In the end, Stiles had ended up on his side, both wrists clamped in one of Peter’s broad fists, pinned to the mattress because he’d kept scrambling to pull away, while the other man nailed into his prostate at an agonizingly steady, slightly too slow pace. By that time Peter had memorized every nuanced touch he needed to, and was playing Stiles’ body like a finely tuned instrument. He’d come with Peter’s name on his lips but cut off his beg for the man to stop. Peter had quickly rolled them over and absolutely pounded into Stiles spent body, coming with his jaw clamped around Stiles’ shoulder, hard enough to bruise.

“If you knew— or even suspected I was a ‘spark’, then why didn’t you just... I dunno, ask me or something?” Stiles asked, chest heaving between panted breaths when Peter eventually pulled away to sit up. He rolled over onto his back, biting his lip to keep from groaning, “Hell, all I probably would have wanted at the time was a couple hundred bucks to let you do whatever to figure it out.”

At that, Peter leveled him with a look from the end of the bed that clearly sneered ‘please’.

“You’re a clever boy, figure it out,” he declared as he sauntered towards the bathroom, leaving the door open as he disappeared from view.

Stiles stared up at the ceiling, noticing a small spot of water damage near the corner he’d never noticed before, probably because it had been painted over and was just barely visible on the textured ceiling. He reviewed the events of the night he met Peter, and nothing really set off alarm bells. The man could have been cruising for any teenaged ass. He’d just gotten back into town, so it was reasonable to guess…

His dad. Peter had been watching out for whoever came to visit his dad because he knew the Sheriff was somehow tied to the ‘spark’ he was looking for, on either a conscious or unconscious level.

“You were watching my dad, waiting to see who could come visit him,” he voiced aloud.

“And?” Peter called.

“And then I did and you knew…”

“I suspected.”
“But that doesn’t explain why you…” Stiles couldn’t really find the right words, something like ‘rape’ was too simple for the level of violence he’d experienced at Peter’s hands, the psychological abuse that came with never knowing if he was around the corner watching him, and willingly subjecting himself to that over and over again…

“Control,” he breathed out, knowing that despite the fact that he’d barely made a sound over a whisper, Peter could hear him. He pulled himself up into a seated position, muscles aching and protesting the whole way, but there was no way he wanted to give Peter the satisfaction of having this conversation on such uneven ground. The other man appeared around the corner and stood framed in the doorway, toothbrush dangling between his fingers, smirk drawing his lips up in one corner, the epitome of smug.

“Loyalty,” he corrected.

“You thought beating me and blackmailing me into submission would make me loyal?” Stiles hissed. “Again, I repeat, I’m fucking homeless with a dad in hospital that needs me. And if I let him down, the bill doesn’t get paid, they pull the plug on him. You could have won my ‘loyalty’ by just continuing to pay me, whether you wanted to fuck me or not.”

Peter tilted his head in mock consideration.

“But could I have? Really?” he asked, tone turning dark and mocking, facial expression hardening as he stalked forward. “How long before you’d squirreled enough away to have no need of me? Before you ran off? You would have left me the moment you felt you had a choice.”

The werewolf seated himself on the bed, menacingly close and Stiles felt is hackles rise in warning, every muscle coiling tight in anticipation of something awful.

“So you needed something to keep me under your thumb,” he surmised cautiously.

“That a boy,” Peter replied softly. With his free hand, he reached out to cup Stiles’ jaw, fingers grazing over the wounds on the back of his neck.

“You wanted me to be afraid of you,” Stiles replied. When Peter shook his head slowly, the teen’s blood ran cold.

“I wanted you to fear the idea of abandoning me and I think we’ve finally reached that point, don’t you?” the werewolf asked, thumb grazing over Stiles’ jawbone in the perfect, poetic juxtaposition to the fingers dancing over the back of his neck.

“But I am afraid of you,” Stiles retorted, the admission stinging.

“If you were so afraid of me, than you wouldn’t have come with my name on your lips less than ten minutes ago,” Peter chastised. Stiles felt his skin itch and burn with disgust, but not for Peter, for himself. Peter released his chin, looking too smug and satisfied.

“Everything in this world is about sex,” Peter remarked. “Except of course, sex itself; Sex is about power.” He stood up strode back towards the bathroom. Seconds later, Stiles heard the rush of water as Peter turned on the taps for a shower. But the other man didn’t bother to return for him. He wavered in place for a moment against the headboard in uncertainty. He knew what he wanted to do– he wanted to put on his clothes, stumble out to his Jeep and chance being able to get into the high school to shower before driving back to the apartment and Derek. But he was smart enough to know better than to try. Instead, he sank back down onto the mattress and pulled the discarded comforter over himself, hoping to at least catch some sleep while Peter showered, but more so that
he’d be lucky enough for Peter to tell him he was done for this week and he could go home.

It dawned on him when he was on the cusp of sleep; what Peter’s little talk had meant in relation to everything. Peter had given away something important even though he’d meant his statement as a threat. Stiles wasn’t a werewolf like Scott, Peter couldn’t just howl a command and make it stick, so he needed a way—other than mere blackmail—to make Stiles submit. Not just give up or surrender, but utterly change a part of him. Like an abusive lover, Peter wanted to make sure that Stiles’ whole world was about him and he appeared to be doing a decent job of it. But his lecture also hinted at something deeper— that Peter didn’t have Stiles where he wanted him yet. The thought was both a small victory, and utterly terrifying. Stiles had never thought of himself as having much to leverage, but faced with losing it, he realized he did; his dad, Scott, Lydia… Derek. Peter could use them all, but Stiles’ had a sick feeling he was saving them for later. He was going to try and break Stiles a different way first.

Stiles knew he hadn’t dosed off for long, when he blinked awake it was to the sounds of dripping water and a light tinkling sound near the foot of the bed. He turned to see Peter at the foot of the bed, just finishing buckling his belt.

“He stirs,” Peter remarked with a smirk. Stiles didn’t say anything, just slowly sat up, shoving the comforter away, very conscious to not move too quickly both because his entire body ached, and more importantly, because he didn’t want to make Peter think he was going to try and get away from him.

“Are we done?” he asked, setting his feet on the floor, but not bothering to get up. He dreaded the answer.

“There is just one more thing I need from you tonight,” Peter purred, moving predatorily towards him until he could push Stiles knees apart and step between them. Stiles forced his face into a neutral expression before looking up.

“And you’ll let Scott go?” he clarified.

“Scott is a part of my pack,” Peter replied calmly. “There is no letting him go.” Stiles could feel his emotions get the better of him, his face twisting into an expression of anger and frustration before he could stop himself. “But I do believe you have convinced me the boy has had enough time to think,” Peter continued before Stiles could voice any objections.

“So what do you want?” Stiles replied hollowly. He half expected Peter to unbuckle his belt, instead the man reached forward, cupping the back of Stiles head. The wounds on the back of his neck stung with the contact.

“As I said, there is just one more thing…” Peter said softly. “I want to know where you went last week.”

“What?” Stiles replied dumbly, heartbeat tripping over itself before beginning to pound. If he lied, Peter would know he was lying, so he told the only truth he could safely tell.

“I– I woke up in the parking lot of the preserve,” he replied.

“Funny, that isn’t where I left you,” Peter replied. Stiles stomach lurched. “You see there is something in the preserve– in Hale territory, that I need your help to find…”

“The nemeton…” Stiles breathed, the resurfaced memory still fresh in his mind.
“You know what they say… a watched pot never boils,” Peter replied. “I didn’t expect much really, but I’d hoped with some digging, that I could have awoken enough of you to come out and play.” Stiles acutely felt the chilling sensation of Peter’s claws lengthening, tickling across his skin.

“There is nothing to tell,” Stiles replied, heart rate picking up to a frantic rhythm. He’d managed to keep Peter from finding out about him and Derek until now and nothing good would come from Peter fishing around in his head. “Look, I don’t know how I ended up in the preserve parking lot if you didn’t put me there–”

“Then we’ll find out.”

Stiles jerked his head out of Peter’s grasp just as his claws had begun to dig into one of his existing wounds. The Alpha’s eyes flashed red for a fraction of a second before settling back to human blue. Fingers, thankfully without claws, brushed over the back of his head, ruffling through his hair in a way uncomfortably like his father always had when he’d been younger.

“Look– I– I don’t know where it is, but I’ll help you find it,” he stammered, holding his hands up defensively, trying to keep Peter away without daring to actually physically try and stop him from touching him. Peter’s smile was soft as his fingers skated down the back of Stiles’ head, completely unperturbed by his attempt at bargaining. Stiles dared to bring a shaking hand up to touch Peter’s forearm.

“I– I’m just tired and I want to go home,” he implored. Hoping that the truth injected into the statement would overshadow the lie of why he was saying it. He held Peter’s gaze, praying the Alpha would let things go for once, or if not, just drag him around the woods for a few hours before ultimately letting him go.

“I understand,” Peter replied, almost tenderly. Stiles was about to breathe a sigh of relief, when he saw a flicker of something sinister in Peter’s eyes. His voice had the same tender tone when he added, “You don’t want me to find out about Derek.” Then his claws were in the back of Stiles’ neck and his last thought, before everything crashed into cold darkness, was to wonder if Peter would have the restraint not to rip his head off.

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Derek startled awake on the couch, the apartment dark around him save for the glow of the streetlights outside. He squinted around in the dark for a few disoriented seconds, trying to figure out what had woken him before he realized his cellphone was ringing, the incoming call notification on the screen letting him know it was Stiles. He swiped the phone from its place on the coffee table too swiftly, cursing as it slid to the floor. He sat up quickly, fingers sweeping the phone from the space between the table and the sofa just in time for the phone to fall silent, and light up with the obnoxious ‘missed call’ notification. He couldn’t believe he’d fallen asleep with all that he’d uncovered. Then again, with his career as a paramedic that worked mostly night shifts, he’d learned to fall asleep just about anywhere and spring into alertness at a moment’s notice.

Stiles had his Jeep and could get home– as long as he hadn’t been separated from it so if he was calling Derek, he was probably in trouble. Derek immediately pounded at the phone’s screen until it finally started to dial. He cradled the phone against his shoulder as he moved towards the front door, keys already in hand. Four rings, five rings, six rings and Stiles still hadn’t answered. He shoved his feet into his shoes and, not really sure what his plan was. He growled at the overly polite recording
as it kicked in informing him that his caller was ‘unavailable at the moment’ and hung up. It was almost three-thirty in the morning according to his cellphone. Stiles had been with Peter for almost five hours.

Derek was so focused on hitting redial, he almost forgot to lock the apartment behind him before starting down the stairs. He’d lost track of the amount of times the phone had rung by the time he got outside. It didn’t matter— he was going to keep calling until Stiles (hopefully Stiles) or Peter picked up.

It was cold enough outside that even Derek could feel the bite through his Henley. The hair on the back of his neck stood up as he hit redial one more time and headed for his Camaro. It was a quiet night— by this time all of the bars had emptied out, last call being over two hours ago. With the exception of the convenience store, every business on the street would be closed. Derek stopped dead in his tracks when he picked up the shrill ringing of a cell phone. He glanced around, dropping his own phone from his ear. It couldn’t be…

He took a chance and ended his call with a lump in his throat. Abruptly, the ringing in the distance cut out. Abandoning the idea of getting in his car, on the crazy notion that Stiles was nearby, Derek hit the call button and jogged to the edge of the parking lot.

In the stillness of the early morning, the shrill sound was particularly eerie. Derek speed walked, head tilted, searching for the source of the sound. He really hadn’t needed to use his ears. As soon as he rounded the corner onto the main street, his stomach plummeted to his feet.

Stiles had been dumped— no— installed in the middle of the street, in between the glow of the streetlights. His skin looked almost luminous in the dark, stark and expansive— he was naked and by the looks of things, unconscious. Had it not been for his training as a paramedic, he probably would have run out into the empty street, instead he assessed his environment, looking up and down the street, listening for any sign of Peter. If he had been there, he was long enough gone that Derek wouldn’t be able to catch him. After what felt like an eternity, he ran out into the street.

“Stiles?” he tried not to yell, both hands gripping the sides of the teenager’s face. He was cool and clammy, just like the night Derek had found him in the preserve parking lot, but he had a pulse. His skin was just barely warm enough to indicate that Peter had left him here not long ago— probably around the time Derek had woke up on the couch…

The cellphone. It lay beside Stiles’ outstretched hand, small screen on the front indicating all of the missed calls from Derek calling it continuously. Judging from Stiles’ location, Peter must have dumped him and called Derek knowing exactly who ‘Sourwolf’ was. Though he hadn’t talked to his uncle, Derek still considered the message pretty clear: I know.

He swallowed hard and forced himself to forget what that meant for the time being, to let his training kick in. He sat back and shoved the cell phone into his pocket before checking Stiles’ vitals. His breathing was shallow, but steady, pulse a soft thrum under his skin. It was hard to overlook the irritated ring of flesh— an unmistakable bite mark— at the juncture of his neck and shoulder. When Derek got to his pupil dilation, he paused. Stiles’ eyes faintly glowed, not like they had the other night, but like there was luminous substance just under the surface of his irises. Like a cat’s eyes in a photograph. Nonetheless, his pupils dilated normally when Derek gently lifted each eyelid and shone the light of the cellphone’s screen at each eye.

Aside from the glaring bite mark on his neck, Stiles had a few scrapes and bruises, but nothing terrible or particularly glaring as new and awful. That was until Derek moved to gently roll him onto his side and carefully pick him up and he saw the explanation for Stiles’ current state. The back of his neck was a tattered mess, caked with blood from his hairline, down to the trails of blood, both
fresh and old, that reached to in between his shoulder blades. Derek’s sympathy hiss of pain morphed quickly into a growl. Peter had been messing around in Stiles’ head again—by the looks of things aggressively searching for something.

Derek had this unsettled feeling that whatever Peter had been looking for had to be connected to what he had found earlier and that had to mean he was already several steps ahead. But he couldn’t dwell on that right now. Right now, he had to focus on getting Stiles—a naked, teenaged prostitute who had definitely skipped out on probation—off of the street. Preferably before he looked like some predator.

He made sure his keys were accessible before gently pulling Stiles into his arms, wincing as he felt the resistance of skin tugging against pavement. Stiles was long and lean and awkward to carry—if not for his current state, Derek probably would have put him over his shoulder in a fireman carry instead of carrying him bridal style. He thanked whatever powers that be that had given him supernatural strength and also an empty street. He walked slowly, deliberately, Stiles’ head cradled against his chest, his mouth slack and limbs gently swaying where they dangled. They’d just reached the edge of the parking lot behind the bookstore when Derek felt Stiles’ body go rigid in his arms. Before he could react, Stiles’ dangling right arm swung upwards and grabbed a handful of Derek’s Henley with surprising strength. His eyes snapped open, wide and terrified, and locked on Derek’s face.

“I’m the weapon,” he cried out, voice hoarse from under use and therefore probably much quieter than intended. Derek blinked, confused, because how could skinny, defenseless Stiles be a weapon? How could a person be a weapon? His confusion must have shown on his face because Stiles attempted to shake him, but the first tangled in his shirt was already loosening, grip going slack.

“He knows,” the teenager said weakly, desperately, before his grip on Derek relaxed completely and Derek as left in the silence of the street, feeling Stiles’ racing heart beating against his own.

Chapter End Notes

Slight reference to House of Cards. Come tell me on the tumbles if you caught the reference. ;) I promise the next chapter won't take as long to upload!
Empty Spaces

Chapter Notes

After a rough battle getting the last few chapters to write godammit, I am finally over my hump! I'm hoping the next couple of updates come a little faster.

Please note new tags; Unconsciousness and Lost time. An explanation is posted in the notes at the bottom for those who need it.

Stiles woke up warm, surrounded by softness and light. He considered the fact that he might be dead, and what that would mean. On the one hand he would be with his mom, and probably soon, his dad. But in the meantime he’d let his dad down. It would take months, maybe even years before he faded out, a slow, painful and lonely time. And that cruel thought was enough to rouse Stiles from his stupor enough to begin to take in his surroundings from where he lay. His face was mashed into something soft and warm— a pillow, his brain supplied helpfully. The last thing he could clearly remember was being naked and thinking Peter was going to decapitate him, because he was going to find out about Derek.

Stiles jackknifed up from his position and instantly regretted it. His head swam and thundered, blood pulsing in his temples so fiercely his eyes immediately slammed shut. He could feel the unstoppable, hot rush of bile tear up the back of his throat and opened his eyes again only to find the closest thing to vomit on or into that wasn’t himself. He didn’t have time to question where a plastic waste bin appeared from out of nowhere between his knees before he heaved over the container, coughing violently as not much more than stomach acid burned a path up his throat. When he finally stopped, a hand removed the waste basket from between his legs and set it aside.

Stiles didn’t open his eyes, vision still swimming in the blackness from nausea.

“Derek?”

The word came out garbled and small, afraid. It felt like too many seconds passed before there was a soft reply.

“Yeah, it’s me.”

Stiles opened his eyes a fraction at a time, the harsh light of the morning sun feeling a lot less warm and a lot more stabby now that he was fully awake. Nonetheless, it was a relief when his gaze settled on Derek. He was reaching over to the bedside table for a glass of water.

“Think you can hold this?” he asked, coaxing the cool glass into one of Stiles’ limp hands.

“Yeah,” Stiles replied with a nod, fingers closing over the tumbler. Derek’s eyes tracked his movements as he brought the glass to his lips. The second the cool liquid touched his lips, all Stiles wanted to do was inhale it. He gulped greedily at the water, tipping his head back until his neck stung and the skin around the fresh wounds pulled tight, until one of Derek’s hands closed over his wrist and gently tugged.
“Slow down,” he urged, “you’ll make yourself sick.”

Stiles reluctantly drew the glass away from his lips.

“My mother used to tell me that,” he croaked around his last gulp.

Derek’s smile was soft. He reached out and took the glass of water from Stiles’ slack grip and set it back on the bedside table. Several seconds of weighty silence passed before Stiles couldn’t take it anymore.

“So I guess we need to talk about last night huh?” he proposed, eyes on his hands, which seemed to have a life of their own, fidgeting restlessly with the blankets.

“I figured you might want to, but I’m not going to make you,” Derek replied. He reached out, keeping his movements slow and tentative, giving Stiles the option to pull away as he captured one hand. Stiles took a shuddering breath in, the touch somewhat grounding. There were things Derek needed to know. Stiles wasn’t so sure about what he wanted to know about what had transpired Peter burying a claw in the back of his neck and waking up in Derek’s bed. He took a deep breath. Might as well rip the bandaid off fast.

“Peter knows,” Stiles started unsteadily, “I think he knew the whole time– even before he,” he gestured at the back of his neck, “took a look for himself.”

“I know,” Derek replied softly. Stiles tried to ignore the way his heart leapt into his throat. Derek paused, took a breath. “Stiles what happened? What do you remember from last night?” Though Derek’s demeanour was calm enough, the question itself maintained a sense of urgency.

“It’s a long story,” Stiles replied, letting one long breath shudder out through his lips before continuing, “but I remember everything up to when Peter said he knew about you– then went digging in my head again.”

“What do you remember what time that was?”

It wasn’t like Stiles was unaware that there were gaps in his timeline, but the way Derek was highlighting the passage of time, intentional or not, made Stiles’ stomach churn. Derek seemed to sense this and abandoned the need for an answer in favor of giving more information.

“I didn’t find you until after 3:30 this morning.”

Stiles felt like all of his internal organs had banded together in a desire to purge themselves from his body. It had been around 1:00 when Peter had revealed what he knew. By the time Derek had found him, more than two unaccounted for hours had passed depending on where Peter had dumped him.

“Wait– you said you know that Peter knows about you– about us–how…” Stiles trailed, mind spinning as he began to think of too many possible scenarios.

“The message was pretty clear,” Derek replied, this time unable to keep the edge of anger out of his voice. He scrubbed both hands over his face, stubbly beard scratching at his palms.

“I fell asleep.” It came out sounding like a frustrated confession. “I was reading something and I fell asleep on the couch. I woke up to my phone ringing. You were calling me– or at least I thought it was you. Now I’m sure it was Peter. I missed the call, but he didn’t call me back. I think he was outside, listening. So I called you back. When you didn’t answer, I knew something was wrong and decided to go look for you. I didn’t have to go far. I found you underneath the streetlight in front of
the building, across the street.” Derek paused, briefly caught Stiles’ eye and looked away again. “You were naked. I’m pretty sure Peter wanted me to find you like that.”

Stiles swallowed around the lump in his throat.

“Fuck,” he uttered, voice toeing the line of hysteria but not crossing it. After all, they were still sitting there, relatively okay. But it was still an unmistakable message, for Derek and him both. It was a mere glimpse of what Peter was capable of— a warning.

“Stiles?” Derek’s voice broke through the haze of anxiety long enough for Stiles to imagine hundreds of bloody plotlines. Stiles looked up from where he was gnawing on a fingernails. “There is one more thing. When I was carrying you inside, you said something. You opened your eyes and you said ‘I’m the weapon’. You looked scared, like you were trying to warn me.”

“I was,” he replied, despite remembering nothing about the interaction at all. Stiles wasn’t surprised to notice Derek’s entire body stiffen in a wave of tension, maybe even fear at the confession. It was an involuntary and yet controlled shift, a conscious effort not to show vulnerability. And to know that mistrust was there, born of Peter’s manipulation was so much worse than anything Peter could have physically put him through. He could only hope Derek would listen to him.

“You were right the other night… I– I’m not just a teenager,” Stiles began. He felt like he was standing at the edge of a cliff, ready to go hurtling into the abyss below if Derek didn’t believe him. “The problem is I don’t know what I am.” The admission saw Derek relax ever so slightly, tension bleeding out of his shoulders just enough for Stiles to notice.

“Something happened when I went to see Scott last night,” Stiles continued with some renewed strength. “I was with Scott and he– I reached out to touch him and he just changed. It was like changing the channel on a television set. One second he was a wolf, the next he was Scott– the Scott I know. And then he was back to a wolf again.”

Derek’s tone of voice when he answered was measured, soft and insistent; “But that’s not possible. It has to be some sort of coincidence, maybe Scott somehow regained control for a couple of seconds. Nothing I’ve ever read or heard of has ever has ever been capable of forcing a were to shift. We will out of necessity, if we’re hurt enough to succumb to an injury as a human… and we can’t if–” Derek faltered, mistrust rearing its ugly head before he clenched his jaw as if to clamp down on the emotion before he continued, “if we’re exposed to a high enough voltage of electricity.”

“Trust me– I had my money on a rapid deterioration of my mental faculties as the reason behind it, but Alan– Deaton– he thinks it’s me. He said he had a theory.”

At that, a ghost of a smile tugged at Derek’s lips.

“That sounds like Deaton,” he retorted, ever so slightly relaxing a bit more. “What was his theory?”

“That Peter wants me for something– I mean, something other than a sex toy,” Stiles replied miserably. “We didn’t get much farther than that discussing it because… well I had to go be that.”

“I should never have let you go.”

“Things would be so much worse if I hadn’t, and besides, you didn’t let me do anything. Just ask my…”

It was like everything in Stiles’ world narrowed to a fine point, the atmosphere crushing the word “dad” from his lungs, before opening up wide, leaving Stiles completely vulnerable.
“My dad!” he blurted. “If you’re okay and I’m okay, he has to have punished me somehow. I need to check on my dad.”

He scrambled to get up, nearly kicking Derek in his haste to untangle himself from the covers and get to his feet. It wasn’t until he really moved that he felt it— a deep, bruising ache, all too familiar to him, and it stopped him in his tracks completely. Because he didn’t remember Peter being that rough. It was enough to halt all movement, one foot on the floor beside the bed, the other folded in front of him on the mattress.

“Stiles?” Derek’s voice was full of concern as he moved to slide over on the mattress, then seemed to think better of it and stood up, circling the foot of the bed to come to his side.

“I’m fine,” Stiles bit out, though he was anything but. He’d have time to worry about himself later, he wasn’t about to mull over what Peter could have done to him when he had his dad to worry about. “I just… I need to check on my dad.”

“Okay, I understand,” Derek replied calmly, “but slow down.” He put a hand to Stiles forearm, stilling him in his efforts to get up. “I’ll call ahead to the hospital, have someone go check on your dad right now. Then you can have a shower, get dressed and we’ll go.”

“I don’t trust anyone there,” Stiles bit out impatiently, then breathed in raggedly considering what Derek said. “I smell like him don’t I? That’s why I need to shower.”

Derek winced. “You don’t–”

“Don’t patronize me,” Stiles replied, but instead of sounding irritated, it just came out tired.

“I didn’t want to do anything you couldn’t say yes to,” Derek said softly. “Not after he–”

“Did something…” Stiles finished softly. His shoulders sagged as he said it out loud. It wasn’t like Derek didn’t know, couldn’t tell, but saying it out loud meant acknowledging it, meant lifting the haze the night before had left. Yet oddly, at that, Stiles felt the tension in his shoulders and back ease.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered.

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” Derek replied simply before standing up, helping Stiles to his feet. Stiles allowed Derek to lead him hand in hand through the living room and to the bathroom, letting go only to turn on the taps and play with the water until the temperature seemed to please him. As he watched Derek, Stiles took that as his cue to coax his aching muscles into folding and bending enough to pull the hoodie he was wearing off over his head.

“I’m ready to leave when you are,” Derek said as he straightened up, “but take your time.”

“Stay,” Stiles found himself blurting. Derek’s eyes widened, his eyebrows lifting towards his hairline.

“I mean, just sit outside the shower, on the toilet or something,” Stiles explained, “A lot of shit happened last night– crazy shit– and maybe Peter hasn’t done anything yet, but he will, and I don’t want to leave things as fucked up as they are in the very, very likely event that Peter makes some sort of move before we get a chance to tell each other everything.”

“Okay,” Derek replied after a beat, nodding his head and taking a seat as requested. Stiles breathed a small sigh of relief.

“Okay,” he said, more to fill the air while he gathered his thoughts, figuring out how to begin. He
tried to bend and peel off the flannel PJ pants he was wearing without making a face—unsuccessfully if Derek’s expression was anything to go by—then pulled aside the shower curtain and stepped inside under the stream of water, leaving the thin film of plastic open a few spare inches so that he could see Derek’s face if he needed to.

“Alright, so first I went to Deaton’s, but you already know that part. So I went to Peter.” He took a deep, steadying breath and plucked the bar of soap from its ledge in the tile. “Of course I managed to piss him off in the first ten minutes and he decided to teach me a lesson— a few lessons.”

He glossed over the specifics of what had happened, only telling Derek enough for him to know about the threats Peter had made about turning him. He managed to explain how Peter had gotten out of the hospital, Derek asking few questions along the way before he got to Scott.

“Jesus,” Derek muttered, when Stiles finished that story. “Hunting like that— it’s straight out of the dark ages. It is why there were— are— hunters, why we have treaties. He’s out of control.”

Stiles sucked in a breath, set the soap back on its ledge and let the water run over his head and shoulders. He stared at his toes, remembering the puddle of blood creeping towards them from Peter’s memories at the station.

“Stiles?” Derek’s voice cut through the steam in the room, the haze of Stiles’ thoughts. “He was the one— he is the reason my life is so utterly fucked,” Stiles rasped, not fully sure that Derek could hear him. Out of the corner of his eye, his eye, Derek’s silhouette moved, pulling the curtain to the side a few sparse inches. Stiles looked up from his toes to see Derek’s eyebrows furrowed together. “He was the one who attacked the police station— he is the reason my Dad is the way he is.”

Derek reached over slowly, turned the water off and grabbed a towel.

“Tell me,” he finally said, as Stiles stepped out of the tub.

Stiles recounted the events of that fateful night, trying to stay as detached as he could, afraid of breaking down completely over something that was too late to change. Instead, he focused as much as he could on the motions of getting dressed, and getting to the hospital before something else happened. Derek sat on the edge of the bed listening as Stiles moved around the room, rifling through his duffle bag for clean clothing.

“I— there was nothing I could do to stop any of it,” the words came out tight and strained through Stiles’ rapidly closing throat.

“You’re right,” Derek replied softly, reaching out to capture one hand before Stiles could veer back towards his duffle in the corner to throw the shirt he was holding back in and grab another one for the third time. The gesture was enough for the teen to stop in his tracks and unbunch the shirt he was holding in his hands, shoving his arms through the sleeves as he talked.

“Most of the station was already slaughtered by the time he got to my dad,” Stiles continued, pausing with his arms in his shirt. His voice wavered but he kept going. “Dad had gone to the back of the station. I think he knew that there was no escaping alive, so he’d planned to lock himself into one of the cells. Peter followed him.” He paused and pulled the shirt over his head. “He wanted to know where the ‘spark’— where I was— but my dad had no idea what he was talking about. He tried to calm him down enough to figure out what he wanted, but Peter wasn’t listening. The second he figured my dad wouldn’t— or couldn’t give him what he wanted, he tried to take it. And that was the end of my dad as I knew him…”

Derek’s face was twisted into a frown as he seemingly stared at a spot on the floor beside Stiles’ feet.
“What?” Stiles prompted, “Why are you making that face?”

“He obviously didn’t find what he was looking for,” Derek replied. “But what I can’t figure out is why he didn’t go looking for you? Why did he stop at your dad?”

“I don’t know,” Stiles replied bewildered because, how had he not thought of the same thing.

Derek stood up slowly, took a hesitant step into Stiles’ space. Though they were similar in height, Stiles couldn’t help but feel small in the shadow his body cast with his back against the sun. With his eyes closed, Stiles could more acutely feel the current of energy that seemed to have always been there between him and Derek. Before it had been easy enough to label as lust, but he knew it was something far more significant than that. He opened his eyes just as one of Derek’s hands came to rest, feather light on the back of his head, the other following, landing on his waist, moving slow enough to declare intent and give the teen the chance to object. He didn’t- and was wrapped in the warmth of Derek’s arms, faced pressed into the crux of his neck and shoulder, half slumped in the other man’s arms.

“I didn’t realize until the other night… I knew your dad,” Derek murmured. At first, Stiles was surprised, but realized it hadn’t been that long ago that Beacon Hills was small enough for everyone to know everyone else. “He was there at the station the night of the fire. I think he was still a deputy at the time. They put him in charge of talking to me and Laura.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” Stiles retorted, then added. “That case never did sit right with him.”

“He’s a good man.”

Stiles nodded, fighting back tears that stung at the corners of his eyes for Derek’s use of the present tense.

“We should go,” Derek said after a moment. “We never did call ahead to the hospital.”

“Yeah,” Stiles replied nodding his head, “let’s go.”

He had a feeling there was more to talk about, that Derek was holding onto something until after Stiles had got to see his dad, and while it was in his nature to want to rip the bandaid off fast and find out what was in store, he appreciated Derek giving him exactly what he needed– the peace of mind that came with seeing his dad.

The ride to the hospital was made in relative silence, that was of course, until Stiles remembered why he and Derek were in the Camaro.

“Fuck,” he muttered aloud, holding back the urge to kick something.

“What?” Derek replied, glancing over briefly before setting his eyes back on the road as he made his turn into the hospital parking lot.

“My Jeep is probably still at the motel,” Stiles replied tiredly, pinching at the bridge of his nose. “At least I hope it is.”

“Do you think Peter would have taken it?” Derek replied as he navigated around the lot carefully, pulling into a spot as close to the doors as possible.

“Probably not; the shifter sticks and sometimes you need to pump the clutch to get it to go. Plus I
don’t think that’s his style. He’d probably impound the vehicle and then blackmail me when I tried to get it back,” Stiles retorted as he unclasped his seat belt.

“We can go there later if you want,” Derek offered. Stiles nodded.

“Thanks.” Yet another thing to add to the ‘to do’ list in Peter’s wake.

It was strange, walking the familiar route to his dad’s room with company instead of alone. Derek followed beside him silently, probably suffocating in the cloud of anxiety rolling off Stiles in waves.

In the elevator, Stiles fidgeted nervously, jaw clenching tightly when a group of nurses boarded and each hit a different floor between the one they were on and Stiles and Derek’s stop. Beside him, Derek’s fingers tickled across the back of his clenched fist until his fingers released enough for Derek’s hand to slip into his and give a reassuring squeeze. When the elevator finally glided to a stop, Derek released his hand and followed Stiles’ lead to the right.

Everyone at the nurse’s station looked busy, but a few familiar faces cast Stiles’ soft smiles and Derek quizzical looks as they passed. Nobody stopped them, nobody looked afraid. Nothing looked out of the ordinary. Stiles wasn’t sure whether to be relieved that nothing looked unusual, or scared by how normal it all was. It was just before they reached the door that Derek’s arm flew out to grab the sleeve of Stiles’ shirt, halting him in his tracks as his heart raced to a gallop.

“There are two heart beats in there,” Derek murmured, glancing around, searching for anyone who might be listening. He tilted his head slightly, seeming to listen closer. “It’s not Peter though,” he continued slowly. And that was good enough for Stiles. Even if the heartbeat did belong to Peter, it wouldn’t have stopped him.

“Good enough for me,” Stiles retorted before started forward again.

His dad was in bed, like he seemed to be at least half of the time, eyes closed, looking blissfully unaware of the potential danger he was in. The relief Stiles felt was so great, he let out a choked sob before stumbling forward to awkwardly wrap his arms around his dad’s prone form, breathing in the surprisingly calming scent of hospital, laced with his dad’s scent, completely unaware of the other person in the room.

“Maybe next time you decide to do something so utterly stupid you’ll think about him first.”

Lydia’s voice would have sounded as though it were dripping in acid, had it not clearly been muddled by tears. Stiles immediately stood up straight and turned around. Lydia sat stiffly in the upholstered hospital chair beside the window, still dressed in her maid’s uniform. In all of the time Stiles had known her, he’d never seen her leave the motel in it. Her eyes were swollen and red, it looked like she’d given up on wearing her usual level of meticulously applied make up… or cried most of it off.

“Lydia–”

“Stop,” she replied, voice worryingly quiet. “How many times have we had a conversation just like this since you got out of McLean?”

Stiles clenched his jaw in frustration, knowing that Lydia had a point even though she didn’t have the full story.

“I showed up to work today and do you know what I found?”
Stiles shook his head, knowing better than to interrupt his friend.

“I found your Jeep sitting in the lot. So naturally I thought I’d probably find you the same way I found you weeks ago— trying to sleep off whatever some asshole had done to you. But I had really hoped, prayed that you’d been smart enough to have learned your lesson by now. So I went to the office and checked the guest registry. And lo and behold, I see, A. Wolfe, the same name that has been in room 216 every Thursday for the past two months, there again. So the first thing I did after clocking in was grab my cart to pretend to do my job, and skip over all the other rooms I was supposed to do first, so I could go check on my friend. And do you know what I found?”

Stiles shook his head, still taking it all in, brain stuck on the fact that Peter had the gall to use an alias like ‘A. Wolfe’. It was like he was daring someone to catch him. Lydia stood up, clearly not satisfied with Stiles’ reaction, or lack thereof. In her tennis shoes she wore for work, her form was even more diminutive than usual, but the anger rolling off of her in waves made Stiles feel like she was the one towering over him.

“I found an empty room. My friend is nowhere in sight. In fact the only things out of the ordinary in the room, were two blood soaked hand towels and the Jeep’s keys on the nightstand. So tell me Stiles, after you went missing for an entire week, what the hell was I supposed to think when I found that?” Lydia finished, hands folded across her chest and gaze expectant.

It was rare that Stiles was ever rendered speechless, but trying to figure out what to say to Lydia saw him struck dumb for several seconds. He didn’t want to lie, he owed her that much, the trouble was, how much of the truth could he tell? As he contemplated his words, for better or for worse, that was when Derek appeared in the doorway. Stiles didn’t even have to turn around to know he was there. Lydia’s eyes flickered to the space above Stiles’ left shoulder, narrowing slightly.

“Who the hell are you?”

Stiles turned just enough to see Derek stepping just inside the doorway of the room, reaching behind himself to push the door at least partially closed. He raised his eyebrows almost comically, probably at Lydia, and Stiles couldn’t help but think of some sort of tiny, teacup sized dog squaring off against a relatively disinterested Great Dane. But then Derek’s gaze focused on the Sheriff’s silent figure in the hospital and his brows fell, face first registering shock, then sympathy before he turned back to the drama unfolding in front of him.

“I’m Derek,” he replied calmly, keeping his distance, “you must be Lydia.” And Stiles thanked whatever deities probably didn’t exist that he had told him about her ahead of time. Lydia turned sharply towards Derek, expression clearly demanding ‘explain’. When he didn’t immediately offer up said explanation, Lydia turned towards Derek once more.

“Well Derek, Stiles and I were about to have a very important conversation.”

“I could hear that,” Derek replied, keeping his tone lighter than Stiles had ever heard it. He ventured a few steps into the room to come to Stiles’ side and leaned close, resting one hand on his waist briefly.

“I’m going to get us some coffee downstairs so you two can talk,” he said softly. Stiles nodded and Derek released him, stepping back.

“I’ll leave you to talk,” he declared, the statement clearly intended for Lydia.

She watched him go, arms still crossed over her chest, waiting for several beats after he’d left the room before she set her sights on Stiles once more.
“Start at the beginning.”

“Before I start, this is going to sound completely crazy,” Stiles began once he’d shared a long embrace with his friend in the middle of the room.

“You realize you’re saying this to the friend who has literally spent time in a psychiatric institution, right?” Lydia deadpanned. Stiles’ felt his face heat with embarrassment at the slip.

“I’m sorry Lyd–” he began to apologize before she waved a hand dismissively.

“So I guess the beginning is when I got out of McLean. I uh– when I was out, this guy picked me up. He didn’t set off any alarm bells or anything, so I went with him,” Stiles began clumsily, just trying to sort out in his head just how things had gotten so messed up, so quickly.

“That was… that was the week I slept in and you thought I’d been with a group.”

“I know this part,” Lydia replied, cautious to keep her tone as gentle and non-judgemental as possible. “I just don’t understand why you would keep going back to someone like that. Even if he was blackmailing you, isn’t one of the perks of being homeless the ability to disappear if you want to?”

Stiles allowed one long breath out through his mouth, hoping it would help him keep his voice steady.

“Not when the person you want to get away from is a cop.”

“Stiles!”

“It’s not like I knew okay?” Stiles all but snapped before reigning in his emotions. He ran his fingers through his hair, tugging slightly, as if to punish himself for his previous stupidity—several weeks too late. “Because that’s what I’d planned. I’d planned to stay away from him, to disappear if I had to. And for a week everything was fine. Then he turned up at me and Danny’s spot. I didn’t know it was him until it was too late. He had a different car. I tried to tell him to fuck off, but he threatened to come after me. So I got in the car, figuring I’d find some way to get rid of him. That was when I found out he was a cop.” His voice wavered as he continued.

“He drove me to the police station and gave me an ultimatum. I could either go back to the motel with him, or he could drag me into the station for violating my probation. So I went to the motel.”

“God Stiles,” Lydia breathed out, “why didn’t you tell anyone?”

“I did,” he replied, staring past her at his dad’s form. “And that is where it gets at lot more complicated.”

Chapter End Notes

Unconsciousness/Missing time tags: Stiles is aware that he was most likely assaulted by Peter, but does not know what happened to him as it occurred while he was unconscious for a period of approximately 2 hours. Nothing is explicitly described.
Derek sat at a cafeteria table, stalling. It hadn’t been that long since he’d left Stiles in his dad’s hospital room with Lydia and he couldn’t go back yet– not until they’d at least had a few minutes to talk. In the meantime, he was trying to figure out how on earth he was going to bring up what he knew about Stiles’ family tree— especially when so many other things were so much more pressing for Stiles right now. And yet, he couldn’t help but feel like this was important, too important to ignore. It made his chest feel tight and panicked with this awful feeling that something was going to happen before he got his chance to talk to Stiles. Naturally, that was when his cell phone blared to life in his pocket. He scrambled to silence it, despite the fact that nobody in the cafeteria seemed particularly perturbed by it.

“Hello?” he greeted without even glancing at the call display.

“Derek? It’s Alan Deaton calling. Are you with Stiles at the moment?”

“Sort of,” Derek replied, sensing the urgency in the Veterinarian’s voice, “We’re at the hospital checking in on Stiles’ dad. A friend of his was here so I’m just down in a cafeteria grabbing some coffee to give them time to talk.”

“Well, when you are finished there, I think you two should come by my office,” Deaton replied in his typical cryptic manner.

“Okay– what’s going on?” Derek pried, trying to get any piece of information he could from the man.

“Scott is human again, but I don’t believe he is in control of his shift,” Deaton replied simply, “which is why I need you. Forgive me, I forgot I still had the office open– I’ll see you this afternoon.”

Derek barely managed to stutter out a reply before the vet had hung up. He slowly exhaled, subconsciously channeling the breathing technique techniques he’d learned as a teen to keep calm.

He’d always been destined to be a Beta, but this felt an awful lot like filling Laura’s shoes. Laura had been the perfect replacement for their mother as Alpha. She exuded control, but not in the tyrannical sense, more of a quiet confidence. She was always sure of herself, always seemed to be thinking three steps ahead of everyone else. It was only when her hand was forced that she would show her true power and strength. He couldn’t compare; he’d try, but he knew all of his weaknesses– intimately– and that was enough to overwhelm his strengths.

Derek knew he’d grown a lot, healed a lot in the years following the fire, but Laura had been a focal point of his recovery. He’d struggled with control in adolescence and though he’d eventually learned, he’d never been good at hiding his true emotions the way Laura had. Ironically, it was only after the fire that he’d gotten better at that skill– and only because he’d been hell bent on punishing himself. But what he lacked most was confidence in his own ability to make decisions. While Paige’s death had taught him to think for himself and not let others convince him of a new course of action, the pendulum had swung too far in the other direction. Instead he’d become fiercely independent to the point of being secretive – so he hadn’t listened to Laura’s doubts about Kate. Of course, that had turned out to be a world-altering mistake.
The fire had forever compromised Derek’s ability to make decisions. And while he’d improved, thanks in no small part to therapy and his career path, major decisions tended to leave him either over analytical about every possible path before he made a decision, or plagued by doubt once he’d made one. When faced with snap decisions, he treated every situation like ripping off a bandaid from a wound– moving quickly to action, hoping the consequences wouldn’t hurt too much.

He was never meant to be the Alpha, but he didn’t have a choice. Peter as out of control and once he’d been dealt with, Scott would need someone to guide him. Duty and redemption were what would make Derek a good Alpha. He hoped.

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“Lydia?” Stiles’ heart hammered in his chest. He’d told her nearly everything that had happened, figuring (with a guilty conscience) that even if she were to tell someone– and he doubted she would– they would think she had completely lost it. He wasn’t entirely sure she didn’t think that of him. “Say something… please?”

“It’s a lot to take in,” the strawberry blonde replied. She took a few more seconds to gather her thoughts.

Stiles was grateful he’d glossed over a lot of details. He’d never made a habit of telling Lydia about any of his tricks, so he left out most of the R-rated details about the near disastrous threesome Derek had interrupted, Deucalion, or the brutal rape Peter had subjected him to after killing Laura. But telling Lydia about being ‘the spark’ had been unavoidable– he knew better than to pass Peter’s actions off as mere madness. Lydia was far too smart for that and would have seen right through it, perhaps gone investigating on her own. And he hadn’t told her much about Derek, just that he was Laura’s brother, had come to Beacon Hills sensing something was wrong, found Stiles, and now Stiles was staying with him.

“No matter where I start, it’s going to be wrong,” Lydia replied with a frown, clearly not used to being at a loss for words.

“That seems to be my philosophy on life at the moment.”

Stiles’ was met with a very half-hearted slap against his chest. Lydia’s lips were twisted into an expression meant to keep from smirking.

“Do you feel any different?” she asked softly as she recovered. Stiles shrugged.

“No really,” he replied, “maybe a little bit scared of myself.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t know what I’m capable of– what Peter’s going to make me do.”

“That’s what we have to figure out– fast.”

Stiles and Lydia both whipped around to face the door where Derek was stood framed in the doorway, a cardboard tray of coffees in his hand.

“I uh, didn’t know what to get you, but you looked like a latte kind of girl,” Derek explained as he
stepped into the room slowly, lifting one of the cups free of the tray to hand to Lydia. A few tense seconds passed where Stiles thought, despite everything he’d told her about Derek, Lydia was going to reject Derek’s offering, but she raised her hand, taking the cup.

“Thank you,” she replied, with a prim smile. Derek retreated far enough to pull the door closed before turning back to Stiles.

“Does she know?” he asked, expression unreadable. Stiles didn’t need clarification to know what Derek was asking: Did Lydia know the truth about Peter, including the fact that he– and the entire Hale family– were werewolves? And for the first time, he doubted himself for what he’d told Lydia– after all he hadn’t asked Derek if revealing his family’s identities as werewolves was okay.

Stiles jerked his head up and down in a stiff motion, a choked feeling in his throat at the thought of Derek being upset.

“I didn’t really have much of a choice.”

“I know,” Derek replied softly. He removed a cup from the tray and handed it to Stiles before removing his own and setting the cardboard tray aside on the bedside table. Then he turned to Lydia.

“I promise I’m nothing like my uncle.”

“That’s fairly obvious,” she replied, lips rising slightly in one corner, softening her smirk. Derek looked down at his feet as he drew in a breath.

“And I’m not enough like my sister,” he continued before hazard ing a glance Stiles’ way, face unbelievably vulnerable for such an imposing person. Stiles’ heart clenched at the pain he saw there, was about to open his mouth in protest, when Derek continued. “She would have had a plan by now… but I don’t know what to do.”

“I’m sure there were times Laura didn’t know what to do.” Stiles replied, trying to be reassuring.

“So who did she go to?” Lydia asked, causing both men to look sharply in her direction. “When your sister needed advice, aside from you, who did she go to?”

“Deaton,” Derek replied, sounding distracted.

“As in the veterinarian?” Lydia’s question hung in the air unanswered.

“We need to go see Deaton,” Derek declared. He looked directly at Stiles. “He called– Scott’s human again, but he isn’t sure he’s in full control of his shift.”

“I– wait– what?” Stiles managed to stutter. Peter had actually kept to his word. Which mean that even though he’d already sacrificed his own well-being for it, Peter would act as though Stiles owed him for the privilege. He was immediately torn. Of course he wanted to see Scott, needed to see his best friend, but the thought of leaving his dad vulnerable without anyone to look over him made his stomach churn.

“We don’t have to go until you’re ready,” Derek said softly, “But when we do, Lydia should come too, at least until we can figure out how to keep her safe,” he added with a nod in the strawberry blonde’s direction.

“What about my dad?” Stiles asked softly, knowing there was no easy answer.

“I don’t think Peter is an immediate threat to him,” Lydia’s voice was light, contemplative. “Think
about it Stiles. Peter knows enough by now to weigh the risks and rewards when it comes to who to go after and when. You live for your dad, everything you do is for your dad. If Peter takes him away from you, he’s got nothing. There would be no reason to help him–”

“Because I’ve got nobody to live for,” Stiles finished for her. But he couldn’t help but look towards Derek the most subtle, complex set of emotions he’d ever felt rising inside of him. He cared about Derek, probably too much considering the length of time they’d known one another, and it felt like maybe, just maybe, there was more to live for in this world. Of course immediately on the heels of that thought came an all-consuming tide of guilt for thinking so selfishly, so shallowly.

“Peter is going to take aim at a more attainable target that is more likely to get him what he wants. He’ll only go after your dad after exhausting every other avenue he’s got” Lydia continued, this time looking towards Derek. “And that gives us time.”

“Time to do what?” Stiles replied, feeling very much in the dark.

“Time to move your dad,” Derek supplied, looking at Lydia, who nodded, clearly pleased that someone had caught onto her plan. “Put in a transfer request to another facility, as far away from Beacon Hills as possible.”

“I can’t afford to transfer him somewhere else. I can’t even afford this hospital. I can probably only afford some crooked home in the middle of nowhere,” Stiles replied desperately. It was selfish he knew, but he still wanted his dad close, needed the assurance being able to see his dad in the flesh every day or so brought.

“Don’t worry about the money,” Derek said softly. Stiles’ didn’t miss Lydia’s eyes flashing with interest at the remark. “Put in the request to somewhere decent– and far away from here.” Stiles opened his mouth to protest. “It doesn’t have to be permanent– won’t be permanent. We’ll move him close again once we’ve dealt with Peter.”

“In the meantime, all I have to do is not piss Peter off,” Stiles muttered. “Easy– or it would be if I wasn’t dealing with a complete psychopath.” He scrubbed both hands down his face in frustration. He knew what Lydia had said made perfect sense, but it was still far from comforting knowing that the slightest mistake could mean dire consequences for his friends.

“Well, I for one am not about to do into hiding and make your dad a target,” Lydia replied sharply. “And I know you. You never put yourself first. Not that I would take advantage of that…” she paused, pursed her lips. “My point is I know I have nothing to be afraid of.”

“Do you have somewhere you could go?” Derek asked. “If there was an emergency and we had to get you somewhere safe, quickly…”

“I can think of a few,” Lydia replied slyly.

“Don’t tell us,” Stiles retorted sharply. “If you tell me, Peter could just go digging for the information–” A horrible thought dawned on him at that moment and he looked to Derek. “It doesn’t matter where I transfer my dad, Peter could still find out if he wanted to know.”

“I thought of that,” Derek replied grimly, “which is why we’re going to have to make going after your dad more trouble than it is worth. I might be able to pull some strings–”

“In New York?!” Stiles all but squawked. He glanced back at his father, seemingly asleep, oblivious to the turmoil unfolding in the world around him, as he almost always was. Now more than ever, Stiles wondered what was going on in the man’s head. He wondered how much damage Peter’s
claws had done to his dad’s mind, whether or not his dad was in a semi-vegetative state like the
to everything going on around him, powerless to stop it. He wondered if his dad had the capacity
to miss him, or if he would wonder why Stiles kept leaving him all alone.

“He’s going to think I abandoned him.”

“He would never think that Stiles,” Lydia replied softly.

“It will only be as long as we have to,” Derek attempted to reassure, “and if we somehow manage to
fix things before the transfer goes through, we won’t have to move him at all.”

Stiles nodded, a lead weight in his stomach.

Can I have a few minutes alone with my dad,” he asked softly, eyes on the floor. If he looked at
either Lydia or Derek, he knew he would crumble.

Yeah,” Lydia replied first. Stiles watched as she bent to grab her bag from the floor beside her chair.
“I’m going to go get changed. I’ll take the Jeep and meet you at the animal hospital, okay?”

Stiles nodded his assent as Lydia and Derek exchanged pleasantries before she walked out the door.
It was only a few seconds after Lydia’s footsteps disappeared down the hallway that the lump in
Stiles’ throat swelled and tears flooded his vision. He let a single, choked sob and Derek was there,
kneeling in front of him to draw him into his arms roughly, like he was afraid he could fly apart if he
didn’t hold him together. Truthfully, Stiles wasn’t all that sure he wouldn’t.

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Derek’s chest felt tight, had felt tight since he’d pulled Stiles into his arms in the Sheriff’s hospital
room and just held on, hoping the waves of misery and the cloying scent of fear and helplessness
would fade. Beside him, Stiles was the embodiment of nerves. The fingers on his left hand picked at
the seam on his jeans, plucking ceaselessly. He stared out the window, right leg bouncing up and
down, chewing on the fingernails of his right hand. Five years ago, all the nerves would have been
enough to make Derek snap, but now Derek was barely able to bring himself to reach out and gently
but firmly grasp Stiles’ left hand and pull it towards himself. He didn’t know what else to do. He
wanted to tell Stiles about the bestiary and what he’d found, but he knew now wasn’t the time.

“What happened to Scott’s parents?” he asked instead, grimacing at what his brain seemed to pass
off as ‘light’ conversation. Given the nature of his relationship with Stiles thus far, he supposed it
was.

“When Scott went missing, his mom– Melissa– she’s like another mom to me. She tried to let the
cops do their job, but with everything that went down at the department, the case got handed off to
another district, lost in the shuffle. So she took off looking for Scott on her own,” Stiles explained.

“What about his dad?”

Stiles snorted.

“What about him? The dick left when Scott was six.” Stiles let out a frustrated huff of breath.
“Laura–” Derek bristled at the mention of his sister, heart aching at the loss. “She knew Scott was
struggling with control. I think once they’d figured it out together, they were going to track Melissa down.”

Silence hung in the air. This was the first time Derek was really getting to meet Scott and he had no idea what to expect. For better or worse, he was pack, but even if he wasn’t, Derek owed it to Laura to finish what she’d started. He’d have to help Scott—a bitten wolf with a very rough beginning—learn control. He had to hope that Peter hadn’t damaged him irreparably and he wouldn’t turn on Derek or Stiles without warning.

“I want to finish what Laura started,” Derek said once he’d gathered his thoughts enough, and the silence had drawn out a beat too long. “But I’m not an Alpha Stiles. I might be able to help Scott, but Peter will always have more control than I can teach your friend. Until we find a way to deal with Peter, we can’t bring Scott’s mom back here. It wouldn’t be safe.”

“I know,” Stiles sighed. “I just hope that Scott can understand that too.”

When they pulled into the vet clinic parking lot, Lydia was already there, lounged against the side of Stiles’ Jeep. The change out of her maid’s uniform definitely made her more striking. She looked out of place next to the battered Jeep in a brown leather jacket and boots, and a feminine floral dress, and Derek realized just how diminutive she was. The thought of Peter setting his sights on her made Derek’s stomach churn. Of course that made Derek’s thoughts turn to Stiles and how, though he didn’t look as vulnerable as Lydia, he was infinitely more so, and continued to suffer for it.

“You ready?” he asked, turning to look at the teen as he parked and killed the ignition.

“As I’ll ever be,” Stiles replied with a sigh. The silence that followed made the air in the car feel thick and heavy. Derek was about to ask what was wrong when Stiles spoke. “Every time I see Scott, something bad happens to him.”

“That’s not your fault,” Derek replied, pained as he remembered the amount of times friends, Laura, Hannah, had told him the very same thing and he hadn’t believed them. He still didn’t one hundred percent believe that the fire hadn’t been his fault.

“But it is,” Stiles replied. “The whole reason my best friend is a werewolf is because Peter was after me.”

“You say that like it’s the end of the world,” Derek replied. He couldn’t blame him. Stiles’ limited experience with werewolves didn’t exactly paint them in the best light. “But Scott will have a pack that will always support him, protect him.”

“But right now, the leader of his pack—your pack—is Peter, who doesn’t give a shit about protecting Scott, or even teaching him what it means to be a werewolf. And I don’t exactly think you’d get Peter’s support filling in the gaps.”

And that was an axe Derek dreaded to see fall. It already appeared to be in motion, what with Peter’s dramatic display earlier. Derek could only guess that when Peter did finally chose to confront him, it would be in an equally dramatic way.

“Well, I don’t give a shit if Peter ‘supports’ my actions,” Derek all but growled. “He’s no Alpha of mine.” He popped open his car door before turning to Stiles.

“Come on, let’s go see your friend,” he prompted, softening his tone and nodding towards the building.
He was ninety percent sure he heard Stiles mutter something about him having a death wish before both of them got out of the car.

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Alan appeared to be expecting at least Derek, because he was waiting at the door, the welcome sign flipped to ‘closed’ despite the advertised hours declaring the clinic open. Stiles’ stomach flip-flopped and he began to wonder if that coffee he’d had at the hospital was such a good idea. He didn’t know what to expect– the same Scott he’d all too briefly talked to on the fateful night of Laura’s death, or the fragile animal he’d spent most of the past two weeks as.

“Hello Stiles, Derek,” the vet greeted with a nod towards each of them. “Ms. Martin, correct?” he added when he noticed Lydia.

“Lydia,” she replied by way of an introduction. Judging by the haughty expression she wore, she wasn’t as in the dark about the vet’s relationship with Stiles as he’d once thought. Stiles shot her a weak ‘be nice’ expression as they all stepped inside the door.

“Is Scott okay?” Stiles asked urgently, full well knowing that in this case, ‘okay’ was a relative term.

“He is doing much better than expected,” Alan replied calmly. “I’ve got him in the back exam room, if you’d like to follow me. Lydia, Derek– if you may, I think it would be best if we let Stiles have a few moments with Scott first– I don’t want to overwhelm him with too many people.”

“You want me to let my– Stiles– into a room alone with a possibly feral werewolf?” Derek asked incredulously. At that Deaton quickly ventured a not-so-subtle look at Lydia for some sort of reaction, and finding none, seemed to relax.

“Derek, he’s my best friend, he won’t hurt me,” Stiles defended, but even he could hear the tell-tale tremor in his voice and feel the slight trip in his heartbeat as he wondered ‘My what?’.

“I’ve taken certain measures,” Alan replied, albeit, in his usual cryptic way. “But I don’t want to place any more undue stress on Scott than is strictly necessary. I promise, Stiles won’t be in harm’s way.”

“I’ll be fine,” Stiles insisted softly when Derek just continued to glare.

“How about you, Lydia and I head to my office so we can discuss Ms. Martin’s role in all of this?” the vet proposed to Derek, momentarily dividing his attention. When Stiles gave him a nod of encouragement, Alan unlocked the examination room door.

“Whenever you’re ready,” he prompted. Stiles cast Derek one last look that said ‘I’ll be fine’ before shoving open the door and stepping inside.

“Stiles!” Scott cried, voice hoarse from lack of use. He jumped down from where he sat on the examination table in the middle of the room, dressed in green vet tech scrubs, and moved towards Stiles, only to stop abruptly less than two feet from him, arms poised for an embrace. His face registered only confusion for a couple of scant seconds before understanding seemed to sink in. Stiles frowned.

“What?” he demanded in confusion. Scott sighed and looked down at their feet. Trailed in a thick
line, circling the entire examination table about two feet from it, was a thick trail of what looked like dirt, but as Stiles looked closer, he realized it was blacker, finer.

“Mountain ash,” Scott supplied, and Stiles remembered Alan mentioning that it was laid right into the foundation of the vet clinic, broken only in a few select places. “I can’t get past it,” Scott continued, “no werecreature can. Which I guess is a good thing since that means Peter can’t easily get to me.”

Stiles looked back down at the line of powder. How could something so fragile as a barrier made of ash, keep something so strong out— or in.

“I need this stuff around my entire life,” Stiles muttered. He looked up at his friend. “If I step in there with you, you have to promise you aren’t going to rip me apart or anything in a fit of wolfy rage.”

“I promise,” Scott replied sincerely. “I– I’m getting better at the control thing… well I was until Peter—” he cut himself off, grit his teeth and breathed in steadily before exhaling slowly. “I can feel when I’m starting to slip and I can usually calm myself down, but it’s harder without Laura.”

Guilt, like a knife, twisted in Stiles’ gut.

“It’s my fault she’s gone. I was supposed to be with Peter that night, but I skipped our appointment. I didn’t know he was a werewolf until it was too late.”

“Stiles,” Scott implored softly, “It wasn’t your fault.”

“Scott, you have no idea how fucked up all of this is. It is—”

“Stiles, shut up,” Scott all but growled, eyes flaring gold for a few brief seconds before returning to their usual brown. “Just– get in this stupid circle so I can hug my best friend.”

Stiles didn’t need to be asked twice. He took one quick step over the barrier and threw his arms around his friend, slightly too rough, but met with the same intensity. Scott smelled mostly like soap, but still faintly of the woods; earthy and green. After several long moments, they reluctantly parted.

“So now what?” Scott asked as they both hopped up onto the exam table next to one another. Stiles huffed out a breath.

“I wish I knew.”

“I should have torn Peter apart when I had the chance,” Scott practically growled.

“Before or after he impaled you on a tree stump?” Stiles asked dryly.

“Both,” Scott replied. “I’m sorry I couldn’t stop him from, from…” he trailed off, unable to say the word.

“You couldn’t have stopped him,” Stiles replied, cringing at just how much worse things could have been if his friend had tried. He looked up from where he’d been staring at his hands. “You shouldn’t have come back.”

Scott’s expression registered hurt before he seemed to understand what his friend had meant by the statement. If he hadn’t come back to try and help Stiles, Peter wouldn’t have taken away his ability to control his shift. Nonetheless, he shook his head.

“You don’t understand… it wasn’t just that I couldn’t have left you there. Being in a pack is like— being a magnet. After he killed Laura and took her power, I could feel Peter pulling me back to him,
just like before when I could feel the Alpha that bit me, near but unreachable. Even when Laura came and made me a part of her pack.”

At that Stiles looked up sharply, a sick realization filling his stomach with dread. Scott didn’t know Peter was the one who’d bitten him in the first place. He still thought some other wolf was out there, but Peter had somehow taken possession of him, or something along those lines. And Laura wouldn’t have known to tell him better because as far as she was concerned, her uncle was missing and presumed dead.

“Stiles, your heart is beating really fast.”

He didn’t need a werewolf to tell him that. He fidgeted, hands lifting from the edge of the metal table and into his lap, fingers restlessly pulling on one another as he contemplated whether it was best to stay where he was and try and be there for his friend, or to be safe, slip down from the exam table and put himself outside of the mountain ash circle before telling Scott the truth. Perhaps suicidal, he chose the former.

“Scott,” Stiles implored, turning to look at his friend, expression miserable. “Peter is the Alpha that bit you.”

For a few seconds, his best friend just stared at him, jaw slightly ajar before he abruptly clamped it shut, visibly clenching his jaw.

“No,” Scott said softly, “No,” he insisted, tone more determined. “The Alpha who bit me may have been wounded, or got killed by hunters, or was some crazy asshole who had lost his mind and just bit me, but he wasn’t Peter.” The last three words came out as a growl, Scott’s eyes illuminating gold before settling back to brown. The anger rolled off of him in waves, rooting Stiles in place. Every instinct told him to move away from his friend— who could easily rip him apart, but Stiles, for better or for worse, was good at ignoring his instincts. So he stayed right where he was, next to his friend and waited for him to calm down. Several seconds passed in tense silence before Scott spoke again.

“How do you know?” he finally asked.

“Peter showed me,” Stiles replied truthfully. “He can do this thing with his claws. He dug one into the back of my neck and it like… tapped into my brain or something. He showed me everything from that night— it was like– like watching a horror movie. There was nothing I could do to stop him. Even when I tried– I screamed to warn you when Peter was about to start chasing you, but you couldn’t hear me.” Stiles spared a glance at Scott, who was staring at him in disbelief. “I remember you looked up–”

“Like I could feel someone there…”

“And you started to run even though I knew he’d catch you.” Stiles shuddered, unable to shake the image of Peter tearing into his friend’s side.

“How much did Peter let you see?”

“Just until just after he’d bit you. He didn’t show me anything between then and the police station.”

“The police station…” Scott’ voice was flat and distant. That was when Stiles realized that for all that had been going on, Scott had missed a lot of it, spending his days as a wolf, either out wandering, trapped as a wolf, or under the protection of Alan and his clinic walls.

“Yeah,” Stiles replied softly. “The night everyone died, the night my dad–”
“Stiles,” Scott interrupted, eyes closed, voice tight and strained, and several registers lower than usual. Stiles heard a faint clicking sound, looked down to see claws in place of his friend’s fingernails, curling over the edge of the exam table. “I’m going to need you to get out of the circle.” Scott’s eyes opened, glowing gold through his glare. “Now.”

Stiles scrambled from the edge of the exam table, heart pounding, not even out of the circle when Scott’s roar of anger filled the small room.

Chapter End Notes

I am happy to say, I finally sat down and plotted out the remaining events of this story in detail. While I can't say for sure how many more chapters it is going to take to wrap everything up, I'm pretty confident in saying we are over the halfway mark, if not more. With the ending in clear sight, as supposed to some murky landmark in the distance, I've found I'm writing faster trying to hit that goal. So thanks for sticking with me for so long everyone, hope you'll stick around to the end!
The wolf, the commander and the spark

Chapter Notes

Thank you all for your tremendous patience waiting for this chapter <3 I'm busy continuing to write and promise the next update will come in a much more reasonable time frame! I should have another update up before Christmas!

“I hope you’ll forgive me for saying this, but Ms. Martin, how did you become involved in… this,” the vet made a gesture around his small office as he took a seat behind his desk, and Derek and Lydia seated themselves in the two small, upholstered chairs across from the veterinarian. Deaton didn’t look overly concerned, which actually set Derek somewhat at ease. Of course Derek couldn’t fault Stiles for telling his friend about Peter or about him and his family, but it made him nervous. After all, he had once foolishly let a cute girl in on a big secret– and it had cost him almost his entire family. Even before the fire, he’d always kept the wolf part of his identity very private. It wasn’t like the majority of the world recognized them as more than mythical creatures anyway, and he’d never gotten to know someone well enough to reveal the information in a way that wouldn’t be taken as a joke– or insanity.

“Because Stiles is involved in this,” Lydia replied simply. Deaton raised an eyebrow at her, wordlessly prompting her to elaborate. For a few seconds, it seemed like Lydia was going to remain stubbornly concise on the topic, before she spoke

“Several weeks ago I knew something was up,” she admitted, and Derek was surprised to notice her eyeing him with trepidation. “I was making my morning rounds for check in when I found Stiles. He was in bad shape and I knew someone– thought more than one person– had gotten rough. Naturally, after I made an excuse to the other maid about the room’s occupant sleeping in, I let Stiles shower, told him he should talk to the police, and left it alone. Except I didn’t actually leave it alone. I knew Stiles wouldn’t go to the police, so I checked the customer check in records for the name of the asshole that had abused him.”

Both Derek and Deaton raised an eyebrow because everyone knew that at hotels like the Comfort Plus seldom insisted on proper identification from their patrons. Lydia, unperturbed by their skeptical expressions continued on.

“I know what you’re thinking– ‘nobody ever uses their real name in places like that’ and you’re probably right– are right in the case of Peter. He was down in our record books as A. Wolfe.”

“Of course he was,” Derek muttered. Only Peter could have such a twisted sense of self-importance to reserve a room and make light of the situation.

“I know Stiles well enough to know that he will stick up for himself, so there was no way he would subject himself to that kind of treatment again unless he thought he could handle it for substantial pay– which is incredibly stupid– or he was being threatened or blackmailed. I didn’t want to find Peter’s name on the register, so for awhile, I didn’t look at it. I tried to tell myself that Stiles was acting differently because of what he’d been through at McLean—” Lydia cut herself off, chewing her lower lip and glancing at Derek.

“I know he was in a detention centre,” he supplied. Laura would have never let that happen if she’d
known him, he couldn’t help but think. Lydia nodded, looking slightly relieved, and continued.

“When I finally checked the records again, I knew what would be there, but I didn’t want to see it. ‘A. Wolfe’ had been in our books in the same motel room, the same night every week since Stiles had been out of McLean. Two weeks ago, my boss called me in for a front desk shift Thursday night because our regular girl up and quit, with the promise of Friday off, I took it. I was there when Peter checked in at around quarter to ten alone. I watched him leave about an hour later alone. I even checked the room and there was no sign of Stiles. Peter didn’t come back that night– the next day, he’d checked out early in the morning, like he always did. So I started to think that maybe I was wrong about him. I’d just resolved to ask Stiles about everything when he disappeared. Then, when I was cleaning the room this morning and found bloody towels, I had a bad feeling– so I went to the one place I knew Stiles would go to if he was in trouble– the hospital.”

“That’s where she comes in,” Derek explained to Deaton. “Stiles told her about everything, and now we think Peter could use her to make Stiles do what he wants.”

“For the record, I think they are overreacting.”

Deaton’s brows came together.

“I for one, do not,” he replied seriously. It was almost comical to watch Lydia’s mouth open to protest before closing again, unable to get the words out. “Based on Peter’s past behaviour, we are going to have to act very cautiously.”

Deaton paused to look to Derek.

“What do you and Lydia have in mind?”

“I– I don’t know,” Derek replied, at a loss. “Laura would have known but I–”

“Trust me when I say, your sister was a wonderful Alpha, but like every Alpha, she had her moments where she doubted her abilities as well– this is why packs have Emissaries. I believe she would have felt much the same as you, Deaton reassured calmly, and Derek couldn’t help but appreciate why his mother had selected him for such an important role. “I’m sure you can understand that, tempting as it is to try and hide Lydia away until the danger has passed, that this would likely see Peter go for the throat so to speak."

“That was my point,” Lydia interjected haughtily before being effectively silenced as Deaton kept speaking.

“What we need to do is create the illusion that we are attempting to protect Ms. Martin, which may involve some acting on your behalf,” the vet continued with a nod in Lydia’s direction, “yet will still need Peter to believe that the obstacles we have put in his way can be easily pushed aside should the need arise.”

“But how do we actually protect her?” Derek replied. He may have barely known the girl, but Stiles cared about her, trusted her, and that was enough for him to do his best to keep her out of harm’s way. Deaton held his gaze as he replied.

“I have a solution, but you aren’t going to like it.”

Naturally as soon as Derek opened his mouth to ask what said solution was all hell broke loose.
An uncontrolled roar of anger reverberated through the walls of the clinic, but Derek’s brain quickly filtered that audio information out in favor of tuning into the racing heartbeat and stuttered breaths he knew belonged to Stiles. He was thankful that he was the one closest to the door, otherwise the conversation about protecting Lydia may very well have been pointless had she been in his way. He charged down the hallway, could feel the change pulling at his features, and yet he knew somehow he was containing it—just barely.

Derek shoved open the exam rooms door without even thinking of the fact that Stiles could be right in front of it—thankfully he wasn’t, but he wasn’t in sight at all, instead a young werewolf—Scott—growled once more, shoving the metal exam table out of his way in favor of lunging at Derek in a blind rage. The way Scott flailed—as if he’d run into a pane of crystal clear glass—would have been downright comical in any other circumstance. As it was, the force of his rage knocked him off his feet and he hit the floor with a solid thud of flesh and bone.

“Scott!” Stiles cried out from his position hunched in the corner by the cabinets and sinks. “Scott stop!”

It took a few seconds for Derek’s brain to cobble together exactly what was going on. Just to the left of the toe of Stiles’ sneaker, was a thick, black line of sand—Mountain Ash. It surrounded the overturned exam table and Scott, creating a protective barrier, but it also meant that Derek couldn’t get in without potentially letting Scott out. The teen wolf was up again, snarling and lunging at his invisible cage, pacing the floor to seek out a weak point Derek hoped didn’t exist.

“What happened?” Derek demanded, dropping to Stiles’ side, tearing his eyes away from examining the mountain ash barrier in favor of inspecting Stiles for damage, hands flapping around in movements much more characteristic of the teen than himself.

“He didn’t know,” Stiles replied, sounding distracted. “He didn’t know Peter was the one who bit him, that he’s always been his Alpha. That he was the one who attacked the police station.”

It was at that moment that Deaton burst into the room, throwing an arm out to the side to prevent Lydia from following too quickly and inadvertently entering the mountain ash circle. It didn’t look as though the gesture was needed, Lydia froze in the doorway, lips parted and eyes wide in shock at the sight of the beast before her. The vet moved with calm efficiency and Scott actually stopped growling and thrashing in favor of tracking Deaton’s movements across the room to a metal instrument cart which had been covered in a sheet, which was tossed aside without ceremony to pick up—

“Is that a dart gun?” Stiles asked incredulously. The vet didn’t answer right away, instead he waited until he’d lifted the implement and taken aim.

“It is. I had a feeling this would happen,” he replied, resigned. Knowing he was a target seemed to make Scott even more feral and he growled and lunged at Deaton, who seemed only mildly perturbed before firing a dart expertly into one of Scott’s flanks.

“No!” Stiles cried out, watching as his friend staggered and slipped, nails clicking on the linoleum tile as he scrambled for purchase for several seconds before wobbling unsteadily and collapsing to his side.

“It’s only a tranquilizer mixed with a mild type of wolfsbane,” the vet explained, stepping into the mountain ash circle and crouching to first check Scott’s pulse, then the dart sticking out from his hindquarters. Deaton removed the dart with a sharp pluck that Scott didn’t even flinch in response too. “He will be out for about fifteen minutes, but when he wakes, he’ll be human again. Derek, if you don’t mind, could you help me set things to right again?”
Derek gave one of Stiles’ hands a squeeze before standing.

“You’re going to have to break that,” he replied, nodding towards the line of ash.

“We have to get him under control.” Derek’s voice was soft, but still seemed to fill the whole room. He and Deaton had righted the exam table together and lifted Scott’s unconscious form onto it, covering most of him with a sheet. He was already beginning to slip back into human form in stages and the last thing Derek wanted to subject him to was the werewolf equivalent of the teenaged nightmare of waking up in class naked.

“I agree,” Deaton replied from his place in the corner, tossing Scott’s destroyed set of scrubs into the trash bin beside him, “however his only options are you, or Peter.”

“Not Peter!” Stiles’ voice, though hoarse, was clear as a bell. Derek could feel the anxiety rolling off the teenager in waves. He glanced up to meet Stiles’ gaze across the room.

“It’s not that simple,” he replied, pained. “Scott has an Alpha. We both have an Alpha. I’m a Beta who has never had to teach a bitten wolf control. My family is made,” Derek swallowed, corrected himself, “was made up almost entirely of born wolves. I can teach him as much as I can, but Peter will always have control over Scott and me— until we deal with him.”

“Our most immediate concern is keeping you—Ms. Martin— and the Sheriff safe,” Deaton added with a nod in the redhead’s direction. “If we can keep you out of harm’s way, Derek, Stiles and I will be able to better deal with whatever Peter has planned.”

“So I’m expected to sit back and let the men handle it?” Lydia quipped dryly, face entirely unamused. Luckily Stiles seemed to know exactly how to handle her razor sharp tone. He uncrossed his arms, half growling, half groaning dramatically and scrubbed both hands down his face.

“You’re supposed to not get hurt because of me,” he retorted. “I know I rarely listen to you when you tell me—”

“Never listen,” Lydia corrected sharply.

“But this is not a time to make a stand for women’s rights. If it wasn’t for you and my dad, my very manly ass would have been as far away from Beacon Hills as I could get the night Peter blackmailed me in the first place.”

Lydia’s jaw snapped closed around her protest before she turned towards Deaton, eyebrows raised challengingly.

“So what is your plan?”

“We’re going to have to call in some assistance,” the vet replied before setting his gaze upon Derek. His heart pounded, somehow he knew the answer before it left the other man’s lips; “The Argents.”

Derek bristled at the name, the ghost of Kate’s lips on his skin making goosebumps dimple his flesh, the suffocating smell of ash filling his mouth and nose as he struggled to make his voice work.

“What?” his voice sounded like he was choking on smoke.

“Wait— the same Argents that killed everyone in his family?” Stiles blurted incredulously. “What the fuck Alan?!”
“The Argents today are a very different breed compared to those you’ve always known Derek,” Deaton continued calmly.

“As far as I remember, there are still two rotten apples left on that family tree,” Derek growled in response. His heart palpitated at the thought of Kate being anywhere near him again and he thanked fate that the only werewolf in the room that would have been able to sense his fear and anxiety, and self-loathing, was out cold.

“That’s where you are wrong. While Kate may still be out there, attempting to maintain the old ways taught to her by her father, her brother Chris, now operates under a different code,” Deaton replied calmly. “When Victoria died, there was a transition period. A series of events transpired that I’m not fully privy too and ultimately, the leadership followed the matriarchal tradition that the Argents have traditionally followed– with the exception of Gerard– and Chris’ daughter became head of the Argent hunters. Her first action as leader was to rewrite their code, her second, to quickly deal with the Argents that were unwilling to fall into the new order. She still very much considers Kate a matter of unfinished business.”

Derek barely had time to process the information he’d been given before Stiles, ever sharp and clever, spoke.

“Hold on a second,” he blurted, eyes narrowed in skepticism, like he could actually see the puzzle before him that he was working out. “I must be missing something here because, unless Chris is like, way older than Kate, his daughter– the commander in chief– of the Argents, would be a high school student.”

Derek blinked. He hadn’t thought about that. To his knowledge there was about 6 or 7 years between Kate and her brother. He hadn’t even known Chris had had a kid, it was almost too human of a thought for a clan like the Argents.

“Indeed, she is a student, attending your former high school,” Deaton replied calmly. “She is a brilliant strategist, and part of this is her ability to hide in plain sight, though she doesn’t make any exceptional efforts to do so.”

“And you think we can trust her,” Stiles replied flatly, “with my best friend’s and dad’s lives.”

Even in the face of Stiles’ hostility, the vet remained calm.

“I do,” he replied seriously.

“And you don’t think for a second that this is all a rouse? That she isn’t going to use this opportunity to cut down the final branches on the Hale family tree?”

Despite the strength of his words, Derek could almost feel Stiles’ heart pounding where he stood. He was scared. For Derek. And Derek… didn’t know what to do with that information. He wasn’t surprised by it, more, overwhelmed.

Stiles had moved closer, now next to Derek. Derek wasn’t sure when he’d moved there. Long fingers with bitten nails and knobby knuckles brushed over the back of his knuckles, still gripping the exam table.

“What do you think?” he asked softly, just loud enough for Derek to hear. He unclenched his hand from the table, opting to squeeze Stiles’ own, praying he was making the right choice.

“Okay, lets meet with them.”
Deaton had called and made the arrangements. The Argents would come by the Animal Clinic in that evening to meet and if they agreed to everything, formulate a plan, which meant everyone had time to go home, shower and rest. Stiles had been reluctant to let Lydia out of his sight, but she could be a very, convincing, albeit, confusing girl; ‘Stiles I am not standing around in this stupid uniform smelling like ammonia and mothballs any longer. I’m going home to shower. Stiles had responded with some sort of remark about the smell potentially deterring werewolf noses and was met with a glare of unparalleled proportions.

Now his head was spinning with the gravity of everything. He trusted Alan, he really did. The man had never done anything to hurt him, and he seemed to care deeply about Derek and his family. But from everything Derek had told him, and everything Stiles knew about the fire, and human nature really, he had an innate distrust of the Argents.

“Why am I somehow less okay with this than you?” Stiles murmured where he sat perched on the counter in the corner of the exam room at the vet clinic, Derek standing in front of him. He stared down at his shoes. One of the ways he and Derek had occupied their time after leaving the vet clinic earlier that afternoon had been to go get him a new pair, since Peter hadn’t been considerate enough to dump Stiles with his only pair of sneakers. For the morning, he’d worn Derek’s too bright, too clean gym shoes, and the other man had been all too keen to get him a brand new pair of his own, but instead he’d convinced him to go second hand. Only this time he’d traded in faded converse for something sturdier– a worn in pair of boots not unlike the ones his dad used to wear on duty. Out of the corner of his eye, Stiles could still see Derek shrug.

“Because I have nothing else that they could take from me,” Derek replied, and God, he sounded so… not defeated, just accepting of it all, and Stiles’ heart broke just a bit. He looked up just as Derek’s fingers traced under his jaw, tipping his chin up. “Except you. If I feel, for a second that they’d put you in danger, I’m calling everything off and we’ll figure something else out.”

Stiles closed his eyes, nodded, revelling in the warmth emanating from Derek’s hand. Their lips had just connected when the door to the room opened and Deaton and Scott entered, closely followed by Lydia. Stiles felt his skin heat slightly when Scott stared at them, blinking several times in quick succession. He hadn’t gotten to fully explaining him and Derek’s relationship to him or Lydia yet. Though Lydia, seemed entirely unsurprised, Stiles could tell he would have some explaining to do with Scott later. Derek moved away to lounge against the counter beside him quickly enough, but he didn’t entirely closet his intentions, instead staying shoulder to shoulder with Stiles where he sat.

“They should be here any minute,” Alan said matter-of-factly, “Scott, if you may.” The vet– Stiles really should start thinking of him as the Emissary he’d referred to himself as– gestured at the exam table and Scott stepped next to it with a sigh.

“Hopefully we don’t need it,” Scott muttered as the vet produced a small, muslin bag from one of the cupboard’s beside Stiles’ head. He seemed to pause for a moment, the giving the bag in his hand a thoughtful squeeze before turning to Stiles.

“Stiles, would you mind doing to honor?” he asked lightly. Stiles wanted to blurt, ‘why me?’ but kept his reaction to a raised eyebrow before hopping off the counter and taking the proffered bag.

“Sorry buddy,” he offered with a watery grin. The bag was pretty light as he tested the weight.
“Alan, do you have anymore?” he asked with trepidation. There was no way there was enough to surround the exam table and Scott, and the last thing he wanted to do was give the Argents an excuse to put down his best friend.

“There’s enough there,” Alan reassured softly.

Stiles gave the small sack a shake one more time before sighing and staring down at the floor.

“So I just… pour it in a line?” That couldn’t be right. He knew Deaton had to be more than what met the eye if an artfully arranged line of burned up tree was powerful enough to contain a werewolf.

“And think purposefully about the boundary you are forming and why,” the man answered.

“So my best friend doesn’t eviscerate anyone and get himself killed in the process, got it,” Stiles muttered before casting Scott an apologetic look. “Sorry buddy.”

“It’s okay,” Scott sighed, resigned as Stiles got to work.

Normally Stiles was the one to break silences before they stretched too long, but this time, as Stiles got to the back of the exam table, Scott was the one to break the quiet.

“So, uh, Lydia, are you and Jackson still a thing or…”

“God no,” she replied with a bit of a laugh, but Stiles knew it was for show—despite his douchery, Jackson was still a bit of a sore point for her.

“Oh uh… sorry,” Scott replied awkwardly, and though he couldn’t see him, Stiles knew he was making his awkward puppy face.

“Besides that’s not really the relationship you want to know about,” she retorted, voice full of mischief. Stiles looked up sharply, almost braining himself on the exam table in the process to see Lydia with an amused expression which he returned with what he hoped was a successful ‘what the hell are you doing?’ face. Naturally, he glanced at Derek, who wore a deer in the headlight expression, then flailed, realizing he was probably wasting precious ash, letting it clump in a pile—and now all over the room. But when he glanced back down, the ash was settling into a perfect line, exactly where he’d been intending to put it all along. He frowned at the line which should have been a mess.

“I uh, don’t really need to ask much,” Scott replied as Stiles continued around the table, enough to see Scott’s pained expression, “they smell like each other. I can pretty much figure things out from there.”

Stiles dropped the bag suddenly, cursing under his breath as the ash seemed to fly out of it—and arched into a perfect line, defying physics and closing the circle around the exam table. He stared in disbelief for a long moment before glancing up. Derek looked like he wanted the floor to swallow him up and transport him elsewhere, Scott wore a similar expression, Lydia looked like the cat who got the cream, and Deaton… Deaton was looking at him with an interested glimmer in his eyes that Stiles knew had nothing to do with his relationship with Derek.

“Thank you Stiles,” he said softly, coming to collect the bag with an outstretched hand. And Stiles was on the verge of ignoring the mortifying circumstance in which his relationship with Derek had become known to Scott, in favor of asking Deaton what the fuck had just happened, when the other boy spoke.

“I think they’re here. I just heard a car pull into the lot.”
Stiles stood quickly and returned to Derek’s side—no sense being subtle now.

“I’ll go let our guests in,” Deaton excused before slipping out the door, leaving his four visitors alone.

“Seriously Lydia!” Stiles crowed as soon as the door closed.

“Oh please,” she dismissed with the wave of one manicured hand. “You can feel the connection between the two of you like a magnetic field.”

Stiles looked to Scott for some sort of support but he merely shrugged, expression indicating that he very much agreed with Lydia.

Deaton returned only a moment later with a set of keys in hand instead of guests in tow.

“They’re coming in through the back—apparently best not to be seen from the road,” he explained, crossing the room to where a rolling metal door formed most of the wall to the left of Scott. He put a key into an outlet in the wall and the door rolled slowly upwards to reveal a loading dock area with a few bags of soiled linen piled to the side against one wall. The other door was slightly obscured, facing the back of the building and the parking lot. Even if Stiles hadn’t known about its location ahead of time, he would have been able to figure out from its location that a corner large enough to hide a car was formed by the building. As the other door slowly rolled open, Stiles took a hold of Derek’s hand and squeezed.

“Thank you for coming Chris,” Deaton greeted as a tall man with greying, sandy brown hair stepped across the threshold. He wore a sleek, dark brown leather jacket, a khaki green v-neck, dark jeans. His entire demeanor was one of calm and confident authority and self-control. Stiles couldn’t help but think, rather wryly, that he would have made a good cop.

“Of course,” the other man—Chris—replied, surprisingly warmly, pausing to shake Alan’s hand. Stiles felt the muscles in Derek’s arms and legs where he was pressed to his side tense as he consciously or unconsciously made his frame appear larger, almost abandoning his hold on Stiles’ hand to cross his arms over his chest, until Stiles leaned over and murmured;

“Down boy.”

Derek huffed out a breath, and Stiles felt some of his muscles ease back into softness, but not entirely. He squeezed his hand reassuringly, prepared for the introductions to begin.

Of course that was when a teenage girl, dark brown hair hanging in a curtain obscuring her profile, stepped into the loading bay. Stiles frowned. Something was familiar about the way she moved. When she straightened up and looked towards Deaton, tucking a few locks of hair behind her ear, Stiles’ heart stuttered.

“Alison?”

Outside of the candy-striper smock she wore at the hospital, Alison was recognizable, and oddly enough, seemed to perfectly fit the image Deaton had painted of the Argent commander, but in her own way. She was dressed in a light brown leather jacket and tall, brown boots that extended to her knees, black tights and a burgundy dress. Cute things a teenage girl would like, that would make her fit in. Practical things that would allow her to move in a fight. Deaton was right, she effortlessly blended in.

“Hi Stiles,” she greeted, much softer and calmer than someone who should have been surprised would have responded. Stiles could feel the intensity of Derek’s gaze on the side of his face and he
knew he’d better explain fast.

“H-hi Alison,” he stuttered out before turning to look at Derek, almost cringing at what he thought he’d see there: maybe anger, loathing, betrayal, disappointment, instead Derek’s eyes were wide, vulnerable with fear he hadn’t managed to clamp down on in time before Stiles looked his way.

“Derek,” he implored almost right away, heart pounding, praying he could get through before the other man either shut down or shoved him away. “I didn’t know. I mean I know her– but only because she volunteers at the hospital, I didn’t know who she was, I swear.”

“He’s telling the truth,” Alison offered quickly. She was keeping her distance, hovering just inside of the second door. Between them, Scott had just slid from the exam table to turn around and now looked tense and nervous. It reminded Stiles of seeing the dogs at the park– all it took was one thinking something was wrong, to set them all off. In this situation, that could end in bloodshed. Several tense seconds passed before Derek nodded, one quick jerk of his head up and down.

“I know,” Derek breathed out, shakily. The ‘I’m beginning to think all of this is some sort of cosmic fuckery’, heavily implied in his weary tone. Scott seemed to relax slightly where he was, shoulders sagging marginally and Stiles was so caught up in his relief at that, that he jumped slightly when Derek’s fingers tickled at his palm, reaching for his hand again.

“Well now that everyone is here, I think we should get started. The longer the Argent’s stay, the more likely they are to be noticed,” Alan spoke, breaking the tension in the air. Every nodded in agreement, and began to assemble.
The best laid plans

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chris Argent made Stiles nervous. Especially when his brain helpfully pulled out a little tidbit of information that Allison had revealed to him before; he was an arms dealer. Even though Allison was talking, Stiles couldn’t help but watch the man out of the corner of his eye. Years of experience around law enforcement, both on the right and wrong side of the law had made Stiles very observant. Chris carried a gun in a shoulder holster and something in his boot— Stiles wasn’t sure if it was a gun or a knife since nobody had moved around too much.

Everyone had gathered around the exam table outside of the mountain ash line— well everyone save for Scott— Deaton and Derek stood near the ends of the table, Lydia and Stiles hovered as close to Scott as they could without crossing the barrier, backs to the door from the front of the clinic, and the Argents stood with their backs to the rear wall.

“So… as you know, Peter Hale appears to be alive and well,” Deaton began seriously.

“The question is how,” Chris interjected. “How did a violent Beta slip from between the fingers of his Alpha.”

“Watch it,” Derek growled at the implication that Laura had been even remotely incompetent. Chris looked somewhat satisfied, arrogant grin beginning to tug at the corner of his lips before Allison looked his way. The amusement dropped away from his expression almost immediately.

“At the time, it was safe to assume that Peter wasn’t any danger to himself or anyone else,” Deaton continued calmly. “Laura had no reason to presume anything other than the story the hospital had told her— that her uncle had wandered off and not returned. As I am sure you know, Kate used a particularly lethal form of wolfsbane in the fire. When ingested— like through smoke inhalation— it impaired Peter’s ability to heal— likely permanently. He’d made nothing more than utterly human progress in his recovery.”

“Peter’s always been one to play the long game.” Derek’s voice was so shocking to hear in the quiet room, so surprisingly calm in the face of people he could have just as easily considered killers. “He wouldn’t have attacked right away, not his style.”

Stiles knew that one all too well. Peter’s cunning, power and flair for the dramatic made Peter all the more dangerous. In many ways he wished Peter had just grabbed him off the street corner, been upfront with what he wanted, taken it, and left him to sort out whatever mess had been left in his wake.

But you never would have met Laura, found Scott… or Derek.

“We only know a small amount about the timeline,” Deaton continued. “In fact, Stiles is likely the one with the broadest perspective in all of this.”

Stiles fidgeted uncomfortably as all eyes settled on him. He knew Alan hadn’t meant to put him on the spot.

“Right uh,” he began haltingly, rubbing a hand across the back of his head, almost like he could gather his thoughts like strands of hair. “What I know is kind of… cobbled together. I’ll do my best, but it’s not going to be perfect. There are definitely uh… holes,” he continued as his fingers brushed
over the wounds on the back of his neck. He took a shaky breath and glanced at Scott, gauging his body language for any sign of distress or loss of control. “All I know is that Peter got out of the rest home with the help of a nurse who gave him some sort of… I dunno, werewolf mojo or something to get him started again.”

He knew that it was likely the only people in the room that knew he wasn’t telling the whole truth were Scott and Derek, he just hoped neither would call him on it.

“The night he got out, he bit Scott before he went to the Sheriff’s department and tore it apart…” he breathed in shakily. Scott was standing straighter, his shoulders rising and falling as he breathed, but he hadn’t so much as let his eyes flicker with the change. Chris immediately set his gaze on the teenager, watching closely, as if daring him to change. Allison kept her appraisal much more subtle. Stiles paused before tentatively continuing. “Then from there I don’t really know what happened… there is a huge chunk of time I know nothing about.”

“How much time?” Chris asked, voice a lot softer and gentler than Stiles expected it to be.

“Almost two years,” he replied, fidgeting uncomfortably under the expectation that he’d know what Peter had been up to. There seemed to be a collective intake of breath while everyone tried to parse what the werewolf could have possibly been up to all that time.

“What did you do in all that time?” Allison asked, carefully to keep her tone one of investigation rather than accusation.

“At first I tried to get back, but everything was so overwhelming. I couldn’t get a hold of the shift. Even thinking about trying to gain enough control enough to go back home and see my mom and tell her what happened made me think about how little control I had and I’d shift,” Scott explained. “For the first few weeks, whenever I changed, it was like… like turning into the Hulk. I couldn’t control this feeling of… anger and frustration. I didn’t want to hurt anyone so I went deeper into the preserve, sticking to some of the caves. I hoped I could get control if I had enough time, enough practice. Eventually I just… lost track of time. Shifting just made me so angry all the time, I just…” Scott looked towards Derek, “I don’t know how you do it so easily.

“Practice,” Derek replied. “But it’s easier for born wolves than bitten ones. I’m sure Laura told you, that’s why so many packs are largely family.” Derek set his gaze on Chris then, and watched it shift from sympathetic to guarded. “We’re selective about who we bite and bring into the pack as non-human members.” A clear reminder then, that Peter was not the norm. He looked back to Scott. “You’ll get a handle on things, you don’t have any other options,” the ‘or people like the Argents will hunt you down’ heavily implied.

“Well I don’t want to stay here,” Scott replied, wincing slightly. “Sorry,” he added looking to Deaton who made a ‘no offense taken’ gesture.

“So we need to eliminate Peter as a threat?” Chris clarified.
“No,” Derek replied firmly, “that is pack business.”

“So what exactly is our role here?”

And wow, for someone so Malboro ad rugged, Chris could certainly sound bitchy. That was when Allison turned to her father and uttered something in French:

“Nous protégeons ceux qui ne peuvent pas se protéger eux-mêmes.”

The sentiment was completely lost on Stiles, but he was somehow completely unsurprised when Lydia smoothly, sharply retorted;

“And Stiles cannot protect himself, let alone his dad,” she replied coolly, clearly in Chris’ direction.

“We know,” Allison replied calmly.

“Wait, what did I just miss?” Stiles interjected.

“Our code,” Allison explained. “It is to protect those who cannot protect themselves.” She looked towards her father. “I don’t see a problem here.”

It was an interesting dynamic that’s for sure; Allison being at the helm of the Argent Hunters, but Chris still being well… her dad, a delicate balance that was clearly constantly at a give and take for the two of them.

“You mean other than the fact that Stiles still hasn’t told us how he managed to cross paths with a dangerous werewolf. Or what that werewolf could possibly want with a teenaged boy.”

Allison turned slowly, taking a deep breath, shoulders heaving with the force of it, expression somewhat resigned. And there was the teenager in her, not wanting to admit her dad might be right. The leader though, was what came out of her mouth.

“He’s right,” she stated. “We need to know exactly what we’re getting into here; which means I need to know how and when you and Peter first crossed paths and what he wants with you.”

Stiles stomach flip-flopped. It was stupid really. The majority of the room knew exactly what context he had met Peter in, but it didn’t stop him from feeling the shame well up inside of him when he thought about talking about it openly.

“I met Peter at the end of September. My first full day after I’d been released from McLean,” Stiles side-eyed Lydia, expecting her to look disappointed in him, angry even. It was a look he was used to seeing her wear. He wasn’t used to the look she was wearing now; wide-eyed, and… sympathetic. “I uh…” he stumbled over his words when he looked at Chris, “He picked me up at the bus stop at Abraham and Lincoln. We went back to his hotel.” Chris blinked, then frowned for a few seconds until he put the pieces together and his face fell as though he was imagining his own child doing something that desperate. Stiles abruptly looked down, avoiding looking in Allison’s direction, even though she’d figured out most of his #tragicbackstory and he’d disclosed the rest not all that long ago.

“I had no idea why he chose me, of all the guys on that block. I thought I was a random, but strategic pick. Choose a kid that looks soft, like he won’t stick up for himself and boom– perfect victim for blackmail,” Stiles continued, looking up again. “The first night started out normal enough– nothing I couldn’t handle. But then he got rough and I knew if I ever went with him anywhere again, he’d probably be the same, if not worse. So when he came around again, I walked away– or I tried to. I didn’t want to go with him but I didn’t have a choice. He knew exactly who I was– who my dad
was– which meant he knew how to blackmail me.”

“Why didn’t you go to the police?” Chris’ voice sounded pained, like he hesitated to even ask.

“Because he is the police. Somehow he works for the department now. And I’m a kid who is supposed to be in a group home in some town between here and Sacramento on probation.” Stiles continued on before Allison or Chris could interrupt him again.

“My point is for the past couple of months, I thought all Peter wanted was to make my life a living hell. But a couple of weeks ago he did this thing,” Stiles glanced towards Derek to make sure he wasn’t giving away any information he shouldn’t about werewolves. The other man nodded, giving his assent. “He dug a claw into the back of my neck and was somehow able to get into my head, look at my memories, things like that. The next week he showed me what he’d been looking at: a memory of my mom in the hospital when Talia– Derek’s mom– came to visit. They were having a conversation about me; about how I was different.”

“Different how?” Allison asked.

“Like, magic,” Stiles replied, nose wrinkling at the term because it just wasn’t right. “But not, I’m not,” he rushed to add, “I mean, not anymore... ever really? When my mom got sick, she asked Talia to erase any memories of me being magic– from her mind and mine. My dad apparently didn’t know. I don’t remember anything. But Peter doesn’t care– he thinks I have something he needs– that’s why he bit Scott, slaughtered the entire police department. It’s why he won’t let me go. Whatever he wants with me can’t be good, but if he’ll kill my family and friends for it, I’ll give it to him on a silver fucking platter.”

“But you are something,” Allison stated firmly, not a question.

“At best I’m an untrained something with amnesia,” Stiles replied, “But Peter isn’t taking no for an answer. And I want to be able to say no. I need to be able to fight. He can’t kill me because he needs me, but he can take away every reason I have for living. That’s why I need your help.”

Allison nodded, expression carefully neutral.

“May we have a moment outside?” she asked, eyes flitting from Stiles to Deaton, who both nodded in response.

Stiles exhaled roughly as soon as he was sure the father and daughter team were out of earshot.

“Well that went well,” he announced sarcastically, an edge of hysteria to his tone, before it turned impatient and sharp, “especially considering that I don’t have a plan b.” He hunched forward, dropping his elbows to the exam table next to Scott, head in his hands. Scott put his hand on his shoulder– a gentle weight attempting to anchor him. Stiles lifted his head slightly.

“I’m fucked, we’re fucked and it is all because of whatever I am. And I don’t even know what the hell that is.”

“Stiles, they’re merely discussing their options,” Alan pacified. “Remember they aren’t father and daughter in this context; they’re commander and officer. Even they must struggle with that balance from time to time.”

“It’s strategy.” Derek’s voice broke through the uncomfortable quiet of the room in the wake of Stiles’ near breakdown. “They need to present a united front in order to appear strong, in control. Packs do it all the time. They don’t want to disagree in front of us or it would appear weak.” He nodded towards the door the Argents had exited from. “She may be young, but she’s smart.”
“If they won’t help, there are other ways,” Lydia replied softly. “We can get your dad moved far away if we need to. Scott can stay here and learn things from Derek.”

“And you?” Stiles asked. Lydia shrugged.

“Feign another fugue state and get re-admitted to Eichen if I have to,” she replied. Stiles stomach plummeted straight to his feet. Lydia hadn’t shared a lot with him about her experiences there, but he knew that saying she would put herself back in Eichen was like Stiles saying he’d put himself back in McLean.

“That is not happening,” he all but growled.

“I said if I have to,” Lydia retorted primly, then shrugged. “Personally, I think you’re over thinking things again. They have no reason to say no. You don’t agree to meet with someone if you don’t have every intention of at least hearing them out.”

“Guess that’s how you gave Jackson a second chance,” Stiles retorted with a lopsided grin, “and a third… and a fourth.”

Lydia raised an eyebrow in a way that made Stiles think she’d been to Derek’s school of non-verbal interaction. When he glanced back at the man in question, he was stifling a smirk behind his hand at Lydia’s ‘I dare you to continue’ expression.

“You know, you’re a lot more…” Scott made a helpless gesture with his hands, “than I remember.”

“Bitchy?”

“Assertive?”

Stiles and Lydia volunteered at the same time.

The teenaged werewolf’s hands flopped at his sides.

“No going there,” he replied, with a shake of his head.

The room fell into silence for a few minutes, with Deaton ducking out of the room surreptitiously under the guise of putting a load of animal bedding in the dryer.

“I remember,” Scott said suddenly, eyes wide and mouth slack in that puppy dog expression he was so good at.

“What?” Stiles replied, puzzled by the non-sequitur.

“Peter is right. He wasn’t lying to you, didn’t plant a fake memory or anything,” Stiles started to explain hesitantly. “There was a day when we were kids, like six, seven maybe? We were playing. It was when my mom and dad were still together and lived in the bigger house by the preserve. We were playing superheroes or something. You fell out of the tree.”

“Oh I remember that,” Stiles interjected, familiarity washing over him before he frowned. “But I was, like ten when that happened, not six, mom had just–”

“No,” Scott interrupted. “You don’t remember. You fell out of the tree and broke your neck. I heard the snap when you hit the ground and when I ran over your head was… at this weird angle.” Scott shuddered. “I ran into the house to get my mom– her and my dad were fighting so it took me a minute to get her attention enough to make her come outside. When we got there you were still lying
on the ground, but your head wasn’t at a funny angle anymore. My mom called your name a couple of times, checked your pulse, your breathing. A minute later you opened your eyes and asked what happened.”

Stiles’ first instinct was to tell Scott he was wrong, that it wasn’t possible. There was no way his neck had been broken– he couldn’t have recovered from something like that. But reality had bent an awful lot in the past few weeks, and after last night in particular he couldn’t be sure what he was and wasn’t capable of.

“Why didn’t you say anything before?” he settled on saying instead.

“Because it’s one of those things where your brain just doesn’t want to believe the impossible thing your eyes are showing you, so you just explain it away, forget about it,” Scott replied.

“Until something happens to make you remember,” Stiles finished. It was all he managed to utter before Deaton returned with a pile of blankets and scrubs in his arms. He glanced around the room before carefully stepping around the mountain ash circle to set the pile of laundry on a cart in the corner.

“I see the Argents have yet to return,” he observed, as if that fact was interested as supposed to distressing.

“If they refuse to help Stiles, it’s me you’ll want to put in that circle, not Scott,” Derek all but growled.

“I don’t believe that will be necessary,” Deaton replied calmly, “If it had been a refusal, it would have been almost immediate. They’re taking their time, which indicates to me that they intend to help, but want to determine the scope first so that they may be the ones in control of negotiations when they step back in the room.”

“Or they’re arguing about it,” Lydia volunteered not at all helpfully. When everyone glared in her direction, she rolled her eyes.

“Please, they’re father and daughter,” she explained, her sentence finishing at the sound of the heavy metal door at the back of the clinic sliding open and closed again. Deaton moved across the room to open the door and Stiles felt an overwhelming sense of trepidation. He looked to Derek automatically and the other man made a small gesture with his head: ‘come here’.

Stiles stepped out of the mountain ash circle, glancing at Scott apologetically, only to be met with a soft smile of understanding. Nonetheless, Stiles’ heart pounded as he landed at Derek’s side and the Argents entered the room. Stiles couldn’t help but be reminded of the anxiety he’d felt on his day in court, sitting next to his public defender, the sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach when he came to the realization that there was no way they were going to let a recently emancipated youth, with no fixed address, walk free after he’d solicited an officer.

Derek’s fingers brushing across the back of his hand, helped some of the panic subside. He tried not to be too obvious when he glanced down as their hands joined, knowing what Allison– and more importantly Chris– would likely think of the gesture. Derek though, didn’t seem to care. In fact when Stiles looked in his direction, he was staring across the room as if daring one of the Argents to say anything.

Once assembled in their previous position across the room, Allison spoke.

“After discussing everything, we’ve agreed we have a duty to protect the former Sheriff and Lydia,“
Allison began, but Stiles could hear the heavy weight to it– the unspoken but, “however we need assurances that Peter will be dealt with swiftly, because if he is not–”

“We will step in,” Chris finished. And man was he ever eyeballing Derek hard. As if it were his fault that Peter was an out of control maniac.

“Like your sister did?” Derek’s voice was dark, and chillingly calm, alarmingly similar to Peter’s whenever he made a threat, but when Stiles looked at him, his jaw was tense, all and he looked like he was choking on a lump in his throat.

“Enough,” Allison said sternly, looking in her father’s direction, then Derek’s. Her expression softened. “I know what my aunt did to your family, but we are nothing like her.” Her jaw remained set, firm, and despite her young age, Stiles could see the makings of a leader to be reckoned with.

She let silence cloak the room, resolutely keeping Derek’s gaze until the tension in his frame seemed to leave in increments, slowly moving away like shadow retreating. After several tense seconds Allison continued.

“As I was saying, we need to establish a plan, and we need to know that Peter is going to be dealt with sooner, rather than later. Not because we think you’ll hesitate, but because eventually– probably very quickly– Peter will figure us out, and he’ll go for whatever link he thinks is the weakest.”

“Stiles,” Derek breathed, reaching up with his free hand to pinch the bridge of his nose.

“More likely Scott or Alan– remember, Peter needs Stiles,” Allison speculated.

“I know my uncle– he always has a plan, a plot, and if push comes to shove, he will do whatever it takes to get what he wants, no matter what– or who– is in the way. If hurting Stiles is a means to an end, he’ll do it.”

At that, Chris tilted his head, making a sound of interest.

“Maybe I’m missing something here, but why do you care so much about what happens to a teenager you just met? I would think you would be more invested in your pack.”

Stiles seethed. Chris knew exactly what he was doing, where he was leading Derek. It made Stiles apprehensive, made him worry that Derek would suddenly see their age as a problem in their fledgling relationship now that someone else had drawn attention to it.

“A member of my pack killed another member of my pack; my alpha. And he did it because she stood between him and Stiles.”

“And yet, that still doesn’t explain why you’re so intent to keep Stiles so close,” Chris replied, the lilt to his voice all too obvious.

Stiles’ heart palpitated like something had reached into his chest and squeezed when Derek’s hand dropped away from his. He’d been pushed too far and now was, understandably, pushing Stiles away. Except he didn’t– Derek’s hand returned, gliding across Stiles’ lower back, palm coming to rest on the back of his hip, fingers just curving around his side enough to be visible from where Chris stood across the room. When Stiles glanced in Derek’s direction, his head was slightly tilted, a trace of a smirk playing at his lips, daring Chris to push further. After a few moments of tense silence, Allison cleared her throat.

“As I was saying, we need to develop a plan– together,” she emphasized. “Derek, we recognize our role is primarily one of support and respect your right to deal with Peter in the manner that you see
fit. But we have an code– and should it come down to honoring that code, or honoring your right to resolve this within your pack, we will act in our own interests. Now if we can all be civil, I’d like to discuss specifics.”

“I can agree to that,” Derek replied, eyes firmly glued on Chris, silently asking ‘Can you?’

Stiles felt his tense muscles begin to relax. Allison was reasonable, she seemed to have at least some grasp of pack sovereignty, even if she couldn’t fully understand why Derek wanted to deal with Peter himself.

Once everyone was settled in place, wearing their most serious ‘planning’ expressions, was of course the moment Stiles thought of it. Some may have called it paranoia, he preferred to look at it as foresight borne from anxiety and past experience.

“Wait!” the teen blurted suddenly, “I can’t be here to hear this.” He was surprised nobody else had figured that out before him, especially Derek or Lydia. “All it would take is one little well-placed poke to the back of my neck with his claw–”

“And Peter would know everything,” Derek finished for him.

“Theoretically, Peter could do that to any one of us,” Lydia chimed in. At that, Allison cocked an eyebrow.

“He could try.”

“Stiles has a point,” Deaton said after a moment. “Under the Argent’s protection, Lydia will be fairly safe. Behind these mountain ash walls, so will Scott and myself. The only true vulnerabilities are Stiles and Derek, and Stiles is the much easier, more accessible target. Peter has a vested interest in trying to keep Derek on his side.”

“That is not happening,” Derek replied in a growl.

“I think we all know that,” Stiles placated softly. “But I should still be out of earshot of all of this,” he gestured to the proverbial negotiations table (gurney), “just in case.”

Out of earshot ended up meaning that Stiles found himself downstairs in ‘Scott’s room’. Everyone, including him to be honest, hadn’t been keen on him setting foot outside the protective confines of the clinic without a competent escort. And since all competent escorts needed to be in the meeting, Stiles needed to stay in the building. Thankfully, he had company– Scott had insisted, arguing he really didn’t need to be present, and that since his situation at the clinic was (hopefully) just temporary, he was almost as much of a liability as Stiles

“Well, at least this time we can actually talk without someone showing up to slaughter my alpha,” Scott said with a wince the minute that Deaton had closed the door to the basement room. He settled himself on the army cot against the wall inside the Mountain Ash enhanced enclosure. “And without me trying to kill you.”

Stiles let his breath gust out through his lips. He hated himself for it, but having a sturdy set of bars between him and his best friend made him feel a lot more secure being alone with him.

“How are you feeling lately– I mean, aside from… earlier?”
“Tenuous,” Scott replied succinctly. Stiles felt his face split into a grin despite himself. Scott wasn’t stupid by any means, but he’d always focused more on the social aspects of school than the academic ones, and that, along with a learning disability identified late in the game meant he’d been stressing about SAT scores—particularly in vocabulary since the day he’d found out what the SAT was.

“Oooo—those are big fancy words you got there Scott,” Stiles jested good naturedly.

“Shut up,” his friend muttered, grinning to himself before his facial features rearranged themselves into a more serious expression. “I’m better than I was, but Laura had me almost there. We wanted to get a hold of my mom by Christmas. It was one of the reasons I asked her to help me find you.” At the last part, Scott almost seemed ashamed, as if either he’d caused Laura’s death, or was using Stiles in some way. And nope, no way was Stiles letting his best friend feel an ounce of guilt for either one.

“And then Peter fucked everything up.”

“It’s more than that— it’s hard to explain to someone who isn’t a wolf. In a pack you can feel a connection to your pack mates, something that feels stronger than family. You feel loyal to your pack, your alpha. You’d die for them, know they’d do the same for you. And when they die… it’s like losing a part of you. I didn’t know Laura for very long, but in my mind, she was always my alpha. When Peter showed up though, it was like— like being torn in half.” He winced and what he probably realized was a poor choice of words. “I wanted to help Laura, but Peter had more control— it was like he had a lock on my brain, preventing me from doing anything to stop him. And now I know why. I feel like he doesn’t want me to learn control, like he wants me to be his attack dog that he keeps on a leash and uses when he needs to.”

It dawned on Stiles then that this really was the first opportunity he and Scott had been able to actually carry on a conversation since Laura’s death. He’d been so occupied by what was immediately in front of him that he hadn’t been able to even look to the periphery at the non-life threatening problems for him and his friends. The fact of the matter was Scott was just as much a pawn in all of this as he was.

“Don’t man,” Scott said softly, after several seconds of uncharacteristic silence on Stiles’ behalf.

“What?” he replied miserably.

“You’re doing that whole ‘I’m responsible for everyone’ thing you’ve always done. What happened to me didn’t happen because of you, it happened because of Peter. I am not your responsibility, I’m your friend. We’ll figure this out— you, me and Derek will find a way to make Peter pay for everything he’s done.”

Despite himself, Stiles could feel tears stinging at the corners of eyes at his friend’s impassioned speech.

“You sound like a comic book superhero,” he mumbled through a sniff, scrubbing at his eyes with the back of his hand.

“Good, that’s kind of what I was going for,” Scott replied with a grin as he stood up from the cot. “Now come here.”

Stiles stood up, blood rushing to warm the backs of his legs and ass from sitting on the cold concrete floor and crossed to the cell where Scott had his arms extended. Stiles mirrored his gesture albeit, slightly awkwardly, fitting his long limbs between the bars of the cell so he could pull his friend close. Hugging was awkward around the metal bars, and Scott wasn’t really able to reciprocate all that well thanks to their mountain ash cores, but it was the thought that counted.
“So, Derek eh?” the werewolf said just as they were parting. He was smirking, amused, but his raised eyebrow told Stiles he wasn’t going to get away with glossing over anything. He sighed, but smiled, hoping Derek couldn’t hear them talking about him, or if he could, he didn’t think anything Stiles said was too embarrassing.

Chapter End Notes

1) After doing a bit of research, I corrected Allison’s French for the Argent code to proper European French grammar and syntax since the Argents did originate in France and the show’s writers bungled it in the series. I don’t even want to talk about the horrific French accents in season 5…

2) So recently we found out that the Sheriff’s name is actually Noah. Which… I can accept, begrudgingly. But I’m not changing it in this fic because to me, he's John in this 'verse end of story. We'll see if I can get over this when it comes to some of my newer works I've been playing around with (so when this story is done, you'll have something to look forward to!)
The pawn on the map

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a beast running practically an extra chapter longer than my usual, but there was just no way to cut it and have it flow nicely with the next chapter’s events (and passage of time) so whomp, here it is. Loads of sexy times lay ahead.

Also… Chapter 37 and we have the title actually IN the fic. Huzzah, look at me author good.

The apartment was still and dark by the time Stiles and Derek got home after the meeting at the clinic. They didn’t say much as they trudged up the stairs and Derek unlocked the apartment door, not letting Stiles cross the threshold until he’d stepped inside, and stood in the dim entry way, listening intently. When he seemed satisfied that the apartment was safe, he reached back and pulled Stiles into the apartment, closing– and very audibly locking– the door behind them. In the darkness, Derek moved easily, but patiently, steps measured and easy so Stiles didn’t have to stumble to follow while his eyes adjusted to the dark. Once they reached the kitchen, where light from the windows could reach them, Derek tossed his car keys to the counter, the metal landing heavily on the granite before the apartment quickly fell into silence again.

Stiles could feel Derek close to him, hovering. Ever since that morning, he hadn’t really touched him, and Stiles couldn’t blame him. Logically, he knew it was because Derek suspected he’d had a rough, likely traumatizing night, and wanted Stiles to initiate any sort of contact, but despite all the years of trying to get his brain to act on logic rather than just emotion, Stiles couldn’t help but feel like it was because he had been tainted by Peter. He turned to say something to Derek, ask him one of the mundane questions he had probably already asked while his mind was in an exhausted fog on the way back from Deaton’s office, but the second he opened his mouth to speak, Derek was in his space, crowding him against the counter, calloused fingers cupping his jaw, the back of his neck, pulling him in close. It was slightly clumsy; Stiles searching out Derek’s mouth, and brushing over the stubble on his jaw along the way before meeting his mark in a sloppy collision of lips and tongues.

Stiles felt his grip go slack on the sack of mountain ash he’d been holding since Deaton had handed it to him at the clinic, letting it land with a muted thud against the tile floor, before he backed up onto the counter, Derek’s body pressing closer, free hand gripping just under Stile’s right thigh to help lift him onto the granite surface. Distantly he thought about their second real kiss, and felt his body flood with warmth as the memory of the past, and the reality of the present blissfully collided. And whatever it was that was between them, it was still an unparalleled force, Stiles could feel it tugging on his nerve endings, driving him closer to Derek as if the other man could alleviate the constant tension he felt, unwind the state of being that could only be described as a constant knot.

Derek obviously felt much the same way. Their bodies drove together, both men breathing heavily through their noses and open lips when they were parted enough to allow. Stiles wasn’t sure what he wanted when he reached to unbuckle Derek’s belt, maybe just to feel his skin on his fingertips, but he somehow didn’t feel jilted when the older man’s hands gently stilled his own. When he pulled away, Derek didn’t go far, resting his forehead against Stiles’ own, hands resettling from where
they’d rested over Stiles’, to bracketing his hips.

“There is something I need to show you, something I found last night and there just… hasn’t been a good time.”

Still breathing hard, coming down from the high that pretty much any and all contact with Derek created, Stiles nodded.

“Okay– is this a thing I’m going to be worried about?”

Derek pulled away enough to look Stiles in the eye.

“I don’t know,” he replied honestly, features more open and soft than they’d been the whole night. “But I need you to see it.”

At Derek’s gently nudging against his hips, Stiles slid forward off of the counter to follow him, hips canting forward just enough for him to graze his pelvis across Derek’s own, teasing. When the other man’s grip tightened as Stiles landed safely on the floor, he couldn’t help but smirk impishly.

“You’re a bad influence,” Derek replied with a shake of his head, smiling softly.

“The worst. Besides, you started it,” Stiles retorted childishly. He needed this, the lighthearted flirting after such a heavy day. Luckily Derek seemed to feel the same.

“And we’ll finish it– later,” he retorted before he seemed to catch himself. “Only if you’re up for it.”

“You couldn’t tell?” Stiles would later justify that Derek had walked right into that one. It took a second before the older man half-groaned, half-growled theatrically and tugged on one of Stiles’ hand.

“Get over here,” he ordered lightly.

Once seated on the couch, Derek pulled a somewhat beat up looking Toshiba laptop into his lap, pecking out a password on the keyboard before setting it back down on the coffee table so both him and Stiles could look at it.

“This is my family’s beastiary– the one my mom referred to in your memory. At least, it’s a copy, Laura’s copy.”

“I’m not going to lie– even after what your mom said in that memory– which I still don’t know whether to believe is real or not– I kind of pictured a big, heavy, weathered leather bound thing,” Stiles replied in surprise.

“The real one, the original is,” Derek replied. “And it’s probably still completely unaltered– unlike this one.” Stiles watched as Derek’s strong hands moved delicately across the laptop’s keys, clicking over a few pages to an incredibly detailed image of a large tree.

“Is that your family tree?” Stiles asked, impressed by the extensiveness of it all, the detail of every branch and leaf, the elegant but easily legible script. Without any zoom, Stiles really couldn’t see any of the specifics and realized that, outside of a computer screen, the original document would have been on a much larger sheet of paper that had likely been folded to even fit in the book. It took a few seconds to realized Derek hadn’t answered him, before he looked up to see the other man, mouth slightly agape, studying him.
“No, it’s yours. This is what I needed to show you— that what Peter put in your head was real. You are everything he believes you are.”

For some reason, Derek’s words sent a thrill of potential, not fear, down Stiles’ spine. Peter not lying meant that Stiles truly did have something powerful inside of him. And if he could figure out how to get all of his memories back— without Peter preferably— he stood a chance against him.

“Can you zoom in?” he finally blurted. He wanted to see, wanted to know. Until now, he’d only ever known his relatives through old photos and stories from his grandparents while they were still alive. To see his family’s history in such a vast display was surreal. Instead of Derek zooming, he pushed the laptop in Stiles’ direction, letting him zoom in on the document reader and pan around the illustration on his own. It didn’t surprise Stiles in the least that most of the names were Polish with a few other Slavic and Germanic variations thrown in for interest. Truthfully, he just as enthralled by the illustrations as he was by his ancestors. Starting from the bottom of the tree, which started in the early 1800s, he worked his way up, Derek silent beside him, watching him.

“Huh,” Stiles finally commented, sitting back slightly once he’d reached the top of the tree where his parent’s, aunts and uncles names were and his was distinctly absent. Every time Stiles found out that Peter wasn’t lying made him feel even more unsettled.

“What?”

“What are the little star things?” he asked, reaching forward to lightly tap the laptop’s screen near his great grandfather’s name, where a tiny symbol sat, almost obscured in the leaves and branches of the tree.

“They trace the spark throughout your family’s history. At one point someone was probably trying to track a pattern, but if there is one, I know I couldn’t figure it out,” Derek replied. He paused, before reaching for the computer where it was balanced mostly on Stiles’ lap, about a third of it encroaching on Derek’s thigh.

With the laptop back on the table, Derek panned to the top of the page and zoomed in, which is when Stiles caught it: the same symbol that he been littered throughout his family tree, floated anchorless in amongst the beautifully inked leaves.

“This is where you should have been,” Derek explained softly.

“Where your mom removed me from to keep me safe,” Stiles marveled, heart hammering in his chest. The world had gotten all too real in the past few weeks and he could feel it pulsing all around him. His recently recovered memory too bright and fresh.

“That’s the thing,” Derek continued. “I don’t think my mom did it.”

Stiles turned sharply, gaze questioning. That didn’t make any sense— all evidence pointed to Talia Hale following the exact plan she’d laid out in Stiles’ memory.

“My mom never liked technology— she was always the one we’d catch swearing at the computer, or begging it to work,” Derek paused to let out a soft chuckle and shake his head, the action so endearing tiles knew he wanted to survive all of this if only to witness it again. “Once, when I was thirteen or fourteen, she actually snapped a laptop in half.” The werewolf’s expression turned soft, fond. “She and my dad loved books, there were always so many in the house. She didn’t like technology and never invested much time in it. My dad knew enough to keep Artifact up with the times, but that was about it. The real techies of the family were Laura and Peter. I’ve been thinking about this ever since you told me about my mom visiting your mom in the hospital. My mom didn’t
have the skill to Photoshop you off the tree— not like this. She would have had to ask someone.”

The dizzying force with which the realization hit him was enough to make the room tilt and twist. Stiles sat back, leaning his head against the back of the couch, eyes closed.

“Peter.”

He knew Laura was just as reasonable of an explanation, but something in his gut knew she wasn’t the answer. But something was still missing. His eyes snapped open.

“But if it was Peter, that means he knew about me all along. He didn’t need to bite Scott, or attack the police station— he could have just found me. He did those things just to—” the lump in his throat was getting hard to talk around, making his voice hoarse. Derek’s hand, warm and heavy came to rest on the back of his neck and he felt the lump begin to dissipate.

“I don’t think that’s it,” Derek replied, the lilt to his voice indicating that he was figuring out how to word what came next. “I think— I think you’re right. Peter was the one to alter the beastiary. But I have a theory. I think my mom asked him to do it. But he was clever enough to know she was onto him— his interest in the power within your family. I think my mom ordered Peter to remove your name from the beastiary and then she removed any memory he had of doing it and hid the original version away. So Peter made a back-up plan— he left the symbol there as a reminder for himself, knowing even if she erased every memory of your family tree, of him altering it, that if he saw the beastiary again, he’d see that thread and pull until he found the answer. Peter is far from sloppy— leaving that symbol was no accident. It was a perfectly subtle clue my mom wouldn’t have known to look for.”

Derek’s theory was perfectly Peter. It was like a giant puzzle, finally complete enough for the picture to be seen. No— it was like a chess game. One where your opponent’s plan to overthrow the board had been revealed in genius detail and your only choice was to try and keep up, try to develop your own strategy without falling into the many traps laid out to destroy you along the way.

“Holy shit.” Stiles exhaled the words, body shuddering as he accepted Derek’s words, not as theory, but reality. “I think you’re right.”

“You were right,” Derek surprised Stiles by replying. Stiles frowned, confused. He hadn’t thought of any of this, so he glanced up to Derek, hoping for clarification. And as if he’d been reading Stiles’ mind he explained: “This is like a game of chess— and you are the pawn Peter wants to make into his queen.”

***

Beside him, Stiles looked so fragile, more so than the nights Derek had found him after Deucalion, after Peter. He could feel the tremors the teenager was trying to clamp down on, minutely vibrating through the frame and cushions of the couch, could smell the adrenaline in the air; ozone and sweat.

“Stiles,” Derek started and stalled when the man beside him swung his gaze from his blank stare at the coffee table, to Derek’s face. He wanted to tell him that everything would be okay, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it— even if Stiles would never hear the lie. Because too much relied on Derek now, and God knew he’d failed too many times in the past at doing the right thing.

“God, I need a fucking valium or something,” Stiles breathed out, steepling long fingers under his
“My brain is just—” he made a fluttering gesture with both hands around his head. “I don’t know what to do.”

Years in therapy had taught Derek several coping mechanisms for stress– even before he’d trained as a paramedic. He didn’t always use them effectively, but he always seemed to find his way to them. Hannah had irritatingly taught him how to look at the bigger picture, alleviate his anxiety by simply asking “and then what?” whenever Derek talked about the uncertainty of his plans. She was always careful to gently rebut his forgone conclusions about the worst possible thing happening. She’d ask questions about what the other possible outcomes could be, and how he would react if they occurred. And together they carefully constructed a way of thinking that eased Derek’s anxiety and tendency to punish himself. As a result, he always tended to think with a plan, to treat no problem like it was insurmountable. He could practically hear Hannah gently prodding; “now what?”

He reached out and captured one of Stiles’ hands in his own.

“Come on,” he urged, slowly standing, “let’s go get a shower, try and relax. It’s been a shitty day– but we have a plan now, And that is one less thing we have to worry about than we did yesterday.”

“Says the man who knows it– I’m still in the dark,” Stiles responded ruefully, allowing himself to be pulled up to stand. “But I trust you, and Alison, and Deaton,” he added softly. And Derek felt both his heat flood with warmth and his gut twist with apprehension before he heard an all too familiar voice; ‘What if it works? Then what?’

Derek had suggested the shower innocently enough, but once in the bathroom, undressing as steam started to fill the small room, he remembered where things had started to head earlier before the necessity of serious conversation had killed the mood. Stiles seemed to be thinking about the same. With each item of clothing peeled away, the scent of Derek and Stiles’ mingling arousal grew more dense and saturated than the steam in the room.

It was Stiles that made the bold move of stepping closer to Derek and reaching out with both hands to slip bony fingers beneath the back of the waistband of Derek’s boxer briefs, palms flat against the tops of his glutes until he lifted them ever so slightly, letting the elastic waist raise and slip off over the back of his hands, halfway down Derek’s ass. But that wasn’t what made Derek start to harden in his barely-on boxers, it was the way Stiles looked at him.

‘Like you hung the moon’ a voice not unlike his mom’s, or maybe Laura’s, provided. He wondered if he looked the same way to Stiles. Apparently he did, because the other man smiled softly before leaning forward to trace his lips over Derek’s clavicle, creating a blazing path up to the juncture his throat and shoulder where he bit down hard enough to make Derek’s blood thrum in his veins, and his control slip enough to let out a low groan, which echoed through the room. His hands instinctively grabbed at Stiles’ hips, hands mirroring the other man’s, taking things one step further, peeling the thin cotton of his boxer briefs over the round bubble of his ass, letting the elastic snap against the skin of his thighs while his hands moved back up to squeeze the soft globes of flesh. Slowly, he backed them towards the tub and Stiles was forced to detach his lips long enough for both of them to hastily strip off each other’s underwear, tripping over the tangles of fabric in their haste to both step into the tub and grind against one another.

Derek had to brace a hand on the back wall of the shower to keep from losing his balance, his other arm reflexively wrapping around Stiles’ lower back, inadvertently pulling him close in a misguided attempt to stop them from both falling over.

“I think this shower is going to turn out to be pretty pointless,” Stiles commented, voice low, rich
with mirth, bordering on a laugh, and even though Derek couldn’t see his face, he was willing to bet he wore the mischievous grin Derek was pretty sure Stiles didn’t know he had. One wet hand slapped against Derek’s peck, one, two, friendly taps, before the teenager righted himself and looked up with a smirk. And if Derek had ever worried about a power imbalance between the two of them, it was mostly assuaged by the way Stiles didn’t seem to pay any mind to any of the advantages Derek had over him as a werewolf; advantages Derek knew Stiles had all too much familiarity with, having had them used against too so many times. He huffed out a breath in response, largely because he just didn’t know what to do with Stiles’ remark because whatever he said was going to be loaded with expectations, and he didn’t want that. He wanted to let Stiles take the lead, feel in charge.

Stiles turned his back, and Derek was positive that he very deliberately, bent to grab the bottle of shower gel perched in the corner of the tub, if the way Stiles’ ass ground into his pelvis was any indication. But Derek was distracted by Stiles’ skin, the bruises and welts that colour it in layers. Despite what he did for a living, and having had human relatives before the fire, he always found himself in awe of how fragile, yet resilient humans were— especially Stiles. And sure, he may not be entirely human, but he was human enough. He allowed himself to be tempted by Stiles’ display enough to lean forward, carefully arching over Stiles’ bowed back to mouth over the knobs of his spine.

He wasn’t expecting Stiles to startle enough to lose his balance, hand shooting out to brace on the edge of the tub, bottle of shower gel clattering the floor. Derek’s hand instinctively gripped a little tighter around Stiles’ hip, and after a few seconds— enough to know Stiles was okay— he could no longer hold back his smirk, pressed into the skin just behind Stiles’ ear.

“This is what I get for trying to seduce someone,” Stiles muttered, almost laughing despite himself as Derek helped him right himself and turn around in the confined space. It was on the tip of his tongue to say something like “no seduction needed” but could feel his insides grimace and what sounded like a line from bad porn. Instead he cradled Stiles head in one hand and pulled him close, their lips joining, parting quickly to seek more of one another.

After the briefest attempt to actually shower, both men dropped all pretenses of washing anything— as if there had ever been any at all— and just unabashedly started making out. Having elevated senses only served to heighten Derek’s arousal as he let go, letting his senses tangle together, tripping over one another instead of plucking each individual sensation our for scrutiny. Single sounds became a symphony; the water striking the bottom of the tub and tile dull in comparison to the racing of Stiles’ heart. Derek could feel its erratic pounding against Stiles’ ribs where they were pressed together, pumping blood into his extremities, heating his skin. The ‘unscented’ body wash did little to mask the smell and taste of Stiles’ skin, though it was difficult to decipher each individual note. It might have been in his head, but Derek swore he could taste the slightest hint of jasmine tea, and something spicy and alive like mint, but not, lingering in Stiles’ scent, deep in his skin, so enticing Derek couldn’t stand parting more than mere inches.

As deft fingers danced across his hipbone, Derek grappled with the smooth globes of Stiles’ ass, greedily taking in the sound of his sharp intake of breath when the heated rivulets of water from the shower’s head slipped over his entrance, unimpeded. When fingers found Derek’s erection, quickly adjusting to the perfect grip, he experimentally skated his between Stiles’ cheeks, greedily stealing a kiss when the younger man bucked forward, mouth agape.

“I’m a bit sore.” He murmured his confession, forehead coming to rest on Derek’s collarbone. Immediately, Derek moved to withdraw his hand, but Stiles’ free hand clamped over it, stilling him at the wrist. “I don’t want to stop— just go easy, okay?”

He nodded, pressed a kiss into Stiles’ temple and moved to slowly withdraw his hand. This time the
other man let him.

“Let’s go to bed,” he suggested, trailing kisses along Stiles’ exposed neck and shoulder.

After another few minutes of heatedly making out, Derek felt the water begin to cool, signaling the end of the hot water supply. He withdrew his hand from where he’d been pressing his fingers into Stiles’ crease, deliberately skating over his entrance, but primarily pressing against his prostate gland from the outside, listening to Stiles’ heartbeat pound harder every time he managed to get the pressure and placement just right.

The room fell into such startling silence that it was almost deafening until Stiles ripped back the shower curtain, the rings shrilly clattering across the metal rod. They each grabbed a towel from the rack, not caring whose was whose, and made a half-assed attempt to dry off. Stiles was the first to ditch his towel completely, cramming it back into the towel rack after doing a quick once over down each leg, across his torso and his arms before finally ruffling it over his hair, Derek, unable to stop himself from tracking his movements while he roughly mirrored them.

The trek to the bedroom was uncoordinated and eager, involved in a brief stop in the hallway just before the kitchen to kiss more deeply than their stumbled steps would allow, and bruised shins from bashing into the coffee table on the way by before stumbling imperfectly over the foot of the bed and onto the unmade jumble of sheets. There, Derek was happy to surrender any sort of lead to Stiles and was richly rewarded as the other man slid down the mattress on his side before manhandling Derek by his hips with an almost bruising grip, onto his side. Derek went easily, blood thrumming in his veins as he watched fingers knead his flesh before suddenly, Stiles bowed forward, swallowing him down just about to the root.

“Shit.”

The curse fell from his lips and he bucked forward, almost falling straight back when he hit the back of Stiles’ throat. But his lover wasn’t having any of that, instead he moaned, deft fingers gripping behind Derek’s left knee, urging him to bend it over Stiles’ ribcage so that the other man could get closer, their balance maintained with the countering of their weight.

“Oh my God,” Derek breathed, barely audible, and closed his eyes against the wave of heat that seemed to rush from where Stiles’ was touching him straight up to his hairline, letting his head drop back onto one of the pillows. He reached out and carded his fingers through Stiles’ hair with his free hand, the short locks already softening as the moisture left them. He wasn’t sure how long they stayed like that before Stiles pulled back, wiping the saliva from his mouth with the back of his hand.

“I’ll be right back,” he promised, gently lifting Derek’s leg to extricate himself so he could grace fully roll off the side of the bed. His brain too lust addled to do much of anything, Derek just watched as the younger man disappeared into the living area, only to emerge moments later with a bottle of lube in hand.

“I threw it in when we went shopping earlier,” Stiles explained with a shrug, “thought it might be useful. Was I wrong?”

Derek shook his head. He felt like rocks were rattling around in his skull, unimpeded because whatever brain matter existed had evaporated at Stiles’ question. Stiles seemed to knew exactly what effect he’d had if his lopsided smirk was anything to go by as he tossed the bottle onto the bed where
it landed after a couple of bounces, right next to Derek’s thigh. He clambered back onto the bed, getting into the same position as before, this time scooping up the lube. He frowned, pausing his movements.

“You’re okay with this right?” he asked softly, fingertips trailing down Derek’s spine, feather light as they delved between his cheeks, pressing perfectly into the space between his hole and his scrotum in an echo of the same stimulation Derek had provided in the shower, his intent clear. Derek nodded until it was clear Stiles wanted some sort of verbal response.

“Yes,” he rasped, swallowed, tried again, this time his voice sounding more like his own: “Yes.”

He wasn’t used to letting someone else take charge of sexual situations. Even when he’d gone through his promiscuous phase, he’d always been the one to steer the course of every encounter, even if it still looked like the other person had control, he’d taken comfort in knowing that he could easily overpower just about any partner if he needed to. But with Stiles, he knew he wouldn’t need to use his strength, he trusted him, and therefore the need to control everything just wasn’t there this time.

Stiles seemed satisfied with his response, and slowly moved back to the position he’d been in previously, drawing Derek back into his mouth while talented hands found the bottle of lube and efficiently ripped away the security seals, the plastic crumpling loudly in the sudden quiet of the room. As the seconds passed, Derek could feel his nerve endings alight with anticipation. When the soft pads of Stiles’ fingertips brushed at the space behind his balls, smearing lube along the way, Derek choked on the moan halfway out of his mouth, inhaling sharply. Stiles’ touch was soft, easy, a gentle pressure drawing closer and closer. Derek felt his entrance clench at the first pass of a finger over the tight furl, pet his own shaking fingers through Stiles’ mop of brown hair, tugging on the strands. Seconds later he pulled away with a messy pop.

“You want me stop?” he asked, breathless. Derek frowned, confused.

“Fuck no,” he finally breathed, realizing his gesture of enthusiasm, of wanting had been misinterpreted as a signal to stop. Stiles smiled, leaned forward and pressed a kiss into one bare hipbone, and achingly slowly, pressed one long digit inward. Derek could have sworn he felt the bump of each knuckle on the otherwise smooth glide in, but inside his brain it felt like someone had set off a fog machine, and he was stumbling around addled and lust drunk and groping for reason. It had been a long time since he’d even done this himself, and the familiar stretch had him panting, muttering out a low; “more” before he could stop himself.

If he were to take an educated guess, Derek would say several minutes had passed, but he really couldn’t tell how long. It didn’t matter, because whatever time had passed had been enough for Stiles to get three wickedly talented fingers inside of him. He’d stopped sucking him off, which in all honesty, was fine by Derek, because he was sure the dual stimulation would have done him in in minutes, and he wanted this to last a lot longer than that— because he hadn’t even got to touch Stiles yet.

“Hey,” he managed to beckon hoarsely, brushing fingers across Stiles’ forehead to grab his attention, “come up here.” Stiles gently extracted his fingers, the digits slipping out with a lewd, slick sound, so he could readjust their positions so that they each lay on their sides, heads close enough together to share the same pillow.

Stiles absently wiped his lube smeared fingers against his own bare hip, leaving a glistening trail on the pale skin before returning his hand to Derek’s side, gently tracing a path over his hip and slowly
up his ribcage, eyes tracking the movement of his own hand until he reached just under Derek’s armpit and smoothed backwards until bony fingers rested on his spine, chin tilting up at last, golden eyes finally meeting Derek’s own. And Derek took the opportunity to reach out and gently draw Stiles in for a long, slow kiss, tasting him, chasing that faint hint of jasmine for several seconds with Stiles enthusiastically echoing his efforts. When they parted Derek took a deep breath, as if to inhale and push all doubt aside.

“Did you buy any condoms with that lube?”

Stiles’ lazy grin, the soft, lusty, hazy, happy look in his eyes immediately faltered and for a few heart-stopping seconds, Derek was afraid he’d either misinterpreted the entire situation, or that Stiles had, that was until Stiles eyes lit up bright and sharp, and excited.

“Pffft, no. That’s what the health clinic is for,” he replied, his voice surprisingly soft despite the joking tone. He glanced down at the space between them, thumb rubbing endlessly back and forth over the skin just under Derek’s ribcage. “Do you… are you asking me to top?” he finally asked, disbelief evident in his tone.

“You said you were still sore,” Derek replied with a shrug, trying to lighten the mood, to make his invitation seem more casual than it actually was. Because it was actually a big deal considering that he hadn’t bottomed since he was a self-destructive teenager. He frowned, realizing how it might sound like he was really only offering a reversal of roles as a consolation prize, and rushed to add; “I want you to– if you’re up for it.”

Stiles let out a huff of breath that ended in a laugh, glancing down the length of his own body. “Oh I’m definitely up for it,” he quipped at his own expense before growing serious, eyes meeting Derek’s own again. “You’re serious?”

Derek nodded.

“I am… okay so confession time, I have never actually done this… part. I’m pretty much the twinky bottom fantasy of anyone–” Stiles wrinkled his nose and stopped talking. “I don’t exactly get a lot of requests.”

Derek found his lips part into a smile in spite of himself.

“I’m pretty sure I can help you figure it out,” he said softly, leaning in to steal another slow kiss. “Now go get a condom,” he added once they’d parted.

Stiles was nothing if not thorough. After retrieving a handful of condoms, he attached himself to Derek like a barnacle, their bodies grinding against one another as Stiles reacquainted his fingers with Derek’s hole as they sloppily made out, lips and tongues sometimes meeting each other’s lips, other times exploring jaw lines and earlobes and other places meant to drive the other farther into arousal.

“I think it’s only fair that I warn you that I am not going to last long enough for this,” Stiles panted between the parting and reconnecting of their lips. “So you’d better be ready to switch when I don’t make it.”

It took a few seconds for Derek’s brain to come back online after his imagination supplied a very vivid fantasy of exactly that scenario. Derek’s hips bucked into Stiles’ at the thought of burying himself inside of tight heat while still feeling open and used and he found himself just containing
himself enough to use human teeth when he hit down lightly on the cord of muscle connecting Stiles’ neck and shoulder.

“Condom, now,” he managed to demand when he pulled away, his voice low, almost a growl. “Please,” he added as an afterthought.

Stiles out-right laughed, the sound ringing through Derek’s ears like bells.

“Okay, but only since you asked so nicely.”

Stiles pulled back enough to blindly slap his hand around on the thrift store find nightstand until his fingers closed around a condom with a noisy crinkling of foil. Derek was all too happy to watch that long, lithe body contort and twist until Stiles had gotten up to his knees, reaching out his condom free hand to pull Derek up to kneel in a similar position in front of him.

“I could be really, really bad at this you know,” he said softly, pulling Derek close enough that their foreheads were touching, their lips ghosting against one another without touching. Between them, Derek could feel the brush of knuckles against his abdomen while Stiles freed the condom of its wrapped and sheathed himself. Even without his unique history, somehow Derek very much doubted that.

“You won’t be,” he replied, hoping it came out reassuring, feeling his heart start to pound slower and heavier with anticipation. “How do you want me?”

Stiles surged forward unexpectedly, long fingers wrapping around the base of Derek’s skull to pull him in for another heated kiss, their tongues tangling, until gasping, they both parted again.

“Uh… hands and knees? I think for our heights that would…” Stiles trailed off as Derek turned, a thrill of anticipation trickling down his spine as he dropped onto his forearms and knees and felt Stiles move to arrange himself behind him. He didn’t know what he was expecting, but it wasn’t for the teenager to drape himself over his back and slowly press a trail of kisses down his spine, fingertips kneading at his hips until his path came to an end and he would be forced to end the trail or relinquish his grip on Derek’s hips. Instead Derek felt one hand lift away, the other smoothing over his hip softly and then the rough, gentle friction of their leg hair as Stiles inched closer.

Derek let Stiles take his moment, despite the prickling sensation of desire that made him want to reach back and align Stiles’ cock himself to get things started. The first tentative nudge of Sties’ dick against his entrance made Derek widen his stance ever so slightly, lowering himself a little closer to the mattress to make their current position work even more to their advantage. This time when Stiles’ slicked up cock pressed against him, the head slipped in easily, Derek’s muscles spasming around the intrusion at the anticipation of what was to follow. Stiles slid in achingly slowly, keeping his movements smooth. It wasn’t until his partner let out a soft groan that Derek realized he’d closed his eyes and let his jaw fall open at the only half expected stretch, and suddenly let out the huff of air he’d been holding in his lungs, breathing raggedly through the overwhelming feeling of fullness that sent a shockwave of arousal through his nervous system, pricking out through the hair all over his body, electric and bright. Because now was a good reminder that though Stiles may look lean, and even fragile, not every part of his body matched that impression.

“Are you okay?” Stiles voice was hoarse, but sweet and gentle and innocent in a way that made Derek’s heart glow with warmth.

“I’m good,” he breathed, and even the movement of his ribcage expanding and contracting as he spoke made him acutely aware of Stiles’ presence inside of him. “It’s just… it’s been awhile.”
“I’d say I can tell, but really I have no idea,” Stiles’ voice was strained. “I just, you feel…” He slowly pulled his hips back, tentative enough to leave Derek space for an objection. “God now I know why I used to get topped all the time.”

Through the fog of lust and want, want, want, the words ‘used to’ sparkled and shone in Derek’s mind, lit up like fireworks, promising to fade the same way. That part of Stiles’ life was over now—forever as long as Derek was around. He just hoped Peter wouldn’t interfere with that. Luckily, before he could spare Peter another thought, Stiles distracted him, the crown of his dick almost slipping free from the ring of muscle that guarded Derek’s hole before steadily pressing back in, faster than Stiles’ first pass, slightly harder and definitely deeper.

“Shit,” Derek cursed under his breath, panting as Stiles filled him up once more. When he felt him hesitate, move to withdraw, he threw a hand back to grapple at his thigh. “Don’t stop,” he managed to order through gritted teeth, “don’t fucking stop.” He craned his neck to look over his shoulder to see Stiles nodding, jaw slack and eyes glassy as he watched his dick disappear into Derek’s hole.

“O-okay,” he agreed, voice completely lust-blown and spaced out.

Whatever assumptions Derek had made about what kind of top Stiles would be, were rapidly dismantled by reality. The kinetic, constant energy that seemed to buzz through Stiles like a current outside of the bedroom was somehow more contained there. Derek would have expected Stiles to gain confidence and quickly develop a fast, frantic pace, show the impatience that he did when he bottomed, but instead he settled into a mind-numbing rhythm, opting for force and finesse over speed, keeping his thrusts long and slow, steady and deep before gradually speeding up, fucking Derek with such perfect force he could feel the bone melting pleasure in his molars with every thrust.

For the first time in years Derek let go completely, instead of maintaining the usual undercurrent of vigilance out of the ghost of threats past. He hadn’t even realized he’d done it until he found himself breathing harshly into the pillow, arms clasped around it, fingertips tingling as he wolf got closer and closer to the surface. He’d collapsed mostly to the mattress, leaving only his hips just barely canted up to meet Stiles’ pelvis, his feet hanging slightly off the end of the bed. It wasn’t until Stiles clamped a hand over one of his shoulders and slowed his movements to a deep grind instead of the steady thrusts he’d been slowly bringing Derek to the edge with, that he felt some presence of mind come back to him.

“Why are you stopping?” He cringed at what came out as an accusation, but Stiles’ didn’t seem to have taken offense, when he replied.

“I was gonna cum,” he breathed, sounding like he was running a marathon as he leaned over to rest his forehead against the middle of Derek’s back, stopping, but not withdrawing.

“Did you mean what you said earlier?” Derek replied, realizing how labored his own breathing sounded, “About switching?” Just thinking about it made Derek unconsciously clench around the length inside of him, dragging a groan out of the younger men.

“I was only half-serious, but now I am full serious,” came the murmured reply into his spine. “I’m not going to last long enough to get you off.”

“You have been– getting me off. I’m just not seventeen anymore– it takes a little longer than it used to.”
“Hey, I ain’t no one minute man,” Stiles replied playfully, though he sounded completely fucked out. Derek glanced at the bedside clock’s glowing numbers.

“More like fifteen,” he teased.

“Oh shut up,” Stiles laughed, the sound dry and wrecked and completely and totally arousing. “Just for that, I’m going to make you wish the next two minutes would last a whole lot longer.”

“Oh?”

With a surprising amount of strength, Stiles managed to haul Derek onto his knees and set exactly the pace Derek had originally anticipated, losing only a fraction of the depth and accuracy he’d been maintaining earlier. Stiles’ hands gripped and grappled at the sweaty skin on Derek’s hips, hard enough to bruise if he wasn’t a were, and Derek felt his eyes rolling back into his skull. If Stiles lasted any longer than his promised two minutes, Derek wasn’t going to. The sound of Stiles hipbones smacking into the backs of Derek’s thighs, their moans and harshly inhaled breaths filled the room and Derek let himself sink into his senses, throwing back the curtain he normally kept up as a shield to the world’s constant stimuli. He knew Stiles was going to come before he actually did, the teenagers breathing becoming labored, bordering on a whine before he groaned, and draped himself over Derek’s back, hands like a vice, one on Derek’s shoulder, the other on his hip, his body finally battling against the careful rhythm he’d set before, and winning, forcing him to writhe through his orgasm, mouth open against the skin of Derek’s back, leaving a pool of saliva and he moaned, loud and beautiful.

Later Derek would replay the his next moves and think about how he probably could have allowed his lover more time to recover before he pulled away, reaching back to grip the base of Stiles’ cock just as it stopped pulsing to keep the condom from slipping off as he rearranged their positions, thighs shaking as he quickly manhandled Stiles onto his side, the other man pitching forward, pressed into the mattress as Derek reached over him to grab another condom from the nightstand table. At the same time that he tore the packet open with too sharp teeth, Stiles seemed to get his bearings enough to strip the spent condom from his cock and toss it towards the waste basket. Derek didn’t bother to watch to see if he missed or not too occupied with simultaneously trying to locate the discarded bottle of lube and sheath his cock one-handed. Frustrated, he focused on sliding the rubber over his dick before he either lost the flimsy latex disc or it got covered in lint from the sheets, then slapped around the comforter until his fingers closed around the plastic bottle of lube.

“You’re sure about this?” he breathed into Stiles’ ear, popping the cap on the lube, but hesitating to coat is length in it just yet. The other man nodded furiously, eyes glassy, and faintly glowing that same copper luminosity from their time together before. He swallowed a few times before finally working out a few words.

“Just take it easy okay?”

Derek shuddered at the feeling of a wet hand around his own dick, applying more lube than was strictly necessary. If Stiles had said no, he could have gotten off this way in a matter of strokes, coming all over Stiles’ perfectly pale globes. As it was he had to take a moment, burying his face in Stiles’ sweating hairline and just breathe before he carefully positioned himself at the other man’s entrance and pressed forward ever so slightly. Whether it was from their foreplay in the shower, or the recent orgasm, Derek wasn’t sure, but the furl of muscle gave easily under the pressure of his cock and Derek found himself sinking in further than intended, blunt human teeth scraping across the top of Stiles’ trapezius muscle.

“Fuuuuuck.”
Stiles’ voice sounded a register deeper than usual, raw and arousing as he held onto the vowel before punctuating the rest of the word. Derek hesitated, long enough to take in the other man’s racing heart and the sudden heady scent of arousal perfuming the air around him, before smoothly, very slowly pressing forward. Stiles’ heat around him grabbed and held tight, so Derek kept his movements shallow at first before building up a rhythm, wrapping his arms around the younger man’s chest and hips, their bodies rocking together, Stiles letting out a litany of shameless moans, writhing in Derek’s hold, movement limited. Less than a dozen slow, easy strokes and Derek felt his entire body heat to a boiling point before he shuddered through his orgasm, angling himself over Stiles enough to capture his lips in a messy, uncoordinated kiss as heat exploded out through his limbs, sweat and goosebumps covering every inch of his skin.

Several quiet minutes passed, with only the sound of thundering heartbeats and panted breaths filling the room before Stiles spoke.

“Will you carry me to the shower?”

Derek’s laugh bubbled up from his stomach, from a place he didn’t know he had anymore, it had been so long since he tapped into it. He pressed his face into Stiles’ neck, inhaling the warm, sweet notes of contentment there. And for a few minutes the rest of the world just floated away.

Stiles’ gait was visibly unsteady, even after their ‘straight to business’ shower, so Derek meandered with him slowly through the dark apartment, parking him at the couch only long enough to change the sheets on the bed– and maybe bury his face in them for a moment– before he pulled him into the bedroom with him for much needed sleep.

“So…” Stiles spoke, voice quiet in the stillness of the dark bedroom, “is there any part of the plan you can reveal to me without compromising everything?”

Derek could hear the apprehension in Stiles’ voice. He understood, the teenager had always been control, or at least had needed to feel like he had choices, and now he was completely without either, forced to just trust, something he knew Stiles couldn’t just do anymore. So Derek replayed the entire discussion at the clinic earlier in his mind, everything he’d discussed with Deaton, Lydia, and the Argents, piece by piece taking everything apart, trying to think of one shred of detail he could share without harm.

“Starting tomorrow, I’m going to try teach Scott everything I can about being a wolf,” he finally settled on. It was something he was sure Peter would assume was happening anyway since he knew Derek was in town, and Derek was with Stiles. “I know Laura,” he paused long enough to let the ache of loss fill his throat with a lump of sadness before he swallowed it down, “I know she taught him a lot, but she had time to teach him control and other things about pack– we don’t. Not if we want Scott to be able to survive this without just being Peter’s pawn.”

“What about Lydia? My dad?”

Derek could tell Stiles’ was very carefully controlling his emotions, but he could still hear the slight waver in his voice, feel the note of anxiety tinge the air and sting at his nostrils. He reached over and teased his fingers against Stiles’ palm, prompting him to roll over to face him.

“They’re in good hands. They’ll be safe.” He was careful not to say he promised, partly out of mistrust of the name Argent– despite how impressed he was with Alison– and partly because he
didn’t want to promise anything with all that Peter had done. The plan was simple; Alison was going to stay with Lydia at her grandmother’s cabin—well, technically it was squatting, but the home was out on Mile Lake, a safe distance from Beacon Hills— in fact a whole two towns over, and out in the sticks, following roads windy enough that anyone who tried to follow was likely to get lost. Both girls would continue their lives as usual, so as not to raise any suspicion. They would “meet” at a benign location like a coffee shop, creating a plausible back story for being seen together should Peter turn his attention towards Lydia for any reason. Chris was in charge of keeping an eye on Stiles’ dad, but he was doing so through a carefully coordinated effort with fellow hunters in the group. This was a show of force, a warning to Peter to stay away. Derek knew Peter was likely to heed the warning too; Peter liked to win, and he wouldn’t go after anything that wasn’t an assured victory, or at the very least, reaped a reward he considered worth the risk.

Scott was the safest place he could be for the time, even if the veterinary clinic was beginning to feel like a jail cell. And Derek knew Deaton could hold his own against a wolf. But Derek knew it would only be a matter of time before Peter set his sights on his pack and either made a move towards Scott and Deaton, or more likely; a move towards himself and Stiles, and whoever Peter went for, the other two would be compelled to save.

“Ohay,” Stiles replied, a weak ghost of a half smile tugging at his lips. “I trust you.”

Derek hoped he wouldn’t live to regret that.

Chapter End Notes

I typed half of this while a little tipsy on great beer, transcribing from my notebook that I wrote in while I was sober and not near a computer. Any typos I didn’t catch in the editing process are probably the fault of being a slightly drunk person.

On another note, I'm curious what people's thoughts are on the most recent mid-season finale?
And so we wait

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains a discussion about suicide and has been tagged appropriately. It does not talk about specific methods or anything particularly graphic, but if you are sensitive to this issue, please read the notes at the bottom for the context of the conversation in order for you to make the decision right for you as a reader (the notes below also detail where this conversation occurs in the chapter).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was nearing the two week mark since Peter had made his abundantly clear statement, but then he seemed to have disappeared. Stiles knew better than to actually believe that the werewolf had though. He could have sworn at times that he could feel the man watching him, lurking just out of sight, but if he was, he never made himself known. For the first time in months, Thursday night hadn’t meant utter hell. Granted, Stiles had spent almost the entire night on the verge of a panic attack, alternating between texting Alison with his burner phone for updates on Lydia and his dad, phoning the hospital to check on his dad, and distractedly watching television while chewing his fingernails. Even Derek had seemed particularly vigilant, eyes never really on the television screen. Before they’d gone to bed that night, Derek had suggested lining the door to the apartment, and the window in the bedroom with mountain ash– which Stiles had done. When he’d finished, he finally felt like he could breathe again, and tried to pay no mind to the fact that the bag appeared just as full as it had when Deaton had given it to him.

Since their meeting at the clinic, Stiles’ and Derek’s days had passed in much the same routine. They woke up, and ate breakfast, Derek made phone calls full of human interactions, making arrangements with his employer, his apartment super, and phoning friends to try and find long term care facilities able to accept a transfer from California. Then they would go to the hospital so Stiles could visit his dad, never staying long because Stiles felt like he was being watched by someone. He hoped it wasn’t Peter, that it was some part of the Argent’s protection plan, but either way he always felt like he wasn’t alone when he was at his dad’s bedside. He didn’t know what to say to him anymore.

**Hey dad, don’t want you to worry or anything, but a psychotic werewolf is after me for some supernatural gift thing mom passed down through her family tree. He might try and kill everyone I love if I don’t do what he says.**

After his daily visits to the hospital, Stiles tagged along to the clinic, which, thankfully bordered on land Deaton privately owned, giving them the privacy needed to practice wolfy things within the privacy and security of a large field, surrounded by mountain ash trees, the single opening sealed each time by a line of ash, poured by Stiles or Deaton across the space between two trees.

“I wonder why Talia never told me,” Deaton remarked quietly, as Derek and Scott grappled at one another across the field. Derek had really been pushing Scott’s tenuous hold on his control, stretching it to its limits. Hyper-vigilance and aggression were Scott’s weak points and he easily slipped into his wolf completely at the sign of a threat. Derek had remarked that he only had maybe a week to help
Scott reach a point that had taken him years after the fire, and therapy, and his alpha, to reach. So far Scott had slipped a few times, claws or teeth tearing into Derek’s human skin, eyes glowing in rage. But Derek had simply done the same thing each time. Quickly healed and backed off, before attacking harder, meaner, slipping into his own beta form to goad Scott into his, rewarding him with peace if he managed to calm himself enough to shift back, even if it was only to retract his claws or fangs.

“Told you what?” Stiles replied, eyes glued on the two betas across the field as he and Deaton sat on a couple of old garden chairs Deaton had dragged out of a shed somewhere.

“About you,” he replied. “I could have protected you from Peter. Taught you how to defend yourself if he ever tried to use you the way he is trying now, taught you how to do many things.”

“Maybe she didn’t want to involve you, put you in harm’s way,” Stiles volunteered. “You told me you were her pack Emissary. Maybe to keep someone valuable in the pack from being harmed by another person in it she decided you didn’t need to know about me.”

“She was more like her brother than she ever wanted to admit,” Deaton replied somewhat wistfully. “Very strong willed, independent. She always had a way of looking at the whole picture though, in a way Peter has never been capable of.”

“What do you mean?”

Across the field Derek and Scott stood several feet apart, both bent over with hands on their knees, both fully human as far as Stiles could tell.

“Talia was able to see past her own interests. It was what made her such a strong Alpha. There were many times she could have made choices that benefited her interests more than that of the entire pack but every time family, pack and community came first– in that order. Peter perceives hunters as a threat– and they are– specifically Kate and her father, who have managed to stay off the radar for years. He also sees the alpha pack as a threat– and he should. The difference is, where Talia would have quietly built strength, forming relationships with other packs to protect one another, Peter wants to demonstrate strength, dominance. He wants his pack to seem invincible, but he’s missed a very obvious problem with that.”

“He’s made himself a target,” Stiles finished, putting the pieces together quickly. “If someone figures out how to take him down, they have the whole pack.”

“And Peter is arrogant enough to believe that won’t happen. He thinks if he can destroy the Alpha pack, hunt down and annihilate the rogue Argents, that it will send a message to others. That he will be respected, feared, but it won’t, instead…”

“It’s a challenge.”

“How is he doing?” Stiles asked as he and Derek headed away from the veterinary office for the afternoon so that Deaton could attend to appointments and Scott could rest for the afternoon.

“Better than expected.” Derek’s voice was tired, exhausted even. “He remembers a lot of what Laura taught him, about finding an anchor and using that to focus on when he is tempted to lose control.”

“What is that? An anchor– Laura never explained…” Stiles trailed off when he realized he’d casually mentioned her name, the sting of her loss still present.
“It’s like… a focus,” Derek replied after a beat. “It can be anything really, a person, an emotion, a mantra, even an object people carry with them as a reminder. It helps young or bitten wolves in particular keep a hold of their control and shift when under stress– or closer to a full moon.”

Stiles nodded his head in understanding.

“So what’s Scott’s?”

Derek made a face as he flicked on the Camaro’s turn signal and navigated the opposite direction of the apartment. Stiles opened his mouth to ask where they were going when Derek spoke.

“That’s kind of a personal question to ask,” he explained, frowning as he searched for the right analogy. “It’s like… asking someone’s sexuality. Some people are open about it, but for others, it’s none of your business.”

“Oh sorry,” Stiles replied.

“Don’t worry about it– you couldn’t have known. It’s just, not my place to tell you what Scott’s anchor is.”

“Makes sense,” Stiles replied, despite his burning curiosity. “So, where are we going?”

“Food,” Derek all but grunted. “I’m so hungry, I could eat a deer.”

Stiles glanced at Derek to see the edge of his mouth twisted, just barely holding back a grin.

“Oh my God, did you just make a joke?”

Food ended up being a tiny hole in the wall restaurant two towns over with maybe fifteen tables in the whole place. After parking the Camaro in a lot behind the building, Derek and Stile were greeted just inside by a tiny woman about the age of Stiles’ dead grandmother. With a warm smile, she led them to the second last booth in a row on the right, gently setting two menus down in front of them as Derek slid into the booth facing the front of the restaurant, Stiles sitting his opposite. She wished them a pleasant meal, turned and proceeded through a door on the other side of the room, letting loose a torrent of what were probably orders in Thai.

Stiles looked around as much as his limited view would allow. On the opposite side of the narrow room, two of the six four tops were occupied, one by business men, the other by a group of college aged friends with an enormous quantity of food. Stiles couldn’t really see much of the neighboring booths, but he could hear a man and woman talking casually and could just barely make out the profile of a girl with her back to him, head bent to look at something in her hand– most likely a cell phone.

“I promise you, Peter isn’t here,” Derek reassured, as if sensing Stiles’ unease in a strange new place. He whipped his head around.

“How do you do that?” he replied, eyes narrowed, trying to figure out Derek’s ability to read him like a book.

“Habit more than anything,” the other man replied. “I can hear your heartbeat, smell chemosignals.”

“Chemosignals?”
“It’s a chemical signal your body gives off during periods of heightened arousal—like when you’re panicking about something,” Derek explained.

“I’m not panicking.”

“I know,” Derek replied with a shrug, “but you’re not comfortable either. Do you want to switch to a bigger table so we can both sit facing the door?”

“And risk the ire of the hostess? No thank you,” Stiles replied, sweeping one of the laminated menus towards himself.

The menu was almost entirely in Thai with some sparse English translations, so Stiles let Derek do most of the ordering, all taken by the same little old lady who had sat them. They ended up with a mountain of food that completely covered the table in front of them, spring rolls and green curry, pad thai and cashew nut chicken, enough for probably four people—yet by the time both men put down their forks, there was only enough pad thai left for lunch—a girl’s lunch.

“Oh my God, I think you might need to carry me,” Stiles exclaimed, leaning back against the upholstered booth and rubbing his still flat, but very full belly. “Because I’m too full and because I might fall asleep.”

“I think it would be frowned upon if I carried you to the car,” Derek retorted with a smirk, glancing around the restaurant at the other patrons.

“True,” Stiles replied with a shrug, picturing Derek trying to maneuver his too-long limbs around and over the tables and chairs and other patrons. He could feel his lips turning up at the image, but they abruptly fell when he looked to Derek, who was frowning like he was focusing on something.

“What?” Stiles asked, trying to keep the edge of panic out of his voice. After all, it wasn’t like Derek had leapt up and started growling, yet he didn’t seem entirely at ease either.

“I don’t know yet,” he said, voice far away, “Nothing bad, just… come on, let’s go pay.”

The counter was at the back of the restaurant, between the doorways that led to the washroom, and the kitchen, respectively, and it was decorated with organized clutter; a small bonsai tree, a tiny fountain trickling water, a porcelain figure of a cat, paw raised beside its gold and red decorated head, and of course, the cash register.

“Stiles?”

The teen spun around at the sound of his named and was faced with none other, than Alison Argent.

“Are you following us?” she asked, as Derek turned around to face her, trying to balance thanking the cashier with answering the young hunter’s accusatory tone. He hurried to nod his thanks at the elderly hostess before stepping aside to allow Alison to pay.

“Of course not,” Derek replied at the same time Stiles finally managed to blurt;

“Us?!”

“Of course, ‘us’,” Lydia’s voice retorted from behind Stiles. He jerked around to see his friend in front of him, dressed in stylish street clothes, frowning. “Alison is practically my shadow these days.”
“What are you doing here Derek?” Alison asked as she handed the bill across the counter, making sure to smile at the woman in the process, the tone of her voice and expression on her face at complete odds with one another. In response, Stiles could feel the shift in Derek’s energy, and watched as he drew his shoulders back, standing straighter, looking more imposing than he already was.

“Eating,” he replied shortly. By now, the elderly woman’s movements were more measured and deliberate, probably so she could listen in longer. “Why would I be following you?”

“Because you don’t trust me,” Alison replied. “Did you tell him?” she asked, tilting her head towards Stiles.

“Tell me what?” he asked, now thoroughly confused, at the same time that Derek responded: “Of course not.”

Both ignored him.

Derek sighed, the motion allowing him to deflate his posture ever so slightly.

“I do trust you, because Stiles trusts you,” he replied softly.

“Trust me, I am very in the dark about everything right now,” Stiles interjected. But he was rapidly figuring it out and he didn’t want to be, lest Peter pluck even a theory from his mind. At that, everyone fell silent and the hostess handed Alison her change, now looking eager for them to leave. They all took the cue, murmuring their thanks and ambling towards the door.

“Look, I just wanted to grab a bite to eat with Stiles where we weren’t going to run the risk of crossing paths with Peter,” Derek explained once they’d stepped outside. “This was the one place I knew was decent, still around, and out of Peter’s jurisdiction. I had no idea either one of you would be here.”

Alison breathed out slowly, hands on her hips, staring at the ground for a moment, composing herself.

“I’m sorry,” she blurted in apology.

“But…” Derek trailed, expecting her to continue, and to be honest, so did Stiles.

“No but, we’re all on edge here, waiting for Peter to make a move.”

“He will soon enough,” Lydia supplied, and everyone turned to look at her in shock. She shrugged, rolling her eyes as if it was obvious. “It’s Wednesday night, and since Stiles won’t be going anywhere near the motel tomorrow, I’d say it’s safe to assume that it won’t take Peter long to come for him.”

“Thank you Lydia, that’s so comforting,” Stiles replied, voice brimming with sarcasm. But if the way Derek’s hand gripped his was any indication, it did nothing to cover up the undertone of anxiety.

“I guess what I’m saying is I don’t like the idea of so many eggs in one basket,” Alison continued.

“And that was way too small of a basket,” Derek finished her thought, gesturing at the building.

“Exactly.”

“I guess this means we’d better go, huh?” Stiles stated, more than asked.
“We all need to lay low right now,” Alison replied, “until Peter makes his next move.”

“It won’t take long,” Derek retorted. “He’s never been particularly patient.”

Stiles rubbed his hands together after clambering into the Camaro. California never really got cold, but it was nearing the end of November now and there as definitely a chill in the air—especially in the evenings. As Derek climbed into the driver’s seat beside him and turned they key in the ignition, Stiles reached over to fiddle with the knobs and buttons for the heat—and heated seats.

“Next time I’m homeless, remind me to do it in a Camaro,” he sighed, sinking into his seat as warmth started to emanate from within it. He glanced at Derek, a half smile on his face, only to be met with raised eyebrows.

“What?”

“You’re unbelievable,” the other man muttered, smirking despite himself before his voice went from light and incredulous to serious. “You’re never going to be homeless again.” And Stiles felt something in his heart tug like Derek was pulling on a string. He knew the other man meant it.

They pulled away from the curb and for once, Stiles let silence wash over them for several minutes as they drove along in the darkness, back towards Beacon Hills. It had been nice to see Lydia, to know that she was okay, that Alison was staying close, but he hated himself for it. To know it was his fault that Lydia needed the protection in the first place.

“Lydia’s right, Peter is coming for me.” His voice rang out in the darkness of the car almost too loudly. “He has to know by now that we’re protecting my dad and Lydia, probably that you’ve been training Scott. He’s going to come for me, I can feel it. The only reason he’s waited this long is he’s got something planned.”

Derek’s knuckles turned white as he gripped the steering wheel harder, adjusting his grip, but he didn’t try to argue.

“No matter what I do, I’m always making the wrong choice.”

Derek’s voice was so resigned, like he’d expected this of himself, expected to be a disappointment, that despite the warmth sinking into his bones, Stiles felt cold.

“What are you talking about?” he exclaimed as they pulled up to a red light, the intersection completely empty.

“I should have hunted Peter down. The night he left you,” Derek visibly swallowed, barely containing his rage, “on the street, I should have hunted him down the second I knew you were okay. I should have been doing that for the past week instead of trying to teach Scott—”

“And then what Derek?” Stiles finally managed to challenge. “I get the pleasure of watching Peter disembowel you too? Then Scott has nobody in his pack except an insane Alpha—”

“He wouldn’t have—”

“That’s what he did to Laura!” Stiles cried, hands flying animatedly. He knew they wouldn’t help him prove his point, but it was like his limbs knew he needed some way to expel the excess energy his emotions tended to generate. “Then what happens? I’m alone and because there is nobody to stop him, and because he needs to strengthen is pack, Peter bites me. Then I’m no use to Scott because
I’m even more controlled than he is. And I spend the rest of my life as Peter’s slave until my dad dies and I finally kill myself because what the hell is the point anymore?”

Silence. Complete and utter, deafening silence filled the vehicle.

“You wouldn’t do that,” Derek’s voice is soft, but tinged with something a lot like fear.

“What? Kill myself?” Stiles retorted, tone bitter and resigned, hands dropping to his lap from where they’d still been suspended in the air, waiting to animate his arguments. “What other option would I have? I’d never be able to take Peter out on my own. He’d hold my dad over my head for as long as he could, and then when he didn’t have that option, he’d just use Scott and Lydia the same way, for the rest of my life. And every time I tried to fight back against him I’d have to worry about my friends. And I can’t live my life like that. The only way to keep them safe would be to take away Peter’s reason to harm them.”

Derek’s gaze held Stiles’ for a long time. In the darkness of the car, the only light came from a swath of light cast by the traffic lights, a slight glow from the instrument panel. Derek’s jaw clenched and relaxed as he seemed to try and figure out what to say.

“You can’t–”

The blare of car’s horn rang out, causing both men to jump. Stiles reeled around to see an Audi on their tail, the driver gesturing impatiently at the now green light. Luckily Derek took the hint before the other driver had a coronary and pulled through the intersection, driving all of a block before smoothly pulling into the parking lot of a small strip mall, all of the stores closed, killing the engine. Stiles glanced at him, frowning as the Audi who’d been behind them sped by.

“What if I can’t do this?” Derek asked, voice so soft it was practically sub vocal. His gaze was fixed on the windshield instead of Stiles, hands still on the steering wheel. When Derek turned to local at Stiles, the teen felt his chest constrict, the other man looked so young and scared.

“I could end up getting everyone killed.” He paused a beat. “Again.”

“Derek no,” Stiles implored softly, because the other man just looked so… broken. “The fire wasn’t your fault. It was the fault of a crazy fanatic who manipulated you when you were just a kid.”

Derek sighed, the motion completely deflating him.

“I know,” he replied softly. He scrubbed a hand down his face, this time his voice coming out a little stronger. “God I know. I’ve spent most of the last seven years in therapy to drill that message in, but some days it’s just harder to believe than others.” Another pause. “I’m sure Peter blames me.”

Stiles made a face before he could stop himself, expression pulling at his brow and lips.

“How would he even know? He was in a catatonic state since the fire.”

“When you talk to your dad, do you think he hears you?” Derek responded miserably. And Stiles felt like someone had punched him in the gut. Because of course he thought his dad could hear him. It was simultaneously the thing that kept him going on his darkest days, and the thing that made him most weary and hopeless at times.

“Yeah,” he responded somberly, Derek’s direction of thought becoming clear.

“Peter has to know Kate set that fire. She set it because of me. And he’ll take out whatever revenge he wants to on me. Unless I’m the good little beta he wants me to be.”
Stiles nodded as his brain scrambled to keep up with where Derek could possibly be going with all of this. He could think of nowhere good, and it made his palms sweaty, his heartbeat pound more insistently against his ribs.

“And I’ve already been a bad beta; taking something of my alpha’s, challenging his authority by training and shielding his other beta from him.” Derek heaved a breath and slowly reached across the space between the two seats to pry one of Stiles’ hands open enough to hold—sweaty palm and all. “I guess what I’m trying to say is… either way you might lose me. He could kill me…”

Stiles felt like he’d been slammed right back in time to that night in the woods, only this time, it was visions of Derek’s body in Laura’s stead that plagued his consciousness. He could practically hear the wet splat of blood against the dying leaves, smell the wet peat and copper tang, could feel the chill of the cold bed of his Jeep against his back when Peter.

He closed his eyes, shuddering as he willed the image away.

“Or he could destroy me in a different way, pull me apart worse than Kate ever could. Break me. You don’t see it, but between the two of us, you’re the one with the strength.”

“I’m really not,” Stiles breathed, voice shaking as he exhaled and tried to keep his composure as he thought about the scenario Derek had introduced, one he hadn’t given much thought to, because the Hales—even Peter—were all strong, persistent, smart. But it stood to reason that if Peter could so easily destroy Laura physically, he could do the same to Derek emotionally. The thought of that, of Derek being there, but not Derek, was one of the worst outcomes he could think of.

“But you have to be,” Derek insisted, “because Peter could break me, and if that happens and we still manage to beat him in all of this, I’ll need you.”

Admitting that Peter could destroy him, showing Stiles the most vulnerable parts of him, was almost like an out of body experience for Derek. The part of him that Kate had so badly damaged chastised him for showing such weakness again. Another part of him banged against a door of a closet in the recesses of his mind, equal parts angry and terrified at what revealing so much of himself, to someone so new, could do to him. After all, it could turn out exactly as it had last time.

“Wow, you really mean that,” Stiles breathed, voice almost reverent, a whisper. He was staring at Derek with a look that crossed between wonder and sadness, carnelian eyes wide and scared looking, even in the dim light. Derek, unable to think of an appropriate response just nodded once, neck stiff.

“I do,” he finally managed to coax his vocal cords into uttering.

“I promise,” Stiles’ voice was noticeably quavering. “If something happens to you, if Peter does anything to you, I’ll bring you back. I will.” The fierce determination in his last two words sent a thrill of adrenaline down Derek’s spine. Other than sensation, he wasn’t able to label exactly how it made him feel. But for whatever reason, he trusted him.

He nodded, took a deep breath in and pulled the other man in for a gentle kiss, the press of lips to lips anchoring, even in the midst of impending chaos and uncertainty. He thought back to all the moments over the past few weeks that, cobbled together would make a normal, happy relationship; making coffee and pancakes in the morning, taking showers together, doing laundry, wearing each
other’s clothes. Even if it wasn’t strictly healthy, or fuck, even legal, Derek wanted Stiles, wanted the normalcy with him. He couldn’t help wondering if it was foolish to think that he had even a chance of having any of that.

When they pulled away, Derek waited a beat before starting the Camaro again, carefully navigating out to the road and heading back towards Beacon Hills. He reached over and coaxed Stiles’ hand into his, only breaking his grip to shift gears as needed; Yet another normal action, to touch one’s lover in insignificant ways, to connect. He’d take all he could get before it was ripped from him. And he knew it would be, because Peter was going to take cruel revenge on him somehow. Derek just hoped that unlike the last time, Stiles wouldn’t have to bear the brunt of it.

It wasn’t particularly late when they pulled into the parking lot behind the bookstore and climbed the stairs to the apartment, but both men seemed to be on the same page. Derek didn’t turn on the hallway light more because he found his eyes adjusted to the darkness easily. Stiles made no move to do so either, even though Derek knew his human eyes were a lot less adept and adapting to the darkness. They navigated through the apartment to the bedroom in companionable silence, pausing only to toss clothing to the bedroom floor before climbing into bed.

“So… do you know where Lydia is staying?” Stiles asked sleepily after they’d been in bed for several minutes, then he quickly corrected himself. “I mean, is she safe?”

Derek didn’t actually know where Lydia was staying. He knew her grandmother’s cabin was out on a lake just outside of town a few towns over, and that Alison was staying with her, almost like a personal body guard. But as for the actual location of the property, he thought it was best he didn’t actually have that information. While Derek wasn’t entirely sure he could trust any Argent, he didn’t doubt Alison’s ability, so he didn’t feel any doubt when he answered.

“She’s safe.”

He could feel the motion of Stiles’ head jerking up and down a couple of times, hair tickling across Derek’s bare chest.

“Okay.”

Derek stared up at the ceiling, frowning at the expanse of white, trying to come up with some sort of plan. He wanted to tell Stiles that he could feel a dark cloud hovering over them, but the last thing the teenager needed in his life was more anxiety to weigh him down. Derek’s stomach fluttered with a persistent uneasy, sick feeling of dread of things to come that felt like something was gnawing at him from the inside, trying to get out. He was grateful that Stiles wasn’t a were creature of some sort, otherwise he’d have known easily that something was wrong. As it was, at some point in the last few minutes? Or was it hours? The other man had fallen asleep, his chest steadily rising and falling, one arm under his pillow, the other flung over the edge of the bed.

Derek heaved in a breath, hoping the influx of oxygen would somehow help him focus on the task at hand: developing a sound plan for dealing with his depraved uncle. He exhaled harshly. He knew he couldn’t hope to get the drop on Peter, after all, the alpha already knew he was in town, knew he knew about Laura, knew he and Stiles were... whatever they were. Either way, Peter just had too much of an advantage between what he knew, and his authority as the alpha of the pack. Derek’s only choice was to go to Peter as his beta and try and reason with him. He had a rough idea of how that would go: not well.
Peter would definitely have a punishment in mind for Derek’s defiance, but what? For Laura it had been death—though Derek suspected her role as the alpha had more to do with that than her role as protector for Stiles and Scott. What would be his punishment? Keeping Scott, another beta out of Peter’s reach didn’t really prevent Peter from building his pack, just using it the way he wanted to. Scott was making progress. Derek could see why Laura had a soft spot for him. There were defined differences between him and Stiles, despite being the same age.

Scott had an innocence about him—maybe it was from months on end of being alone and feral in the woods—he hadn’t got a chance to mature, maybe it was the big brown eyes that made him look like a kicked puppy whenever Peter was mentioned. The only thing that seemed to harden Scott’s personality, make him look the part of the capable, supernatural being he had become, was the hard determination and concentration that would cool his eyes, and the hard set of his jaw when he was focused on one of Derek’s many drills designed to test his control and strength. And he was getting there. Derek had to give the kid credit—he was determined, a hard worker and absolutely loyal to Laura and Stiles versus Peter. And that wasn’t something easy to do with an alpha like Peter.

No, what Derek really had to worry about was his relationship with Stiles. Peter had made that abundantly clear when he left Stiles in the middle of the street like a sacrificial lamb at an altar. Every image Derek’s brain seemed to conjure up was an abstract, distorted collage of misery, no image completely clear. Peter wasn’t a complete maniac. Derek suspected that, in his own sick way, Peter would make the punishment suit the crime. He just hoped the alpha would leave Stiles out of it for once.

The best thing Derek could do was also the thing his every instinct fought against: go to his alpha and offer his submission and hope it would be enough to appease him. He knew better than to expect that would actually work. That he would get away with all that he’d done, but it was his safest bet. At least, it was the one least likely to get him killed—and by extension, Stiles.

He huffed out a breath of frustration, turned and rolled on his side, curling around Stiles’ sleeping form, breathing in the smell of him; jasmine flowers and petrichor, concentrated at the nape of his neck, then closed his eyes and tried to focus on the sounds of the sleeping teen’s breathing, the rhythm of his heart.

Eventually, he slept.

Chapter End Notes

After they leave the restaurant and are driving home in the Camaro, Stiles mentions that should Peter kill Derek, he would likely take his own life in order to prevent Peter from hurting or killing anyone in his family as collateral. There is no explicit discussion of how Stiles would do this, nor is it graphically described, however if you want to skip over this part, you can resume reading after the *** indicating a point of view change and you won't miss much of anything but a whole lotta feels.
Beacon

Chapter Notes

Warning: rapid cycling of POV ahead. As an author, part of me absolutely hates doing this because it really messes up the continuity, but on the other hand, it also ends up reading more like something you’d see on screen for a television drama- which has a certain allure. I’m just hoping this works in my favor and achieves what I wanted it to. This chapter runs a little long too, but there was just no good place to break it, so ya’ll are just going to have to deal with a little extra.

I’ve included a small amount of werewolf lore and references to magic. While I did a little bit of research, what I’ve included is completely and totally made up to fit the purposes of this story, and I’m positive it isn’t entirely accurate to any real practice.

“That has to be the stupidest idea I have ever heard,” Stiles declared, voice coming out in a growl where he stood with hands braced on the kitchen counter while Derek poured them each a coffee that Thursday morning.

“It’s the only chance I’ve got to reason with Peter, if I come to him instead of making him come to me. A step towards submission– or at least that’s what it will look like to him.”

“You hope,” the teen snarled, voice dark and cynical.

Derek exhaled roughly through his nostrils, the sound coming out in a frustrated sounding huff.

“I have to start somewhere,” he replied, exhaustion and resignation clear in his voice. “If I go to Peter, try to reason with him, submit to him as his beta–”

“There is no guarantee he’ll actually believe you’re actually submitting. He could decide to just rip you in half. Last night you said he could destroy you. Now you’re talking about trying to go find him to have a rational discussion? I’m beginning to think that ‘fucking nuts’ is a Hale gene.”

“We’ve talked about this,” Derek continued, doing his best to ignore Stiles’ unique sense of dark humor. “He needs me. Whether he likes it or not, when it comes to pack, three seems to be the magic number. A pack of two is a vulnerable one. And Peter won’t let himself be vulnerable– especially not if he believes there is someone or something out there waiting to attack.”

Stiles chewed on his lower lip as Derek slid a cup of black coffee across the counter to him. The teenager’s long fingers wrapped around the ceramic, threaded under the handle to enclose around the whole base of the mug. He took a sip of coffee before pulling the vessel away from his lips.

“Have you ever stopped to consider that this ‘plan’ of yours might end up backfiring catastrophically?”

“How? I mean how much worse can this possibly get aside from me getting one of you killed?” Derek retorted.

“Oh I don’t know,” Stiles growled with a shrug, sarcasm rolling off of him in waves. “He could agree with you, that three is a magic number. And that he doesn’t need his problematic nephew
fucking his toy or retraining his beta. So instead he decides to kill you– and bite me.”

Derek’s hand stalled mid-air, coffee on the way to his mouth. He had to admit, it was a possibility. He was willing to hedge his bets that it was an option Peter wasn’t likely to pick though. Not if he played his cards right. Derek set his coffee back down on the counter and cautiously stepped towards Stiles.

“He won’t… not if I play my cards right. If I go to him while he is at work…”

“So you’re just going to waltz in and ask for A. Wolfe?” Stiles retorted, eyebrow raised.

“I was thinking, asking for Officer Wolfe,” Derek replied calmly, reaching out towards Stiles, gently bracketing his hips with both hands. This close he could feel the pounding of his heart, and if he released a little bit of the control he’d learned over the years, he knew he’d be able to hear it thundering. “Since we don’t actually know the full name he’s been using.” Stiles leveled him with a completely incredulous look and opened his mouth to say something, but stopped, eyes dropping to the hands on his hips, so Derek continued.

“If I go to the station, we’ll be in a public– or at least semi-public space. He’ll be more likely to act reasonably and rationally then.” Stiles froze, the fingers drumming against his mug off coffee going so abruptly to a stop it was like a marionette being dropped.

“Right, because he’s never slaughtered an entire police department before,” Stiles retorted quietly. Derek dropped his hand’s from the teenager’s waist when he twisted away to put his coffee on the counter.

“Do you know what I think of whenever I have to pass that station? At least what I thought about before Peter actually showed me what he did?” Stiles continued, his voice only slightly above a whisper. “I think about the night they booked me for prostitution. I hadn’t been in the station in months because it hurt too much to see faces I didn’t know, and think about how they had replaced everyone I did. I remember when they brought me in, walking me past the front desk, they had painted the walls, but done a bad job of patching them where officers had fired their guns and lodged bullets in the plaster, so there were these bumps in the wall if you looked at it in the right light. But mostly I remember staring at the floor, thinking it was more yellow-brown than I remember it being… and realizing that was probably because they’d never been able to get all the blood out. I remember having to sit in one of the plastic chairs in the pen, this time in handcuffs, where I used to wait for my dad to finish what he was doing so we could get dinner. I remember praying that they didn’t put me in one of the cells because I knew I would have a panic attack just thinking about the fact that that was where they’d found my dad. And when they did put me in a cell, I started to freak out badly enough that when the officers talked about moving me to Eichen House that actually appealed to me more than staying where I was.”

Through Stiles’ entire speech, Derek could feel the lump growing in his throat, blocking his own airways– like getting a contact panic attack from the anxiety that assailed the air, the scent cloying and suffocating, like ammonia. The teenager looked up at him, deep brown eyes glistening with barely contained tears. It was one of the few times that he actually seemed his age, and Derek couldn’t help envisioning him that awful night, panicked and traumatized and alone, his mind whirring as he simultaneously tried to figure out what was going to happen now, and uselessly, what he could have done to prevent this from happening. Derek had felt that way once before.

“You can’t go there,” Stiles finally finished, voice a shaking mess, just above a whisper. His hands gripped the edge of the counter top, knuckles white, as if the ledge was holding him up. And Derek got it. It didn’t make things easy, but he couldn’t stand the thought of Stiles falling apart if he went through with this particular plan to confront Peter. He reached forward slowly, not entirely sure Stiles
would welcome the contact, but every instinct wanted him to pull the other man close and just, hold him until they both felt calm again. Thankfully, Stiles let him, folding easily into Derek’s arms, tucking his head against his chest while Derek’s finger’s tangled in his hair.

God Derek never wanted to let him go.

“I’ll call him,” he finally settled on, several minutes later, murmuring into the teenager’s hair. “I’ll call him at the station, tell him we need to talk. Does that work?”

It better, because he had nothing else.

Stiles slowly lifted his head, and where Derek had hoped to see at least some relief, instead he saw a haunted expression.

“It’s Thursday. He’s been planning something, but he’s going to come to us– come here. I know he is. I can feel it.”

Derek didn’t want to believe Stiles; they’d faced the same mid-level panic last week, and had taken all the appropriate measures to keep Peter out or from using Stiles’ family and friends as leverage, but he’d never come. But this time, as much as Derek hated to admit it, Stiles was likely right. Peter had probably delighted in the panic he knew he was causing, held that as a small reward for himself to tide him over as he laid all the groundwork for his next move. Nonetheless, Derek sincerely doubted that any sort of calm, rational conversation would take place if Peter showed up at the apartment. He just hoped that he knew his uncle enough to confidently say that Peter, for once in his life, would favor subtle menace over a flair for the dramatic and schedule his confrontation for a time when Artifact was closed for the night.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea,” he murmured against the top of Stiles’ head, “letting him come to us.” He could vividly picture the myriad of terrible ways this was going to go. No matter what, he knew there was no way Peter would leave without Stiles. And Derek couldn’t win. If Peter decided to take Derek along, it would only be if he had a way to control him, otherwise, he’d be left behind, scrambling to protect Stiles from a distance.

“It’s too late to do anything else,” Stiles replied, voice rough but resigned. Derek felt his insides writhe with discomfort. No matter which move he made, it was going to be the wrong one where Peter was involved.

“Let’s eat something, then I’ll take you to go see your dad,” Derek finally breathed into his lover’s hair, already hating himself for what he was about to do.

***

When Derek dropped had Stiles off at the door to the former Sheriff’s hospital room, Stiles had felt fine, for all of about ten minutes. Over the past two weeks he’d gotten used to the Argent guards Chris and Alison had strategically placed at the hospital. To the average staff member, patient, or visitor, they probably looked like ordinary visitors; men and women moving through the halls looking tired, hospital coffee cups clutched in their hands. But to a trained eye, one could see the small differences in the way they carried themselves; the subtle way they were always aware of their surroundings, never running into nurses or ambling patients even with their heads down, staring at a cell phone, always positioning themselves so that they had a vantage point over most of the room, the
way they subtly scanned each and every person that entered Stiles’ father’s room and repositioned themselves close by whenever a nurse or other staff member got too close. Stiles knew something wasn’t right, could feel it in his bones, but instead he chalked it up to the electric feeling of a big storm coming in, knowing that Peter was lurking in the shadows somewhere, waiting to make his move.

In the quiet of the hospital room, his eyes traced over his dad’s body, which seemed to be shrinking. *Because people aren’t meant to be kept alive for this long like this.* Stiles knew he had a tendency to look at the world as though everything was black and white— or at least he had. Things were right or wrong, choices were good or bad, people were good, or they were not. And not for the first time, he felt the grey creeping in. He knew what he was doing was selfish, that he was keeping his dad alive for himself because he needed him. Every few months the hospital would bring up the option of a DNR order, and every time, he made it clear he wasn’t going to sign anything like that. But the next time… he was starting to think he should reconsider.

He reached out, clasping a hand in his father’s loosely curled fingers, closed his eyes and slowly exhaled, using a technique his therapist just after his mom died had given him. In his mind’s eye, he visualized walking through his house, ascending the stairs to his bedroom. He focused on the details, how the fifth stair creaked under his weight, the penciled tick marks on his door jam of his bedroom where his parents had tracked his height since he was four, the stormy grey-blue of his bedroom walls. Gradually, his mind cleared.

“I don’t know if you can tell that things are different,” he began softly. “If you can, I’m sorry I’ve been keeping you in the dark…”

Stiles let himself ramble for the better part of an hour, trying his best not to burden his dad with the turmoil going on outside hospital walls that he could do nothing about. It was difficult to avoid talking about Peter, or Derek— even Scott, and there were several times Stiles found himself trailing off, sitting in silence— an unnatural state he found uncomfortable— no, not uncomfortable, frustrating. He’d just trailed off for the third or fourth time when his phone chimed from his pocket— a text from Derek:

_I’m outside, want me to come in?_

_You don’t have to. I’ll meet you at the front._ Stiles typed back, progress painstakingly slow and clumsy on the keypad. Truthfully, he was relieved, as shitty as that made him feel. It meant not having to hide his frustration and helplessness from his dad. Nevertheless, when he stood up, he hesitated, carefully leaning over his dad to gently wrap his arms awkwardly around him.

“I love you Dad,” he murmured, holding on a little longer than was necessary or comfortable, because in the back of his mind, was the thought that this could be the last time for quite some time. When he left, he didn’t look back, but when he looked up, he noticed one of the Argent’s men, a man in his mid-thirties with close-cropped sandy brown hair, a plaid shirt and jeans staring at him. The second their eyes met, the man averted his eyes, looking back to the cell phone in his left hand. Stiles had just reached the elevator bank when the doors opened and Derek stepped out. For a few seconds, he didn’t see Stiles, and his face was drawn, lines furrowing his brow, eyes wide and… scared? The thought of Derek being scared about something enough to allow t to break through his calm façade in public, even if he could easily disguise it as concern for a friend or family member, caused Stiles’ brain to jump to the worst of conclusions— that Peter was coming here, right now. It was in that moment, before Stiles could even say his name, that Derek’s eyes found him. In two swift steps, he’d moved almost supernaturally fast, dragging Stiles into his embrace. For a few moments, Stiles was struck dumb, unable to move before his nervous system got it’s shit together enough to
react appropriately and he was able to bring his arms up around Derek and hug back.

“I thought he was here,” Derek murmured into Stiles’ neck.

“What? Why?” Stiles immediately felt goosebumps rise on his arms, the hairs on the back of his neck prickle in their follicles. He pulled his head back enough to look Derek in the eye.

“You didn’t answer my text— I thought something had happened,” he replied, frowning. Stiles wriggled in Derek’s arms enough to dig into his jeans pocket for his tiny black flip-phone. He groaned when he opened it and noticed, not only a text from Derek—Okay, meet you in the lobby. Deaton wants to see us—but that the little volume icon on the screen had an x through it.

“I must have turned it on silent by accident when I hugged my dad.” He moved his arms up to hang around the back of Derek’s neck. “Sorry to scare you.”

They parted and Derek hit the elevator call button.

“Sorry to overreact,” he apologized.

“It’s okay.”

Truthfully something inside of Stiles felt warm and safe at the thought of overprotective!Derek. It was enough, at least for a few seconds, to quell some of his anxiety.

“So, what does Deaton want?”

“What do you mean wants to see me?” Stiles asked incredulously as Derek pulled into the clinic. His stomach flip-flopped nervously. Alan had drawn a clear line in the sand, whatever past he and Stiles had was over and they would never acknowledge it again unless Stiles brought it up. But it wasn’t that making him nervous. What made him nervous were the strange pieces of his life slowly falling into place like snowflakes gently drifting to the ground. He hadn’t missed the way Alan had looked at him once he’d laid the mountain ash barrier for the Argent meeting. He’d hardly shown anything but keen interest upon learning that Peter thought he was ‘the spark’.

“If you don’t want to be alone with him, I can—” Derek started before Stiles cut him off.

“No, it’s not that— you can go do your wolfy wrestling with Scott.” Derek regarded Stiles with a dry expression. “Don’t give me that look, that’s basically what it is— it’s just that, I don’t get a good feeling about this.”

Turns out, he was right.

***

Scott was making incredible progress, all things considered, Derek reflected from where he lay on the cold ground on his back. He could see why Peter wanted to keep control over the young wolf—with more training, he’d be a worthy opponent. Scott wasn’t particularly bulky and imposing, he didn’t have brute strength going for him, but he did have speed, agility and determination. From his earlier years with his uncle, Derek knew Peter had a unique style of fighting. He enjoyed demonstrating his power and strength, though he kept it for opportune displays, perfectly timed. He was agile, but what was truly impressive—and now intimidating—was his endurance and stamina.
Peter could take one hell of a beating and keep standing, keep fighting until his opponent tired and he could land a perfectly executed blow to end it all.

When the beta offered Derek a hand, he look it, leveraging his weight to pull himself to his feet.

“Sorry,” Scott apologized almost immediately, gnawing at his lower lip.

“What for?” Derek blurted.

When the teen just stared at him dumbfounded, he sighed.

“You were doing exactly what I’ve been teaching you,” he explained.

“Oh.” Scott sounded a little dejected. “I thought I’d really hurt you.”

“You probably would have– if properly motivated– which in a real fight, you will be,” Derek attempted to reassure. Scott looked slightly less wounded. “Your control is coming along well. You didn’t slip at all that time.” Truthfully that was what Derek was most proud of. It made him feel like maybe one day he stood a chance of being a good alpha like his sister; capable of building a pack. It was never a future he’d been able to envision for himself before now.

“Yeah– the real question is, can I hold it together when Peter comes back around...” Scott trailed. Derek could hear his heartbeat begin to pound as the other beta thought about the inevitable confrontation. Derek couldn’t help but feel some of the same apprehension. As a beta, it was a natural compulsion to want to please one’s alpha, to obey. It wasn’t for a lack of free will– of course pack members had their own autonomy, but the urge to comply was like an itch, only to be conquered by scratching or successfully ignoring the impulse.

“You have to tell yourself he’s not your alpha,” Derek replied firmly, because now was not the time for Scott to break. Not when Derek was going to need him. “Peter may have been the one to give you the bite, but Laura was the one to teach you everything you needed to know, how to regain control. She is your alpha.”

“So what does that make you?”

Derek shrugged: “Pack.”

Scott nodded, twisted his body towards the clinic to look over his shoulder. Derek mirrored the move.

“It’s going to be hard,” Derek continued, “like being told not to itch when you have poison ivy I guess.”

“You guess?”

Derek shrugged, “It’s always healed too fast for me to know. I’m just going by what humans tell me. My point is the longer you can hold out and resist, the better.” He thought back to his teenage years, the memories bittersweet. All the times he’d pushed back against Laura as she tried to do what was best for him. It was the only reason he knew– with some shame– that refusing to acknowledge one’s alpha was the only way to resist. “It’s like pulling on an elastic; the more you stretch it, the more resistance you meet. You want to give in before it snaps. Only this time, you’ll want to push past that resistance to break the hold Peter has on you. It’s not going to be easy. But you have to do it.”

Derek didn’t need to say why. Scott’s second glance back at the building behind them, barely visible through the trees, was more than enough to communicate he’d been understood.
“How is your father doing?” Alan asked politely as he led to way to the same room these kinds of pow wows always seemed to take place in. Stiles recognized the formality for what it was, but also knew Alan’s words were in fact, genuine.

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“About the same as always– the Argents are keeping a good eye on him.”

Alan nodded.

“From what Allison reports, Lydia is doing well– though frustrated by the constant supervision.”

Stiles couldn’t help but huff out an amused chuckle.

“Yeah that sounds like her.” He paused, leaning against the familiar bank of cabinets as Alan rounded the exam table. “So... why am I here? I mean why did you want to see me?”

“It struck me, how powerless you seem to feel, for someone with such extraordinary potential. I feel we need to change that.”

Stiles’ eyes narrowed as he asked; “How?”

“Well, to begin with, there are certain measures you can take to protect yourself from Peter, with very little training or guidance.”

“Like the mountain ash?” Stiles replied.

“Like the mountain ash,” Deaton replied with a nod. “But the effectiveness of mountain ash, and other substances like it, is entirely dependent on the user, their abilities and motivations. For you, mountain ash is a barrier as simple as locking a door from the inside, but as effective as a bank vault door. It takes very little effort, aside from merely thinking about locking the door, to make it work and yet there is an incredible amount of strength to your barrier. For others, they must maintain concentration as they lay the ash in a perfect border, must continue to consciously think about it while under duress, and so their barrier is more like a barricaded door being met with an incredible force that must constantly be pushed against.”

“So... you’re saying I really didn’t want Scott to hurt anyone?”

“While I have no doubt that is true, I don’t feel you gave it much conscious thought. It was more like…” the doctor paused, searching for the right words, “a reflex. So I can only imagine how much power would be behind you should the need arise to keep Peter out of a space. However I’m more interested in the other ways your power can manifest. And I suspect Peter is intensely curious about the same. Based on everything you’ve told me so far, I believe his next move will be something to do with your memory, and an attempt to restore it in full.”

“But how would he even do that? Talia Hale is dead. Any memories I have— besides the ones Peter dug out of my brain are gone.”

“That is what I’m attempting to figure out,” Alan replied earnestly, “aside from his specific motivations for wanting to do so. It all depends on what he has learned from his family’s beastiary— and I’m willing to bet that it is significant enough to cause concern.”
“That’s… comforting,” Stiles replied dryly.

Alan’s lips pursed together, betraying that he didn’t like this any more than Stiles’ did.

“Having grown up here, and not gone much further than the county line, you probably haven’t noticed anything particularly unusual about Beacon Hills. But the town is… unique.”

Stiles snorted. Beacon Hills was a small city, especially compared with the likes of Los Angeles, San Francisco, hell, even Anaheim had more than four times the population Beacon Hills did. In fact, Stiles was pretty sure Beacon Hills had just been designated as a city sometime in the past two years—if it even held the designation at all. But it still felt like the same small town he’d always known, not quite ‘everyone knows everyone’ but at least, ‘everyone knows if you want a good burger, you go to Ruby’s’. He had no doubt that across America, were hundreds of similar towns.

“Unique? I mean, I like Beacon Hills and all, but I’m not sure I’d use ‘unique’ to describe it.”

“Most wouldn’t,” Alan replied, “but I’m not surprised you don’t. Think back over the past, about everything out of the ordinary that has ever happened, especially the things you can’t explain.”

Stiles opened his mouth to reply before stopping himself with one look at the other man’s clam, expectant face. For one, there was Peter— and Derek and Laura and Scott. Werewolves. Deucalion had been one too—and shown up and Peter had taken him out. Peter, who’d been revived because of some sort of witchcraft, who wanted some sort of revenge against the family of hunters who had killed his family. And he wanted to use Stiles to exact his revenge…

“Jesus, is the only normal person I know Lydia?” he muttered, and to that, Alan hummed, an interested sound.

“What?” Stiles replied incredulously. “You don’t honestly think Lydia is like… a vampire or something, do you?”

“That is a topic for another time,” the vet replied mildly. “However, I will say that teenaged girls do not typically go into a fugue state and wander the woods at night.”

“Lydia is not a vampire!” Stiles replied emphatically, now not entirely sure if it was the entire world that had gone crazy, or just him.

“I never said she was,” Alan replied. “I am not altogether certain of what she is.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Stiles breathed, starting to feel lightheaded.

“Think Stiles, think about the name of this town,” Alan invited, smoothly navigating away from the topic of Lydia for now.

Beacon Hills. The ‘hills’ was the obvious part, referring to the terrain which had probably all looked pretty much like the preserve before development. But the beacon part? All Stiles’ mind could conjure up were lighthouses perched on rocky shorelines meant to warn sailors they were coming too close to shore, or communicate with them when needed. If he stretched it, Beacon could just be referring to the beacon of light emitted from a lighthouse… but it was nothing that made sense for landlocked Beacon Hills. He stared at the surface of the stainless steel exam table, watching the afternoon light dance across its surface, flashing and pulsing…

“Stiles, would you please, cut that out…” the sheriff requested, as another beam of sunlight burned
at his eyes, voice weary and tired where he sat at the kitchen table one Saturday morning, looking at a case file, a plate of pancakes rapidly cooling, set off to his left.

“Only when you can guess what I’m saying!” Stiles retorted from across the table where he was using a small hand mirror— an antique compact with a black exterior and roses artfully carved into the top that Claudia had found at an antique market— to reflect the light from the kitchen window directly onto the sheriff’s face. After a night that had gone later at the station than he had intended, John didn’t have a whole lot of patience left. He took a deep breath in and closed his eyes, the flare of light from the mirror in his son’s hand still burning his retinas through his closed eyelids. Melissa McCall was coming over later to pick Stiles up and keep him overnight for a sleepover so that he could go to the hospital to visit Claudia. Stiles was still asking when she was coming home. He hadn’t had the heart to tell his son that she wouldn’t be. He blindly reached out, feeling for his coffee mug and took a sip. It wasn’t liquid courage really, but it allowed him to pause long enough to appreciate his son’s excitement.

“What do you mean?” he asked, opening his eyes warily, readying for another solar blast.

“In morse code. What am I saying?”

“How do you know morse code?” the sheriff replied incredulously, though he shouldn’t have been surprised. His son had the ability to find the strangest, most niche interest and research it to death, spending weeks utterly obsessed with a topic until he knew all he could— before he was onto the next one.

“Mom taught me,” his son replied with a shrug. “Scott and I aren’t gonna talk tonight, just use morse code, so I wanna make sure I’m doing it right. Now guess.” Then proceeded to hit him with another series of long and short bursts of light.

“A signal,” Stiles breathed aloud. “A beacon is a signal.” He looked to Alan, who was smiling softly, eyes bright with excitement.

“Exactly,” the vet replied quietly. “Beacon Hills is a beacon, or I should say it is home to a beacon that attracts supernatural activity.”

“Like Peter,” Stiles supplied flatly.

“And dare I say more,” Alan continued. Recognition suddenly poured over Stiles like a bucket of freezing water. His limbs seized up tight and immobile and he started to shiver. Because of course Alan and Peter were talking about the same thing.

“The nematon,” he managed to blurt out. “The nematon is the beacon.”

At that the vet stood up straighter, surprise evident on his features. The atmosphere of the room changed, charged with energy.

“You know what it is?” he asked voice almost flat with disbelief.

“Not really,” Stiles replied. “I mean, I know that Peter needs me to find it to use it. But I don’t actually know what I’m looking for or where it would be— other than in Beacon Hills. Peter used to know, before Talia took his memory— and Derek’s too. She thought one day Peter might try to use it… use me. She was right.”

“And that he was, but without your memories intact, the task will be difficult and dangerous— for
you. Talia was a wise woman, her intentions always pure. I doubt she ever thought that taking your memories would put you in danger. Rest assured Peter won’t take any undue risk, not when he’s this close to what he wants, however…” the vet trailed off, expression betraying he was deep in thought.

“Is this what you wanted to talk to me about? Because I knew something like this was coming. Peter’s been building towards it since the night we met.” He didn’t mean to come off as irritated or ungrateful, but the more time he spent discussing Peter’s intentions in Alan’s office, the less time he had with Derek and Scott before the alpha acted.

“My concern is how Peter is going to attempt to have you locate the nematon,” the vet replied. “Without your memories intact, and no way to restore them without Talia, the only way to locate the nematon would be to transport you to another realm of existence—”

“Wait, what?” Stiles felt his features furrow into a frown. This was all becoming too much for him, too Inception meets… he couldn’t think of a science fiction reference bizarre enough to describe his current situation and that— that was saying something. Alan sighed, closing his eyes for a moment, hands braced on the edge of the exam table opposite Stiles.

“I apologize, I am getting ahead of myself,” he began. “Our world, as I am sure you have discovered, is much more complex than the average person will ever know.”

“No shit…” Stiles muttered.

“But you have a particularly unique place in it. A ‘spark’ is like, the nematon’s fraternal twin. You instantly recognize one another and have a relationship. A spark is the only being that is able to use the power of a nematon, and more importantly, tame it. This is I suspect, why Peter has worked so tirelessly to tame you. Without maintaining control over you, he could have no hope in ever using the nematon to his advantage— you’d be able to overpower him easily. Unfortunately, when Talia took your memories, she inadvertently created the perfect storm. Without your memories, you don’t know how to communicate with the nematon any longer.”

“Well isn’t there someone who could teach me? Couldn’t you teach me?” Stiles replied, trying to keep the choking sensation down enough to force his anxiety into dormancy. Because if he was hearing things, there was little hope in ever defeating Peter.

Alan shook his head, expression bleak.

“At this time, you are the only spark in existence. And aside from that, your relationship to the nematon cannot be taught; it’s instinctive, almost like a reflex. Either you’re going to have to relearn that relationship, or regain your memories.”

“So how do I do that?”

“My concern is, how do you protect yourself when Peter attempts to reunite the two of you.”

“Right, that whole transporting me to another realm of existence that we just glossed over,” Stiles retorted, sarcasm getting the better of him. “So how would Peter even do that? Is there like, a portal somewhere? A ritual he’d have to perform?”

“The other plane is the spiritual realm that exists between life and death. It holds many spirits and beings, some act as guides, others constantly trapped in that limbo, trying to reach one side or the other. But the nematon can be found there, since it transcends all realms.”

“So what? Does this mean he’s going to try and kill me… then bring me back when I’ve found the nematon?” Stiles retorted, spitting out the very first insane conclusion his mind could grasp at.
When the silence that followed stretched too long he looked to Alan, his jaw clenched, brown eyes full of trepidation. His heart pounded harder, and if he’d thought he’d experienced anxiety in the past, it was but an echo of what he felt now. It felt like something had reached up from the depths of the earth and grabbed him, rooting him in place so that it could suck the life right out of him before Peter got the chance. His heart felt like someone was squeezing it, his head pulsing, lungs emptying of air, but mouth too stupid and disconnected to inhale again. So naturally, his next words were:

“You’ve got to be shitting me.”

“It’s the only way of transferring your corporeal form from this world to the other,” Alan replied grimly. “My concern isn’t so much how Peter is going to bring you back—I’m sure he has thoroughly researched all of his options and in the fashion typical of him, has a plan of some kind—it is what you’ll encounter while there, what may try to hitch a ride back to our world. *That* is why I needed to see you—if I can’t stop Peter, I owe it to *Talia* to protect you from what I can.”

He moved around the exam table to a small supply room tucked into the corner and gestured for Stiles to follow. Stiles felt like he was practically prying his feet free from the tile as he stumbled around the exam table to follow Alan who, despite his concerns, seemed entirely too nonchalant about Stiles’ *dying*. The room in the corner was tiny, not much larger than one of the holding cells at the police station. On the longest wall opposite the door was a bank of cabinets and counter in the same style as the exam room, stretching the entire length of the wall. The afternoon sun cast a rectangular beam of light from the window high up on the right wall downward across the room, dust particles dancing in the rays, illuminating the space in dull, hazy light. The counter top was neatly lined with various tools; a set of offset scales, their digital counterpart directly beside, three different sizes of mortar and pestle in varying materials, a varied collection of pots and canisters, a few bottles of oil, a wooden cutting board and a salt cellar.

“I’m sure you’ve heard lore about various plants having protective or destructive properties,” Alan introduced over his shoulder as he opened a set of cupboards about a third of the way down the wall and pulled out a few more canisters and a swath of brown leather along with some sturdy looking twine.

“Yeah, like mountain ash,” Stiles retorted, finally finding his voice, “it’s a type of tree, right?”

“Exactly—and you’ve witnessed the power it can have. So I need you to trust me when I tell you that not all lore is merely such,” Alan replied as he organized his canisters in a neat line. “Many hunters, emissaries and mages rely upon earth’s resources to act as protective, even offensive agents. “And this protection can be employed a multitude of ways including wearing it, either temporarily, or permanently.”

“Permanently?”

“Many in this line of… duty, choose to have protective essential oils infused directly into tattoo inks, applied by a skilled practitioner.”

“Please tell me you don’t plan on giving me a tattoo,” Stiles pleaded. He did *not* want a permanent reminder of this period in his life.

“I assure you, I have no plan of that,” the vet replied, turning around. “We’re going to use much more temporary, but similarly effective methods.”

“We?”

“Do you recall how I mentioned that intention is an integral part of the effectiveness of mountain
Stiles nodded, scrutinizing the display before him.

“You are going to create a protective poultice of your own to ward off harmful beings if Peter is successful in sending you through to the other plane.”

“So uh, I have a few potential issues here,” Stiles retorted. “The first being, I have no idea what I’m doing and the second being that you seem to have missed the part where Peter could kill me.”

“Peter may be many things, but he is not stupid. He would not take a risk of this magnitude unless he was confident that he would both maintain some semblance of control, and gain a great reward.” Then, as if to say there would be no more discussion of the matter, Alan stepped to the side and placed his palm on top of the first canister; “Angelica root,” then the second, “Fennel,” and slowly the rest, “Anise, Frankincense, Clove.”

“So… what am I supposed to do with all of them?” Stiles replied hesitantly. Alan moved across the counter, pulling a bottle of oil and one of the mortar and pestle– a medium stone one, towards them.

“You’ll mix them, then bundle them in this,” the other man replied, fingers brushing over the swath of leather. “It doesn’t need to be much.”

“Oooo-kay,” Stiles breathed, starting to become more than a little frustrated at the evasiveness his former client, someone who was supposed to be helping him, was showing. “Do you have directions, or a recipe, or… something? This seems a little serious to be winging it.”

Alan moved slowly, coming to stand next to him before clapping a hand on his shoulder. “You already know the recipe,” he replied with a soft smile, “just… do what comes naturally.” Then he stepped back, towards the doorway. “I’ll be outside with Derek and Scott. Come see me when you’re done.”

Stiles watched dumbfounded as the other man turned and walked out the door before his feet finally coordinated the effort with his brain to move Goddammit.

“Great,” he muttered to nobody in particular, before staring down the row of canisters and pots in front of him. He opened each container one at a time, first smelling the contents. The fennel was definitely his favorite, like licorice but a lot more subtle. The Angelica root made him recoil when he was hit with an unexpected wall of musk and was the very first thing he pinched out with his fingers and tossed into the mortar with the mindset of ‘if it smells this bad to me, it is bound to keep other things away as well’. It didn’t take long before he was absorbed in his task, not even consciously thinking about why he was doing it. His hands moved steadily through the motions of pinching, sprinkling, grinding, and his only pause came when he felt like he’d added something from every pot Alan had pulled out of his stores, and still felt like something was missing. So in typical, curious-to-the-point-of-criminal, he began opening cupboards, not quite sure what he was searching for until he found it, and as he added his final ingredients, a sense of rightness, and calm, even in the face of what was about to happen to him, came over him.

He placed the canisters labeled ‘Linden’ and ‘Ash’ back in their places on Alan’s shelves after he’d made a clumsy looking, but functional bundle out of the mashed herbs and leather swatch left for him, washed his hands, and headed out the back of the clinic where he knew Derek, Scott and Alan
would be. He found them, sure enough, Alan leaning against a tree that bordered the field, watching the two half-shifted wolves circle one another. It wasn’t immediately clear who was winning this particular round of sparring, which, when Stiles thought about it, was probably a good thing. It meant Scott was getting stronger, gaining control— at least enough to be an ally with Derek, rather than a burden for the other man to worry about if push came to shove.

“How did it go?” Alan asked without turning around, eyes fixed on the field in front of him. Stiles tossed the leather sachet up into the air and caught it in his palm swiftly.

“Honestly? I have no clue, but it feels like I did something right.”

At that, the vet pushed away from the tree and turned to look at him, gaze appraising.

“May I?” he asked, palm extended outward. Stiles suddenly felt a little self-conscious of what he considered to be a somewhat shoddy job on the exterior of the sachet, however he handed it over easily enough, and Alan seemed completely unconcerned by the appearance as he turned it over in his palm, so he could grab gently, and bring it to his nose, inhaling softly. He hummed, sounding almost… pleased?

“You added your own touch.”

It was said without any heat or accusation. For a few seconds Stiles just stared, jaw slack, because honestly, he’d assumed someone who spent the bulk of his time around wet dogs probably didn’t have the most acute sense of smell. He ran a hand over the back of his head, tugging on the longer hairs at the back of his neck, trying to answer in such a way as to minimize the fact that he’d been snooping in the vet’s cupboards.

“I uh….”

Alan inhaled once more, smiling softly.

“Linden and Ash ” he remarked, voice contemplative and light, and of course, maintaining that same air of mystery that was both irritating and enlightening all at once, “how appropriate.”
Eventualities

Chapter Notes

Who would have thought this fic would outlive the actual television series? Teen Wolf is officially over. And to not drone on endlessly here with an author’s note, I’ve actually made a post over on my tumblr about it if you wanted to check it out. Coles notes version:

- I’m thankful that I got a chance to meet these characters, and that you gave the fandom something awesome to work with.
- I’m willing to overlook your blatant disregard for the sanctity of your character or a decent plot structure in later seasons.
- Now that I don’t have to worry about canon being added to, I’m even more inspired to write.

And with that, onward we adventure.

It felt strange to attempt to go through the motions of a normal routine. The ride back to the apartment above Artifact from the clinic was filled with stilted conversation. It reminded Derek of the weeks following the fire, when the reality of what he’d done had sunk in and all that was left was him and Laura and grief. He felt like an imposter, a liar, hiding things from Stiles.

He’d gone to the police station. Against everything that Stiles had asked. Like so many of his decisions in life right after the fire, it was one made out of fear. He didn’t want to make Peter come to them. As much as he wanted to rip his uncle’s spine from his body for everything he’d done, he knew he was in no position to bring brute force against someone so cunning– and he wasn’t sure he’d win. No, he had to let Peter think he was in control of the situation, that Derek was coming to him as his second. He’d sat in the parking lot for almost ten minutes, debating whether or not to go into the station. It felt like he was betraying Stiles– but it also felt like he could potentially be saving him.

The police station was a quiet hum of activity, it had been awhile since Derek had been there– in fact the last time had been just after the fire. Little had changed about the place, save for the addition of a waist high, solid wood railing that extended out from either side of the front desk, interrupted only by a gate on either side, matching panels of frosted glass with the sheriff department’s crest emblazoned on them and all Derek could think was: ‘That wouldn’t even slow Peter down’.

“Excuse me? Sir?”

Derek blinked, realizing he’d been standing just inside the doors for a beat too long. His eyes locked on the source of the voice, an immaculately uniformed young Latino woman, hair tied back in a neat bun. Her face was so young looking, despite its irritated expression, that he couldn’t help but think she had to be fresh out of the academy– and resentful to be stuck on the desk. So naturally, he turned on the charm, hoping she wouldn’t see through the façade. He plastered on a grin and strolled up to the desk, leaning over it casually.

“Sorry,” he apologized, all feigned bashfulness. He let his eyes travel obviously, without outright leering, but… lingering on her name tag: K.Martinez. “I’m going to guess… Kamila?” For a
second, the woman blinked and Derek thought ‘fuck, too far’ and then her face broke into an amused smile.

“Katarina,” she replied smoothly, softly rolling the ‘r’, but to you, it’s officer Martinez.” Her tone remained light, playful.

“Right, my apologies.” Derek retorted, heart pounding. This was it. Time to man up. He swallowed. “I was hoping I could speak to Officer Wolfe.”

A million possibilities raced through his mind, including that the name Peter used at the motel differed from the one he used in his second life.

“By officer, you mean deputy, right?”

And holy shit, he had used the same name and was the sheriff’s deputy. Of course he’d inserted himself into some position of authority and importance.

“Uh yea, sorry about that,” Derek replied, hoping his fumbling response still fell into his ‘clueless and adorable’ role. It had been awhile since he’d needed to use it.

“He’s off for the next few days,” the officer replied, eyes narrowing, signaling that the belief in Derek’s flirtatious alter-ego was coming to an end. “What is this regarding? I can direct you to another officer for assistance–”

The young officer’s words faded out at the rushing sound in Derek’s ears. If Peter wasn’t at work…

Stiles.

He abruptly abandoned his lounge against the counter and stood up straight. Rationality said Stiles was safe, the Argents had a consistent presence at the hospital, but his inner cynic said Peter was cold, calculating and had been waiting for this moment, would do whatever it took.

“I’ve… I’ll uh, I’ll come back later,” Derek stuttered out, distracted by his own thoughts. The young officer frowned, expression turning serious.

“What did you say your name was again?” she asked as Derek turned around and started walking away from the desk.

“I didn’t,” he called over his shoulder, keys for the Camaro already in his hand before he’d even reached the door. It took every effort to act natural, casual instead of peeling out of the lot.

Derek was just turning from surrendering his jacket to the coat rack when cool fingers tickled across his jaw, the smell faintly herbal, addictive. Stiles’ eyes were their usual earthy amber, but the shadows under them seemed to dull their usual glint of mischief. He was tired, stressed, but still his mouth had a lilt to the corner as he pulled Derek into a kiss, and for a few seconds, Derek allowed himself to enjoy the soft press of lips to lips, the tentative exploration of tongues. His hands searched out and found denim clad hips and he was like a man possessed, couldn’t help stepping forward, Stiles stumbling back in kind, moving in a clumsy rhythm down the hallway into the apartment. He knew where this was going, but he couldn’t do it, not with his lie by omission hanging over his head. Luckily both men broke the kiss, paused their movements. Stiles pressed his forehead against Derek’s collarbone.

“Today is a shitty day,” he declared, voice tinted with resentment, heavy with the wet blanket of exhaustion. So naturally that was the moment Derek blurted; “I went to the police station.”
Stiles’ head jerked up, his eyes narrowed. His hands dropped away from their hold, one on Derek’s neck, the other, his hip.

“You what?” he hissed, voice low. He stepped backwards, into the apartment, not to leave so… well, Derek would take his victories any way they came at this point. “How could you do that? Why would you do that?” His eyes went wide suddenly and he started to shake so violently it was like watching someone pre-hypothermic.

“Where is he?” Stiles demanded, voice quiet, almost defeated sounding. “If you talked to him, why isn’t he here?”

“No!” the teenager cut him off sharply. “Do not talk to me all reasonable like I’m some patient in shock. What deal did you make that he let you walk away?”

It was killing Derek to watch this man—this incredibly resilient teenager fall apart like this, so utterly terrified he looked like he was going to fly apart. Derek took a step towards Stiles who in turn took a step back, anger and betrayal and sadness flitting across his features. And Derek felt a desperate ache squeezing the breath from his lungs, like some… thing was standing on his chest.

“Stiles– he wasn’t there,” he finally managed to blurt out. It was enough to make the teen pause, still but for this tremors that wracked his frame. It allowed Derek to reach out a hand and tentatively reach for one of Stiles, almost surprised when the teen let him drag him into his arms, where he went boneless. For a few minutes they just stood there in the hallway, just past the bathroom, still and silent until Derek thought it might be safe to speak again.

“Peter wasn’t at the station. He had the day off apparently,” Derek murmured, voice wry at the end. He couldn’t help but see the dark humor in it all. Life had certainly been stranger than fiction as of late, and of all the stupid, realistic blunders to occur, when Derek went ready to fight, bargain, whatever was needed, he’d be thwarted by something as benign as a scheduling issue.

Stiles snorted.

“So let me get this straight,” he replied, voice muffled against Derek’s chest. “You went to the police station, quite possibly to kick start the final show down, but couldn’t be bothered to call ahead?” Derek could hear the amusement in the teen’s voice—apparently they shared the same twisted sense of humor.

“It would have ruined my entrance,” Derek deadpanned, and was rewarded with a deep groan.

“You are an absolute idiot. But since you didn’t get yourself killed, I’ll forgive you,” Stiles replied, pulling back from Derek’s embrace slowly. He scrubbed his hands down his face and stepped back into the apartment further.

“So what now?”

Derek shrugged.

“The same plan as before. We wait.”

“I hate this limbo thing,” Stiles muttered, moving towards the living area. “So I get why you went to the station, the good ol’ ‘rip the bandaid off fast’ idea. But if Peter decides to draw this out, you can’t
lone wolf it again.” The teen flopped onto the worn leather couch, long legs sprawled out in front of him, arms folded across his torso, expression anything but relaxed.

“I’m serious. I hate to say it, but even my stubborn ass knows that Peter has a plan and trying to figure it out is a fruitless endeavor,” Stiles continued, one hand rising lazily to gesticulate before flopping back into his lap. “We should focus on what to do when he does show.”

Derek finally followed suit, flopping down next to Stiles, head leaned against the back of the couch, turned towards the other man.

“Trust me, I hate this too. I’ve known Peter my whole life and even then, I can’t even guess at his plan– or mental state.” For all he knew, he was trying to reason with a mad man– scratch that Peter definitely was insane, it was just a matter of determining whether he was delusional insane, or sociopathic insane that was the problem.

Silence rested between them for a few seconds and Derek found himself stretching his arm out across the back of the couch, pulling Stiles into his side to plant a kiss against his temple. Having him so close made something glow pleasant and warm in his belly, but it was accompanied by a too tight feeling in his chest, the dread of things to come. This close, a subtle, not unpleasant woodsy smell cloaked the two of them and Derek’s fingers reached out to trace the source, fingers settling on a thin strand of cord peeking out from under Stiles’ hoodie. Stiles made no move to brush his hand away, so he hooked an index finger under the strand, tugging until a small leather sachet freed itself from the confines of Stiles’ hoodie to rest on his belly.

“That’s my…” his brow furrowed, “actually I have no idea what it is actually called. It’s got a bunch of herbs mashed together, supposed to protect me…”

“Deaton gave it to you?”

“Uh, sort of?” the teen volunteered. “I made it. He just let me use his stuff, told me what different herbs did. He seems to think it will work.

“Against Peter?” Derek frowned. He couldn’t see how one little sachet of herbs would do any good against Peter, especially since it didn’t seem to be doing anything to him.

“Uh… sort of?”

The uptick in Stiles’ heartbeat was very slight, but there nonetheless. For the first time since he’d met him, Stiles was hiding something from him.

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And fuck. As hypocritical as it was, Stiles had hoped to avoid telling Derek about Alan’s theory, about him technically, maybe dying so that his consciousness could go to the in-between, which sounded… absolutely crazy when said out loud to anyone other than the vet. The way Derek was looking at him told him there was no way he would get away with hiding anything. It wasn’t like his conscience would have let him anyway.

“Alan thinks Peter is going to use me to find the nematon,” Stiles began, because that was the easy part, the obvious part, “by transporting my consciousness to limbo– his words were ‘the in between’–”

“How?” Derek’s voice was low, like something from deep within him was forcing it out, belying that he knew whatever the plan was, it wasn’t good.
“He has to lower my heart rate,” Stiles said carefully, hoping that by remaining calm, Derek’s reaction wouldn’t be to barricade him inside the apartment and start something with Peter.

“How much?” Derek asked, voice quiet, sounding balanced on the edge of something. He sat up from his slouched position on the couch.

“Well you’re the paramedic… what’s low enough to almost but not actually kill me?”

“You’re serious?” Derek replied, voice cloaked in disbelief and lightly veiled fear. “How are you okay with any of this?”

Stiles snorted, exhaling roughly; “Trust me, I am far from okay with this, despite my morbid curiosity, but it’s not like I can stop him.”

“Stiles, he could actually kill you,” Derek replied, voice toeing the line between incredulous and pleading, and it broke Stiles’ heart. Because here was this man; a werewolf, a strong, capable paramedic, who had somehow survived losing his entire family, who had completely, selflessly taken in a homeless kid, and then gotten tied up in this mess, became emotionally invested, and here Stiles was, asking him to potentially lose everything again.

He didn’t want to die. He was scared out of his mind. Inside his head felt like a hurricane, a violent storm of too many thoughts twisting and crashing into one another. Of course there was the natural fear of dying, the unsettling unknown of what afterlife there was– if anything at all– but that paled in comparison to the plaguing sense of guilt he felt. If he died, his dad would end up in some crooked rest home, forgotten about until he died. Scott would end up Peter’s pet, doomed to never be his equal, and never be free of him. Lydia might stand a chance of being fine, Stiles wasn’t self-important enough to think she’d grieve by his graveside every day, but he knew his friend would miss him, and he knew enough to know that she would eventually confront Peter on her own. Then there was Derek, who’d never asked for any of this when, weeks ago, all he did was pick up a semi-conscious homeless kid lying in the preserve parking lot, and get him to help. He thought about the conversation him and Derek had shared in the Camaro on the way home from dinner the other night, how fragile the other man had revealed he really was. The thought of Derek having to survive him, the mess he had inadvertently created, had him gulping in air, trying to fill lungs that felt too small. Tears prickled at the corners of his eyes and he swiped at them furiously with the back of his hand.

“I know okay,” he replied, voice coming out choked. He tried and failed to catch his breath, to just get it together like he’d somehow managed to do every time before. He couldn’t bring himself to lift his eyes to Derek’s. It was like his entire body wanted to just stay in place and fall apart while the rest of the world rushed past him.

“Hey,” Derek coaxed softly, moving closer, one hand inching across one of Stiles’ thighs until he could tangle their fingers together, headless of the wet path Stiles’ tears had left behind on the back of his hand. Stiles let himself be moved, let Derek slowly recline backwards and pull him against his chest. In the one fleeting moment that their eyes met, Derek’s crystalline green gaze was so openly apprehensive that Stiles had to look away under its intensity.

Several minutes passed and Stiles just lay against Derek’s chest, listening to the rhythm of the other man’s heartbeat, at first almost equally unsteady as his own before it started to slow. Stiles focused on the warmth of Derek’s breath where it softly gusted against the top of his head, the steady, warm weight of his hand as it meandered slowly over the same path starting between his shoulder blades and gliding down to the small of his back, over and over again. It was a little awkward, a little uncomfortable, both men being slightly too tall for the length of the couch, but Stiles didn’t want to move. If Peter showed up right now, he could damn well pry Stiles out of Derek’s arms.
“I feel like he is watching us just waiting,” Derek spoke, voice soft, slightly raspy from lack of use. Stiles bristled, head jerking up to look at Derek.

“Like, do you feel him here, now?” he asked, shuddering at the thought. It was bad enough, already feeling that way every day, being reminded in little ways that Peter could be around any corner, lurking in any shadow, but the acute feeling of being under glass right now was making his skin prickle.

“No,” Derek was quick to reassure. “I just mean, I don’t like being toyed with. Just when I think I could be figuring out his game, he changes it. I’m not used to feeling like I can’t keep up.”

Stiles knew that feeling– intimately. Every time he set foot in Peter’s sights, he was both literally and figuratively fucked with.

“I know that one,” he murmured humorlessly. “Except I’ve become accustomed to feeling like I can’t keep up.” At that remark Derek craned his neck forward and pressed his lips into Stiles’ temple. Another several minutes passed, neither man spoke or even really moved and Stiles found himself in that contented space just before sleep when Derek spoke again, this time his voice a near subvocal murmur, but against his chest, this close, Stiles heard it:

“I love you.”

He blinked, once, twice, not entirely sure he hadn’t nodded off. For no real reason, his heart began to pound. No big deal, it wasn’t like Derek could read minds and would know Stiles had just dreamed that. He lifted his head and was met with Derek’s gaze. He looked so… fragile, lips slightly parted to reveal his two front teeth, just slightly bigger than the rest, endearing in their own imperfect way, cheeks flushed just slightly. But his eyes– Derek looked like a deer caught in the headlights.

“Did you just…” Stiles ventured to ask, heart skipping and tripping an awkward dance in his chest, because he already knew the answer before Derek actually blurted;

“Yes.”

“Did you say it hoping I was asleep?” he asked, heart pounding with trepidation.

“No.”

Stiles’ head swam, It had been a long time since he’d heard those words. Years. Hell, he’d realized a long time ago that he may never hear them again from his dad, never hear them in this intimate way for his whole life. Logically, it was too soon to feel so deeply, to pass off what he felt as anything other than lust or the thrill of something new, or even just, the feeling of being cared for instead of used. But Stiles could feel it; the intensity there from the moment they’d met, the magnetic pull that Stiles knew would need a force of nature to overpower. It felt both too early and too late.

“Stiles?” Derek’s voice was small, his hand had stilled, fingers tangling in the cotton of Stile’s t-shirt. “Say something.”

Stiles wished he had the strength to do the right thing, to say something like “don’t”, to let Derek walk away from the supernatural disaster that was his life. But he was weak or selfish or both and he couldn’t do it, couldn’t successfully quash the feeling of something inside of him filled to overflowing, flooding his cold, shaking limbs with warmth. But with that warmth came the cold, clawing shadow of dread, looming, threatening to take everything away. Stiles was certainly no stranger to loss, its sweeping, devastating effect on his life thus far. So this time, he wasn’t going to pass up the opportunity to hold on to something before it was gone– even if it would hurt him more.
in the end.

“I—” he started, pressed his lips together and took a breath, because this could be the only chance he ever got to say this to someone. “I love you too,” he exhaled, and it felt freeing, to name what was between him and Derek, even if it felt simultaneously like too much and not enough. At least it was out there, at least Derek knew how Stiles felt about him before everything fell apart.

Stiles slowly shifted, careful not to destroy the fragility of the moment, planting one hand in the space between the couch cushions and their bodies, and the other on the arm, next to Derek’s head. The other man’s eyes tracked his movements, the hand on his back applying just the slightest pressure, as if afraid Stiles was moving to get away from him. His brow furrowed in apprehension and Stiles melted at the sight, dropping his forehead down to lightly rest on the other man’s. His eyes slid closed as he just savored the moment, the faint smell of Derek’s shampoo, the trace of coffee on his breath, the barely there lively smell that Stiles couldn’t exactly name, but if he could describe it, would say pine and a brook in the middle of the woods. Finally, after a long minute he moved, lips drifting to meet Derek’s, only to find his journey cut short when the other man met him halfway.

The early evening drifted by in a strange kind of daze that Stiles couldn’t describe. Had it not been for the underlying tension of Peter’s eventual appearance, it would have felt like the Saturdays Stiles remembered wasting as a kid. After making out like teenagers for awhile on the living room couch, giving the apartment a thorough clean, and cuddling on the couch, each man with his own book, a particularly loud growl emitted from Stiles’ stomach and Derek pulled him up from the couch with a simple; “Let’s go get food.”

They walked the few blocks to Peretti’s, moving faster than what was probably necessary on the way back, eating their bagels and carefully taking in their surroundings, watching for any sign of Peter. Stiles started to wonder if he looked as paranoid as he felt as his eyes swept around the street taking in details, but not fast enough for his brain to stop racing. Window reflections had him doing a few double takes as the glass caught the reflections of other pedestrians as they passed, motion flickering in his peripheral vision until his head jerked to the side.

Hypervigilance, his therapist– the resident social worker at McLean had called it after he’d been attacked; the instinct that bordered on a compulsion to always be aware of one’s surroundings and to react inordinately to perceived threats.

By the time they had returned to the apartment, it was clear that the day had taken a mental toll on both men. When Stiles yawned, stretching his arms above his head, Derek gently took his hand and led him to the bedroom where each of them stripped down to their boxers before sliding into bed. Normally Stiles woke up to find himself either coiled around Derek or around a pillow with one of Derek’s arms curled around him– if Derek wasn’t already awake making coffee. This time, both men lay on their backs almost shoulder to shoulder, staring up at the ceiling as the sun, just beginning to set, cast the room in a wash of purples, oranges and pinks.

For most people, Stiles assumed sunsets were relaxing, but ever since he’d ended up on the streets, he found himself subconsciously growing more and more restless the deeper the sun sank in the sky.

“I might be the only person in the world that doesn’t like sunsets,” he declared, eyes on the ceiling.

“I can understand that.” Derek’s reply came, softness matching the warm light filtering into the room. Stiles let his head drop to the side so they could look at each other. “Even before Peter I can understand that.” Derek’s fingers twitched across the back of his hand before tangling with Stiles’ own. And somehow it felt even more sweetly intimate than other things they’d done in similar states
of undress.

“...I always knew that eventually I’d have to, you know, stop what I was doing. But I just… never really thought about it. Every time I tried to build up enough in my stores, something would happen to empty them, like the heat in my Jeep going, or getting sent to McLean. So I only really thought about it in like…” he paused, pressed his lips together, trying to find the right word under Derek’s softly attentive gaze, “like… eventualities I guess. Like, eventually my dad would either wake up, or die.” His throat went dry at the thought. “Or I’d pick up the wrong John and end up dead in a ditch somewhere. And the thing is, I knew those eventualities would happen soon. It wasn’t like I was going to get to adulthood, or my dad was going to live to a ripe old age of 80, with things like they are. In my head, it was always imminent.”

“And now?”

“Now I just really want to punch Peter in the face,” Stiles retorted, despite knowing what Derek really meant. He sighed.

“Maybe one day, sunsets won’t be so bad.”

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The air was cool and crisp in the semi-darkness of the preserve. A storm was coming in. Derek frowned in confusion, disoriented, trying to place the events that had landed him here. His feet were bare, and he wriggled them in the earth, a soft blanket of dirk and fallen leaves, spread over the landscape of knotted tree roots and large rocks, and a sense of not right settled over him. The earth didn’t feel the way it always had, it wasn’t cool, in fact, aside from looking at his feet and knowing they were semi-buried in the earth, Derek didn’t feel the coolness of the forest floor. His breath gusted out in front of him, hanging in the air.

Cold, I should be cold, he thought as he realized it wasn’t just his extremities that were bare, he was stark naked. The longer he lingered here, the more unsettled he became. The wind rattled through the trees, casting leaves to the forest floor, causing the trees to bow against the force of it, yet Derek didn’t feel a thing; not the whisper of a breeze against his skin, nor the rising of goosebumps or the hair on the back of his neck, nothing. The breeze seemed to carry away all sound of any living thing and Derek could hear nothing at all—no birds, no crickets, no small animals scurrying for cover. It was like they were already gone, the threat was already here, and it was too late for Derek to run, which was when he heard it; the pounding, relentless, hurtling rhythm of a heartbeat. Hearts only beat like that when the owner was witless with terror, fleeing for their life.

“Derek!”

Stiles’ voice shredded through the silence, a cry so harsh and ravaged by fear, Derek could practically feel the strain in his own vocal cords. His head whipped around, searching out the sound, his own heartbeat rising to a crescendo to match his petrified mate. Across the small embankment just to his left, out of the corner of his eye, a flash of pale flesh jerked his head to the side, the heartbeat in his ears growing deafeningly loud. Derek gave chase, scrambling down his side of the embankment and up the other, but for all the grace that came with being a werewolf, he couldn’t catch up. As quickly as he’d managed to scale the other side of the small embankment, Stiles was already well ahead of him, racing through the trees, tripping and stumbling over the gnarled roots of the large redwoods and other trees, and the jagged pieces of rock that emerged from the earth.

Logically Derek knew he should be gaining ground, that there was no way a terrified, delicate human, who was tripping and falling as he fled a threat, should be this far ahead of him. He watched the other man stumble, falling almost to his hands and knees, only just managing to keep from
sprawling onto the forest floor when one hand made contact with a boulder on the forest floor and he was able to pull himself up. It should have been his chance to catch up, and yet he couldn’t.

“Stiles!” he shouted at the other man, though he couldn’t be sure whether it was to reassure him that he was coming, or whether it was a plea for him to slow down so he could catch up. Whatever threat the teen was running from, Derek hadn’t detected it yet… which was unsettling.

A prickling sensation dropped down Derek’s spine and before he could identify it either as the threat itself, or just his general unease, ahead of him Stiles’ stumbled again, falling to the ground in front of two towering redwoods. He scrambled onto his hands and knees first, then clumsily to his feet, and this close, Derek could smell the sweat clinging to his skin, the hint of blood from damaged flesh. A few short stumbling steps, and Stiles went sprawling again…

And completely vanished between the two giant trees, a completely impossible, unreal, illusion.

*It’s a dream.*

The revelation didn’t stop Derek from rushing forward, eyes transfixed on the two trees Stiles had disappeared between, so afraid he was going to lose track of them in this strange world, or worse, lose Stiles.

“Derek…” a whimper as he drew closer and was hit with a wall of anxiety even before he passed between the two tree trunks and into a clearing. In the seconds before he passed between the two trees, Derek had this fleeting image of being repelled by some invisible force, thrown against the surrounding trees like a rag doll. The image was so powerful, he actually braced himself for the impact as he raced forward.

It didn’t come. Instead, Derek found himself in a clearing, darker than the rest of the preserve, the tree canopy impossibly dense when considering the enormous stump in front of him that likely would have provided shade for a quarter mile or more when it stood. As it was, it hadn’t stood in a long time. The base of the stump extended maybe three and a half feet out of the ground, it’s roots visible above the soil, as thick as the trunks of most trees, gnarled, clawing into the earth like an old man’s hand ripping up a weed. And on top of the massive platform that the stump created, stood a terrified, shaking Stiles trapped by one arm across his hips, another slung under one arm, across his chest. Over his shoulder, Peter’s face was tucked against his neck, eyes trained on Derek.

And Derek had never felt an urge so strong— aside from maybe the one that had pulled him to Stiles in the first place— as the urge he felt now to rip the alpha to shreds. He even took an aborted step forward to do just that, stopping in his tracks only as Peter’s claws lengthened on the hand around Stiles’ stomach, petting against the expanse of skin menacingly as he tutted;

“Uh, uh, uh,” practically into the teenager’s ear, eyes still trained on Derek. Stiles in turn, scrunched his eyes closed, his expression a grimace as he fought tears. He twisted his face away from Peter’s, unwittingly baring his neck. Stiles’ legs were shaking as he tried to maintain balance on the tree’s stump, knees scraped and raw, his knuckles in a similar state, like his feet, covered in a layer grime and soil.

At the glaring gesture of submission, Peter’s focus shifted back to Stiles, and he grinned predatorily before leaning in, tracing a path up the side of the teenager’s neck with his tongue, leaving a wet path in its wake, causing the teen to shudder so violently his knees buckled. The only thing that saved him from adding a few more bruises and scrapes to his vast collection, was Peter’s arms clenching around him to hold him in place. The whimper Stiles allowed to escape was barely vocal.

“Peter please,” Derek implored, sounding much less like the assured, reasonable beta he’d hoped for,
betraying exactly how desperate he was. He could practically feel Stiles’ pulse reverberating through the air like the bass at a rock concert.

“Oh Derek, don’t pretend this isn’t exactly what you want,” his uncle chided as he pulled back from Stiles’ neck, maintaining his hold on the teenager, but putting his claws away.

“I don’t want you to hurt him,” Derek replied, hoping to prevent his uncle from doing anything irrational, thinking Derek was a threat.

“You know it will hurt him, you’ve been through this before, but I promise this time it will be different, it will only hurt for a few minutes. Then he’ll be perfect.”

The bite. Peter was going to give Stiles the bite. At the same time Derek realized it, Stiles’ heartbeat grew impossibly loud, a sound that pounded at Derek’s temples, causing a resounding ache almost immediately. Thoughts of Paige instantly came to mind. The details were foggy, small clips of memory sewn loosely together, submerged like they were underwater. He remembered asking Peter to find an alpha to bite his girlfriend, so that she would be safer in a world with so many threats humans didn’t even know about. He couldn’t remember the name of the alpha who bit her, couldn’t remember how he had gotten to the giant tree in the middle of the preserve that he had somehow never seen before, just that Peter had gotten him there when Paige had started to bleed, and bleed, and bleed, with no signs of stopping. He knew that she died, but couldn’t remember the precise moment that he’d felt her heart stop beating. Then he remembered his mom, kind, patient, wise. And there was nothing else after that.

*The nematon.*

A voice whispered it in Derek’s ear. This was the place Paige had died, and should have lived. Visions of Stiles’ lips tainted black with blood poisoned by the bite flooded his mind, watching him cough and writhe as his body rejected the bite, listening to his pulse go quiet and his breathing shallow. Only this time, there would be nobody to take away that pain, to dull the memory enough to leave only an ache present enough to learn from, instead of the bright, sharp pain of loss.

“I’ll even let you take a turn with him from time to time since you’re so fond of him,” Peter taunted, and it felt so real, Derek faltered for a moment, believing maybe this wasn’t a dream. Then his uncle’s face rippled in that tell-tale way, as his bones shifted beneath the surface of skin, so he could take the form of his wolf, face lengthening, shifting, a jaw full of teeth gaping open, clamping around tender flesh. And Stiles’ screamed out his name in desperation before it broke to a choked off cry.

Derek blinked awake to the sound of his name being called– murmured really, in a much calmer tone. He quickly realized that the voice belonged to a sleep-addled Stiles and that both of them were still safe in bed, in the relative security and comfort of the apartment. Not yet fully awake, it took Derek several seconds and another hoarse, ‘Derek’ from Stiles’ lips to realize he was wrapped tightly around the younger man, mouth open, teeth clamped not-so-lightly around the same expanse of skin Peter had brutally bitten in his dream. And he was pressed up against Stiles’ back, hips rutting against him. His hips stuttered to a stop and he pulled away, heart rounding as he rolled onto his back.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized instantly, dragging a hand down his face as if to wipe the expression of horror from it. And he didn’t have time to parse how fucked up it was that he’d been dry humping Stiles in his sleep while enduring the utter nightmare he’d just awoke from, when a wall of arousal hit his nostrils, so sweet, and distinctly Stiles he could practically taste it. Stiles let out a low, rumbling laugh as Derek turned his head to look at him.
“Clearly, I did not mind,” the teenager replied, voice lazy with both sleep and arousal as he vaguely gestured to the prominent erection tenting his boxer briefs. “But I figured I should probably wake you up, you know, consent and all that– yours I mean.”

Derek wrestled with himself internally. A part of him knew that someone like Freud– fuck, probably whole panels of psychologists– would have a field day analyzing his psyche. That part of him called him irreversibly fucked up for even considering his baser desires at the moment. But in the wake of his horrific nightmare, a part of him that he didn’t entirely want to label as his wolf (because who was he kidding?) demanded that he claim Stiles, mark him before Peter actually got the chance. One look at Stiles in this moment though; pale skin lit by the glow of the moon, posture and expression relaxed, hair sleep ruffled, and most importantly, completely unharmed– caused what little resolve Derek had to crumble. He rolled over, bracing himself over Stiles before capturing his knowing smirk in a deep kiss.
The Axe

Chapter Notes

Guys. Sneaking in just under the wire- my last update of 2017. This chapter— and every interaction in it— has bounced around in my head for almost TWO YEARS- that is how long this story has been writing itself in my head and how long it has taken my hands to catch up. Reaching this point feels like reaching the last mile in a marathon because we are in fact, heading towards closure (I'd say we're in the last third of this fic). As I keep writing ahead a bit, I hope to be able to give a chapter count sometime soon. I'm still amazed that I have so many people who have stuck around and read this fic. Thank you, so much, I am beyond grateful. 2018 is the year I finish this sucker, so I hope you'll stick around.

Stiles woke up suddenly, eyes snapping open to the pale glow of sunrise on a hazy, rainy day, unlike most days where he rose slowly from sleep, denying the morning’s existence for as long as he could. He realized he was being gently, but urgently shaken.

“Stiles.”

Derek’s voice was calm, too calm for the force of his hand against Stiles’ shoulder, shaking him, and Stiles’ nervous system instantly kicked into high gear. He sat up quickly, a lurching motion like the one his Jeep made when he down shifted too quickly at too high of a speed. A few paces away, Derek was quickly, efficiently, dressing; tugging on a pair of jeans, followed by a green henley plucked from the top of the dresser, before Stiles could finally speak, voice choked with panic.

“What’s happening? Is he here? Is Peter—”

“No,” Derek replied, as soon as his head was free from the neckline of his shirt, “Peter isn’t here, but the police are.”

“What?” Stiles all but yelped, swinging his feet over the edge of the bed— or attempting to. His left foot was caught, and he was left frantically kicking at the sheet tangled around his ankle until it freed him. Derek crossed the room and crouched down in front of him, putting one hand on the back of Stiles’ neck, fingertips just barely grazing the marks left from his teeth the night before, on the junction of his shoulder and neck, grounding him.

“Stiles, I need you to listen,” he ordered firmly, in a voice Stiles could still hear loud and clear over the rush of his own pulse in his ears. He nodded, one quick jerk of his head, up, down, and then Derek started talking.

“In about two minutes, the police are going to knock on the door and take me in for questioning about Laura’s disappearance.” Derek’s eyes were wide and serious… scared. “They can’t know you’re here.” Stiles opened his mouth to protest that Derek had nothing to do with what had happened to Laura, but was silenced with a gentle squeeze to the back of his neck; focus.

“They can’t know you’re here,” Derek repeated firmly. “So when they get here, let them take me. I’ll be fine.” Stiles could feel his chest growing tight. “As soon as we’re gone, seal the windows and doors with mountain ash and call the Argents, then Deaton.”
Stiles nodded, the instructions rattling around in his head like marbles in a bag. He jumped at the sound of banging on the apartment door.

“Stiles repeat what I just said,” Derek ordered, voice quiet, sounding calmer than he had any right to be.

“Stay quiet. Seal the entrances. Call the Argents. Call Deaton,” Stiles rattled off. Derek nodded and Stiles felt the hesitation in his hand before it dropped away at another series of bangs on the door. The other man stood up stiffly, striding towards the bedroom door, glancing at Stiles one last time as if to say, ‘I’ll be fine’ before disappearing from view.

Stiles sat stark still, listening as Derek opened the apartment door.

“Beacon Hills Sheriff Department, are you Derek Hale?” Stiles heard an officer greet. He knew there were two, they always sent two if they thought someone was going to give them trouble… if there was going to be an arrest.

“I am,” Derek replied, not overly friendly, though not impolite either.

“You’re a difficult man to track down.” This voice was a younger sounding officer, by the sounds of things, a cocky little shit– Jackson-esque.

“Is there something I can help you with?” Derek retorted too calmly.

“Is there anyone else in the apartment sir?” the older officer questioned.

“No.” Stiles listened to Derek lie. He held his breath, praying that the officers believed him, because if either officer chose to investigate, they’d find Stiles butt ass naked sitting in bed, practically having a panic attack.

“In that case, you’d better lock up son.”

“Why?” Derek all but growled.

“Derek Hale, you’re wanted in relation to the disappearance of Laura Hale…” the younger officer began, sounding all too triumphant about everything.

Stiles knew it had been coming, but his stomach plummeted nonetheless. Had Derek known all along? Been able to hear the officers conversing on their way up the stairs? Stiles listened to Derek’s reply;

“What?” Derek’s voice was one of genuine shock. If he was acting, he should have gone into that instead of becoming a paramedic. His stomach panged nervously– and the only reassurance was knowing that they could only hold on to Derek for 24 hours, or until they found something incriminating enough to charge him. Stiles listened to the door close and lock, listened to the muted voice of the officer reading Derek his rights, then listened to footsteps descending the stairs. The second they were out of earshot, Stiles scrambled to his feet, swiping a discarded pair of sweats from the floor and struggling into them, tripping from foot to foot as he raced into the kitchen, swiping the bag of mountain ash from the kitchen island where he’d left it. His heart hammered the closer he got to the front door, and after carefully checking the locks, he knelt by it to carefully line the threshold, and all he could think of was Peter bursting through the door.

**Seal the entrances. Call the Argents. Call Deaton.**

Stiles stood, sparing the thick line of ash that extended three inches past the door frame on either side
only a cursory second glance before racing back towards the bedroom to seal the window where the fire escape was. In his hand, the sack of ash felt as heavy as it had when he’d first swiped it from the counter, a strange marvel considering how much he’d just dumped out in the hallway in the name of protection. He frowned, staring at it for a few seconds in confusion as he continued to move, before a chilling sensation washed over him the second his bare feet hit the living room carpet. And like a deer in a hunter’s sights that somehow realizes it is about to become prey, his head snapped upwards.

There, casually seated on the leather couch, was Peter.

“Hello Stiles,” he greeted in the same, bone-chilling tone he’d used in greeting him, Laura and Scott in the woods that fateful night several weeks ago. It had the effect of a hunter’s foiled shot. Stiles very nearly dropped the precious sack of ash as he shot towards the bedroom, with little hope that he’d actually make it there in time to either lay a line of ash or make it to the fire escape and scale down it. He felt Peter move behind him, inhumanly fast, and it was like that was the tipping point, more fear than his body could handle to maintain motor functions, and he felt himself lose his footing at the sensation of fingertips closing around his ankle, the leg of his sweats tug. He flinched away from the other man so violently that he pitched forward and ended up gracelessly sailing through the open bedroom door, sprawling forward on his hands and knees. He turned over almost immediately, and scrambled backwards in a lame attempt to delay the inevitable, tossing the bag of mountain ash to the side, abandoning all hope that he could get away from the angry wolf now. He squeezed his eyes closed, his entire body going rigid where he lay on the floor.

You should have gone for the front door.

Seconds passed, Stiles’ heart pounding like a jackhammer in his chest, waiting for Peter to either drag him from the room, or worse– and more likely– pin him to the floor, but nothing happened. He blinked at the ceiling, before slowly sitting up on his elbows.

Peter Hale stood framed in the doorway, dressed casually in jeans, a dark sweater, a leather jacket, looking deceivingly normal for a monster, and his head was cocked to the side, staring at the floor like something there was intensely interesting. He seemed to sense Stiles’ gaze, because he looked up, eyes deadly with cool amusement.

“Clever boy,” he remarked. Stiles frowned, then followed the path Peter’s stare had taken. Laying off to the right, two or so feet from the door, was the sack of mountain ash tipped on its side, top lax and open. When Stiles’ eyes traced the path from the sack to the door, he felt his jaw slacken and drop. Across the threshold, the deep charcoal line of ash was obvious against the cream coloured carpet. It lay in a thick, uniform line as wide as an envelope, mounded ever so slightly, stretching across the doorway, forming what Stiles hoped was an impenetrable barrier. It shouldn’t have been possible, and the only far-fetched explanation was that when Stiles dropped or kicked the bag, it tipped and spilled into that perfect line, creating a barrier that defied logic– just like it had in Deaton’s clinic. Like willpower alone had formed the protection.

“Holy shit,” he breathed, letting himself collapse back against the carpet. He couldn’t help himself when laughter bubbled out from between his lips as he realized Peter couldn’t get to him. And with that knowledge, his brain finally came back online.

Call the Argents. Call Deaton.

He sat up and Peter was watching him, cool and calculating for the most part, eyes narrowing at the sight of the outline of Derek’s teeth against his neck, until his gaze drifted over Stiles’ bare torso and lower, to the stretch of skin and light dusting of hair revealed where his sweats had slipped down his hip on the one side. He felt his skin prickle under the scrutiny and quickly tugged the fabric back in place, standing and adjusting the drawstring on his pants tighter. Any self-consciousness and most of
the feelings of prey all but disappeared as another thought crossed his mind.

“If it weren’t for the innocent people downstairs, or Derek’s memories of his family, I’d set fire to this place just to watch you burn,” he said casually, watching Peter for a reaction, but the man showed nothing but mild interest where he stood in the living area, the coffee table upended and shoved to the side behind him. Stiles kept talking as he moved towards his duffle bag, imagining watching for as long as he could before escaping the blaze by the fire escape, leaving Peter trapped by the ash barriers across the bedroom and front doors. “As it is though, I can live with whatever the Argents and Derek choose to do to you instead.”

He crouched by his duffle bag, uncomfortably close to the door despite the ash, and began to rifle through the bag, hunting for the discarded pair of jeans he was sure contained the cell phone Derek had given him.

“Isn’t my dear nephew a little tied up at the moment?”

Stiles froze at the sound of Peter’s voice closer than he’d expected, and all sadistic joy he’d felt a moment ago left him in a shudder. He turned slightly to see Peter as close as he could get to the threshold before being unable to enter. Stiles’ eyes narrowed.

“You knew,” he accused, then went back to tearing through his things before he felt the tell-tale lump in the pocket of his jeans.

“Of course I knew,” Peter scoffed. Stiles seethed, yanking the phone free from his pocket and flipping it open with shaking hands.

“Yeah well, Scott and I will make sure the police know exactly what you did to Laura,” he growled.

Peter let out a frustrated huff and the utter lack of desperation to it was… unsettling.

“Put down the phone Stiles.”

Instantly, he wanted to rebel, fingers moving to tap at the contacts icon.

“You do realize that I’m not trapped in here like you think I am,” Peter continued. “How long do you suppose it will take the Argents to get here?” Stiles’ eyes tracked Peter as he casually stepped away from the doorway, out of sight. He quickly scrambled to his feet, apprehension getting the best of him. He stayed behind the line of ash, safe— for now— while Peter moved closer to the living room window, glancing outside at the quiet street.

“I could jump from here,” he said mildly, eyes trained on the street below for a moment before looking back to Stiles, holding eye contact. “I would probably break one, or if you’re lucky, both of my legs in the fall. The question is, how long would it take me to heal?”

Stiles stood, phone still limply clutched in his hand, the unasked question hanging in the air between him and Peter— would the Argents get here in time? The answer was a resounding no, not unless they had someone in the area posted to watch the apartment at all times and could get a hold of that person right away.

“And then what would happen to you?”

Something awful. But that was going to happen anyway and he knew it, his fingers clenched tighter around the phone, lifting it despite Peter.

“Or I could get lucky, manage to jump from the window to the fire escape,” Peter continued, glancing out the window once more. “And more than likely, at this hour, I’d be in there with you
before anyone picked up the phone. And if you make me chase you, if you make me come in there, there will be dire consequences.”

Stiles froze, but he didn’t drop the phone, just kept fidgeting with it. He checked the time; 6:47 in the morning. His heart hammered in his chest at the thought of Peter getting in there with him and what he would do to him when he did. He knew Peter was smart enough not to stick around for long, whether he called the Argents or not, but he also knew that he wouldn’t leave without taking Stiles with him.

“Put down the phone Stiles,” Peter commanded casually, coming to loom in the doorway once more. His eyes flashed red, a few seconds and Stiles just about dropped the phone in response before he steeled himself.

“What are you going to do?” he challenged, “Bite me?”

At that Peter let out a low, humorless chuckle.

“Oh make no mistake, I am going to give you the bite. Just Not. Right. Yet,” he purred smoothly. “I need you to stay just as you are-- for now.” That was all the answer Stiles needed, and to be honest, he was surprised Peter had given that much away. He just hoped that the Argents, Deaton, or Derek could find him before Peter decided to turn him. Heart pounding, he flicked his thumb over the contacts and hit the entry titled Argent911. A sub-vocal growl made him jump, the phone finally tumbling from his clumsy, shaking fingers. He immediately bent to pick it up, to frantically dial and hope, pray that the Argents answered.

“Pick that phone up, and Derek will pay a very dear price.”

Stiles stopped, arm extended halfway to where the phone had landed on the carpet. Suddenly his legs felt weak, and his head spun. The realization that Peter’s arrival wasn’t just him being an opportunist who had the inside scoop from working at the police department, was enough to knock him from his feet. Slowly, he folded to the floor, like a house of cards collapsing, hand guiding him to the floor instead of reaching for the phone. He landed, leaned up against the foot of the bed. Peter had planned this whole thing. And like an iceberg, Stiles was likely only seeing a small fraction of what Peter had planned.

“What did you do?” he breathed.

“Nothing. Yet.” Peter answered. “However, if you force my hand, I will do what is necessary. Right now, the department has no idea where Laura Hale is, but I can have her turn up if properly motivated.”

The image of Laura’s arm, thin and white and extending into the darkness on the forest floor as Stiles lay in the bed of the Jeep with Peter on top of him was enough to make him feel like he was going to vomit. He swallowed down the excess saliva flooding his mouth, the tell-tale sign he was going to puke, and closed his eyes, willing the image away as best as he could.

“What did you do?” he repeated. Peter sighed.

“Enough games Stiles. You want to know what I’ve done? I’ve buried Laura in the woods near her and Derek’s childhood home, just deep enough to keep animals from disturbing her body, but not deep enough to keep the police from finding it if properly motivated,” Peter replied, his lips curling towards the end of his sentence.

“That proves nothing,” Stiles replied bitterly, but a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach told him
Peter wasn’t finished.

“It may not, but it is enough, when combined with the shovel, gloves and other assorted memorabilia in the trunk of Derek’s Camaro, to keep my dear nephew occupied until I see fit to free him.”

And there it was, Peter’s leverage fully revealed— or at least, revealed enough to feel like an anchor, dragging Stiles under water. He felt like he was drowning. If he didn’t do as Peter said, Derek would pay a horrible price, and he couldn’t let that happen. But he was scared.

“Break the line Stiles,” Peter growled impatiently from the doorway. And Stiles shook his head, trying to gulp in air un成功fully as his brain attempted to cobble together a plan. He could still phone the Argents. Peter would come in there and make him pay dearly for it but it would be worth it… unless Peter took his threat against Derek to the next level immediately. Stiles struggled to breathe through the panic; the air in the room suddenly felt too thick to draw in, too heavy to push out, a feeling like having the wind knocked out of him after a well-placed punch. He was immobile, unable to move to run, or move to surrender.

“Last chance Stiles,” Peter threatened, voice devoid of emotion. He stood in the doorway for several seconds before stepping backwards and all Stiles could imagine was what would happen if he managed to get in through the fire escape; the utter hell he would drag Stiles through, either directly, immediately, or through hurting his friends and family, over time.

And before his resolve could crumble, he scrambled to his feet and to the doorway. Peter looked up from where he stood by the window, one hand stroking over the sill where the window now gaped open, the breeze ruffling through the fabric, animating it like a pale apparition. Stiles looked down at the line of ash, the flakes of ash stirring ever so slightly in the draft, but not near as much as they should have been. He put his bare foot forward, felt the coolness on his heel as he dragged it through the line and stepped back, the sudden implications of what he’d just done making him take a few aborted steps towards the fire escape in the bedroom to at least try to get away. All too quickly, arms wrapped around his waist, pinning his left arm down against his side, dragging him back away from the window, back into the bedroom.

“Naughty boy,” Peter growled in his ear, one hand reaching up, tangling in Stiles’ hair, yanking his head back as he dragged him back into the bedroom before twisting around, shoving him onto the unmade bed. His stomach rolled, knowing exactly what was about to happen, but he scrambled to the other side of the bed, defeat dumbing his limbs because he knew he was never going to manage getting off the bed, out of the bedroom, through the front door still barricaded by ash… and then what? When Peter effortlessly pinned him to the mattress, he landed on his back, arms pinned beside his head, Peter’s entire body pressed against him between his splayed legs.

“You reek of him,” the alpha half growled, half spat. And Stiles couldn’t look at him, he kept his neck craned to the side, unwittingly exposing his neck and the mark Derek had left there. He squeezed his eyes shut against the grey morning light coming in the window, acutely aware of the power imbalance between them, the zipper on Peter’s jacket cold against the bare skin of his chest, the soft fabric of his shirt a stark contrast to the violence Stiles knew he could impose. He breathed shallowly, choking back the sob that wanted to burst forward from his lips when Peter lifted his body away, so sure that in a few seconds the only scrap of clothing he was wearing would be ripped away.

“But we don’t have time for me to remedy that at the moment,” Peter breathed, sounding regretful, hands pressing Stiles’ wrists into the mattress for a few seconds longer as he stood. “Get dressed,” he ordered, while Stiles stared at the ceiling, gasping for air like a fish washed up on the sand. “We
have places to be.”

Stiles felt like he was peeling himself from the mattress, fighting against gravity just to move. He sat up just in time to see Peter sweeping his discarded cell phone off the floor with deft fingers, and was surprised when he didn’t snap the device in half, simply flipped it open and powered it off, then slid it into his jeans pocket. He then moved to the bedroom doorway, half smirking at the now useless streak of mountain ash and lounged in the doorway, watching as Stiles numbly stood and crossed the room to his duffle bag. He grabbed the first t-shirt he could find, along with his faithful red zippered hoodie, softened from age and years of washing with cheap detergent. There was no discrete way to retrieve the bundle of herbs from the nightstand, so he didn’t bother with subtlety, just swiped it from the stand and looped it over his head, daring Peter to say a word about it. The other man didn’t, but he certainly did notice, eyes gleaming with interest.

“So, where are we going?” Stiles asked, hoping to mask his fear with bitter resignation. At that, Peter casually strolled back into the room again, circling Stiles predatorily before a hand snapped out to capture his chin. His grip was far from tight, just cradling, but it was enough to make Stiles feel fragile– especially when Peter’s thumb dragged across his lower lip, pulling it down.

“Oh no clever boy, if there is anything I’ve learned about you, it’s not to give that nimble mind too much time to dwell on the inevitable,” he mused. “Now I suggest you put on some socks and shoes– we’re behind schedule.”

In the early morning, the historic downtown was still and silent, only Derek’s Camaro and Stiles’ Jeep occupied Artifact’s small lot, and none of the shops that lined the streets, save for probably the coffee shop several storefronts down, were open or showing any signs of life. Looking down the empty street, Stiles had to quell the itching urge to run. Peter seemed to be able to read Stiles’ mind and, learning forward from where he already hovered too closely, he breathed in Stiles’ ear:

“Run, and I will make sure you know pain intimately before I turn you. Do you understand?”

Despite the shudder that raced through him, the razor edge of anxiety, the rolling wave of disgust from the gust of warmth in his ear made Stiles sharply jerk away from Peter.

“Yes,” he hissed in irritation, rubbing at the warm mist that had settled against his skin.

“This way,” Peter gestured down the street, his other hand coming to rest on the small of Stiles’ back, urging him forward. They walked about three blocks, just south of Peretti’s, before Peter nudged Stiles, withdrawing a set of car keys from his pocket. Beside them, parked on the street, a maroon Jeep Wrangler flashed its lights in greeting. Peter opened the door and Stiles peered inside; another pristine interior of a rental. When it became clear that Peter wasn’t going to move before Stiles was in the vehicle, he clambered in.

“We going off-roading or something?” he quipped, voice heavily laden with sarcasm. His ears rang in the silence the followed Peter slamming the door closed.

“Seatbelt,” Peter ordered simply as he smoothly slid into the driver’s seat and started the Jeep, once again, that rebellious voice muttering ‘make me’ in the back of Stiles’ head. He had enough reason to know that a moving vehicle with an angry Peter in the driver’s seat wasn’t the ideal place for rebellion.

It only took a few turns for Stiles to realize where they were headed, and by the time Peter pulled onto the long stretch of road that led to the Comfort Plus, Stiles’ empty stomach was rolling. He
glanced at the dashboard clock; 7:26am. Relief and trepidation hit him at the same time. Lydia wasn’t at work yet, but her Argent escort would be dropping her off soon, and unless the county had become incredibly efficient down at the station, Derek wouldn’t have gotten a phone call yet, wouldn’t have been able to raise any sort of alarm with Deaton or the Argents— couldn’t have known Stiles had never been able to raise the alarm himself, which meant if Stiles had any chance against Peter, it would take place in the next half hour, when Lydia got to work.

“Stiles, how long has it been since you last saw me?” Peter asked, voice light and conversational, like they were on their way to a fucking picnic, breaking the silence in the vehicle.

*Two glorious Goddamn weeks asshole.*

“Not long enough,” Stiles grumbled. Beside him, Peter continued to drive like a model citizen, expression amused, ignoring Stiles’ attitude— for now.

“It’s been just over two weeks,” Peter supplied. “And don’t you think that in that time, I have been given substantial opportunity to consider every possible scenario to get what I want?”

Stiles shrugged, he didn’t like where this was going.

“What I am trying to say here is whatever twisted little plan your brain has started to conjure up will not work. So you may as well stop devoting the energy to it now.” Peter smiled as he easily maneuvered into the Comfort Plus lot. “Just enjoy the ride.”

Once in a parking spot, Peter killed the ignition and opened his door, and Stiles was once again tempted to act out of spite and refuse to move, but he knew better than to do something so stupid. It wasn’t the right moment. His feet landed heavily on the ground next to the Jeep feeling encased in concrete, yet he still managed to drag them forward when Peter produced the familiar tacky, diamond shaped plastic key ring, a single key, dangling from the end.

Peter had already been in the room; the signs were subtle, but present nonetheless, the most obvious of which being the black weekender bag occupying the chair in the corner. Stiles waited for the familiar set of orders; Strip, go shower, get on the bed, or for Peter to just manhandle him to the floor or bed, because he would be the type to play the sick mind game of abusing Stiles with the Argents mere steps away. But Peter did neither, and the longer nothing happened, the more nervous Stiles became. When Peter stepped up behind him to deftly wrap fingers around the zip of his hoodie and drag it down, Stiles felt an almost sick sense of relief.

*He could have done this at the apartment– probably would have enjoyed it more– there is a reason he took you here.*

Sometimes Stiles hated being the son of a cop, constantly examining everything like a puzzle, questioning every motivation. But now his brain felt particularly sluggish, like he was trying to tread water in quicksand. It wasn’t until Peter had stepped around him after removing his shirt, that his brain started to rise from the muck it was caught in.

“Take off your shoes and socks,” the werewolf ordered, voice calm, but commanding as he stepped back far enough for Stiles to obey.

“I hope you know, I will run naked into that parking lot if it means the Argents can get their hands on you,” Stiles responded more bravely than he felt as he toed out of his running shoes and bent to pull each sock off.
“Oh, I have no doubt of that,” Peter replied. In an instant, Stiles was on his back, the motel room ceiling snapping into place like the faded, colour bleeding slides his history teacher used to show on Beacon Hills High School’s ancient slide machine. Peter painfully wrenched his arms above his head, and he realized quickly why Peter had been here earlier; he’d prepared for this moment. Two sets of handcuffs already dangled from the headboard, connected with one of those coated wire style bike locks.

So nobody can hear you struggling.

Stiles writhed and grabbed at Peter’s flesh as he managed to clasp one cuff around one a pinned wrist, the werewolf rebuffing his movements with cold efficiency, easily capturing Stiles’ other flailing hand while keeping the rest of him pinned with his body weight, the entire interaction chillingly reminiscent of the night of Laura’s murder. Seemingly satisfied with his work, Peter slid down Stiles’ body, hooking his fingers under the waist band of his sweats and slowly dragging them down. Stiles’ heart started to hammer when Peter stood back, surveying his work, head tilted to the side before he reached down, ripping the bedding out from under Stiles’ prone form, jostling him on the mattress until he lay only on the fitted sheet.

Stiles stomach felt like lead. It would be just like Peter to make this some sick game, to find sadistic victory in raping Stiles while within spitting distance of the Argents. The werewolf stepped back, turning towards the black bag on the chair in the corner, and from its depths withdrew a roll of duct tape. The sounds of the tape ripping from the roll filled the room as Stiles watched Peter advance towards him. And there was nothing he could do. He could scream but it would be short lived, muffled in seconds, he could kick and fight, only to be subdued… or he could plead, submit.

“Peter,” he managed to implore once, before Peter climbed onto the mattress, effortlessly swinging one leg over Stiles’ torso, straddling him, and the length of tape hit his lips. Peter wrapped the length securely around his face, bending to bite at the end connected to the roll only when he’d wrapped the length securely around almost to the back of Stiles’ head.

“Here’s how things are going to work Stiles,” he began, one hand cupping the side of his head, almost lovingly, before bending to speak into his ear.
Modern folklore

Chapter Notes

So originally I had meant this update to quickly follow the last and then I just got stuck and the chapter I was writing at the time just wouldn’t come out the way I wanted it to #writerproblems amiright? I’m over the hump now and generally pretty happy with it and figured, since I’m trapped indoors due to crazy ice storm shenanigans happening where I’m from, I’d do some writing, editing and posting so while I still have power and an internet connection.

Buckle up. I’m not going to lie, its pretty much going to feel like I have my foot pressed straight down on the accelerator for the next several chapters. There is a LOT of stuff crammed into a short period of time, so this section of the story is going to take place over a number of chapters with no major leaps in time just so I can get all the suspense filled details in.

Stiles breathed against the layer of duct tape, squirming in discomfort against the cuffs holding his hands above his head. The room’s lights were off to make the room look unoccupied. Any minute now, Lydia was going to open the door to clean the room, and walk straight into Peter’s trap.

He still didn’t know why Peter needed Lydia in all of this, abducting her right out from under the Argent’s nose was a bold, uncharacteristically risky move on Peter’s behalf. Peter had leverage in Derek, Stiles’ dad, Scott. A threat to any one of them could make Stiles do just about anything, and he knew it, so why Lydia? That was the question his brain was still racing to answer when there was a gentle knock at the door. He immediately shifted, turning his back on where he knew Peter lurked in the bathroom in favor of facing the door, hoping that Lydia would recognize him right away, would be perceptive enough to read the look on his face telling her to stay back, to run. He didn’t want to think about what would happen if it was one of the other cleaning staff, someone Peter didn’t need, someone expendable. The door opened a crack and another soft knock came.

“Hello? Housekeeping!”

The second Lydia’s voice rang through the room, Stiles’ heart gave one heaving bang against his ribcage before he started to cry out under the duct tape, struggling against his bonds and trying to make as much noise as possible. He was surprised Peter didn’t emerge from the bathroom to stop him. The door suddenly opened much wider, the greyness of the day filling the room with muted, hazy, light. Stiles shook his head frantically, hoping his muffled pleas for Lydia to stop, turn around and leave, get help, would somehow be understood. Because if she went back outside, Peter would have to figure out how to take her in front of a whole host of witnesses, without making a scene. Instead for once in her life, Lydia chose to make things easy for someone. The door swung open enough for Lydia to step inside before she closed it behind her.

“Stiles!” she cried, crossing the room in two quick strides, grappling for the lamp on the nightstand.

Stiles felt like someone had grabbed a hold on his heart and started to squeeze. He smacked his head a handful of times against the pillow cradling it, tears burning in the corners of his eyes as the feeling of defeat sank in. It was too late now.
The glow of the lamp cast a dim, yellowish light throughout the room, and if not for the all-out terror he felt, Stiles probably would have spared a moment to be a self-conscious. Lydia’s eyes couldn’t seem to stop moving, flitting from his cuffed hands to taped mouth, down his torso far enough to stop herself for his dignity, then back to his face.

“Stiles what happened? Where is Derek?” she asked sharply, eyes wide with horror, hands shakily reaching for Stiles’ face as it seemed to dawn on her that if she wanted an answer, she needed to remove the tape hindering Stiles’ speech.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized briefly as her fingernails found the edge of the tape near the back of Stiles’ neck and pulled, at first slowly, then quick as she dared until the strip of tape could be tossed aside in a crumpled ball.

“Run!” Stiles managed to croak out as forcefully as he could before the stinging burn left in the wake of the tape could fully fade. Lydia’s delicate features shifted from wide-eyed and scared to confused, brows pinching in scrutiny. And just as realization seemed to settle into place, came a tutting sound; “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

Lydia sharply looked up at the sound of Peter’s voice, expression shocked before it was quickly resettled into a mask of ferocity.

“You’re Peter– or do you prefer Andrew?” she replied boldly as she slowly stood, her tone sharp as a razor’s edge. And even though he was lying on his side with Peter behind him, Stiles was all too familiar with the sort of amused expression the man was likely wearing.

“Clever girl,” Peter replied. Stiles rolled onto his back, helpless to stop Peter from navigating around the foot of the bed, moving towards Lydia. She worried at her bottom lip but looked to Stiles, ignoring the predator in the room for the time being.

“I’m okay,” he managed, voice wavering dangerously. Was Peter’s plan to drag Lydia along with them, threaten to bite or kill her if Stiles didn’t do as he said? He watched as the man moved slowly and he knew it wasn’t to keep from spooking his pray, but for the dramatic effect of it all. Stiles let his head list to the side, avoiding looking at Peter and giving away just how terrified he was in the situation, and that was when he noticed that Lydia had ever so slightly repositioned herself so that his back was to the nightstand, and one hand was stealthily inching the drawer open, fingers bracketing the knob, while her eyes, remained deceptively trained on Peter.

“The Argents know all about you,” Lydia declared bravely, all while inching that drawer open as Peter moved closer and closer.

“And yet, they left such a precious resource unprotected,” Peter responded mildly, stepping ever closer.

“Don’t touch her,” Stiles half pled, half growled, knowing that from his current position, there was absolutely nothing he could do to stop Peter from doing just that… but he could divert the man’s attention for a time. But to what end?

Before Stiles had any chance to further ruminate on that question, Lydia swiftly stepped to the side and yanked the drawer free from its stand. Everything that followed happened too quickly, and Stiles found himself transfixed on the disaster unfolding in front of him. Lydia swung the drawer up with her right hand, its scant contents scattering in an arc; a bottle of lube Stiles was sure Peter had left there, a small flashlight, a pad of motel stationery, pen, and a Gideon bible– which landed beside Stiles’ head– before the drawer smashed into the side of Peter’s face. Remarkably, it didn’t go to pieces on impact, and even more unbelievable, Peter actually flinched when it made contact. He’d
underestimated Lydia because he didn’t know her, because she’d made herself look like prey. She moved quickly, abandoning the drawer while Peter clutched at his face on reflex.

Stiles both wanted her to run, to get as far away as she could, but he couldn’t help but feel that it was fruitless to try, that Peter always won. Instead, his jaw remained stubbornly locked closed. Lydia took advantage of Peter’s distraction and made a move for the door, sparing Stiles a glance fraught with mixed emotions; determination, fear, guilt, and before Stiles could even begin to feel distress at being left alone with Peter, the wolf was across the room, the door slamming closed the half a foot Lydia had managed to open it. Stiles blinked, black dots dancing in his vision at the sudden brightness from the door being snatched away so quickly.

Next to Peter, Lydia looked so small and fragile. At work, her towering heels had been swapped for white canvas runners, and her tiny five foot two frame stood nearly a foot shorter than Peter, and yet she glared up at the werewolf as if they stood eye to eye. Peter’s left hand remained braced against the door where he stood, an imposing predator looming over his prey. He studied Lydia a moment before turning his head to look at Stiles.

“You two certainly are quite the pair,” he mused, “equal parts clever and foolish.”

When Peter turned back to Lydia, Stiles felt like there was a snake lurking in his belly, poised to strike, coiling tighter still when the alpha reached out to run his fingers through a few tendrils of soft, red hair.

“Don’t touch her.” Stiles meant for the words to come out as a menacing growl, instead it sounded as though someone had a hand closing over his throat. Peter pointedly ignored him. Lydia, fierce as ever, scowled up at the man before one hand snapped up to bat his hand away. With supernatural speed, Peter plucked Lydia’s wrist from the air, closing his hand around it tight enough that she flinched.

“I’ll scream,” she threatened, voice low, a growled threat rather than a desperate bargain. Peter’s mouth parted in a wry grin.

“I’m counting on it.”

His left hand snapped from the door, straight to the back of Lydia’s neck just as her mouth opened in a scream. Instead, what came out was an aborted, choking kind of gasp. Stiles yanked against his bonds, uncaring that the metal cuffs were digging into his flesh, threatening to break the skin. He watched in horror as Lydia’s eyes glassed over and her form went limp. Peter’s hand on her wrist quickly repositioned around her waist to ease her unconscious form the floor. When he turned to look at Stiles, he rolled his eyes.

“She’s fine. She’ll be out for the trip I’m sure, but she’s fine.”

“You piece of shit,” Stiles hissed, finally finding the venom he’d been trying to conjure earlier. “I hope the Argents find you, and that when they do, they let Derek rip your throat out with his teeth, maybe let Scott tear out your heart–”

Peter swiftly took the two steps away from Lydia necessary to climb on top of the bed, swinging a leg over Stiles’ torso to straddle his hips and clamp a hand over his jaw with so much force, Stiles could feel as well as hear it creak.

“Listen very closely Stiles. Lydia is special, but not as special as you. In fact, I will have very little need of her after she has fulfilled her role today. And as intriguing of an ingénue as she is, as much as it would please me to have her as a member of the extended pack, I will just as easily have her
share a grave with my niece if you show me even an inch of that mile wide rebellious streak today. Do you understand me?"

Peter didn’t lift his hand to allow Stiles to speak, but he did lessen the pressure enough to permit him enough movement to nod or shake his head. Stiles nodded frantically, tears burning a path down his temples.

“Good,” Peter replied softly. “Now I’m going to untie you, and without making a sound, you’re going to get dressed while I put Lydia in the car.”

Stiles felt like his bones were rattling around as Peter navigated through the preserve, the Jeep bouncing over the uneven terrain of gnarled tree roots and rocky hills. His heart hadn’t stopped pounding since they’d left the motel and he was sure Peter could hear it even with the radio on. Lydia remained unconscious, draped across the backseat with her head carefully cradled in Stiles’ lap. Stiles smoothed the hair that had fallen across her shoulder away from her neck. Despite violent appearances, the back of Lydia’s neck bore only a small, precise mark less than an inch long, and Stiles could have sworn it was already healing. He’d wiped away the blood the best that he could with the sleeve of his hoodie the second Peter had slammed the door of the Jeep after snapping the metal cuff dangling from Stiles’ wrist to the door’s pull.

At first he’d thought for sure that Peter was heading towards the Hale house, but when they’d entered the preserve from the north western side, bordered by the neighboring town, Stiles had lost his bearings, but he was sure that wasn’t where they were headed any longer and felt a modicum of relief, given that nothing good had happened the last time he’d been there. However that paled in comparison to the gaping, black hole of dread that had opened in his gut.

After about fifteen minutes, it seemed like Peter was following a discernable path, a destination in mind. He swung the Jeep expertly through tight openings between trees, slowing through trickier patches of vegetation, leaves and branches slapping and scraping lightly across the roof and sides of the vehicle.

Lydia’s eyes fluttered open just as Peter’s path seemed to smooth significantly, and Stiles’ attention was momentarily split between his friend and the view unfolding through the windshield. They’d reached a small clearing, and in it was a tiny log cottage, the wood dark with age, red shutters on the two small windows on either side of the front door, chipped and faded with age. It looked like the surrounding vegetation was trying to swallow up its fallen comrades, a manzanita appeared to have its crooked branches poised to claw across the roof to the small chimney as if to pry the entire thing off. Various weeds poked up from between the boards on the small porch that wrapped around from the front of the cottage to the side. If he’d been alone with Peter, Stiles probably would have made some sort of quip about his evil lair being underwhelming to ease the knot of uncertainty that continued to weave itself tighter and tighter in his belly, instead he focused on Lydia.

“Hey,” he greeted softly, hoping, praying Peter hadn’t done any permanent damage. He’d never recovered so quickly from the same injury and didn’t know whether that made him, or Lydia the unusual one. Lydia drew in a harsh, rattling gasp, like she hadn’t been breathing the entire time she was out. Stiles knew she had— he’d been compulsively checking her breathing by hovering a hand near her parted lips whenever he had any doubt, just so he could feel the warm reassurance of her breath. Lydia sat up so quickly that Stiles felt her hair graze his cheeks, the top of her head narrowly missing his jaw.

“Sleeping beauty awakes,” Peter remarked from the driver’s seat, eyes meeting Stiles in the rear view mirror, and Stiles felt a chill race up his spine at the idiom normally reserved for him. Lydia didn’t
seem to register what Peter had said at all, and turned to face Stiles, lips parted and eyes still slightly
glassed over. She looked, for lack of a better word, wild, hair messy and tussled from laying in
Stiles’ lap, expression haunted. She turned slowly and looked to Peter.

“You,” was all she gasped out.

“What?” was the only word Stiles could conjure as he struggled to keep up with what was going on,
because it sounded like Lydia now recognized Peter… when she didn’t before. Peter smirked in the
rear view mirror before pulling to a stop beside the cottage and killing the ignition. In the space
between Peter stepping out of the driver’s side and rounding the vehicle to open the door Lydia was
closest too, Stiles scrambled to form words.

“You know him? How do you know him?”

Peter jerked the door open just as Lydia opened her mouth to reply.

“He bit–”

Peter wrapped a hand around one slender wrist and pulled Lydia towards him, where she toppled
backwards, scrambling to get her feet under her, the tacky gold maid’s uniform hiking up her thighs
indecently until Peter had slammed the Jeep’s door, Lydia upright and on her feet beside him.

“No!” Stiles yelled, as Peter circled around the car with his friend in tow, towards the dilapidated
cottage. Stiles yanked on the handcuffs securing him to the door handle, twisting his body to brace
his feet against the door panel and pull, desperately (and hopelessly) trying to free his hand short of
ripping it off. Horrendous images filled his mind, pictures of Lydia thrown against a dirty mattress,
uniform sliced apart, pale, freckled arms beating ineffectually against Peter’s chest, nails digging at
his hairy forearms, her lips parted in a scream. He kept thinking about Laura, how one lightning fast
display of force had ended her life, had made everything so much more complicated and dark.

Minutes passed and it became clear– as if it wasn’t already– that Peter was completely unconcerned
at the amount of noise Stiles was making because there was nobody close enough to hear him. But
Stiles would be damned if he wasn’t going to make enough noise to distract and annoy Peter until he
was forced to abandon whatever he was planning to do to Lydia in favor of shutting Stiles up.

“You cowardly piece of shit!” Stiles yelled at the top of his lungs, kicking at the door and seat in
front of him in rage. He broke off into a desperate sob, lungs growing tight. “Please, please don’t
hurt her. You can do whatever you want to me—” he was choking on the lump in his throat, gasping
out his plea when the door to the cottage opened and Peter stepped out, rolling his eyes, before
sauntering down the front steps and around the Jeep to the door he’d pulled Lydia from. Stiles fell
silent, heart pounding in his ears, lungs burning. When Peter calmly opened the door and did nothing
but stand, framed in the opening, Stiles sagged against the driver’s side rear door, already resigned to
his fate.

“Are you done?” Peter’s voice was patronizing but calm, one eyebrow raised.

“Where’s Lydia?” Stiles demanded.

“Lydia is safe and sound and waiting inside,” Peter replied before gracefully sliding into the back
seat beside Stiles.

“So you’re telling me she’s just sitting there, doing exactly what you told her to do, without you
doing anything to her?” Stiles tried to say with venom, but his voice quaked tellingly. He couldn’t
imagine Lydia doing a thing Peter told her unless he’d physically forced her to, or used some sort of
leverage to make her compliant.

“As a matter of fact, yes,” Peter replied, sliding closer. Stiles felt his insides writhe and he inched closer to the door, as if he stood a chance of the metal dissolving behind him to allow for his escape. A finger traced up Stiles’ right arm. “All I had to do was tell her that if she moved an inch, I’d use you to take the edge off before we went inside, since I didn’t get a chance to back at the motel.”

“Like you weren’t planning on it anyway,” Stiles groused.

“Now you’re sounding every bit the petulant teenager I’m used to,” Peter replied with the characteristic edge of amusement he’d come to use with Stiles, when not opting for straight up menacing predator. He pulled a set of keys out from seemingly nowhere and leaned across Stiles, reaching for his captive limb, hovering uncomfortably close, his voice turning low. “And no, I wasn’t planning on it right now. But when I finally get you in alone, I plan on taking my time, taking out every ounce of pent up frustration on your hide, believe me.”

There was the menacing predator Stiles hadn’t missed in the slightest.

Peter tugged at the door’s release suddenly and Stiles toppled backwards for few heart-stopping seconds before Peter effortlessly plucked one of his flailing arms from the air and hauled him to his feet. He couldn’t help but think he would have rather hit the ground.

“So where did you find this shit hole, creepycabinrentals.com?” Stiles quipped as Peter all but dragged him across the small expanse of forest floor in front of the cabin.

“I’ll have you know this cabin has stood since before the house did,” Peter replied calmly. “In fact I’m pretty sure Derek could have been conceived here,” he added with a chuckle. “The house wasn’t finished being built until Talia was about 5 months pregnant.”

Stiles cringed, thinking about how Talia would probably roll over in her grave if she knew what Peter was doing with the cabin now.

“After the house was built, the Hales largely used this as a place for some… alone time during mating periods, or for guests when they visited.”

Stiles’ stumbled up the steps behind Peter and was unceremoniously shoved through the cabin door, which still stood a few inches ajar. He blinked at the sudden dimness, eyes struggling to adjust in the sparsely lit cabin. Peter let go of Stiles’ arm and allowed him to look around the small space. At one point in time, it had probably been a cozy hideaway, but it was ruined now, less by neglect than by Peter’s presence. They’d entered directly into the living space, on the left was a kitchen, a breakfast bar with a few wooden stools pulled up to it dividing the space from the living area, that contained two worn looking arm chairs, one equally worn love seat, and a battered coffee table. On the back wall, another door looked to lead to a screened in porch off the back of the cabin, and to the right of that, against the wall, was a fireplace, and what looked to be a short hallway. Though all of the furniture looked to be scrounged from an antique store, it was clean, free of dust and the general dinginess Stiles has expected. Which could only mean that Peter had been here and cleaned up, had time to prepare.

Lydia was nowhere in sight, but before Stiles had much of a chance to ask where she was, Peter nudged him in the direction of the small hallway. It didn’t stretch out very long at all, maybe twelve or fourteen feet, and Stiles was almost overwhelmed by the sound of rushing water the second he passed between the two walls on either side of him. The hallway was narrower than standard, and that, combined with Peter’s presence behind him, and the echoing sound in the small space, made Stiles feel like the world was pressing in against him from all sides.
The room to Stiles’ right was dark, and through the slightly ajar door, he could see a neatly made bed covered in a blue and white quilt, and a window with the drapes drawn closed. Dust particles floated in a small stream of dim light, held captive in the beam by the stillness of the air. Stiles jumped at the touch of Peter’s hand when it slid up the back of his shirt, palm sliding up from the small of his back to just under his shoulder blades, no doubt seeking out the hammering sensation of Stiles’ heartbeat, likely already loud in the werewolf’s ears. Stiles stumbled forward a few steps, reluctantly allowing himself to be shepherded towards the source of the rushing water.

The bathroom was surprisingly large considering the overall size of the dwelling and Stiles imagined that if Talia Hale was anything like his own mom, she’d likely had a hand in designing the space. But like everything else, it held only the ghost of her presence. The opposite wall held a wide vanity and two sinks, a dusty mirror above it reflecting Stiles framed in the doorway, Peter looming closely behind him. He averted his eyes, quickly moving on to the rest of the room, chiefly, the two walls that formed an L shape around an elegant looking claw foot tub against the right wall, surrounded by windows that would have been high enough to see out of without being seen– not that someone would just be passing by in such a private location. The windows however, were almost entirely covered by the claw-like branches of the manzanita trees outside, making the grey, early morning light look more like evening as it filtered through the small openings provided between the dense leaves and branches.

For a moment, all Stiles could look at was the deep tub, the faucet spewing cold water, crashing into the bottom of the tub. The only thing that actually pushed him to step into the room was the frantic need to know that Lydia was okay, by laying his own two eyes on her. He took two quick steps into the room, turning to see Lydia perched on the closet lid of the toilet, next to a wall with a towel warmer attached to it. The plush grey towels—obviously brand new—stood out as starkly in the room as Lydia did, the tacky 70s gold colour of her uniform looked almost garishly bright in the scant light of the room, It was enough to both distract and draw Stiles’ attention to the dozen or so bags of ice grouped around her bare feet.

Lydia jumped to her feet at the same time that Stiles closed the space between them, the two of them springing together like magnets. Stiles was pretty sure his fingers were going to leave bruises on the delicate skin around Lydia’s shoulder blades, but she didn’t seem to care, burying her head against Stiles’ chest enough for him to smell the vaguely fruity notes of her shampoo. Suddenly a thought floated to the top of Stiles’ murky consciousness, one he couldn’t believe he’d managed to let sink away for even a minute.

“You know him,” Stiles murmured into the top of his friend’s head, despite the fact that in all likelihood, Peter could hear exactly what he was saying even with the rushing of the water in the background. Obviously Peter had done some sort of voodoo claw magic thing to make his friend forget, but their paths had crossed at some point. Lydia broke their embrace, stepping back enough to look Stiles in the eye, a single line furrowing her brow between her eyebrows.

“He bit me,” she replied, voice just above a whisper, said almost as if she didn’t believe the words spilling from her lips herself. It didn’t make any sense. If Lydia had been bitten, she would have known she was a werewolf.

“And then, a curious thing happened,” Peter interjected, strolling into the room. He glanced into the tub and bent to twist the taps closed, and Stiles wasn’t sure he’d chosen that moment to turn off the taps because the tub was actually full or for dramatic effect. Stiles turned from Lydia, but only to put himself between her and Peter protectively.

“I didn’t change.”
Lydia’s voice was reedy and high, as if it were teetering on the edge of reason, and Stiles found himself torn between trying to keep an eye on Peter, and turning to look at his friend.

“No but you… awakened,” Peter replied, hands coming up at his sides, fingers spread apart, wriggling like an old cabaret act, tone carefully contained excitement. At that remark, Lydia appeared to come back to her senses.

“If that’s what you call it,” she snapped.

And all at once, Stiles was hit with the incredible force of it all, realization barreling into him like an avalanche; Lydia’s fugue state, her time at Eichen House, were both connected to Peter.

“No…” he uttered, because it was just too un-fucking-believable that Peter had found another way to entangle himself in Stiles’ life.

“Now to be fair, I had no idea what was so alluring about Lydia that drew me to her– and her to me,” Peter explained vaguely. It was a true testament to how terrifying the whole situation was that Stiles didn’t immediately probe for more details, demand to know in vivid detail how everything happened, how Lydia had been bitten without being turned, and why she was here now– well that answer he did want right now.

Peter took an imposing step forward and Stiles threw his arms behind himself, hands landing over the pockets of Lydia’s uniform, cloaking her hips. The werewolf smirked, took another step forward and Stiles leaned back, Lydia’s hands grappling at his waist as she tried to keep her balance under the strain of leaning back and not toppling over the toilet or bags of ice at their feet. But instead of moving any closer, Peter simply snagged one of the bags of ice and dragged it towards himself, the contents grating over the tile until Peter hoisted it into his arms. He took a few steps towards the tub and held the bag of ice out over it by its twisted closure at the top. In one quick movement, his other hand grew claws, viciously ripping through the middle of the bag, ice chunks spilling into the water below.

Stiles felt lightheaded, he gagged around the lump in his throat so forcefully that he was compelled to abandon his hold on Lydia in favor of covering his mouth. Lydia’s hands loosened their grasp on him, one hand lightly rubbing against Stiles’ sweaty back through the fabric of his hoodie and t-shirt. When he blinked up at Peter again, the man’s eyebrow quirked up.

“Lydia, now that we’ve… filled in the gaps in your memory, how about filling in Stiles on the real reason you’re here?” he invited, all false pleasantries as he snagged another bag from the floor, dragging it towards the tub. Lydia’s hands gently prodded at Stiles’ back, gesturing him to step forward enough that she could move out from behind him without tripping. When she circled around him, her arms were folded across her midsection, eyes on the floor. And Stiles immediately sank to where she’d sat before, wanting to give her at least one iota of power back in the whole situation, even if it was only the power to look down at him instead of having to look up.

“I ended up in Eichen because my parents thought I was schizophrenic,” she began, pacing a few minute steps from Stiles, eyes at first, on Peter. “I was hearing voices– but not because I was mentally ill…” She looked back at Stiles just as Peter emptied another bag into the tub. “They were voices of the dead, whispering to me.”

“What?” Stiles gaped, now scrutinizing his friend, wondering just how much of her brain Peter had managed to scramble.

“What?” Peter interjected.
“It rings a bell,” Stiles replied dryly, “They’re known for their wail after a loved one has died.”

At that, Peter looked pleased.

“Close,” he retorted, then strolled closer, creeping up behind Lydia. “A banshee is said to be an Irish spirit,” he continued, running his fingers through a few strands of red locks. Lydia jerked away from his touch, glaring over her shoulder, but Peter looked completely unaffected by her rejection. “But they also have many other interesting qualities.”

He moved past Lydia and grabbed another bag of ice.

“So what you’re trying to tell me, is that my very alive friend, is actually a spirit,” Stiles retorted skeptically.

“Well that’s where the folklore comes in,” Peter replied with a playful smirk. “There’s always an element of fiction to make us more comfortable with reality– which is why the world believes werewolves don’t actually exist, and banshees are just an Irish spirit.”

Stiles looked to Lydia for an explanation. Because this was insane… and yet in the past few months, Stiles’ had been forced to alter his version of reality significantly to accommodate the existence of werewolves, and sparks, and magic.

“Trust me, I am very much alive,” Lydia replied dryly. “The night Peter bit me was the night I went missing, so I don’t remember anything about how it happened. All I know is that I was found two days later and admitted to the hospital with a bite wound from an animal and a high fever. ‘Viral Encephalitis’ they said. I can’t remember anything. But my medical records say that when a nurse went to change the dressing on the bite the next day, it was gone. When I woke up days after that, it was because I could hear the whispering.”

“I don’t understand though… how are you not a werewolf?” Stiles replied incredulously. And it wasn’t that he was mad at her, or hurt, more that he couldn’t believe she’d suffered that fate alone.

“If you’d spent time in Eichen, you’d understand why I learned to feign normalcy,” Lydia bit out. “There was no way I was ever going back there.”

“I wouldn’t have let anyone take you back there and you know it,” Stiles replied fiercely, so afraid he’d offended his friend, made her think that he thought she’d belonged in an institution, when really, he knew the opposite to be true.

“Would you? Even before you knew about all the things that go bump in the night?” she replied humourlessly. And an uneasy feeling made Stiles’ stomach twist and roll, because in a world without Peter, if Lydia had told him about the voices, he probably would have made Lydia at least go to Beacon Hills memorial– which likely would have landed her back in Eichen House.

“That’s what I thought,” Lydia replied softly, pursing her lips at Stiles’ guilty expression. “So I
learned to tune them out. Like a radio I just… changed the station.”

“So… what do they say?” Stiles couldn’t help but ask, morbid curiosity getting the best of him as he imagined what the dead would possibly talk to Lydia about.

“I can’t really tell, it’s like… a room full of murmuring people– too many voices all at once to decipher any single one. Until now, I didn’t know what they were.”

“You’re welcome,” Peter chimed in smugly.

“I have nothing to thank you for,” Lydia snapped, and Peter let out a soft chuckle before his expression turned dark.


Lydia turned to look at Stiles once more, this time her expression significantly cowed, looking once more, afraid.

“A banshee will wail when death is imminent,” Lydia provided softly.

And at that, the full picture Stiles had really been denying to himself, snapped together; The tub full of freezing water, the cabin somewhere in the outer reaches of the preserve, the abduction of his friend. Deaton was right– Peter was planning to use Stiles to find the nematon, and it looked like it was going to happen exactly as the veterinarian predicted.

“Precisely,” Peter replied, oblivious to Stiles’ epiphany. “Now, why would I need a thing like that?”
Thank you all for sticking around for a long ass time between updates. Again, I decided that we'd waited a ridiculously long time and threw my silly author goals (of staying ahead 3-5 chapters) out the window just so I could give you guys an updated you have more than patiently waited for. Hope it was worth the wait!

Just a reminder, since it has been awhile, to check the tags for updates, just in case anything has turned up that could be potentially upsetting.

On the ride over to the police station, all Derek could think about was Stiles. He sat in the back of the cruiser, hands cuffed behind him, glaring a hole in the back of the head of the younger officer, relieved that he was the only werewolf in the vehicle– his own distressed chemosignals were stinking up the cruiser. He’d figured the Beacon Hills police department getting involved was inevitable, but couldn’t for the life of him figured out how reporting Laura’s disappearance in New York, had turned into the police in Beacon Hills come for him. Somehow, he couldn’t help but get the sense that Peter had set a trap for him all along, and he’d walked right into it. But rather than thinking about his own fate and what Peter potentially had in store for him, his thoughts were on Stiles, and this horrible, sinking feeling, that Peter had been close by, waiting somewhere just outside the reach of Derek’s heightened senses, waiting for just the right moment.

He knew Stiles was intelligent, quick witted– but he could also acutely remember the sound of the rushing sound of his pulse, the harsh breaths that held him teetering on the edge of a panic attack– and he didn’t know if Sties had managed to do what Derek had asked him to. Even if he’d only managed to barricade himself inside the apartment and call the Argents, that would be enough to keep Stiles safe with Peter practically at the door. The Argents could get in touch with Deaton if they needed to. Derek blinked back the feeling of his eyes glowing blue, as he hoped the Argents wouldn’t rip Peter apart before he got the chance to, and cast his eyes to his lap, waiting for the feeling to pass.

“You’ve got some balls to show up at the station asking for the deputy,” the younger officer, some little prick whose nameplate read Smithson, commented from the front seat. Derek knew the type, since paramedics, police and fire so often interacted with each other. Not fresh out of the academy, no, this guy had been an officer for at least a few years, enough that he felt comfortable in the department, except he mistook confidence and power, for cockiness and megalomania. After enough run-ins with the law in his youth, Derek wasn’t about to fall for it. When the officer was met with silence, he craned his head over his shoulder, looking for Derek’s reaction– or lack thereof. Derek just stared him down, keeping his face a careful mask of calm, knowing the best kind of reaction with these kinds of pricks, was no reaction at all.

If Derek had really wanted to, he could have broken through the handcuffs circling his wrists like they were the plastic variety, part of a child’s police officer costume set. He doubted Smithson would be so cocky then– but then again, the older officer likely wouldn’t be much liked that.

“Enough,” the older officer navigating the cruiser interjected tiredly. “Can you at least wait until we’re at the station before you start playing bad cop?”
Derek liked these kinds of officers, the kind who’d been around long enough to grow out of their cocky-jackass stage, the kind who had a family to get home to; two and a half kids, a wife, maybe a dog. The kind who didn’t get any fulfillment out of antagonizing suspects, or lording their power over civilians with things like handing out speeding tickets for going ten over the limit. But from his experience, they were a rare breed.

“Relax, I’m just getting to know him a little,” the young officer complained. “Don’t get your panties in a bunch.”

“There is a reason you can’t keep a partner to save your life,” the older officer grumbled under his breath. The younger officer obviously didn’t hear over the static of various calls on the radio, and Derek kept his eyes on his lap as he smirked in satisfaction before starting to formulate a plan.

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“You want me to get into that bathtub,” Stiles deadpanned. His heart started to pound harder in his chest. “And it could kill me, so you made sure you brought Lydia along so you can pull me out just before it does.” Stiles chanced a glance at Lydia, and one look told him, Peter had already told her his plan. “But she could walk right out that door right now and you would have nothing.”

“She could try, but why would she?” Peter replied calmly.

“Because without her, you might kill me, and you can’t afford that,” Stiles replied with a lot more bravery than he actually felt. His saving grace was that he knew it was true, so his heartbeat would stutter and give away precisely how terrifying the situation was.

“‘Might’ being the operative word” Peter replied contemplatively. “I could also pull you out and turn you if I heard your heartbeat falter past saving. But that isn’t the reason dear Lydia is here on her own free will.”

At that, Peter let his eyes bleed red, a blatant display of status and power.

“Yeah, well, I wouldn’t call that free will,” Stiles retorted with disgust.

“Oh that’s not what I meant,” Peter replied with a knowing smirk, “Lydia’s skills are more… specialized, than my own. And she knows she’s the only one who can help you where you’re going… and that if she leaves, not only could I hunt her down, but your blood would be on her hands.”

“I am not altogether certain of what she is…”

Alan’s words rang through Stiles’ head, and as incredulous as he’d been in the moment, his dread grew, a sickening weight in his stomach dropping into his bowels, swelling and making him double over in an attempt to keep the panic from reaching his lungs.

“You want me to find the nematon by going to some other realm,” Stiles finally managed weakly, eyes cast up at Peter’s form, finding no use for hiding what he already knew from the alpha. Peter raised a single brow in interest.

“I see you paid a little visit to the good veterinarian,” he retorted. He strolled closer and beside Stiles, Lydia went rigid, spine straightening and fists clenching as Peter passed, gracefully closing the space
between him and Stiles. And even though Stiles saw every move coming, he still flinched when Peter hooked his index finger through the small section of cord revealed at the back of Stiles’ neck and slid his finger along it, gently grazing Stiles’ skin until lifting just enough for Stiles’ to feel the weight of the small leather bundle lift from his bare chest under his shirt, before dropping weightily against his torso again, out in the open for Peter to see– not that he hadn’t noticed already.

“Dear old Deaton always was wise– if not a little intrusive,” Peter remarked, finger still hooked under the cord around Stiles’ neck. “What else did he tell you at your visit?”

“Not much, just that you were going to try and make me find the nematon there– so you can find it here,” Stiles replied as boldly as he dared, glaring up at Peter, the rest of his posture rigid, every nerve fighting the urge to pull away from the other man harshly.

“And then you did a little arts and crafts together,” Peter replied, sliding his finger along the cord before finally releasing it. “Remind me to send him a little thank you note for making this that much easier. What else did he tell you?”

“Just that to get there, you’d have to lower my heart rate enough for me to lose consciousness and cross to the other side, that my spirit or consciousness or whatever would go there.”

“Hmmm,” Peter hummed, not entirely satisfied with Stiles’ answer.

“What?” Stiles snapped tiredly.

“He didn’t prepare you as much as I’d imagined is all,” Peter responded. “Then again, Deaton’s always been a little cryptic, everything’s on a need to know basis with him.”

“You’re one to talk,” Stiles muttered. At that Peter made a sound of mock offense.

“I’ve been nothing but honest, haven’t I Lydia?” he replied, head swiveling to look at her. And slowly, she nodded.

“Limbo, The Spirit Realm, Barzakh, Bardo– different cultures have different names for it, but I assure you, it’s all essentially the same,” Peter explained. “It’s the plane of existence between life and death, and anything that holds energy, can have presence there– it’s just, how long it can survive? Therein lies the question, and why Christianity, Islam and Buddhism have always regarded it as the afterlife’s waiting room. They’d like to believe a person’s soul or spirit receives judgement there, is either absolved of wrongdoing in reward for faith, or condemned to a much bleaker eternity.”

“You sound like you disagree?” Stiles interjected.

“I wouldn’t know,” Peter replied with a shrug. “Do you feel right with God, despite all your sins,” he leered, not waiting for Stiles to respond with anything more than a glare of contempt before continuing on. “The nematon is a powerful energy– look at it as… the hidden nuclear reactor at the center of it all, keeping the lights on. And you’ll be drawn to it, it will pull you in. Its power remains constant, and if you can find it there, you’ll find it here– even without the memories Talia stole from you.”

“And what if I can’t find it there?” Stiles replied. “Are you just going to leave me there until I do?” He looked to the bathtub. “Until I get hypothermia or my heart almost stops and you can use that as an excuse to bite me?”

Peter chuckled for a moment before his expression went cool and menacing.

“You talk as if the bite isn’t an inevitable part of your fate anyway,” he retorted smoothly. “Besides,
you have more important things to worry about than hypothermia, as I’m sure the good vet told you. And while I appreciate his concern, that is why we have Lydia, and that is why she won’t be going anywhere. You see Lydia, like other Banshees, has a limited ability to pierce the veil between this world and the next. Like placing a drinking glass on a wall between two rooms, she can overhear what’s on the other side of the wall if she pays close enough attention.”

Stiles looked to his friend, still in disbelief that his life would largely be in the hands of someone he thought was completely human—normal—which begged the question…

“Wait– Alan was worried for a reason– and so are you. What are you not telling me?” Stiles asked, eyes narrowing. Already he felt tired— not because he’d been pulled out of bed at the ass crack of dawn, but because of the weighty sensations of dread, anxiety and fear draped over him like a heavy, wet blanket.

“Nothing you don’t already know I’m sure,” Peter replied, eyeing the sachet now resting against the bottom of Stiles’ ribcage. “But, as I mentioned, it’s a place where various entities end up wandering—and not all of them are particularly keen on their destination. Some may try and hitch a ride back, if you’re unwise enough to let on that you have a willing body waiting for you back home. Others though— those are the ones you really have to look out for; the tricksters that will lure you in with false promises, say they’re a guide, then get you lost so they can come back and take your place—or worse. So no, I’m not going to just ‘leave you in there’ until you find the nematon—it’s too dangerous. As you so astutely observed, you’re still human, and susceptible to all the same physical limitations. So if you can’t find the nematon before your body succumbs to its… human fragility, you have my word, I’ll pull you out of that tub myself. More importantly, if Lydia senses you’re in danger, she’ll tell me, and I’ll pull you out—whether you’ve found the nematon or not.”

Stiles looked to Lydia, who had remained uncharacteristically quiet during his and Peter’s exchange. She looked so far from the graceful, confident and brazen woman he knew her to be, her legs shifting restlessly, bare feet locked in place on the tile floor. Like she wanted to run—but refused to give in to the impulse to do it.

Stiles exhaled harshly, running his hands down his face, trying to parse everything Peter had just told him. And his thoughts immediately drifted to Derek, the feeling of his lips against his skin last night. He thought about Scott, sitting alone in the vet clinic basement, the hold Peter still had on him—the same one he held on Derek, and Lydia too—their alpha. And he thought of his dad, alone in that hospital, oblivious to the mess unfolding in the real world. And if Stiles put even a toe out of line, everyone he loved would suffer. Either his, or Lydia’s refusal to participate in Peter’s meticulously planned ritual would mean everyone paid a price—a rally of dominos collapsing against one another, each strike pushing forward to the next.

“Now, I do believe I’ve given you enough explanation of what is going to happen when you get to the other side, so let’s talk about getting there,” Peter replied. “The water in that tub is cold should be around 35 degrees right now, which means, once you get in, you’ll lose consciousness within about 15 to 20 minutes, and after that, we have between 15-45 minutes before cardiac failure.”

Stiles knew enough from high school science classes to know Peter was right—and if the spare bags of ice slowly melting near his feet were any indication, that water was about to get colder. He remembered reading about what would happen to a person if they fell through the ice on a body of water. How the body’s first instinct is to gasp as their torso constricts, and that most people drown rather than freeze to death because shivering kicks in and they aren’t coordinated enough to get to the surface. Their heart rate and blood pressure climb, and if they have a heart condition, this is where they could have a heart attack. But if they don’t drown, if they stop shivering, and they don’t have a heart condition, the real danger becomes hypothermia.
“Wait… you’re saying once I pass out and my consciousness or soul of what have you goes to the other realm, we only have– at maximum– half an hour for me to find this thing?” he retorted incredulously, sitting up straighter to look at Peter angrily. “You’d better have one hell of a plan B– and we should just skip right to it, because this–” he gestured wildly between the tub, himself and Lydia, “is never going to work.”

“Well, we’re never going to know if we don’t try, now will we?” Peter retorted mildly. Before gesturing with one dismissive up and down sweep of his hand. “Take off your clothes.”

Stiles felt his skin heat, blood rushing to his cheeks. It was ridiculous really, after everything he’d done, getting naked in front of Lydia was the thing that was making him blush. In his defense, it was like being told to get naked in front of your sister. At least in the hotel he’d had a sheet to cover him up. When Stiles didn’t immediately move to be obey the order, Peter sighed, exasperated.

“Time passes by differently there,” he explained, exasperation clear in his tone, as if magically, this was the key to making Stiles feel all better about the situation at hand. “What is minutes here, will feel like hours there.”

“Oh,” Stiles snarked in return, head bobbing in mock understanding and enthusiasm. “Thank you, I feel so much better now about getting into a fucking bathtub full of ice because I’ll be fucking with the space–time continuum.” When Peter just continued to stare, gaze cold, jaw tight with barely contained anger, Stiles knew in that moment, that once Peter got what he wanted when it came to the nematon, Stiles was going to be faced with punishment for everything he’d done the past few weeks.

“Do I have to take everything off?” he asked, voice much smaller now. But Peter didn’t reply at all.

“It would be best,” Lydia spoke tentatively, voice breaking the awful silence in the room. She looked to Peter, as if he’d order he quiet, but when he didn’t, she continued. “The less you’re wearing, the faster your temperature will drop– but we’ll also be able to heat you up more quickly if you aren’t wearing any wet clothes. It’s nothing I haven’t seen before anyway.”

A shudder of breath left Stiles’ lungs as he closed his eyes and shrugged out of his hoodie, chest already constricting with terror. He felt drugged, too many endorphins already pumping through his body to separate rational thought from emotion. His hands shook on the way out of the sleeves of his hoodie as he stood up and toed out of his shoes next, bending to pull off his socks, the coordination already almost too much to ask of his body. Peter was watching him attentively; his eyes a burning presence as he stripped off his t-shirt and dropped it in the pile growing behind him. He moved closer to the tub, the only thing compelling him to move being the thought of how much worse his punishment was going to be later if he didn’t. At least he could use this small token of obedience as a bargaining chip to hopefully delay Peter giving him the bite before Derek, Scott and the Argents had a chance to move into action.

Stiles stared down at the water in the tub, the ice cubes floating to the surface gradually losing their shape as they melted. Those melting cubes gave only an illusion that it wouldn’t be so bad. He knew that water was fucking cold. It had to be, in order to lower his core body temperature enough to make him hypothermic enough to lose consciousness. And he knew whatever was on the other side of that experience could be so much worse.

“I am really not in the mood for games Stiles.” Peter’s voice was cool and stark in the tiled room, impatience echoing around them in the relative silence.

“Yeah, well forgive me for not being particularly motivated to strip naked in front of my best friend and get in a tub of ice so I can help you with your evil plan,” Stiles retorted dryly, trying to use sarcasm to cover over the rabbiting beat of his heart in his chest. But his voice sounded dry and
rasping, the sharpness of his words completely filed down by his own fear. Peter would get his way
if he had to exert his will by force. There was no sense pissing him off about it.

“So what do I do… just get in?” he asked, craning his neck to look over his shoulder only to find
Peter had crept up right beside him. He inhaled sharply when fingers brushed against his exposed
hipbone, toying with the stretch of skin before slipping just under the waistband of his sweats.

“Yes,” Peter replied simply. “Lydia and I will do the rest.”

Stiles took a deep breath and moved to step into the tub only to have the hand around his hip tighten
its hold.

“I think you’re forgetting something,” Peter purred into his ear, and Stiles felt his hands clench into
fists at his side. He caught sight of Lydia gracefully averting her eyes by turning her head, red hair
falling in a cascade across her face so her expression was hidden. Stiles trained his eyes on the wall
ahead of him before quickly shedding his last article of clothing, his naked ass uncomfortably
brushing against the fabric of Peter’s jeans. He took one last look at the glistening cubes of ice on the
surface of the bath’s water before raising a foot and stepping into the tub.

The water was so cold it didn’t just sting, it burned. Every impulse he had was making his limbs
twitch with the urge to scramble right back out of the tub again, but Peter’s hand was around his
upper arm, steadying him so he could lift his right leg over the tall edge of the tub, but imposing
enough of a presence that if Stiles didn’t follow through on his own, he knew Peter would force him
into the water. The violent shivering started almost immediately and he looked down at the water, up
to his knees, barely feeling the ice cubes bumping into his calves after being disturbed. The impulse
was a complete contradiction to what Stiles felt, which was on fire, the cold so severe is actually felt
like a burn. And somehow he managed to fold forward, hands grappling for the edge of the tub only
for his arms to go rigid as he attempted to force himself into the water, sinking slowly until his thighs
and buttocks hit the surface and he stopped, breathing hard, arms shaking. And before he could even
think about scrambling to get out of the tub, he was already trying to do it, and then Peter’s hands
were on his shoulders, forcing him down. He watched his shaking arms try and withstand the
pressure for a few seconds before his feet slipped out from under him in his crouched position, water
sloshing over the edges of the tub and he slipped backwards, the only thing keeping him from going
under, Peter’s hands on his shoulders and his slippery left hand gripping the edge of the tub like he
was dangling from a cliff.

He gasped, struggling to pull in air as he plunged into the water up to his chest and he was so
focused on just breathing that it made it easy for Peter to pull him back against the end of the tub,
back connecting with the icy porcelain and making him shudder into heaving, hyperventilating
breaths. Stiles dropped his head back against the edge of the tub, eyes squeezed closed against the
pain, trying to open his airways, remembering his high school bio textbook in clear detail:

The torso reflex is a physiological response when a person suddenly enters cold water. The reflexive
sucking in of air is a way for the body to rapidly increase oxygen intake into the lungs as a means of
increasing survival.

He’d stop gasping soon enough, but next would come the shivering, the increased heart rate, and
after that, his shivering would stop and be replaced with fatigue, and a total lack of coordination, then
loss of consciousness, and if Peter didn’t keep his word and pull him out in time—death.

He cracked open his eyes and glared up at where Peter stood over him, face placid calm, but his grip
still firm on Stiles’ shoulders.

“Y-y-you-re an assssshole,” Stiles managed to curse ineloquently through his body wracking shivers.
And all Peter replied with was a hum of amusement, one hand slipping from Stiles’ shoulder to plunge under the water.

“Lydia, another bag please,” he requested mildly, and Lydia looked to Stiles, biting her lip before doing as she was told, crossing the small distance between the remaining bags of ice and where she stood near the other end of the tub.

“No,” Stiles objected quickly when he realized what he’d asked. “Peter no.”

At least Lydia showed her objection to the order by dragging the ice over to Peter’s feet.

“You do it,” she all but growled, glaring at the other man before turning to look at Stiles, reaching into the water for his right hand. Stiles watched her flinch as her hand broke past the surface, lips pursing at what Stiles knew was the feeling of her skin being burned off, down to the bone.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized near a whisper.

“Sss..ok.”

God he sounded weak. Even weaker when Peter dumped the bag of ice unceremoniously over his chest and midsection and he let out a squeal of pain at the sensation of coals landing on his skin. He squeezed Lydia’s hand under the water, but knew she was squeezing harder. How cold was the water anyway?

“Fuck,” he managed to curse before craning his neck to glare at Peter. “If I f-find that t-th-thing, I’m go-ing t-to use it t-to kill you,” he threatened ineffectively. The fucker actually dared to smirk in amusement. Even under the surface of the water, mostly hidden by ice cubes, Stiles could see Lydia’s hand going bright red in his, which along with the rest of his body, was already paling. He loosened his grip, pushing her hand away towards the edge of the tub.

“You d-don’t w-want fr-frost bbite,” he mumbled to the look of dejection on her face, managing a weak grimace of a smile. A few moments passed in silence, in which Lydia stood up and Stiles just sat, fighting every impulse to get out of the tub now that Peter’s hands weren’t holding him in. Even in such a short time, his limbs ached. The burning sensation throughout his entire body was fading to an unpleasant warmth, an irritating sensation he wanted to shake as soon as possible, like pins and needles. His violent shivering started to slow and though his breathing was still jittery and uneven, his heart no longer felt like it was beating so hard that his lungs couldn’t compete and draw air at the same time his heart beat.

“So are you guys just going to watch until I pass out?” he croaked when the silence drew on for so long that he felt the need to fill it– like he always did, for better or worse. His voice hung in the air for a few seconds, and he figured out what was to happen moments before Peter actually laid his hands on his shoulders and did it.

In the few scant seconds he had before being unceremoniously shoved under the icy surface, he took one aborted gasp of air, inhaling a mouthful of water and squeezing his eyes shut against the cold. He thrashed as much as his numb limbs would let him, fighting the urge to cough, or swallow because if he did either, his lungs would fill with water and he’d drown. His lungs started to burn nearly instantly, the coppery, mineral taste of the water repelling enough that all he wanted to do was spit the water out, but he couldn’t– because spitting it out meant letting what precious little oxygen he had out with it. His hands breached the water’s surface, clawing upwards blindly, reaching out towards Peter’s arms, which meant slipping further into the tub. When they did finally manage to grasp at the flesh, he clawed, nails raking across skin, breaking flesh. His bare feet and legs kicked and slipped against the slick surface of the tub, uncoordinated and desperate until he realized nothing
he was doing was working. Through the fog settling into his brain he realized he had two choices; he could give in, open his mouth, let the water pour in and probably drown, or come close enough to it that Peter felt the need to bite him; or he could steal his nerves, stop struggling, and hope either the cold, or lack of oxygen made him lose consciousness and that Peter would pull him out of the water before he drowned.

There was no way he was giving in and letting Peter bite him.

So instead of focusing on the ever increasing burning sensation in his chest, he focused on the increasing numbness in his limbs, the heated pressure points of Peter’s hands moving to his chest and belly when the weight of his own extended limbs forced him to drop them under the surface of the water, hands feeling as heavy and blunt as cinderblocks. His head felt ready to explode from the pounding pressure of his heart, beating at his skull from the inside, and all he wanted was to do was relieve the strain. It was all growing to be too much, the inferno in his lungs growing hotter, a forest fire raging out of control, searing a path up his throat, spreading behind his eyes, smoke and ash choking him, embers caught in his mouth, and it was enough, he wanted the cool rush of water to fill him up, to put out the blaze inside of him, to offer that sweet relief. He felt the set of his jaw loosen, his stubbornness quickly losing face. He hoped it wasn’t too late by the time Peter pulled him out, that all he had to do was cough out all the water in his lungs, along with the burning ash. The pounding, suffocating pressure increased, building to a crescendo so intense Stiles wanted Peter to bite him, just to end the incredible pain, just to feel the sweet relief of one gasped breath. He could feel consciousness slipping away from him, the muted sounds of the ice cubes in the tub ineptly colliding with one another fading to a rush not unlike the whispering sounds of leaves. And he fought against the gruelling pressure that made him feel as though his jaw had been wired shut.

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Beacon Hills’ Police Department was small enough that when Derek was paraded in the front door, hands cuffed behind his back, he could feel all eyes on him— including the officer that had been on the desk the other day when he’d come in looking for Peter. Suddenly his anxiety in the cruiser felt like calm in comparison to the helplessness he was feeling now. He vividly remembered the night of the fire, finding out that both of his parents, his siblings save for Laura, were all just… gone, how everyone in the station that he passed, or that passed by him and Laura had looked on in pity while he felt nothing but numb; cold and shaking under a flannel blanket someone had managed to find and drape over him and Laura.

For the first time Derek wondered exactly how long Peter had been setting everything up like a domino rally. His uncle was clever, and there was no doubt he’d set this entire situation up as a clear attempt to keep Derek out of the way, but there was a sinister air to it all, something that told Derek that he was only seeing the tip of the iceberg, and that there was much more below the surface when it came to what Peter was planning. This wasn’t just a ploy to keep Derek out of the way while Peter gained access to Stiles, it was a psychological game he could play with both men by praying on their pasts, using the police station as an intersection for some of their worst memories. Stiles knew about the fire, Derek knew about Stiles’ arrest, about the incident at the station where Peter had torn most of it apart. And Peter was praying on those emotions to weaken Derek, and if he was honest with himself, Derek had to admit that Peter was succeeding at getting in his head.

As he passed through the hallway past the reception desk, he felt the hallway closing in on him, well aware of the psychological effect the space was meant to have on those passing through it. The older
Darmouth his tag read—lead the way, one hand guiding Derek by his elbow down the hallway, past the curious onlookers in the bullpen, the younger officer, Smithson following, only because the hallway was too narrow for all three to pass together. Derek didn’t have to look back to know the other officer was proudly showing off his kill as he walked past the audience of his peers, keeping up a bravado even if he wasn’t the one actually escorting Derek through the station. He wondered how well this man knew Peter, if he was doing any of this in the hopes of impressing him or if by chance, Derek had just been unlucky enough to have to deal with some young, cocky asshole as a test to his often admittedly thin patience.

There were only three holding cells across the back of the room and a single desk against the wall to the left beside the emergency exit, none of which were occupied. When Derek and the two officers entered, the middle aged, dark-skinned officer stood, reaching into the desk drawer for a set of keys before he moved to open the cell door to the right. Derek waited patiently for the other officer to slide the set of bars open before being gestured inside.

“Take one step inside, keep your back turned. Once the door is closed, take one step backward and we’ll get you out of those cuffs,” Darmouth, the officer at Derek’s elbow commanded. Derek didn’t offer a word, simply did as told, satisfied with the knowledge that, if at any point he’d really felt any desire to get out of the metal wristlets, he could have. As soon as he was free he turned around.

“I’m going to see who is in booking,” the older officer turned to state to his partner. “I’ll meet you in room three.” His expression was tight, almost as if he were holding back from adding; don’t do anything stupid. He exited the way he’d come, and Derek realized, or the first time that he’d been given the only cell with a full vantage point of the hallway. The younger officer, Smithson looked over his shoulder, watching his partner go until the other man disappeared into the bullpen before he turned back to Derek.

“You’re one cocky son of a bitch,” he provoked. Behind him, the other officer settling back to his desk, rolled his eyes. “You must truly have thought you’d get away with it, and decided you wanted a challenge. I mean, that’s the only reason I can think of that you’d waltz right in here while we’re investigating your sister’s disappearance, and ask for the Sheriff’s deputy without even mentioning what you were here for– your own sister and you couldn’t even think to mention it to the officer on duty. Conscience finally got the better of you? Or did you just want the challenge of seeing if you could get away with it right under our noses?”

Derek’s stomach flip-flopped. Something wasn’t right here. He’d reported Laura missing in New York to a bored sounding officer down at the 88th precinct while already on his way to Beacon Hills. Laura hadn’t sounded panicked in the voicemail she’d left him– the voicemail he still had saved on his phone– but Derek’s gut had him taking off across the country, ignoring the logical part of him that had said to stay put when she hadn’t picked up his returning call. And then he’d walked into the shit-show occurring in Beacon Hills and his life had spiraled out of control. Because he’d known exactly what had happened to Laura the moment he set foot in the preserve, but it wasn’t like sensing your sister was gone, forever, was something you could report to the police without arousing suspicion. And he’d quickly found himself too focused on keeping innocent people safe and dealing with his uncle himself. His sister’s whereabouts in the eyes of the law became an afterthought– and that mistake was coming back to haunt him. He knew it the second his face had dropped the mask of calm he’d adopted because the young officer’s stubbled lip twitched in a sneer.

“Have a seat,” the officer said lightly, gazing past Derek’s shoulder to the lone metal bench affixed to the wall, before he turned on his heel and strutted from the room, leaving Derek both figuratively and literally feeling very much like a caged animal.
The Other Place

Chapter Notes

Well, Merry Christmas Eve folks! I'm not going to lie, I'm super stoked about this chapter. I have literally thrown all supernatural rules out the window on this one. After weeks of looking through various mythical creatures and spirits, I decided, the hell with the rules because nothing was quite fitting the bill for what I needed, for some things, and others were a perfect fit; so welcome to Jaymes’ made up, Bardo-like land where some of the beings are made up, others are real, and it’s all terrifying anyway.

This is also a long chapter (yay? Consider it a Christmas bonus/apology for taking forever) because I didn’t want to break Stiles’ trip to the other side into two parts.

Stiles heaved in one great, gasping breath, an inhalation so long it felt like he was breathing for the first time in years. The air was cool and damp and tasted of earth and fallen leaves and rain, soothing his seared lungs. His eyes flew open to a darkened sky, and a canopy of trees just barely visible against the starless canvas, hazy with fog. His back felt damp and cool, skin damp and clammy even through the material of his t-shirt and hoodie. His bones ached from the cold.

God, how long had he been lying in the middle of the preserve?

He sat up suddenly, and regretted it instantly, head swimming with the sudden rush of blood that made his skull positively pound. Stiles wasn’t in the preserve at all, and the longer he looked, the more apparent that became. The fog that floated languidly in the air undulated like paint bleeding from an artist’s first dip of their brush into a fresh vessel of water. And what looked like floating particles of dust from several feet away, were insubstantial in the inches of air in front of Stiles’ face. It all gave the effect of… being under water.

Stiles felt like the entire bath tub in the Hale cabin had been dumped over on him, his veins turning icy at the realization that Peter’s crazy plan had actually worked. The feeling passed quickly because holy shit he wasn’t dead– at least not yet.

The air lapped at his exposed skin, tepid, like memories of childhood swimming lessons, and staring around the treed landscape, Stiles swore had to be a part of the preserve, he felt the same uneasiness and morbid curiosity of a child who had wandered too close to the deep end of the pool, not yet certain of his ability to swim, and even less certain about what lurked in the deeper water. He waited for the pounding in his head to abate a little bit before daring to pull himself to his feet, his bones ached as though he were still in the icy water of the tub, despite the lukewarm feeling of the air, so he was slow and clumsy.

He had no idea how much time he had– especially since Peter had mentioned that time would pass differently here– but he still felt a sense of urgency, and that was what compelled him to move. Stiles squinted in the dark, looking for any sort of path of trail, but all that stretched before him was an endless stretch of trees, gnarled forest floor, and fog and floating particles that obscured his view beyond more than about ten yards. For all he knew, the woods around him stretched on for miles, just an end of labyrinth of darkness and unknown. He huffed a breath out between his lips,
marveling at the sensation of just breathing.

“How the hell am I supposed to find anything here?” he asked aloud. And for the first time, he noticed the weight of the sachet around his neck shifting slightly against his damp skin, leather sticking to his damp skin, reminding him exactly of what could be lurking in the darkness. He wondered what might have heard him. He listened for a few moments, but all he heard, was the rustling of leaves, the violent flutter before a storm.

He took a few tentative steps forward, and started to walk. He didn’t trust this place. Deaton had warned him that there were things that could hurt him here, and he really didn’t want to wait for whatever was out there, to come to him, and he really didn’t want to move towards it or them either, so he focused on the goal at hand; finding the nematon, which he realized, he hadn’t really thought much about past the sheer terror of pretty much drowning to get to a realm beyond reality.

He started to walk, tentatively at first, feeling his way across a ground, that for all its similarities to the preserve floor, felt insubstantial under his feet, like it was going to drop out from under him any minute, even though the reality of that was probably pretty slim. The leaves and rocks made the same crunch beneath his sneakers, twigs snapping here and there, pebbles tumbling over gnarled roots. But as the trees seemed to grow thicker, taller, more looming, creating more darkness, his pace quickened, stomach knotting at the frantic feeling of having not enough time, and constantly being on guard for a threat.

It started as a barely heard whisper, a murmur that could have been mistaken for the rustling of leaves, when Stiles’ ears miraculously plucked a single, quiet, female voice from amidst the wall of sound.

“Over here.”

His head snapped to the left, searching out the source of the voice, and out of the corner of his eye, he caught a flicker of movement, the long streaming trail of a young woman’s blonde, almost silver hair, the side of her face, and one pale arm disappearing into the trees.

“Hey!” he shouted, but either she hadn’t heard him, or she was running from something. It was the fission of fear at that thought, combined with the fact that so far, she was the only sign of life that Stiles had encountered, that saw him running, stumbling over gnarled tree roots, paying little attention to his course as he shouted after her– but not once did she pause or turn her head. He was so focused on her trail of silver hair, floating in the darkness like satin ribbons, that he must not have noticed the change in terrain, because suddenly, he was weightless, before it felt like gravity had hooked him by his entrails and he was falling.

His feet limbs flailed madly in the air, like a puppet, before his strings were abruptly cut and he hit the ground hard, just barely managing a roll, the smell of wet earth clogging up his nostrils as he tumbled, shielding his head from damage, dirt and grit filling his mouth and nose. He opened his eyes to see smears of stars and trees and dirt– and a large rock he was barreling straight for. Try as he might, gravity was just too strong of a force for him to scramble out of his hunched roll, and he collided with it back first, with a sickening sounding crunch, hard enough to knock the wind from his lungs. Everything slowed– whether it was from the lack of oxygen or his collision with the rock, Stiles couldn’t say– but he finally landed with a thud against the forest floor, staring up at the sky once again.

It took several minutes to catch his breath for Stiles to realize that it was darker here, the tree coverage more dense and intimidating. He sat up again, pressing one hand to his chest where it ached, pain radiating from his back. The girl was nowhere to be seen. The whispering was gone, replaced by chilling quiet, just the faint rustle of a breeze and those barely there whispers.
“It’s a trick– well, a trap.”

Stiles’ head snapped to the sound of the voice, coming from the tree line a few yards to his right.

“She lures you here with your weakness– let me guess, yours is you always have to be the hero– and then she leaves you here for all of us to find.”

The voice was moving. Stiles could have sworn it was behind him, and unease began to fill the invisible glass inside of him, getting closer and closer to the top.

“I suppose it’s the only way she survives in here, though why she wants to stay anywhere near this place, I couldn’t tell you.”

The owner of the voice stepped out from the shadowy space under what looked to be the remains of a bridge a few yards in front of Stiles. The only reason the structure would have to be there would have been if there was a creek where he currently sat, but if it had, it was long ago and had dried up. The figure stayed cloaked in darkness for a few more paces before stepping out into the light, revealing what looked like a young man, only slightly older than Stiles. For all of the sinister air about him, he actually looked reasonably approachable, like some college kid Stiles could have seen on the bus or at the clinic; brown, kind of curly hair in a mop on top of his head, jeans, a t-shirt, jacket, sneakers– not exactly appropriate hiking attire, but who was Stiles to talk at this point?

“And how have you survived?” Stiles retorted, voice still pretty strained from the bruised feeling in his ribs. The other boy smiled.

“I’m charming, of course.”

“What are you?” Stiles asked, eyes narrowed, as he gathered his bearings. He’d run far. It was a bizarre conclusion to come to considering he had no point of reference from where he’d come from, but the ache in his legs told him it was far enough to have found himself deeper.

“What are you?” the other boy answered with a question, a single eyebrow raised. They stood, regarding each other in the pale moonlight for a moment before either one of them spoke. And when Stiles did first, he had the distinct impulse to lie.

“Human,” he replied. It was the key to a good lie; inject an element of truth into it, merely omit an important detail, like being the heir to some sort of genetic-predisposition towards magic or some sort of innate power.

“How did you get here?” the other young man asked. Stiles shrugged his shoulders, slowly pulling himself to his feet, allowing the injuries from his fall to stiffen his movements.

“I was drowned.” He didn’t see any advantage to lying about that part, especially when he wasn’t entirely sure that was the kind of answer his companion was looking for. The other man grimaced.

“That’s a bad way to go,” he remarked before donning a conciliatory, soft smile. “At least if you’re here, you’re not dead yet. You can find your way back.”

“That’s comforting,” Stiles grumbled. He hadn’t really thought about the potential discomfort he’d be facing if he managed to survive his foray into the underworld.

“I’m Jack,” the other teen offered. He didn’t offer a hand to shake, instead he shoved them into his jeans pockets and rocked back on his heels for a moment.

“Stiles,” Stiles offered in return. And though he saw no real reason to, other than not knowing where
the fuck he was, he grew uneasy. He tried to shake the feeling. Just because the girl who had led him here clearly wasn’t anything good, didn’t mean anyone or anything that was here was bad news. For all Stiles knew, this kid, this Jack, was even more lost than he was. Nonetheless, he felt warring impulses both to just start walking away, and to stick around and see what this guy’s story was. He split the difference, and started casually walking in the direction Jack had come from. A few steps later, he heard the rustle of dried leaves crunching underfoot as Jack followed him.

“If you’re looking for a way out, you won’t find it this way,” he offered. Stiles paused as the other teenager caught up to him. Under the shadows of the tunnel, he studied the face of the other boy; in this light he looked thinner, less jovial and more desperate, gaunt and tired.

“How long have you been here?” Stiles asked slowly, eyes narrowing.

“Long enough to know, that isn’t the way out,” the other teen replied, one eyebrow cocked up before he nodded to the left.

“And how would you know that?” Stiles replied, keeping his pace slower than he normally would have in the circumstance. “You’re still here, shouldn’t you have gotten out by now?”

The other boy let out a low, sardonic laugh.

“You say that like it’s so easy. Look, there are things out there–” he gestured towards the woods to the right, just visible through the crumbling remnants of the bridge’s mortar and bricks. A beat of silence passed, two, and it was as if he’d cued up an orchestra. All at once, Stiles heard it again; the whispering of many voices, coming from the deep thicket of trees that loomed, dark and foreboding to his right, a gaping maw of uncertainty.

“I know,” Stiles snapped grimly. He stopped, ran his hands through his hair, regretting snapping at his only company. “Look, it’s not like I want to go out there, but I don’t see a whole lot of options. So you can keep walking around looking for a way out and hope you don’t get–” he made a sound of frustration, “I don’t know, eaten or something, but I’ve got shit to do.”

His movements felt wooden as he turned directly towards the dense treeline where the whispering sounded as though it was coming from and marched a few determined paces forward. He could actually feel the minute tremor in his limbs, like every fibre of his being was telling him not to go into those woods, but he fought the instinct to turn the other way and climb up the embankment he’d just tumbled down.

“Did you ever think this is exactly where you’re being herded?” Jack hissed, hanging back beside the bridge, gesturing off to the left, where the gully continued on before it disappeared into a sea of mist.

“Definitely,” Stiles replied, not worrying about the not-so-subtle accusation he was tossing out there.

*Lydia will know if something is wrong. She’ll scream. Peter will pull me out of the tub.*

He took a couple of steps more and behind him, Jack sighed, exasperated, the same sound Scott used to make whenever Stiles suggested some crazy plan that was most definitely going to get them into trouble. He reached up and brushed his fingers against the sack hanging outside of his t-shirt, then tucked it under the layer of cotton. No sense in advertising his protection, and by extension, the abilities he still had a hard time believing he possessed. If Deaton, the Beastiary, Derek, Peter, and the memories he’d been shown were right, he’d be okay.

Footsteps crunched on the leaves behind him as Jack jogged forward to catch up.

“I’m just going to say on the record now, in case you get both of us killed, this is a terrible idea,” the
other teen stated. Stiles looked over his shoulder, appraising.

“Noted.”

They walked in near silence the few remaining yards to the tree line, hackles rising.

“If you want to bail…” Stiles invited, trailing off.

“Where the hell would I go anyway? As you so tactfully pointed out earlier, I’ve been hanging around here playing chicken for… awhile now.”

When they stepped across and treeline, Stiles actually shuddered. Everything felt thicker here. The fog clung and hovered, denser, along with its compatriot, darkness, and the unsettled feeling he’d felt when he first arrived in this place felt like nothing compared to now. He suddenly understood why people in horror movies always made such bad decisions; the suffocating heaviness of the air made breathing laborious, made drawing oxygen in to his brain a conscious thought. For several minutes they walked without saying a word.

“So what are you looking for?”

Jack’s voice came out sounding as strangled as Stiles felt.

“What?” he replied hoarsely, startled at the question.

“If you’re not trying to get out, then you must be looking for something here– or someone,” Jack reasoned as they walked. Stiles didn’t really know how to respond to that. While his initial distrust was just starting to fade, he still wasn’t about to open up and tell Jack his life story. Instead he stayed silent, a trick his dad had told him he used when questioning people because human nature was to want to fill that silence with something.

“As far as I can tell, this place is huge. It has layers, like the knots on a tree stump. But where the fuck we are, I couldn’t tell you. I haven’t found the edges or an out, but I feel like getting out might mean going deeper. And let me tell you from personal experience, that shit is terrifying.”

Stiles could definitely believe that. The whispering was getting louder, and he had to actively ignore the shadows in the periphery of his vision; like a child who pulls the covers over their head so they can’t see the monster lurking just inside their closet.

“What do you think is out here?” Stiles’ voice felt too loud in this place, and he cringed at the thought of his voice carrying, drawing too much attention.

“Well you had the pale woman– she lures people deeper into this place. I’m pretty sure she’s what myths would call a Bogle. There aren’t many things that hover on the outside edge of this place and I don’t know whether that is because they can’t or because they already have someone willing to do half the work for them,” Jack explained as they walked. “Further in there are all kinds of things. The Naiad– they look like beautiful women, quiet and non-threatening– until they get you near the water. They’ll drown you, feeding off of your energy until what’s left of you is gone. The Golem’s though– they are the ones that scare the shit out of me. They look like a person, but their made of–”

“Stone,” Stiles supplied, remembering getting lost in the black hole of mythical creatures books at the library. “So what you’re saying, is that everything I’ve read about the big bads of the world is true?” Stiles actually stopped midstride as he asked.
Jack gave him an appraising look.

“Probably not all,” he replied, “but more than any reasonable person would care to admit to themselves.”

Yeah well, apparently I’m not a reasonable person anymore since I’ve managed to get myself entangled in the world of werewolves and sparks and banshees, Stiles thought wryly to himself.

“So what are the voices?” Stiles asked, just as the woods several yards ahead seemed to break apart again, the trees thinning to a more open space. It took a few paces before he realized Jack had frozen where he was, head tilted to the side.

“What voices?”

A chill crawled over Stiles’ skin, raising goosebumps despite the tepid air. His pace slowed to a stop.

“The… you don’t hear the whispers?” he croaked out. Jack was staring at him, expression uneasy.

“Look man, I don’t know what you are… but it isn’t human. And I don’t know whether you’re lying or you got your memory wiped, or you just legitimately do not know what you are but I don’t hear anything,” the other teen responded, voice on what sounded like the edge of fear.

“I– I’m not anything,” Stiles found himself replying, his tone pleading. “I’m human,” he repeated his earlier sentiments, and oh, had the tables turned. Now he was the one under suspicion. He ran both hands through his hair in exasperation. “Don’t you think if I was anything other than human that meant you any ill will, I would have done something by now?”

Both boys stared at one another for several seconds before Jack’s shoulder’s sagged.

“You’re right,” he muttered. “And I’m sorry. It’s just– you can’t trust anything in here.”

“It’s fine,” Stiles replied. “I get it, I’m not exactly the most trusting person either.”

Both boys continued to walk. Ahead of them, the trees parted to a more open space, and just as Stiles was about to step into the swath of land illuminated by the moon, cool fingers harshly grabbed his wrist, yanking him back hard enough that it jarred the bones in shoulder, made him stumble, nearly losing his footing. And that was when he saw it; looming on higher ground, was the unmistakeable structure of the Hale house.

“The black dog lives there.”

Jack’s voice was low, a warning, and Stiles felt a drop of fear race down his spine. This Hale house was completely untouched by fire. The white siding all but sparkled in the moonlight, and the windows were clean and unbroken. The front porch didn’t sag, but sat bare, mist weaving its way around the lower floor of the house.

“The black dog. There was no doubt who or what that could be.

“What did you say?”

“That house– there is something there. Sometimes you hear screaming– not like, someone screaming in pain or crying or anything– but someone losing their mind with rage.”

Peter.

Stiles didn’t have any doubt of that, but several questions floated up like the fog around him. If Peter
was also in Bardo, how was he conscious in the real world? Why was a part of him here, in a house that had never been touched by fire? Would he recognize Stiles here? Was he only a wolf here?

“The lost man went in there one day and he disappeared,” Jack continued. “He wandered in and never returned.”

Stiles turned suddenly to look at Jack, something in his heart clenching and squeezing, almost suffocating him.

“Who is the lost man?”

Jack tilted his head as he answered, cautiously.

“He was wandering, all over this place, for a long, long time. He was looking for someone, but he couldn’t speak, so nobody could help him. Then one day, he found this place and it was like, he knew what I was. He just opened the door and went inside, and never came out.”

Stiles knew better than to ask when all of this had happened. Time passed differently here— it felt like hours, but he knew it couldn’t have been that long— there was no way he could live beyond a few minutes under icy water.

Dad.

Without waiting for Jack to follow, Stiles bolted into the open grounds around the house, sneakers slipping over wet leaves and soil and gnarled tree roots.

“Stiles!” Jack shouted after him fruitlessly. It caught Stiles’ attention enough to see the other boy hesitating at the treeline, as if running after Stiles was the last thing he wanted to do, but he kept going, all the way until he reached the porch, which creaked ominously as he ascended the steps. Only when he paused at the door, could he hear Jack scrambling after him. Heart-pounding, Stiles reached for the doorknob and pulled, stepping inside the house, not allowing Jack the chance to stop him— nothing would come between him and his dad— not even a big black wolf.

Inside the house was eerily still and quiet and abandoned, as though nobody— or nothing— lived here, yet the house seemed to faintly glow with just enough warm light for Stiles to see his surroundings. It was as though, the inhabitants had just… walked away. Furniture sat untouched, a fine layer of dust covering every surface— there were even a few magazines left on the coffee table in the living room, visible through the wide, arching doorframe. Stiles felt a shudder work its way out through his limbs, as if this were somehow familiar to him. He walked past the staircase that would have led upstairs, through the living room area, back to the kitchen, where there were even mugs and dishes on the counter— though none of them dirty, they were just… there. He stood in wonder for a few moments; Back in Beacon Hills, the entire kitchen was pretty much gone, save for the supporting wall in the middle, that butted up against the back of the stairs, but this kitchen showed how big the house had actually been. The back wall featured a set of French doors, one left hanging ajar, covered in dust, but through those doors, was another room. He wandered closer, steps tentative, as if any moment the black dog would leap out at him.

When he pushed open the door, it creaked loudly enough to startle him. He paused, listening attentively for several minutes to the near silence of the woods. He couldn’t even hear Jack’s frantic repetition of his name any longer. The door revealed a part of the house Stiles hadn’t even known existed— what was once a large sunroom with a door leading out the back and into the woods. It was coated in dust and grime, the furniture thick with it, the glass so densely coated it was almost impossible to see through to the other side— but not quite. Through the grimy glass, Stiles could make out the twisting branches of a manzanita wrapping itself over and around the structure just like it had
the cottage; strangling the sunroom and reaching towards the house. He craned his neck, following the twisting branches’ path across the roof towards the house. He froze when his eyes fell on a second story window, which was glowing faintly in the dark, as if lit by a lamp, except the light it emitted was like no lamp Stiles had ever seen; faintly violet, again without a defined source. It made him shudder.

It made him curious.

He started back towards the house, the uneasy feeling he’d successfully ignored for several minutes returning tenfold. Something felt not right, like the entire world had been shifted slightly to the left. It took too long for Stiles to catch on, he was already at the kitchen door again, leading to the front hall, the stairs, when he figured it out.

Despite the grime and dust all over everything, his feet left no footprints. There wasn’t a single shred of evidence that he’d ever entered the house.

“I should go,” Stiles muttered to himself, eyeing the front door, still open a few inches, beckoning him to safety– or at least somewhere slightly less frightening, with someone who at least knew what the threats out there were. Instead he turned his back on the door, and set foot on the stairs.

You always choose the stupid thing, don’t you?

Each stair creaked as he climbed, movements cautious, ready to react at the slightest sound or flickering shadow; to fight, to run, he didn’t know. He reached the top of the stairs and discovered all the doors were closed, it was more unsettling than it had any right to be. Even from the landing, he could see the faint glow leaking out from underneath a door down the hall to his left. He moved closer, each step more of a soft touch, and slide against the hardwood so that in the haunting silence of this version of the preserve, he was less likely to be heard. When he reached the doorknob, he hesitated.

What if some part of Peter is right behind this door?

He listened for several seconds, the only sound coming from his own frantically beating heart.

Get it together.

He turned the knob slowly, and just as he felt the latch release, he dropped his hand. The door swung open slowly, revealing the source of the glow.

The room was decently large for a bedroom, with high ceilings, but Stiles couldn’t take in any more detail than the general size and shape and that it was a bedroom before his eyes settled on the bizarre and terrifying scene in front of him, lie something out of some sort of horror or sci-fi movie. His heart leapt into his throat, choking the air from his lungs.

The wood floor was buckling and rotting in places, and pushing its way up through the planks, cloaking almost the entire floor, were calf height and taller stalks of a plant with vibrant violet-blue, bell shaped flowers, softly glowing, all over the room. They grew up the sides of walls and furniture including the bed, where someone was lying, tangled up in the plants that had climbed the bed and now held this person like the straps of a straightjacket. Stiles recognized the furrowed brow, and slightly freckled skin, the closed eyes and lax mouth, but usually when Stiles saw him, he was dressed in a hospital issue gown, not Sheriff’s browns.

“Dad!” he shot across the room, trampling plants underfoot along the way, skidding almost to his knees on the warped floor. He was just about to reach down and grab his father’s shoulders and
shake, but successfully stopped the impulse, willing himself to just look before he could do any damage. He pressed one clammy palm against his Dad’s forehead, the slight grooves from years of frowning and laughing tickling his fingertips. His skin was too cool, Stiles realized with a lurching sensation in his stomach, so, swallowing hard, and with shaking hands, he lowered the tips of two fingers to his father’s jugular and felt for his pulse. He let out a sob of relief to feel the dull thud there, steadily pumping, albeit faintly under his skin, and dropped his head to the mattress beside his dad, heedless of the plants growing over the mattress.

He let the faintly herbal smell invade his nostrils for several seconds as he tried to formulate a plan, brain feeling underwater-- which he supposed, was technically true. He had to get his dad out of here, but then what? His mental faculties kind of stopped there. What was he going to do? Drag is his father’s unconscious body behind him, further and further into the darkness of the not-preserve? Then what would happen when Peter and Lydia pulled him out of here? The only solution was to somehow wake his father up and free him.

Stiles’ hands wrapped around the thick, gnarled roots in front of him, the ones constricting his dad’s subconscious form in place, banding over his chest and arms and started to pull, but the roots were thicker than his fingers, mature and tough and too difficult to pry off, even with both hands. He growled in frustration, dropping his hands to run them through his hair. There was no amount of will that was going to give him the strength to be able to free his dad on his own. He needed something sharp. And just as he was about to stand and head for the kitchen to see what he could find, he was hit with a wave of dizziness and nausea strong enough to bring him to his knees, retching and gagging, nails clawing at the uneven floor boards and the overwhelming amount vegetation pushing between them. Was it just him, or was it growing?

He closed his eyes, breathing deeply through his nose, inhaling more of the herbal smell, trying to quell his nausea and slow the spinning sensation that made him feel like he was on some hellish version of the Gravitron at the county fair. When he finally felt like he could move again, he let his eyes flutter open, and that was when he caught sight of it; spearing through the bottom of the bed, straight through the mattress, and growing into the back of his dad’s neck, was one of those purple, blue plants. His eyes frantically traced the path of the plant from the back of his father’s neck, where it disappeared into the mattress and re-emerged through the bedframe before twisting backwards and disappearing into the wall, plaster crumbling and cracking where it had been speared through. Stiles quickly sat back on his heels.

“No way…” he uttered, scrambling on hands and knees towards the window he’d been looking up at from the sunroom one floor below.

The manzanita tree wasn’t a manzanita tree at all.

Now that he had a higher vantage point, Stiles could see the large system of roots tangling around the glass room below, and the purple-blue flowers growing over them. And before he could truly appreciate how well and truly fucked the entire situation was, a low, rumbling tremor vibrated through the floor. A growl.

Stiles turned sharply, expecting to see a perfect carbon copy of Peter’s werewolf form. Instead, what he was confronted with was sent a fission of fear racing down Stiles’ spine; Framed in the doorway, was a full-fledged wolf, dark grey just like the colour of Peter’s coat in his shifted form, but nothing resembling having even close to a shred of humanity. The wolf was at least twice the size of any wolf Stiles had ever seen– he imagined closer to the size of a bear. Its snarls rumbled the room, picture frames on the walls and dresser quaking at the low level vibration. But Stiles wasn’t focused on that– he was focused on the line of razor sharp teeth that looked capable of ripping him in half, never mind the claws he’d seen in action before. But what made it all the more disturbing was the
whirling, shadowy presence that seemed to surround the wolf, hovering around it like a closely contained hurricane.

Stiles fell back on his hands, back slamming into the wall just under the window, heart pounding hard enough he thought it might just burst forth from his chest to land at the wolf’s feet in a bloody, twitching mass. Yet the wolf didn’t move, just stood in the doorway, snarling and lunging. And Stiles’ pulse slowed its pounding just enough for him to hear someone yelling his name.

He craned his neck uncomfortably in an attempt to keep at least one eye on the wolf, and also look out the window, but eventually caved and had to turn around completely. Outside, Jack stood on the forest floor beside the glass sunroom, face red as he yelled up at the window, waving and ranting like a mad man. Stiles couldn’t make out what he was saying, voice muffled through the glass. If it was a warning, he was already too fucking late anyway.

Distantly, Stiles wondered if Lydia was screaming yet– or if Peter was mistaken, that Lydia couldn’t possibly detect what was going on in this world. He couldn’t understand why he wasn’t already a bloody, torn apart mess of human remains, why the wolf hadn’t leapt across the threshold to tear him limb from limb for being in its territory. The only answer he could come up with was that this wolf was clearly at least a part of Peter, because it seemed to relish the mere sight of Stiles quaking on the broken, weedy floor, and the idea of drawing out Stiles’ terror and uncertainty a little while longer.

A cracking, shifting sound broke Stiles from his thoughts, and he twisted to see Jack wrenching open the window behind him, years of old paint and grime groaning as they were displaced in favor of letting the tepid air in. It dawned on him just as Jack shouted inside; “Stiles! We have to run!”

The purple flower had looked familiar; it just looked a lot different when it wasn’t shrivelled and dried in a canister at Deaton’s office, labeled Wolfsbane.

Jack all but pulled Stiles through the window by the back of his shirt, and for a few seconds, he felt the stomach dropping weightlessness of not knowing where the ground was below him (if it was below him) before he was on his back, the sandpapery surface of shingles scratching against the skin of his lower back and palms of his hands as Jack loomed over him.

“Don’t just lie there, let’s go!” the other boy shouted, scrambling towards the edge of the roof. But Stiles was frozen in place. He couldn’t just leave– and yet he couldn’t make his mouth work to tell Jack that, instead he gaped like a fish out of water as Jack dragged him to the edge of the roof, until he got his feet under him, realizing if he didn’t, he was going to end up free falling an entire story, because Jack was clearly out of his wits with fear.

Stiles managed to make his flailing legs actually work and struggled out of Jack’s hold enough to take control of his own body. He managed to slither backwards and dangle off the roof and control his fall enough to land on his feet from the bone jarring height.

“That thing is going to come out here if we don’t get the fuck off its territory right now,” Jack declared from where he had landed, a few feet away, bent with his hands on his knees, huffing in air.

“Yeah, well I don’t know if you noticed, but there was a person lying in that bed, completely vulnerable to whatever the fuck that thing is, and that person was my dad,” Stiles half shouted, half hissed. At that, Jack stood up straight, looked back up to the window and took a deep breath.

“The lost man… that’s your dad?” Jack asked, his voice several decibels lower than before. His face recovered it’s shocked expression enough to frown. “Look, I don’t know if you really saw that
thing, but there is a reason nobody in their right mind– human or otherwise– comes anywhere near here. Now is not the time to try and be a hero–”

“Wrong. Right now is exactly the time,” Stiles growled, starting back towards the house before Jack’s hand snapped out towards him, grabbing him by the front of the shirt.

“Look, I’m sorry about your dad,” Jack acquiesced, “but he has been here for a long time– been in there for a long time,” the teenager removed his hand from where it had been fisted in Stiles’ shirt to gesture at the house. “If that thing could get to him, it would have figured out a way to do it by now.”

Stiles paused. There was a reason those purple-blue flowers growing all over everything were called wolfsbane. And with the suddenness of a punch to the gut, Stiles remembered Laura.

“So what about wolfsbane? Is it actually poisonous to werewolves, or is that another myth?”

“It depends on the kind of wolfsbane it is. Some species will just give us a rash, like humans get poison ivy. Others though, can cause respiratory distress if we breathe in their spores, or parts of them or make us violently ill if we ingest them. It can make us hallucinate too, just like aconite poisoning does in humans. And the deadliest varieties can kill us in minutes if they get into our bloodstream. Which is why hunters often infuse their bullets and blades with wolfsbane.”

“Stiles, we have to go,” Jack declared empathetically. “We can find back up, come back if we have to– but we have to go now.”

Stiles wanted to stay strong, to insist that he wasn’t going anywhere, instead, he took one last glance back at the house as Jack’s hand closed around his wrist and hauled him off towards the other side of the clearing with surprising strength for a gangly teenager.

They ran; a weaving, panicked affair, tripping over tree roots and large rocks jutting out of the ground, stumbling up and down embankments, branches thwacking at their limbs as they ducked and wove until finally Stiles felt his knees buckle out from under him, his lungs burning from a lack of oxygen.

It took Jack several paces before he appeared to realize that Stiles was no longer at his heels, and his pace slowed to a jog before he came to a stop a few yards ahead. For almost a minute, neither boy moved and the silence was filled with gasping breaths almost enough to block out the sound of the ever-present chorus of whispers.

“I think,” Jack huffed, started again. “I think we got away.” Stiles nodded, still roughly inhaling, wincing with each searing drag of air into his lungs. Hearing nothing approaching he let himself fold to the ground and flop backwards, staring up at the dark sky and landscape of floating particles that hung in the air. He was tired and wondered how much time had actually passed– it seemed such a slippery thing now.

What if he didn’t find the nematon? What would Peter do to him?

“Stiles?”
Stiles hummed at the sound of Jack softly calling his name.

“Why are you really here?”

It wasn’t accusatory or aggressive, in fact, the other teen almost sounded *scared* of what Stiles’ answer was going to be. Stiles couldn’t say he blamed him, all things considered.

“Did you come here to find your dad?”

Stiles sat up slowly, not wanting to spook his only ally. This time he didn’t lie or speak in half truths.

“No, surprisingly enough,” he replied roughly, rubbing the sweat from his face. In the tepid air, it felt like he’d accomplished very little. He still felt feverish, chilled and gross. “I got sent here. To look for something.”

“So what are you looking for?”

“That’s the thing,” Stiles replied. “I’ll kind of, know it when I see it?”

“Well,” Jack gaped at Stiles expectantly. “What is it?”

Stiles hesitated. For some reason, it still felt like he was sharing something *personal*, taboo even by uttering the words. He would have had a hard enough time explaining this to Scott, would have with Lydia had Peter not basically done it for him, and he’d known and trusted both of them for years.

But telling Jack what he was looking for– maybe even getting his help– was *infinitely* less terrifying than failing because he had no doubt that Peter had some sort of back-up plan, and considering *this* was considered plan a, he didn’t even want to think about what plan b could possibly entail.

“It’s called the nematon,” he replied, not bothering to move, his limbs still aching, still burning. “It’s supposed to be some giant, powerful tree or something– someone back in,” he waved his hand in the air beside his head, “well, you know, the ‘real’ world, wants me to find it.”

“Badly enough that they *drowned you*,” Jack replied, voice flat. Stiles nodded and the other boy let out a low whistle, which floated off in the heavy air, almost like an echo.

“Yeah,” Stiles muttered. It sounded even more like something out of a horror movie coming out of somebody else’s mouth.

“So you find it here, then what?” Jack replied skeptically. “They can’t come back here with you– that isn’t how this place works.”

“Apparently if I find it here, I don’t have to worry about coming back here, I’ll be able to find it in the real world,” Stiles replied, finally sighing, getting sick of the earth’s dampness sinking into his skin and pulling himself to his feet. Jack snorted.

“You speak as if *this* isn’t real.”

Stiles didn’t need the reminder that this place *was* all too real. Between Deaton’s dire warnings before Peter had taken him by force, the way he got to this place in the first place, and seeing his father’s trapped and helpless body, he knew the stakes were high, knew there were very real consequences out in the ‘real’ world to what he did here.

“I know it is,” Stiles retorted, tone just shy of snapping at the other boy, brushing at the backs of his thighs, trying to sweep away the grimy layer of dirt and whatever else was stuck to him.
“I guess that’s why you have Colonel Sanders secret blend of eleven herbs and spices around your neck?”

Stiles looked up to see Jack wearing a wry smile, and stilled in his movements. He’d hoped that the satchel had gone pretty much unnoticed, though he didn’t understand why the other boy noticing it caused a liquid, cool sensation to race down his spine and pool at the small of his back. He chuckled uneasily, playing at nonchalance as he plucked at the cord that hung around his neck so that the sachet hovered a few inches in front of his sternum, suspended in midair.

“What this?” He let the sachet drop against his chest, like it was nothing, like it wasn’t the single thing he had to protect himself in this place. “Yeah, I guess– wasn’t my idea or anything.”

Jack’s expression shifted almost imperceptibly. Almost.

“Whoever sent you here must have wanted you back if they sent you with protection,” Jack continued as he ambled another few steps closer, voice lower and smoother than Stiles had ever heard it. And yeah, there was definitely a justifiable reason for Stiles’ nervous system to kick into overdrive, especially since suddenly, the other boy seemed a little too close.

Stiles couldn’t help but think of Lydia at that moment, somewhere out there, helping Peter hold him under icy water. And for once, he really hoped that Peter’s plan was going to work.

“He does want me back,” Stiles replied, voice growing harder, as if that could combat the slight twitch in his legs that he supposed was his flight instinct; enough time with Peter, and he’d learned to suppress it. Go figure.

A low chuckle reverberated through the air, like it was all around Stiles, instead of coming out of the young man in front of him.

“Oh I’m sure he does.” Jack’s posture had changed, the tension from their brush with death was gone, all humanity; the panting for breath, the sweat on his skin, had all fallen away, and now he stood, posture too relaxed. “Does he know about you? Know what you are?”

Stiles’ jaw ticked as he mulled over his answer– chiefly, finding one that wouldn’t kill him.

“Yeah, he does,” he finally bit out. “And trust me when I say, he is one nasty piece of work.”

At that, the other boy barked out a laugh, bending double for a few seconds before standing straight again, eyes glistening with tears of laughter.

“And yet he was stupid enough to send you here alone, with a bundle of herbs as your only protection.”

Stiles decided that yep, it was time to run now, hopefully put enough distance between himself and whatever Jack actually was and hope to hell or whatever afterlife there was, that Lydia let out the best banshee cry she’d ever made before it was too late. He casually started to side step, as he spoke.

“Look, if I don’t come back in one piece, trust me when I say, he is not the kind you want to trifle with. He’ll rip you clean in half, I’ve seen him to do it.” Stiles hoped the last part of his diatribe came out as a hiss, the slight utter of a threat, as supposed to the desperate bargaining that it was.

Jack tilted his head, considering, appraising and Stiles knew nothing good could come of that. For a few heart-stopping seconds, his feet sank into the earth before the dirt was solid once again and he was able to scramble towards the thicket of trees opposite where they had fled from the wolf. He didn’t dare chance looking back to see if he was being followed, he couldn’t afford to be slowed
Please Lydia, please Lydia, please.

Branches scraped against his arms and legs, slapped at his face, his feet stumbled and slid over rocks and tree roots, and his lungs started to burn once again from exerting himself too soon. Ahead he could see a break in the trees once more. He hesitated– had he run in the opposite direction by accident, trapped himself between two equally terrifying opponents.

The few seconds of distraction was all that was needed for his foe to catch up, and suddenly Stiles’ face was in the dirt. He coughed and sputtered, the air knocked out of his lungs again. He could feel the dirt and debris in his mouth and lungs, but couldn’t take in any air. Black spots sparkled in his vision, as he was roughly flipped onto his back and met with the horrifying mask that had to be Jack’s real face as the creature clambered over Stiles, kneeling over him.

“Do you really think he could get here before I rip you open and devour all those shiny bits inside of you, Spark?”

Jack’s voice was all around them, and Stiles found himself focusing less on his words, and more on the fully blackened pupils, the rows and rows of razor sharp, pointed white teeth, way too many teeth between lips stretched too thin around them.

He gasped only when the other boy– thing– stood and stepped over him, and then he was lurching backwards, one iron fist gripping him by his t-shirt and hoodie, dragging him across the earth. The trees and rocks he’d just passed kaleidoscoped away from him as he struggled to breathe, legs bouncing uselessly over the ground in front of him.

“It’s funny you know. All this time you trying to hide what you’re looking for from me, and all this time I’ve been leading you right too it anyway,” the creature began conversationally, as he moved towards his target, not even bothering to look backwards. “Do you suppose the rumors are true? That the real magic happens when I get you to your special little tree? Rumor has it, it’s kind of like placing you on your charger. When you’re out of juice all I have to do is bring you back here and fill you up again. Like an all you can eat buffet. Are those still a thing?”

Lack of oxygen be damned, Stiles started to struggle, legs kicking, feebly at first before his heels dug into the earth and he found enough leverage against the astonishing strength of his adversary to arch his back off the ground and twist around, still breathless, vision starting to darken at the edges from lack of oxygen. He dug his hands into the earth, knuckles scraping against rocks and tree roots as the-being-formerly-known-as-Jack dragged him forward.

“Over and over again, I’ll be able to empty you out, and it will fill you back up for me. And nothing here will make me run from it again. Everything will run from me now.”

Finally Stiles gulped in a breath of air, but it didn’t bring near the relief he’d hoped it would, instead his single breath scraped down his throat as though he’d tried to swallow a jagged rock, making his eyes water.

When he blinked at the world unfolding in front of him, he felt like he was suffocating all over again. It was like one of those movie moments, where the camera locks in on a subject, and in a single frame, smoothly glides towards it– the captive audience unable to move away from the thing they don’t want to see. Through a break in the thicket of trees, was the largest tree Stiles had ever laid eyes on– even growing up surrounded by redwoods. He was far enough away that Stiles could truly get a sense of the enormity of it; the way it dwarfed the redwoods surrounding it, making the manzanitas look like mere weeds. The trunk couldn’t be even be seen in its entirety, and even from
the distance he was at, Stiles could see the gnarled roots clawing into the earth, extending several yards away from the tree like the legs of a spider, the weathered, rippling bark of the trunk, crevices so deep that he bet up close, he could lose a hand between them. It was unlike anything he’d ever seen in Beacon Hills’ preserve. He was sure nothing this big could exist in the real world undetected– the thing would have been visible for miles. But more than just that, he could feel the strength of it in the air, like he was looking at the oldest thing in the world.

A low, droning sound, almost like the first haunting call of an air raid siren sounded, as though coming from far away, gradually growing louder as the seconds ticked by. The heavy feeling this entire world seemed to have intensified, and it felt like something heavy was forcing Stiles down only to drag him onward, a relentless, organic force like the strongest magnet, and the closer he got, the more crushing and suffocating the sensation got. Every part of his body was screaming in warning, his nerves crackling with the raw intensity and unpredictable energy of an electrical storm. This wasn’t at all like Deaton or Peter had alluded to when it came to him having a connection with the nematon– something was very wrong.

He collapsed forward, his hands digging into the ground no match for the sheer strength of Jack– whatever he was– pulling him forward, and for what seemed to drag on for an eternity, he gasped and sputtered as dirt and dried leaves mashed against his face before he was thrown forward, towards the base of the tree where the roots buckled and twisted out of the earth, like arthritic, crippled hands, clinging to the dirt and rocks below. He groaned at the bruising sensation that accompanied landing on such an uneven surface with such force. For several seconds he just closed his eyes bit his lips.

The droning sound was growing louder, higher in pitch and Stiles wanted to cover his ears against the grating sound that made his chest ache. Or was that the proximity to the nematon? He fought against the weight that seemed to be pressing him into the earth. It had never been so hard to just sit up in his entire life, but he did so, prying his eyes open if only to see his last seconds on this earth.

From this angle, Jack looked ten feet tall. Hands hanging by his sides, he had grown nails so long that they extended to almost his knees, curling slightly inward. Even with the mouth full of too many teeth, Stiles could tell he was smiling.

“They say it tastes like bright, whatever that means,” the monster said conversationally, completely heedless of the intense wall of sound surrounding them. He shrugged, lifting a hand, pausing. “I wonder how long it takes for you to fill up again?”

And Stiles really couldn’t parse what was more terrifying; everything ending here, never seeing his dad or Scott, or Lydia or Derek again, doomed to either die, or if Jack was right, be continuously feasted upon for all of eternity, or facing whatever Peter had planned next. He wanted to stand up and fight, willed whatever energy was in that giant tree to do something useful in his defense but he felt plastered in place, sonically assaulted into submission by the droning sound that had grown so loud and high pitched that Stiles felt like his head was going to explode. He raised his arms, hands bunched into fists, like something inside of him was wound too tight, and shielded his ears against the wall of sound. Maybe it wouldn’t be the creature in front of him that would kill him. Maybe it would be his brain matter dissolving and trickling out of his ears…

Out of barely open eyes, he watched Jack raise one hand of claws and wriggle them experimentally before he smiled, mouth too wide, and lunged. Stiles was pretty sure he let out a strangled noise, maybe a scream, but any sound that came out was swallowed up by the nerve-shattering crescendo of noise surrounding him.

Then abruptly, there was silence. Less than that, there was nothing at all.
Chapter specific: I don’t know a whole bunch about California interrogation regulations etc. but I figure if canon Teen Wolf can completely disregard reality in terms of the medical profession etc. I can fudge a few details about the law in the hopes I get them halfway right. Final disclaimer; Suspend your disbelief, its fiction.

On a personal note: This update has been a long time coming and more delayed than any other and I know it. I want to assure you all that not only am I committed to finishing this work (and omg dare I say, I’ve contemplated a sequel), even if it takes me awhile between updates, but I plan to write more inside this fandom (so many ideas!).

Fandom writers sometimes have crazy lives outside of the world of Ao3 and tumblr (where I’ve been conspicuously absent I know), but sometimes we have a really good excuse for not updating. And I have to say, ya’ll have been the most patient readers on the planet so I thought I owed it to you to explain my really good excuse: I adopted a baby. So yeah, #momlife has me a little busy and I’ve been slightly distracted from the world of Stiles and Derek smut. It’s taken the better part of the past few months for me to figure out just what the hell it is I’m doing and I’m not stupid enough to say I’ve got it all figured out now, but I’ve got it figured out enough that I’m hoping to be less scarce around these parts.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Stiles’ skull felt like it was going to explode. His chest hurt like someone had dropped an anvil on it, Wile E Coyote style and all he wanted to do was relieve some of the pressure. He coughed, sputtered and a flood of warm liquid flooded over his chin and neck, threatening to rob him of the miniscule breath he’d managed to take. Then there were hands, too many hands touching him, twisting him so that the water no longer flooded back down his throat or over his chin, and instead gushed lazily out of the side of his mouth like the faulty water fountain outside the Spanish classroom at BHHS. Through murky, blurry vision, the dark tiles of the bathroom floor started to come into focus, as did the hands on Stiles’ arm, holding him steady on his side, and the cradling his head; sturdy knuckles with the slightest smattering of hair, long fingers with blunt but clean nails.

When he tried to move out of Peter’s grasp, he realized his arms and legs felt like they were made of lead and that prickling pins and needles feeling one gets when they sit too long. He coughed instead, more water splattering onto the tile in front of him, black spots dotting his vision.

“Stiles?!” Lydia’s hoarse and distant voice echoed from somewhere behind him. It sounded… wrong. Like something was broken in her.

“Lydia, be a dear and pull back the quilt on the bed in the other room,” Peter ordered calmly. “We need to get him warmed up again.”

It took several more seconds for Stiles to reorient himself, and it was only when he caught a flutter of movement out of the corner of his eye, that he realized he was on the floor in front of the bathtub, lying on the tile, watching Lydia drift into the hallway. He flopped back against the floor slowly, realizing, belatedly, that Peter had guided his slow roll onto his back. He blinked against the too
bright light streaming in the windows between the cloaking coverage of the manzanitas outside, bouncing off the pristine white of the tub, which, by the sounds of the ice clinking around inside of it, had yet to be drained.

He didn’t feel cold. In fact, he felt warm, not just warm– hot. Like he was on fire. His eyes opened to see Peter hovering over him, stripping off his own shirt.

“No,” he forced out weakly. His throat burned as he spoke, that jagged rock he felt like he’d swallowed earlier working its way back up. His fingers and toes were positively on fire, and just about the only things he could move and it was agony to do so. His skin was prickling, like somebody was stoking the embers of a furnace inside of him, and that feeling slowly ramped up until he felt like he was inches from the blue hot flame of a blow torch, directed over his entire body. If he’d been able to move, he probably would have hauled himself right back over the edge of the tub and into the water again, but as it was, his torso still felt like someone was sitting on it, his limbs weighed down by invisible cinderblocks.

He watched as Peter stood and stripped out of his pants, tossing them overhand towards the bathroom vanity. Somewhere in the back of his mind, was a quip floating around about having a strange somnophilia or invalid kink, but that was all mixed in with thoughts about how he was not shivering, and that being a very, very bad sign. And his frantic efforts to scramble away when Peter moved closer resulting in only in the most minor twitching in his arms and legs? Yeah, also a bad sign.

The werewolf bent down to effortlessly pluck him from the floor and Stiles did his level best to become the most awkward, obnoxious load to try and carry. He squirmed and twisted as much as he could, but really only ended up flopping around like a dead fish in Peter’s arms for a few seconds, before the other man roughly adjusted his grip so that Stiles was being carried over his shoulder instead of bridal style, the change in angle nauseating as all the blood rushed to Stiles’ head. His vision smeared and he blinked hard, fighting back the urge to vomit. Just as he felt like he might actually pass out, he sailed through the air to land with a soft bounce against the mattress of the bedroom.

Lydia was still in the room, and she stumbled back in surprise, as Stiles scrambled to get out of the bed and failed miserably, his skin screaming as the cotton of the sheets scraped across it as though it were sandpaper on sunburnt skin. When Peter slipped into the bed beside him, Stiles slammed his eyes shut, cringing away. Was Peter really so sick that he’d do this right in front of his friend? Why wasn’t Lydia doing anything? His head hurt, blood pounding against his temples. He couldn’t breathe.

“Lydia? Like we discussed,” Peter was saying mildly, and Stiles tried to reel around to face him, with the valiant hope of bloody retribution, but the resigned expectation that the best he would be able to do was beg. To his surprise, rather than forcing his face into the mattress, Peter seemed to help him turn around to face him, reigning in his flailing limbs and arranging him until they were chest to chest. That was when he passed out.

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Derek could feel the cool metal surface of the table leaching warmth from his forearms where he sat with them crossed on the table in front of him. He heard the footsteps in the hall a few seconds before the door opened and Smithson entered first. Derek found himself gritting his teeth because this would be an exercise in self-control. As a paramedic, he was pretty used to working alongside other first responders, and he’d definitely dealt with his fair share of assholes, but his usual strategy of ‘stay
out of my way, and I’ll stay out of yours’ wasn’t going to work here. So it was a relief when the
other officer following, closing the door behind him.

Derek remained silent, eyes tracking both men’s movement towards the table. Despite there being
two chairs at the table, only Smithson sat down. Darmouth ambled towards the arrangement but
stopped short, leaning against the wall across from the table, his clear dislike for his partner apparent
in his desire to keep his distance. Interesting.

“Before we begin, California law requires that I disclose to you that this interview is being recorded.
Pursuant to your rights, you may invoke your right to silence or your right to an attorney at any time.
Do you understand?” Smithson began, all business for the camera. Park of Derek really wanted to
mess with this asshole on principle, but he was old enough to know better.

“Yes,” he replied even.

“Please state your name and date of birth for the record.”

“Derek James Hale, November 11th, 1988.”

He’d really hoped that the older cop would have been the one to take the lead, but at the same time,
the younger was more likely to mess up his line of questioning. He knew what he should do in any
other circumstance; make the first, and last word out of his mouth; ‘lawyer’, but he also knew this
was one of Peter’s games and that lawyering up too soon would mean dire consequences for Stiles.

“What made you drive across the country to Beacon Hills?”

He glanced up from his hands to see the young officer studying him, one brow just slightly
raised incredulously above grey eyes. His jaw twitched almost imperceptibly.

“I uh, I was at home,” Derek replied.

“In New York?”

“Yes,” Derek replied stiffly. Just because he was in a position of having to answer questions, didn’t
mean he was going to incriminate himself or make the process easy.

“And what made you drive across the country to Beacon Hills?”
“My sister called me and left a message saying something was urgent.”

“And your solution was to drive across the country?” Smithson replied incredulously. He let his back thump against the back of his chair dramatically, an unhindered sneer crossing his features before Darmouth exaggeratedly cleared his throat. The older man frowned at his partner’s interrogation tactics, yet stared steadfastly ahead at Derek, clearly expecting an answer. Derek glared back, waiting until just before the detective opened his mouth to rephrase his question.

“When my sister didn’t answer her phone, or return any voicemails and her voicemail filled up, yeah, my solution was to try and find out what happened to her.”

“So you drove from New York to California?” the officer repeated. “When did you leave?”

“Three days after she left her voicemail.” Derek felt a pang of regret. It wasn’t like leaving any earlier could have prevented a thing, but he still felt like he could have done something.

“And in those three days it didn’t occur to you to file a missing persons report? Or in the entire month since her apparent disappearance?”

And there it was, the stupid mistake Derek had known he had made from the very beginning– one that he had no doubt that Peter had known all about when he had orchestrated all of this. But Derek had known filing a missing person’s report would have done no good. He’d felt the loss, a faint ache from so far away, but one that grew the closer and closer he’d drawn to California. Yet he couldn’t very well answer; ‘Because I knew she was already dead’.

“No,” he replied instead, watching with satisfaction as the younger officer sat up straighter, like a snake rearing back to strike. Behind him, the older officer tilted his head in interest.

“And why would that be?”

Instead of answering with the truth, Derek looked up from where he’d glanced down at his hands and locked eyes with the younger officer, raised an eyebrow and spoke a single directive; “Lawyer.”

When Stiles came too, it was to a sweet, floral, smell with an undercurrent of dust. His brain still felt foggy and heavy, but the feeling of having a blow torch aimed at his skin had lessened greatly. He blinked and shifted, and something tickled across his cheek for a few fleeting seconds before rough fingertips brushed it away.

His eyes shot open to land on a sprinkling of hair across pectoral muscles and he bolted upright, scrambling to sit up so quickly that he just about knocked Lydia from the mattress where she’d been tucked in close behind him, a few strands of her hair falling into his face. She didn’t stir, and before Stiles even had a moment to panic about why, Peter seized his wrist.

“Good, you’re up and in fine form again,” he declared calmly.

“No thanks to you,” Stiles grumbled, trying, and failing, to free himself from the other man’s grasp. Somehow the words had much less of an effect when they practically vibrated out through a shiver. Despite not being near as cold as being in the tub, Stiles could still feel a bone-deep chill radiating from inside of him.

“Well not entirely thanks to me, Lydia helped,” Peter retorted, deliberately skirting around the point. Stiles yanked at Peter’s grip yet again.
“What did you do to her?” Stiles knew there was no point in hiding the hint of panic from his voice, so he let the emotion fray his words, hoping for some sort of mercy.

“I didn’t do anything to Lydia,” Peter defended calmly. “It’s been awhile since she’s used her abilities, I would assume she needs to recharge—sleep it off if you will.”

“You assume?” Stiles hissed, attempting to rip his arm from Peter’s grasp once more.

“Well, it took me some time to adjust once I’d regained my strength…”

Stiles gave up on any hope of Peter releasing him from his grasp and instead twisted his body towards Lydia, bones in his wrist creaking, and ribs protesting as he twisted his torso with his arm held captive and crossed over his chest. At first glance, Lydia looked like she was sleeping peacefully, her red hair fanned out around her like a fiery halo. Until Stiles studied her longer; noticed the fluttering of her eyelashes, and her lips rapidly, but softly whispering ceaselessly—or it would have been a whisper if any detectable sound was coming out. It was like something out of a horror movie, something with omens of horrible things to come. And his friend being an apparent harbinger of death didn’t help the situation either. But before he could strain closer, Peter was dragging him across the mattress, and his only choice was to either dig his heels in, and run the very real risk of Peter breaking his arm, or just let himself be moved.

He slid across the mattress, skin burning on the cotton sheets as Peter dragged him until he toppled backwards, legs kicking out and just barely nudging Lydia’s thigh—she didn’t move. Once Stiles was pulled flush against the other man’s chest, he realized how cold he still felt.

“You saw it, didn’t you?” Heated breath whispered into his ear.

Stiles contemplated lying, but he knew Peter would be able to tell, and that his next step would likely be to go digging around in Stiles’ brain to find the memories for himself.

“Yes,” he begrudgingly admitted. His memory drifted to the sounds of ceaseless whispers, and big black wolves, and his dad, trapped in the old Hale house. Peter released his arms and stepped back, walking wordlessly out of the room, leaving Stiles temporarily alone with Lydia. Not one to miss an opportunity, he moved right back to the bed, bending over the place his ear right next to Lydia’s lips, straining to hear what she was uttering. He could hear Peter in the bathroom, and ground his teeth against the sound of the tub draining, hindering his ability to hear a sound he wasn’t even sure he hadn’t imagined. Less than a minute later, a soft, cool thump hit him in the side.

“Get dressed,” came the order from the doorway, “we’re going out.”

“What?” Stiles snapped. Aside from scooping his clothing into his lap, he didn’t make a move to get dressed and instead gestured at Lydia. “We can’t just leave her here.” Images of her rotting away in the same place for days or weeks filled Stiles brain so vividly it made him want to vomit.

Peter, now fully clothed, huffed out a breath, crossed the room and lifted one slim, pale wrist in his hand, fingers pressed over the pulse point there.

“She’s perfectly fine,” he dismissed, voice taking on a clipped tone. “She’ll wake up in a few hours, likely with a headache, and—”

“And then what?” Stiles hissed. “We’re in the middle of nowhere, it’s not like she can just walk back to town. It could be days before anyone finds her.”

Peter raised an eyebrow.
“Please Stiles, you and I both know that the Argents have been taking very good care of Lydia. She and Alison even seem to have struck up a lovely friendship. I’m willing to bet they’ve already become aware that she’s missing. Now Get. Dressed.”

Stiles was beginning to think that pathetic fallacy was a real, natural phenomena instead of just a literary device. He squinted up at the stark, grey sky, illuminating everything in a dull grey glow. The wind had picked up, racing through the trees, making their usual soft whisper a more consistent drone of natural white noise. Before Peter, this had been one of Stiles’ favorite times to be in the preserve. He could tarp down his Jeep, and fall asleep to the wind and the first droplets of rain– if he could keep his eyes open that long. But today none of that comfort existed. Instead he stood in front of the small cottage, barefoot on the earth, tremors vibrating through his body, his entire nervous system alight with impending danger.

“If you found the nematon there, you can find it here,” Peter purred from behind him. “Close your eyes and concentrate.”

Stiles took a deep, rattling breath and stared down at the earth.

“I hope you know this could mean we wander the preserve for hours without any progress,” Stiles retorted. “Nothing here looks familiar to me.”

“Don’t worry,” Peter replied, menacingly calm, raising one hand so that it was in Stiles’ field of vision, to slowly unsheathe his claws. “If you need a little help, I’m sure I can be of assistance.”

Stiles shook his head, unable to move away without risking impaling himself on Peter’s claws– and he’d seen what those could do.

“Just… can you back off?” he managed to choke out. His brain felt too unfocused, pulled in too many directions to concentrate properly. He couldn’t stop thinking about Lydia, passed out inside the cottage; what would happen when she woke up? What if she didn’t wake up? What if she was in one of those fugue states again? Then there was Derek, sitting in a police station, with God knows what kind of evidence against him, totally unable to do anything to help Stiles– at least not until he got his one phone call. Scott and Deaton wouldn’t be able to anything until the Argents realized Lydia was gone and contacted them. Then thoughts drifted to his dad, lying in a hospital bed, no agency at all in the world. If Stiles couldn’t pull it together, he was never going to see him again.

He took a shuddering breath in and closed his eyes, willing himself to conjure up the image of one of the many things he never wanted to see again; his dad imprisoned on an old bed, surrounded by the eerie, phosphorescent glow of purple-blue flowers. Like a child’s flip book, snapping to the last page too quickly, his mind’s eye brought him back to that room, each detail vividly sharp; the wrinkles on his dad’s brow, the freckles and laugh lines, the eerie floating particles in the air, the worn wooden planks of the heaving floor, the bedroom door ajar, and glowing eyes staring back at him–

Stiles’ eyes snapped open.

“We have to go to the house,” he wheezed, chest tight with dread. “Your house… it existed in Bardo or whatever you call it– or some version of it did. I need to start there to figure out where I’m going.”

He managed to take a few, faltered steps forward before he realized he had no idea where he was going, whether the cabin and the house were anywhere close to near enough to each other to walk, or if one was halfway across the preserve from the other. When he didn’t detect any movement from behind him to indicate that Peter was following, he turned slowly, heels crunching over the detritus
of dried leaves and dirt where he stood, a yard or two away, an arm’s length away from the Jeep’s passenger door. And the way Peter was looking at him…

“We’re not going to the house.”

Stiles dug his fingernails into the palms of his hands in frustration, opening his mouth to snap out a protest, but Peter kept talking.

“Aside from the fact that you can bet that is the first place the Argents will go looking, like the sophomoric sheeps in wolves clothing that they are, you were out for over an hour.”

The werewolf was moving closer, closing the space between them quickly and Stiles was backing up, watching as the other man appeared to stay calm, hands at his sides… except for the claws emerging from his fingertips.

“We don’t have time to go gallivanting around the preserve on a whim… so let me help.”

It was a split second decision– to run– and a stupid one at that. And Stiles knew it, but he couldn’t stomp down on the impulse hard enough not to. He turned tail and made a beeline for the trees, clueless as to whether or not he was headed in the right direction. He hit the earth several yards from the Jeep and the cabin, a combination of his own uncoordinated steps in bare feet over uneven ground, and Peter slamming into him, a dark burble of cold laughter bursting hot into his ear.

“Concentrate Stiles,” Peter growled.

And Stiles did– on keeping Peter out of his head, away from images of big, black wolves, stalking through the Hale house, of men grown into beds, of creatures chasing him through the woods to towering trees.

Stiles gasped, choking and coughing on a mouthful of dirt, flying backward into a position on his hands and knees, staring down at the earth. He was still in the here and now, but suddenly it was like a door had opened, showing one, clear, distinct path. He felt the usual dizzy, heady confusion after Peter had gone fishing around in his head, but now he could feel a pull. And it felt like a sweater, unraveling when caught on something. He couldn’t help but give chase, trying to stop it.

As he rose to his feet, distantly, he knew something was very wrong. The thoughts of Lydia, and Derek, and Scott and his dad had all sunk into a murky background as he staggered forward, a few steps before breaking into a run. He knew Peter would follow. The terrain passed in a blur. Stiles could feel the soles of his feet around obstacles; the flesh ripping open over boulders and stones, scraping over tree roots, but in his trance, he felt none of it. The wind had picked up, whipping through the trees, faster and faster, moving through Stiles’ skin like it was made of paper.

He ran until his lungs burned, chasing that unraveling thread feeling, desperately trying to get ahead of its pull when something made him stumble to a halt. He hadn’t been observing where he was going at all, and now, directly in front of him, was that same wreck of a bridge, stone and brick crumbling. Only this time, things were different. When Stiles looked down, he stood almost knee deep in the bed of a creek, his feet ghostly white and distorted in the running water. He was in a part of the preserve he’d never been in before– and he thought he knew that sprawling land like the back of his hand. Behind him, he could hear Peter’s footfalls through the fallen leaves on the forest floor, rushing after him. When he glanced over his shoulder, he shuddered at the sight of the familiar embankment.
Suddenly the need to keep moving forward significantly dampened, Stiles wavered on his feet in the frigid water.

_Stop, Stiles._

Lydia’s voice rang through his head so clearly, he whipped around, searching for her voice, finding only Peter, striding to his side to grab his elbow in a rough hold.

_Go back._

He dug his feet into the riverbed, toes curling over pebbles and clay, heart clenching around dread. That’s what she had been murmuring over and over again in her sleep or whatever it was— a warning of things to come. Something terrible was coming. The cool sensation drifted through him not entirely unlike the water soaking into the bottom of his sweatpants, creeping up his legs; cold, uncomfortable and sick feeling. Peter’s fingers tightened infinitesimally around Stiles’ upper arm, pulling slightly. He turned his head to look at the man, the _monster_, and it felt like the contents of his head were rolling around like scattered marbles on a plain of smooth, even floor. The werewolf rolled his eyes, and tugged Stiles from the creek in the direction of the bridge— and he made the mistake of making his body as rigid and immobile as possible, giving away his position. He crashed to his knees when Peter all but dragged him out of the river bed, onto the bank, hands and knees mashing into the earth as he clawed at it, trying to just _stay still._

“Stop,” he garbled over the rushing of blood in his ears. And after a few hoarse commands Peter did, surprisingly enough, roughly releasing him several yards from where he’d stood in the river, now under the decaying bridge. He wondered if Peter could actually _make him_ do what he wanted, how far he could run before being dragged back on course. There was really only one way to find out. He faked a few loping steps forward, feeling as though he was gliding along a rail, before he tore himself off the tracks and took a harsh turn towards the embankment he’d just come down– but had no recollection of doing so– and tried to tear back up the uneven terrain. It was _seconds_ before Peter had caught him again, slamming him into the ground with so much force it knocked him breathless.

“Why do you always have to choose the path of resistance?” Peter breathed into his ear. Stiles’ shoulders ached with tension, never mind the full weight of Peter against him on the forest floor. His entire body felt on edge, muscles aching with tension from resisting the magnetic force that was pulling him back towards that invisible track– and in anticipation of the pinpricks of razor sharp claws on the back of his neck.

Stiles stumbled, his head filling with a steady drone, growing louder and louder, just as it had before. Beside him, Peter dragged him onward, feeling out every step that he faltered, using Stiles’ resistance as his compass– and Stiles was helpless to stop him. By now it felt like it had been hours and he could barely stand up straight. Distantly, he wondered how he was even managing to walk. He supposed he wasn’t. Peter was more or less dragging him by one bicep in a semi upright position as they moved through the preserve. The sky was getting darker and darker, wind hurtling through the trees, sounding oddly like Lydia’s whispered warnings; _Stop Stiles. Go back._ And now Stiles recognized things in the landscape; a cluster of trees here, a rock formation there– they were getting closer. And the closer they got, the more his head and heart started to pound, like his blood was too thick for his veins. He felt the same blind terror, the same disorientation and helplessness as he had when his body had been under water and his consciousness someplace else, only this time he was practically mute with terror. He wasn’t sure what was worse; whatever Jack had been, or Peter, but he was willing to put his money on the very tangible werewolf dragging him through the woods.

A few more yards and his head started to pound worse than the typical post-Peter-claws-mind-
meddling hangover. Like a migraine from hell, cross bred with the worst sinus headache imaginable; all the light sensitivity and dizziness, now with a side of sinus pressure and leaking nostrils. He continued to stagger onward, Peter’s grip on him now completely gone, like the werewolf knew he wasn’t capable of running anymore. He swiped at his running nose with the back of his hand and stopped his arm halfway as it pulled back; the sleeve of his hoodie smeared with black. He turned his hand over, fascinated, then watched as a fat, black blob that smelled like copper, but looked like ink, fell with a splat onto the palm of his hand. His head pulsed, another fat blob of viscose black falling to his palm, and the terrible, all too familiar droning sound started growing again, higher in pitch.

He turned to look over this shoulder in Peter’s direction, the entire world twisting and smearing around him, wondering if the werewolf could hear it too, or if it was all in his head. Peter stood watching him with narrowed eyes for a few seconds before his jaw slackened in shock. If it weren’t for the awful ringing in his head, Stiles would have taken a few seconds to be satisfied that he’d actually managed to catch the man off guard for a change. Which of course was when he caught sight of her, several yards behind Peter, red hair whipping about her head, wild and frantic like the flame at the top of a lit match; Lydia standing barefoot in the woods, feet and legs covered with dirt, leaves tangled in her hair, mustard uniform bright and garish in the grey, muted colour of the woods, even as speckles of rain began to darken it. She looked… absent, eyes blank and unseeing, body too still to be natural. She didn’t look right. Stiles took a step back in shock, and then very suddenly, her fists clenched and she bent forward.

Stiles barely managed to get his hands over his ears, or maybe he didn’t, when suddenly the trees around him twisted and bent, and he felt as weightless as one of their leaves breaking free of it’s branch to sail off in the wind.

Chapter End Notes

Once again, a huge thank you to everyone who has continued to follow this fic. I’m hoping to give you one wild ride from here to the end!

End Notes

First time out of the gate with Teen Wolf… I appreciate any comments, kudos and bookmarks I get.

I try not to make people wait to long for updates, but life happens. I have no update schedule, I’ll just keep writing as it hits me, and update the Chapter count when the end game is in sight.

My very recently rebooted tumblr.

Works inspired by this one:
- Constant Knot [FANART] A Lady by Loup_Aigre
- Constant Knot [FANART] Red by Loup_Aigre
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!