The Weight of the World

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Summary

Stiles had never known more to his life than the pack. Thus, when the pack decided he's too much of a collateral damage, he runs. While running from his past, he stumbled his way into S.H.I.E.L.D and somehow managed to squirm his way into the hearts of The Avengers, especially a certain Captain's.

When he had finally amount to a life worth living, the world just had to crash and burn. He and The Avengers are humanity's last hope--a heavy burden to bear with hard decisions to make, all while dealing with his old pack. Sometimes, you just can't save everyone; Stiles learned that the hard way.

Notes

This is my first fic, hope you like it :) The fic will start from the beginning (as in Pre-Apocalypse going on Apocalypse then Post-Apocalypse) so you can see the character
development of Stiles throughout the whole process. And the pairings between Steve and Stiles are canon, but I'm still working on Derek and Stiles; so I don't know which is going to be the end-game. I've also no idea if this is going to end happily or sadly so bear with me :) Please comment, bookmark and subscribe because it's how I continue writing ::))))
Beacon Hills

Stiles Stilinski received the text that started the falling dominoes to the ruins of his Beacon Hills life on a Saturday morning at precisely 8.56 a.m. The text was a simple order of 'come to the loft' sent by his further and further estranged best friend, Scott McCall.

He was trudging through the woods on the look-out for Theo the night before, so he figured that he could just go straight to the loft without coming home. Stiles always knew that Theo was trouble with the devil's horns; this was confirmed after the night on the hospital and when he threatened to reveal what happened to Donovan.

Inside the loft, the whole pack was gathered. Scott, Lydia, Isaac, Kira, Malia, Liam, Jackson and even Derek and Cora were there. The only surprise that shouldn't have surprised him was Theo. Of course that lying motherfucker would be there, cause why not? Stiles was rarely included in any pack meetings nowadays but finding out that the outsider was included was a whole new level of 'low blows'.

"What's going on?" Stiles asked, letting the question hang in the air, uneasy from the glares and queased faces he was receiving.

Scott's glare was the harshest one, a smirking Theo lurking right behind him. "I heard what you did to Donovan."

Oh, that little fucker he's going to--

"You killed him."

Wait, what?! Stiles backed in his mind, whiplashed by the accusation. "Killed him? Scott, no." He stepped forward only to be cut by Malia's growl. Because apparently that was the thing now, Malia and Scott, slutting up the halls of Beacon Hills High. "It was self-defense."

"Self-defense?" Isaac scoffed, followed by a couple others from his back. "We heard of how you stabbed him with a construction pole in the library. And how you hid the body."

"I didn't sta—"

"Stiles, that's cruel. That's murder. At the very least you shouldn't have gone through hiding his body and just confessed to the police." Kira, sweet loving adorable Kira, was even on Theo's side. "Your father's the Sheriff, Stiles."

"When it was the Nogitsune," Scott started, making Stiles flinch noticeably, "I understood that you had no control over that. But now?"

Stiles sighed, frustrated and betrayed by how the pack was treating him. "I'm going to repeat myself. It was self-defense. Donovan attacked me out in the parking lot and chased me inside, then the scaffolding fell while I—"

"Stop lying, Stiles!" Lydia screeched at him. The girl was admittedly close to the boy, but that was before she knew how much the boy had to offer to the world. She grew up in a world without competition, Lydia Martin who had everything she wanted in a snap would bound to be jealous. "Theo told us everything."

"Theo?" Stiles breathed, his eyes stinging from the fact that his pack—who he had died for and got
possessed for and killed for—was abandoning him for fucking fourth grade (really though?) classmate unknown Theo.

“We know he was targeting your father and I get your intent of protecting him. But we don’t kill people Stiles. We don’t kill those we’re trying to save. We’re better than that. There’s always another way.” Scott reasoned, Theo’s hand on his shoulder for a false sense of comfort.

Stiles took one deep breath, knowing a loss in words when he sees one. No one will understand, anyways. “Fine, what is that you want? For me to apologize?”

“You’re human. You’re weak, you’re reckless and you’re a burden that needs protecting, dragging us down on top of a hindrance.” Derek, who had been quiet this whole time with an even more quiet Cora by his side, spoke up with a shake of his head. “We want you out.”

The red-hooded boy had to literally swallow his cry; he could hear a few whimpers from the pack, particularly Cora, Liam and surprisingly Jackson, but he did his best to ignore them. “Out?”

“Of the pack.” Scott finished his sentence.

The sun shone through the tall wall windows, glaringly bright, at that moment. Streaking the pale mole-stricken face with a hint of shadow. The pain in his eyes and the tears glazing over, it was too much to bear. Betrayal. “Fine.” Was all Stiles could say, his throat choking from the need to shout. “Have fun not dying without me. I won’t help even if you begged.”

He was out the door, in his jeep, and driving aimlessly before the wolves could even snark a reply. On the wide expanse of the road, he drove and drove. Without a destination but home, added with a million detours. Stiles rationally knew this was coming. It didn’t make it any less painful. They were the closest thing to family he had, and they threw him away like yesterday’s garbage.

What hurts most is that everybody seemed to have agreed with Theo. He’d known that Scott, Malia and Kira would be on Theo’s side because those three come in a weird package. Lydia and Isaac though? He was there for Lydia and saw the real beauty between the facade. He was the one who comforted Isaac through his nightmares from both his father and Allison. Stiles wasn’t sure about Cora, Jackson and Liam, but they didn’t come to his defense. That said enough.

But Derek? In the base terms, Derek and Stiles never got along. Stiles knew that. But for the past months, they’ve reconciled. They’ve talked and Stiles became the closest thing to a confidant the former Alpha had. He should’ve known it would be like this. Fucking Derek and his stupid fucking hair and jaw.

Stiles hit the brakes abruptly, the jeep jostled by the motion. His feelings were a turmoil of anger, pain and sadness. He didn’t know whether to scream or cry or punch a whole in the wall. The jeep started shaking. The ground underneath it forming hairline cracks. The coins in the cupholder rattled against each other before bouncing off the car, embedding itself into the dashboard and door of the car. Stiles snapped from his rage, controlling the magic boiling in his heart.

Another thing Stiles kept from the pack was his magic. He was human but he wasn’t weak. He was a Spark; a natural magic user. He was going to tell them eventually, but now?

All the emotions finally broke loose in a loud cry. Wrecking sobs tore through his body, slumped against the steering wheel. He’d been driving for the whole day and he still found no answer. All he knew was the pain, unbearable and scarring. He had cried until nightfall that day, for the loss of his pack. Loss of his family. Loss of his home. All he wanted to do was run.
And so he did.

That night, he applied for a transfer of school through his father’s email, pending on the next location. Grabbing multiple books he had of his magic and supernatural, he reached for his laptop to copy the bestiary and important documents and programs into a USB. He packed it into a duffel bag and withdrew the money he’d hid under his bed from the Benefactor’s funds; it was never returned and split evenly between Scott and Stiles after all their bills were paid. $50,000 cash, all in untraceable 100 dollar bills. He left his phone in the bath tub, ruining the data inside so they couldn’t track him. He’d left a note for his dad in the dining room, telling him that he couldn’t bare to stay and leaving, and he didn’t feel sorry for leaving. After all, his father was never home, traumatized and scared by his son ever since the possessing.

The place he once considered home, a warmth of comfort in a bad day, was gone. The memories of his mother long faded from the couches and walls of the Stilinski household. He looked back through his life and all it had been through. He’d found out all the things that had gone bump in the night existed. He’d been through horrors and pain unimaginable to what a sixteen year old should have been familiar with. He’d grown and lost so many things, and now, two years later, became a person his past-self wouldn’t recognize.

Did he regret it? Honestly, no. If he hadn’t brought Scott out in the woods that night, none of it wouldn’t have happened and they could’ve avoided a lot of tragedies, yes. But all the lives they’ve saved would’ve died. He has to believe that was more true than the lives that were lost that could’ve been saved otherwise.

In the end, reflecting on everything, Stiles knew. This changed them for life. They matured, hardened like officers and tortured like veterans. Scott desperately kept hold of his innocence and scout-boy honors and moralities, Stiles knew that too. He couldn’t blame him. Scott will always be Scott. He had never had to make a hard choice because everyone else was doing it for him. One day he’ll learn, or maybe not. But that has nothing to do with him now.

With that, Stiles slung his duffel into the backseat of his mom’s Jeep and closed the door. Sliding the gear to drive, he headed for the airport. Not even looking back once.

He wasn’t sure where to go or what to do, or even less, what he wanted to be. But he was sure that he’d start over. For better or worse, New York is his future.

Besides, nothing can possibly beat the dangers of staying in Beacon Hills, right?
Getting to New York was relatively easy enough. Stiles ditched the jeep halfway through the ride to the airport, he drove all the way out of California to Nevada and took a cab from there to the airport. That way he could buy time from the on slaughter man-hunt that his dad would put out for him (maybe, he wasn’t sure whether his dad or pack cared where he went).

One airplane flight later, he was in the bustling city of New York; the land where all dreams are made possible—a rather odd and very misleading statement; correction: New York, the land where all dreams are possible, only if you have the money, connection and face for it.

Anyways, the first order of business Stiles made was to take the high school exam to get his certificate for ‘finishing school’, because if he went through 10 years of hell he better damn well get something out of it. Maintaining a GPA of 4.9 was a miracle in all the shit storm he’d been through, accounting that he was taking 4 AP classes. With that, he applied for a double major course in criminology and medicine in NYU, with the money from his college savings and a half-tuition scholarship.

After all was done and well, he found a decent studio apartment above the bookstore he worked in; a special discount from the owner who he helped avoid a falling bookshelf when he was there for the first time. He barely furnished the studio, only added a bed without frames but an overload of pillows and comforters. He didn’t even buy a TV, only a radio for the local news and none of that FOX bullshit.

Of course, he furthered his study in his magic; understanding the basics of the whole spark natural magic he had, after all he skipped everything and went straight for the hardcore against battling the Dread Doctors. He learned a few things being in New York for the first month; he met a weird monk-like dude in a museum, who thought him the truth about Sparks and what he was. He’s always had a tether to nature, but that apparently meant he was an Elemental Spark. Who knew?

Sad to say, he was majorly disappointed when he found out that he couldn’t have a wand or his own Dumbledore. That magic doesn’t exist. Nonetheless, he was still enthralled by his own ability to control the four elements. He excelled at controlling the earth and water; his fire and air still unstable but steadily growing.

In the first month he’s been in New York, he’s met more magicians than he knew existed, albeit only two and one of them was his landlord-boss, the other an unknown sassy monk (which was in all the ways weird but a wonderful accident as he’d expected). Stiles visited the local New York pack to announce his presence and was offered the emissary position to which he politely declined; that pack bullshit was out of his life forever, he’s not going anywhere near that no sire. But, he
didn’t want any enemies so he made an alliance with them; apparently Sparks were very well-regarded and respected in the supernatural industry, so huh.

So far, his life was turning out to be quite the normalcy, if you discount the occasional once-week monster-hunting (New York has an abundance of crazy wild supernatural creatures). It’s like they had a schedule of who’s going to wreak havoc next for each week of the month, it was exhausting. He’s faced vampires, rogue werewolves, ghouls, succubis and incubis (a very fascinating and deadly experience, mind you), and he was finally getting use to the life he’d have built for himself in the 3 months he’s been here.

He even has his own favorite customer at the bookstore; a ridiculously handsome and charming hunk of a blonde that had the manners of a gentleman from the 1940’s, a rare oddity but a welcomed surprise. That’s when you know you’re living the regular New Yorker life (and the occasional cursing to cab drivers who barely avoided hitting you in the sidewalk).

Stiles was happy, and of course that’s when the world decided he’s been taking a 3-month-too-long life vacation. Because the world of the weird and supernatural extraordinaire couldn’t survive without Stiles somehow getting dragged into the middle of it. Fuck you, world.

To be fair, in hindsight, it was technically his fault. He didn’t mean to hack into the intelligence servers of the government, but he needed to find out how much the government knows about and deals with the supernatural world. Imagine his surprise when he was abruptly abducted—no excuses, it was still an abduction, Stiles would swear that up and down to Merriam-Webster—with a bag over his head into a van with a syringe of anesthesia (he suspects benzodiazepines or ketamine with the rate that it worked at).

He came to with a throbbing headache and a bagful of questions, starting with ‘Am I Dead’ and ‘Not-fucking-Again’, the latter directed to the beings in the sky—he’s open to religions, Stiles Stilinski is a man of respect, thank you very much.

"Wow, the amount of treatment I am receiving is spectacularly new and fascinating, if not harsh and dehumanizing." Stiles snarked, head bag taken off of him. The metallic paneled room, or should he say holding interrogation cell, flooding his eyesight. "Do you guys have a Yelp-like system, I'd rate it a quality top score of negative 5."

His abductor was a man with a strictly pressed suit and a receding hairline, but it strangely works in an oddly charming and sleek way. “Do you know why you’re here, Mr. Stilinski?” Damn, even his voice is clandestine.

“No, but I do know from experience that I have a magnetizing presence to abductors and kidnappers.” Stiles smiled, having the whole ‘kidnapping interrogation’ routine memorized down to a T.

The agent returned his smile with a plastic one, sliding a report on the metal table, which, oh look, he was handcuffed. Fun.

“It says here that your name is Stiles Stilinski, an outstanding student with an impressive GPA and record in NYU, majoring in two very oddly combined majors. But your real name is redacted and your records scrubbed clean, although we were able to find the suppressed large numbers of police reports connecting you to an alarmingly frequent animal attacks, deaths and bombs.” The agent read off from the report he undoubtedly broke laws to get since Stiles had classified his file as a countermeasure to hide his identity. He directed an eyebrow raise at him. “So, tell me, Mr. Stilinski, who are you?”
"A concerned citizen with astonishingly bad luck."

The agent blinked an unimpressed glance at him. "You hacked national servers."

"I can neither confirm nor deny that until I am within presence of my lawyer or does the law not apply here? Do you guys work outside the law? Because I think you're an independent structure, with more a power hierarchy than the law-abiding systems." Stiles wasn’t about to fold, he’d been beaten down so many times, it feels like another Tuesday to him.

“It’s clear that you were trying to access documents that were flagged as confidential.” Stiles winced a little at that statement, because he thought he’d hid his tracks pretty well, but the Agent saw his reaction and smiled a little bit wider.

But Stiles is a master at ignoring the problem until it goes away, it’s his life motto that kept him alive for many years, so he evaded. "I’m confused though, why are you involved in whatever it is you think I did?"

The Agent, to which he still does not know the name of but is surprisingly starting to like, blinked, caught surprised by the question. "What?"

Stiles Stilinski, supernatural extraordinaire, folded his hands on the table as best as he can with handcuffs on, knowing he’s got the man’s attention. "Not saying I did do what you think I did which I completely did not do, but isn't this supposed to be handled by the direct government investigative or at least intelligence agencies like FBI or the CIA, of which owns the 'national servers' I definitely did not hack into.” The Agent blinked once, a tick of the jaw that he wasn’t sure was a suppressed smile or blatant surprise. "I’d be honored if the NSA come greet me themselves but I didn’t think this would be a matter of national security if not a mere curiosity in the unknown."

"We are the FBI." Phil Coulson flipped his badge to show Stiles his credentials. Phil Coulson, huh, never thought Stiles would meet him.

"Huh, funny. I didn't ask to see your credentials, which yes you were trying to assure professionalism and authenticity, but masking it with an initiative of forcing me to trust you, a common trick of illogical fallacy.” His words ran out of his mouth with precise execution, as he can see the man Phil Coulson start to break away from his serious disposition. "It would've worked better if you didn't. Because that badge is a fake. Credentials aren’t supposed to have ID numbers, only badge numbers, unless its on their card which they only use in the office."

Coulson smiled, his mind racing with thrill from the fast conversation—by far the most interesting interrogation he’s had in a while. "Aren't you scared? Someone pretending to be FBI all the while kidnapping you for an information we might or might not torture out of you."

"You won’t resort to torture.” Stiles returned a tooth filled smile at him, breaking the egg once and for all. “It’s not in the SHIELD books."

Weirdly enough, he could hear a bark of a woman’s laughter outside the walls. Coulson spluttered for a while, his mouth opening and closing with a tilt of his head and squinted eyes. “How do you know who we are?”

“There’s not a lot of clandestine force that works outside the law handling odd extraterrestrial matters. It’s not that hard to link SHIELD into it.” Stiles waved his hands only to yelp in pain due to the metal restrictions digging into his flesh. “Plus, I’ve been following your activities as best as I can.”
Coulson raised his eyebrow. “Why exactly?”

“A gentleman has to have a few hobbies, how else are we supposed to live in our white supremacy?” Stiles blinked his eyes innocently, sarcasm dripping through his lashes.

Coulson let a little grin break from his poker face, so Stiles called it a win. Establish a connection is something you’d want to do in a hostage situation. But he was sure he didn’t need it.

“So, Mr. Stilinski, do you know what’s about to happen?” Coulson asked, the file long forgotten. He was curious to see how much this kid knows about their operation and how they worked.

“You’re gonna lock me up in some cold dark tiny room where you keep all prisoners in with a scary nondescript name like ‘the Fridge’ or ‘the Sandbox’.” Stiles winked at Coulson, enjoying the twitch in his eye when he hit the nail. “Or you’re going to let me go and hope that I’ll keep my mouth shut.”

The bark of laughter came back, following a deep chuckle. Maybe the room wasn’t as sound-proof as he thought. Coulson let a long weary sigh escape his mouth, but he was also failing to hide his smile to the constant surprise the man Stiles Stilinski turned out to be, “There’s a third option.”

Stiles raised his eyebrows in a challenge.

“Join SHIELD.” Coulson offered, leaning forward in his chair. “We could use someone like you.”

Stiles almost laughed, barely containing it. “And what exactly is someone like me?” He hadn’t shown his magic or his supernatural knowledge and connections.

“Someone with a fast wit and intelligence, a thirst for knowledge and a very adept way at talking out of trouble.” Coulson explained, the boy reminded him vaguely of a fusion between Tony and Skye—Daisy, he corrected himself—which was either a really scary horrible mix or a spectacle to behold. “Plus, I’m pretty sure you’ve hidden a few tricks up your sleeves. You’ll be an outstanding operative.”

It was his third month in New York, and Stiles admitted that he kind of missed the thrill of adventures and not-dying every second of the day, despite how taxing it was. He felt a need to help, and he knew that doing things alone would only work until a certain extent.

“First, is this really necessary though?” Stiles rattled his hands and the handcuff with it. “I’m not a hostile, I look like someone that can barely hold up in a cage fight with white church bunnies.” Stiles could tell Coulson didn’t buy the lie for a second, the guy was even tougher than werewolves and they’re actual walking lie-detectors.

Coulson relented, showing a leap of trust on his behalf. Stiles could see himself working next to the guy, maybe it wasn’t a bad thing. “If I do accept this deal, what’s in it for me?”

Stiles waited for the reply, expecting a threat or some greater good horse crap that everyone excuses themselves with. Coulson just shook his head, somehow reading his mind. “A fancy badge, cool toys and a hell of a story to tell your grandkids.”

The laughter ripped from his throat in a shock of delight. Stiles liked him. He definitely likes him. He stood from his seat, straightening his hoodie. “Okay, you got me.” He waited for Coulson to stand before offering his hand. “I’m Stiles. A proper introduction is needed if we’re to trust each other, and I expect a full trust because loyalty is my first priority.”

Coulson shook his hand, feeling a weird warmth spread through his palms. “Phil Coulson,
the feeling’s mutual.”

Stiles let go of this hands, stuffing them into his pockets while Coulson opened the doors. “I’ve got to tell you though, I’ve been through a lot so there’s nothing much that can surprise me that makes a better story than what I’ve already got.”

The only thing he got back from Coulson was an all-knowing smile which he absolutely hates. God, he’s like another Deaton. Cryptic and enigma-like. The worst trait to someone with a deadly curiosity such as Stiles.

He figured out what the smile meant when he was lead outside the holding cell, seeing a couple of people smile at him with mirth over a touch-screen table and a huge screen that was showing the live footage of the holding cell they were in earlier. Inside a plane.

Stiles dropped his mouth, looking to Coulson for an explanation; the smug expression on his innocent face speaking loudly to his question.

“Welcome to SHIELD.”

That was how he got into SHIELD, completely by accident and a breach of national secret servers. It was the first domino to fall in the long run of his fate. Stiles didn’t knew it then because he was too caught up in the new excitement of being a part of the agency, but that was the beginning. Of what, one might ask?

Everything.
“Stiles!” Daisy shouted over the gunshots, causing a slight reverberation in Stiles’ eardrums, hiding under the open bar.

It was his first week in SHIELD damn it. First week and straight into the hell hole of almost dying every single day of the week. He was given about two days to get his matters into order, apparently they were going to somewhere called the Triskelion, where they were going to start his training properly, since they were in a plane (he still could not believe that).

So, technically it’s only been, what, less than five days. Which was surprisingly delightful to his knowledge. He made quick friends of Fitz and Simmons, the only two set of brains that could race with his to an educated rant of a new drug being invented or a new technological development and their ethical concerns; plus it also helped that he got on their good side when they show him the SHIELD toys. Daisy and him bonded terrifyingly quickly; he simply approached her in the command centre that he first saw them in and stood next to her while she was cracking a code, and helped her wordlessly. After that, they sat at the open bar and drank away eventually spilling hilarious jokes and giving Stiles the know-hows of the place. Apparently, Daisy was recruited the same way he did, so that’s another bonding factor.

Mellinda May was a terrifying woman and he’s starting to think he has a soft spot for strong scary women that could stare him to death. She favored him slowly, but the key point was sitting next to her when she was doing her daily tai chi and yoga; he learned that to calm and center himself when the Nogitsune left, out of paranoia, maybe.

Antoine Triplett. Now that’s what he hasn’t figured out yet. He was the grandson of a Howling Commandos, which holy motherfucker, the Howling Commando, as in Captain America. Stiles may have questioned him on their adventures and gadgets for a little over 2 hours, but the guy didn’t seem to mind, in fact he claimed he’d love to talk to him again.

All in all, the four days aboard the ‘Bus’ was spectacular. Until, of course, on the fifth day, they got hijacked.

It started with the plane being hacked remotely, causing the plane to nose dive downwards. Stiles, Daisy and Trip were out on the sofa’s, playing a game of go fish when the plane started tipping and their cards flying. “What is happening?” Tripp called out.

The acceleration downward made the gravity shift, Stiles holding on to one of the belt straps when his body lifts off the ground. “Are we crashing?”
Then the plane stabilized for a split second allowing Fitz and Simmons to run up the spiral staircase, falling in their steps, holding on to the railings.

“Coulson!” That’s when a force came on top of the Bus, shaking the interior before they heard the air-lock gate on the ceiling open. “Are we being—“ Fitz couldn’t finish the sentence when masked men came trooped down the stairs, guns blazing, “—What in the bloody hell?!”

Trip and Daisy acted quickly, unholstering their I.C.E.R.s (Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division was big on acronyms, who knew?), firing away at the intruders. Fitz threw a spare he has to Stiles, aiming himself with the railgun.

When the nosedive continued angling the plane down into the ocean, the gunfire stopped for a moment, everyone caught unbalanced and disarrayed.

“Is this plane water-proof?” Stiles shouted, looking out the circular window, nearly missing the gunshot to his shoulder.

He didn’t receive an answer, nor did he need to, because right after the question was asked, the plane dove into the waters.

“Uh, Coulson, this is not a submarine for god’s sake!” Fitz spluttered to the missing boss in question, pushing Jemma and himself into his bunk, pulling the doors half closed so he could still assist the rest in shooting.

The lights suddenly went out, along with the AC and controls. May had shut down the plane, hoping it would reboot out of the control of hacker’s hands.

Stiles took the advantage in the dark to knock out his opponent with the butt of his icer and the other with three dendrotoxin bullets to the chest. He felt the plane start up again, but the enemy still out numbered them.

“Daisy!” Stiles called out to the woman under fire from two men, formulating a plan. “Lead them to the cargo bay!”

The Inhuman shouted back, “What?!”

“Just do it!” Stiles ran down the stairs, heading to the cargo bay when he fell down the last two steps due to the steep incline May had set the bus on out of the water.

He still kept his magic a secret, and would like to keep it that way until further needed. The men came rolling down the stairs from Daisy’s quake powers with the help of the angle off the plane being almost 90 degrees to the ground. Stiles worked fast, going next to Lola when the gunfire started again, getting ready to push the cargo bay door lock button. “Daisy, hold on!”

The woman just had about a second after the warning when the cargo doors opened, sucking the men out of the garage and nearly popping her shoulders out of place. One of the men caught Daisy’s legs, hanging on to them with one hand while the other held a gun pointed straight at her face.

Stiles let go off his hold on Lola, quickly unloading his last bullets to the man, causing him and the man to fly out the cargo into the open air.

“STILES!” Daisy shouted to the empty garage. She panicked, thinking she had lost their newest recruit, refusing to believe that he was gone.
Stiles didn’t want anyone to know about his magic, but he figured one person knowing was better than dying. He controlled the air around him, pushing it forward to his will, making him fly back into the plane—simultaneously shocking the hell out of the Inhuman with vibration powers.

He flew over to the button, hitting it with all his power causing the doors to shut back up. The two of them fell onto the floor with a body slam, knocking the air out of their lungs. They looked at each other, Daisy a mix of awe and shock while Stiles just shook his head with a wink.

“Everybody okay down here?” Fitz popped his head from above, raising his thumbs up.

Stiles chuckled at Daisy’s mock expression, he had rendered her speechless, that’s an achievement right there.

“We’re all good.”

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Two days and a major clean up later, they arrived at the Triskelion. Stiles learned that the invaders were a common enemy of Coulson’s personal team called the Watchdogs. He’s fully geared in the black-jumpsuit-like apparel that all SHIELD agents are supposed to wear, debriefed on the tests and other documents he’d need to sign.

Spending time with Coulson’s team was a good introduction to what SHIELD dealt with, Stiles was a positive thinker (a total lie, but he's in denial what can he say), he’s decided to take only positives out of what nearly was a death mission on a flying submarine of a plane.

Daisy had agreed to keep his powers a secret, although he could see her desperation to ask him a bunch of questions leading with ‘Was he an Inhuman’ but he wasn’t really sure. He’d never went through terrigenesis, at least not that he knows of.

Coulson led him to the top floors--a floor that consisted of his office. Phil Coulson was a man of importance here in SHIELD, Stiles took great note of that and promised not to cross the guy when he asked him how important he was.

“Stiles?” His name sounded from one of the corridors. There wasn't a lot of people in the floor he was in, sitting down on one of the huge sofas outside Coulson's office waiting for him.

Stiles stood and turned his head to the voice, greeted with clear blue eyes with a shade of shock and confusion—he was getting a lot of that look lately. “Oh, hey, bookworm.”

Bookworm smiled, lips parted and still confused. "Really?"

"Hey, you’ve never mentioned your name before, Mr. Bookworm." Stiles joked with his favorite customer.

"Stiles." Bookworm shook his head in disbelief and sighed. "I've told you before, it's Steve."

"Steve Bookworm." Stiles rolled the name around on his tongue. "It's a bit odd but it’s growing on me."

"This coming from the man called Stiles Stilinski." Steve chuckled, stuffing his hands in his casual
wear jeans.

"I'll have you know that's a nickname." Stiles waved the banter away, his breath stuck in his throat by the way Steve was stretching his white wash jeans and casual blue training shirt. "Uh, how's the book you bought last time? What was it, 451 Fahrenheit?"

Steve's smile grew wider, his stomach fluttering by the fact that his favorite librarian employee manages to remember every single book he's bought. "It was very insightful, quite positive, and different from what I've previously read, I quite like it."

"Your previous reads were George Orwell and John Steinbeck, I don't think your statement holds much meaning." Stiles squinted his eyes at the older man, teasing him like he always does.

Steve read classics that he missed ever since he woke up. Other than painting and sketching, he spent his time reading novels. Back before the war, he remembered only having one copy of Dr Seuss that he absolutely loved and read over and over again. That was actually how he met Stiles. He still remembers the beanie-adorned glasses-wearing adorable young man stifling his laughter over his shoulder when the man was bent over a Dr. Seuss classic.

"What's wrong with Steinbeck and Orwell? Why is it not insightful and positive?" Steve tested the young man, crossing his arms.

Stiles was momentarily distracted by the muscles that poked through the sleeves, he was a growing man with a high libido—he's allowed to stare.

"Nothing. Just that, Steinbeck and Orwell, they're views are similar to each other, so that's not much of a comparison—both led similar paths of lives. Steinbeck was a liberal pro-democratic writer and Orwell a socialist from communist influence."

From the eyebrow raise that Stiles received, he shook his head. "My point is Ray Bradbury was a visionary, but he absolutely loathed technology. It's a dark and true prediction of what we're living in; we pay more attention to our social media and claim it's out of our hands. We're stripping away morality and our conscience under an excuse to not read books for intelligence and instead seek entertainment and happiness."

Steve nodded, thinking over his response. He loved having discussions of literature with Stiles. It was just one of his ordinary highlights of his visits to the book store.

"But still, the book writes of newfound hope and the importance of true knowledge behind words. It's quite different from the turmoil of darkness in 1984 or Animal Farm." Steve argued, watching the expression on Stiles sour, rolling his eyes. "Don't look at me like that, you're just ridiculously pessimistic and cynical."

"Spoken like a true American." Stiles pushed him on the shoulder, which was 99% pure muscle. "You sound like one of those Captain America motivational posters."

Steve choked on his spit, causing Stiles to reach over and pat his back. "You okay, dude?"

In his mind, Steve snarked on himself that the great Captain America's tombstone would read: death by self-induced choking. Outwards though, he nervously chuckled an assurance to Stiles that he was fine.

"Stiles, I'm done here, let's go." Coulson closed his door behind him, walking over to the young man when he saw Captain America. The fact that Coulson had a huge man-crush hero-worship on Steve Rogers was a big not-so-secretive secret, but he will deny it to his grave. "Oh, Ca-"
Steve coughed, a series of big loud coughs and several throat clearings.

"Are you okay, Ca-" Coulson started, only to be overpowered by the loud vicious coughing by his favorite Avenger.

When Stiles looked towards Coulson, Steve stressed his warning through a furious head shake.

Coulson stood like a deer caught in the headlights, head angled back-wards like he always does when he has confused the hell out of his mind.

"Oh! That reminds me!" Stiles directed his attention back to Steve. "What are you doing here? Do you work in SHIELD? I just got recruited, funny story."

Coulson frowned, his mouth opening to question Stiles' mentality, when Steve cut him to it. "I-uh-yeah. I work here, of sorts. I would love to hear that story but it looks like you have to leave with Agent Coulson."

"No, actually, we’re—“ Coulson slipped into the conversation but once again—

"Leaving. Busy day, today."

"Sure. You know where to find me." Stiles smiled unsurely, gesturing Coulson to the elevator. "By the way, you should really change into your uniform." He leaned forward to Steve, dramatically whispering pointing to Coulson, "He's very particular about uniformity, clandestine organization and all."

The elevator doors opened, Steve rushing them into the metal box, Stiles watching his behavior with an amused expression. "Right, yes, thanks for the warning. I'll see you soon, Stiles."

"See you, Mr. Steve Bookworm." Stiles waved as the metal doors closed and the elevator started its descend.

Coulson stared at him like he was out of his mind.

"Why're you looking at me like that?"

Agent Coulson stared at the elevator ceiling, letting the elevator music drown his long sigh. He looked back at Stiles, no valid explanation coming to his mind, and gently executed the most professional face palm (in Stiles’ opinion).

"What?"
Coulson’s team left to go on another mission after Stiles got settled in the SHIELD headquarters. They gave him a bunk of his own and everything, even though he told them he wouldn’t need it since he’s got his own studio apartment—the smile he got in return for his explanation bodes nothing good for his future. Before they left, Daisy and Trip companied him to tour the facility, showing him the cafeteria, the command centre, which levels were restricted to which level of Agent status you were on and all the boring hierarchy that still exists even in a secret agency. This filthy, filthy world.

Fitz and Simmons showed them the lab and the gadget’s development center, which blew his brain up to bits when the learned that he was welcomed to use it whenever he wanted to.

Coulson had that weird stare as if he was secretly assessing the man with special care like you would to a mental patient. It wasn’t unusual for him, hell, he was a mental patient once, granted he wasn’t literally present in his mind at the time, but it’s still on the records.

Admittedly, Stiles was a bit lost on his first day there when the team left to help a fellow Inhuman named Lincoln. He got his lanyard card with his name as a level 1 Agent. He wandered through the facility once or twice before he finally gave up in trying to get a sneak peek at the black ops mission they were working on. So he decided to go on with his training.

Stiles first held a gun when he was four, his father was a police officer so it was a given that he’d know how to fire one. He would deny it if anyone asked, but when he entered the range and saw the firearm collection, he squealed. Looking around to find the range was empty, he picked up a standard issued glock and the magazine before settling in a slot in the pistol shooting lane.

He set the target the farthest it can go.

“Don’t get cocky, kid.”

Stiles turned his head to the new voice, scoffing when he saw the choice of weapon the man equipped himself with. “It’s only cocky if I don’t make the shot.”

“What is it if you make it?”

Stiles slotted his magazine in, pulling the slide back. “A party trick.”

The agent beside him chuckled. “Make sure you don’t miss.”
“Or else what?” Stiles settled the gun in his hand, facing the agent, slightly smirking. “You gonna bet on it?”

The agent considered his proposal, humming. “What’ll you give me if you miss?”

“Satisfaction, ego, and the feeling of accomplishment for beating a ‘kid’.”

“Cute.” He leveled his gaze at him, but Stiles knew the man enjoyed the game. “What’ll I give you if you make it?”

“Your embarrassment.” Stiles turned back to his target, slipping on his safety goggles. “I’m a simple man.”

The agent simply smirked, leaning back against the dividers of each slot. “Add a meal and we have a deal.”

Stiles brought his hands up, aiming himself with the gun at the target, hiding his smirk behind his shoulder. “Just a warning, I expect a full-course french fine dining with at least a bowls worth of foie gras.”

He took a deep breath, preparing himself for the whiplash of the gun. Then he fired, emptying his magazine. All 15 shots at the human-shaped target. Perfectly rounded in the red crop circles; 5 head shots and 10 to the chest.

The agent beside him whistled, “Guess I got to get that foie gras.”

Stiles let a little laugh, exhilarated from the rush. He took his goggles off.

The agent held his hand out. “I’m—“

“Clint Barton.” Stiles cut him off before he could introduce himself, secretly proud of the speechless look on his face all the while shaking his hand. “Hawkeye in the flesh. Tell me, how does it feel losing at your own game to a kid.”

“I haven’t lost.” Clint laughed, pleasantly shocked. “How’d you know?”

Stiles shrugged, unwilling to reveal how he’d known the identities of most SHIELD operatives even before he got recruited. He simply grabbed 3 arrows from the armory, tossing them to Clint, his eyes lighting up with a challenge.

“Headshots, three different targets.” Stiles provoked him.

But Clint nodded, and to Stiles’ surprise, he made his way to the sniper range. Clint took a look back to see the kid’s eyebrows raise to his hairline.

Agent Barton wasted no time to nock his arrows and let two arrows fly in a blink, nailing the two target’s head at it’s farthest distance. Stiles let his lip part, damn.

“I win.” The archer grinned, nocking the third arrow into his bow, not even focusing on the target and instead looking directly at Stiles.

When Clint blindly shot the last arrow (he has a third eye, that has to be the only explanation), the circuit behind them sparked a rage before blowing out, taking all the lights down with it.

Both of them snapped their heads to the ceiling, looking at each other with wary. Stiles chuckled nervously, “What are the chances that it’s just a blackout?”
Clint rolled his eyes at the kid, huffing a small laugh, “In our line of work? Never.”

The electricity was taken out, their emergency breaker kicking in place to run on limited power source, which meant the elevators didn’t work and the doors won’t open to the emergency staircase.

Clint cursed, but moved anyways. Grabbing a tube full of arrows, he strapped it onto his back along with the compound bow he was holding. Clint took one look at the kid staring at the ceiling before handing him a handgun with two extra magazines of bullets.

Stiles looked at him, unsure. “These are real bullets.”

“Those are real enemies.” Clint reassured him, relieved when the kid nodded and pocketed the gun and the bullets. “Now, we need a way out of here.”

“Let me climb you.”

Clint stopped and stared at him, assessing the statement. “I’m flattered kid, but--”

Stiles sighed. “Help me up.” He nodded to the ceiling where the air vents were attached to.

Clint swiftly nodded at this, crouching down so Stiles could use his boost to latch on to the barred panel of the vents. He ripped it off his hinges, throwing it aside before climbing in and offering his hand down. “Come on.”

Looking at the kid with absurdity and amusement, Clint scoffed and took his hand.

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They kicked down the panel, letting it fall, before sliding out to drop themselves. Stiles pat himself uncoordinatedly, muttering, “For a secret agency, your air vents system is atrocious.” Clint shoved him in return.

As expected, the command centre was bustling with agents running around like chickens with their heads cut off. This wasn’t nearly the picture Stiles had imagined himself being in upon first time seeing the command centre, but he’ll take what he can get.

At the very least, he got to see Nick Fury. The man was even more intimidating in real life. And Stiles knew intimidation. Hell, staring the Dread Doctors in the eyes weren’t as scary as he was, and they feed on fear.

Clint led Stiles beside him, standing right behind Nick Fury spouting orders and complaining all the while. “Would somebody please enlighten me how the headquarters of one of the most secure agencies is compromised? We don’t even exist, how is this possible people?”

“Our servers are down.” One of the agents updated from his side of the monitor, the big screen that fitted in the frontmost wall shadowing them with red highlights of it’s warning signs. “It’s a virus.”

“Then counter it.”

The agent looked away, “I can’t, sir. It’s disabled our anti-virus counterattack softwares.”
Fury cursed, “Initiate lockdown protocol.”

Another agent manning a monitor called out. “I can’t access the protocol, sir.”

“Then send a notification to the men downstairs to do it manually.” Fury spelled out as if he was talking to a child.

The agent faltered in his answer, his hand on the landline phone to his ear. “Uh, none of the communication line works sir.”

“Then what the hell can you do?”

The agent bowed, inciting the others to do the same. “The mainframe is down, sir. I can’t do anything.”

Fury sighed, long and tired. “That was rhetorical.”

Stiles squeaked from his position behind Clint, “Again, seriously?” What is with his luck? First the plane now the headquarters. He’s been here for all of two minutes, god damnit. He peeked at the monitors and the screen. “It’s not just a virus, you’re being hacked.”

Clint stared at him, confused.

The big screen popped another warning, the alarms sounding out in loud long rings that pierced their ears. “What now?” Fury stressed.

“Someone is accessing our servers remotely, sir.” An agent from the far-right corner announced. “They’re in our hostile systems. But I can’t see what they’re doing, they’re overriding my commands.”

Clint heard Stiles mutter a, “Told you.”

Maria Hill strode in with her Stark pad on he arm, running diagnostics on the virus programming, settling in beside Fury. “They’re deploying the missile drones!”

Fury closed his eyes, his brain a big drum rolling painfully in his skull, annoyed. “Where?”

Stiles moved forward to the edge of the bannister separating them from the lower ground of working agents and their monitor in long panels. He saw the agents trying to hack in with no avail, obviously, because they’re using the wrong code. No wonder they’re getting hacked every other week, these agents sucks.

Or maybe it’s just his extreme case of bad luck and horror following everywhere he went, but he refused to accept that. He’s been through too much shit for it all to be the world’s most ridiculous occurrence of bad luck—or a family curse.

Maria Hill hopped down from the platform they were on, commandeering one of the monitors, tracking the movements of the hacker. “The drones are aimed—“ She stopped in her tracks. “Here.”

Clint’s grip on his bow tightened. Fury frowning at the command of agents under him, “Well, stop them.”

The agents all stopped working, looking at their director with unease. “We can’t, sir. Our access is blocked.”
Oh no, no. He got out of Beacon Hills to start a new life. There’s no way in hell he’s gonna end up blown to bits and hand his life over to agents who don’t know how to code to save his own life.

Stiles slid himself through the spaces between the bar of the bannisters, hopping down on to one of the agent’s monitor, standing behind him. “Follow the virus.”

The agent sitting down in front of him frowned. “What?”

“Follow the virus and redirect it back to the originating source. If you can’t beat it, use it.”

All the personnel working focused their attention at Stiles, even Fury was looking at him but with the intensity of a microscope.

When the agent stilled, confused by his directions, Stiles huffed. “Oh my go—just move.” The agent once again stared at him in mock surprise. “Jesus, move!” He pushed the agent over, not minding that he fell down to the floor with a thump. He’s an agent who can’t do his damn job, he can at least take a tiny fall.

Stiles got to work, his hands flying at the keyboard at a speed that shocked everyone. Clint felt the side of his lips pull, the kid’s just full of surprises. He leaned forward against the bannister, watching Stiles work from above. “You’re decoding the virus and rewriting it. Why?”

“A virus is easily decoded once you know the mother key line of code that it was built upon. But smart hackers build a virus with a contingency that makes it more aggressive and malignant as someone tries to decode it.” Stiles explained off the back of his mind, unaware of the impressed looks directed at the back of his head. “To prevent that, I’m rewriting it as I go to redirect it back to the origin, making it essentially self-destruct.”

Hill walked over to his station, hands braced on the side of the monitor, eyes following his movements. She constantly checked her own Stark pad for the progress. “One minute until launch.”

Stiles bit his lips, a bad habit. “Come on.”

“40 seconds.” Hill reminded him.

Stiles almost bit her hand off. “Not helping.”

“30 seconds.”

Huffing a breath out, he typed impossibly faster. “I’m trying to hack a complicated virus controlling a fucking nuke under pressure. It’s gonna take a minute.”

Hill scoffed. “You have less than 20 seconds.”

Stiles couldn’t even glare at her, his eyes stuck to he monitor. Green letters typed in a fast sequence over the black screen, racing with the red flying codes on the other side.

“10 seconds, agent.” Hill banged her hands on the panel, making Stiles jolt.

“Shit.”

“5 seconds!”

“Done!” He pushed back from the monitor in his swivel chair, hands up in the air, waiting for his code to override the virus. Then the red lights were gone and the alarms stopped, all systems
turning green and back online.

The room cheered, even Nick Fury’s perpetually stiff shoulders slumped down a millimeter. Hill let out a breath of relief, placing a hand on his shoulder and a smile that represented her apology for the pressure. The whole vicinity of the room directed their applause to him.

Clint chuckled, doing a backflip over the bannister, landing beside Stiles’ chair. “I want to scream your name but I don’t know it.”


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He didn’t know exactly how he got there, but he was in the director’s office. As in Nick Fury’s personal torture dungeon but with a magnificent view over Washington DC. Started from the bottom now he’s here. Except he really really didn’t want to be here—he’s decided that he’s going to lay low in SHIELD and kickass in the shadows.

“Stiles Stilinski.” Director Fury drawled his name, swerving in his chair like a bond villain. “You acted out of command. You’re not an official agent, yet you inserted yourself in an operation.”

“Inserted?” Stiles scoffed, ignoring his sub-conscious reprimanding himself to rein back the attitude. “Wow, you called that an operation? Since when was self-sabotage an ‘operation’? You’re doing your enemy’s work for them.”

Nick Fury frowned. Holy shit, he’s in big trouble. To be fair though, Nicholas J. Fury perpetually frowns. It’s his image, goes with the whole eyepatch long coat assemble.

“You could’ve compromised the situation.”

“Compromise a situation where your headquarters is already compromised?” Stiles quoted the director’s words, openly chuckling. “Yeah, I would love to see how that works.”

He should’ve listened to his sub-conscious, but they’re called sub-conscious for a reason—they’re only half conscious over your brain.

Fury’s eyebrow twitched. “You risked the lives of countless agents.”

“Excuse me for trying to do a job that your ‘countless agents’ obviously can’t. I mean, seriously, where do you recruit these people?” Stiles leaned back into his chair, very tempted to kick his feet up on to the director’s desk, but very logically decided not to—because that’s his director. “Do you just put up non-conspicuous ads on craigslist looking for people with credible poker faces and maybe a decent right hook?”

After a long stretch of silence filled with Stiles beating himself up in his brain formulating ways of quick death before the guy decides to torture him, the conversation—if he could call it that—went on.

“Who the hell are you, Mr. Stilinski.” Director Fury stated; the intonation was a statement, yet there’s still a question. Stiles did not even understand the grammar of how that worked.
Stiles shook his head in disbelief, muttering to himself, “I have a very weird feeling of déjà vu here.”

“Whoever the hell you are, you knew exactly what was going on while my trained agents of over 5 years could not bat a single fucking eyelash.” Fury laced his hands and propped his elbow on his desk. “How?”

“It’s not exactly rocket science.” Stiles leaned forward, his elbows raising up to imitate Fury’s position but stopped midair from the glare he received. He cleared his throat, starting over. “Your firewalls were breached by someone good enough to hack it.”

Fury stared him down. “Our firewalls are airtight, it’s unhackable.”

“Oh trust me, I’ve seen tighter. Nothing’s unhackable, not even Tony Stark’s software.” Stiles trailed off. “Unless—“

Director Fury’s eyebrows raised impossibly higher. “Unless what?”

Stiles smiled, big and bright. “Nothing.”

He received an unmoving and unconvinced stare in return, but Stiles just kept on smiling, testing the patience of his new director—which is probably not a good move considering Nick Fury might just be one of the most dangerous men in the world, and he’s his new boss.

“Well then, Agent Stilinski.” The gaze Fury had on him intensified at the classification title. “There’s a system consisting of line of commands and directives to ensure that a situation like this never happens. It’s called SHIELD protocols. Make sure you look it up.”

Stiles nodded his head stiffly, itching to remind him that the hypothetical situation happened already, but swallowed his remarks. It almost worked, until he reached the door and stopped at the handle. Well, at least he tried.

“You’re welcome, by the way.” Stiles turned back despite his better judgement. “That’s called manners. Look it up.”

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Clint Barton was waiting for him outside when he (ran out of) left the director’s office. The smug bastard was smiling at him.

Stiles winced at the door behind him, tired. “Is he always like that?”

Clint shrugged. “Just to those on his radar.”

The scene that had happened in the office replayed in his head like a b-rated horror comedy. Or the start of a really bad porn, and Stiles is not amused. “Great.” He groaned. “I fucked up my career before I even started.”

“On the contrary, I think he quite likes you.” Clint nudged his shoulder with his own, finding amusement at the boy’s behavior.

“Oh yeah, what makes you say that?” Stiles narrowed his eyes at the agent, his sarcasm snapping
back into place. “The two-hour cold coffee you had while waiting for my threatening lecture?”

Hawkeye crossed his arms, pushing back against the wall from his leaning position. “Well, if he didn’t, you’d be dead.”

Somehow, that wasn’t as reassuring as Stiles thought it was supposed to be. Dreading the rest of his SHIELD career, knowing he’s going to have hell for testing the director. “Kill me, please.”

Clint took a slight pity to the kid, attesting to the sentiment he had, but for completely different reasons. He slung a hand across the boy’s shoulder. “I’ll get you two bowls of foie gras.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Stiles leaned at the arm, feeling Clint drag him in the hold towards the elevators. “I just saved your sorry ass, you owe me a fancy candlelit dinner and an accompanying string quartet.”

“Well, three bowls of foie gras and maybe one candle.” Clint hummed his offer, playfully weighing the options.

The younger shook his head. “Three bowls of foie gras, one candle and a cellist.”

“Four bowls of foie gras, one candle and a live recording of Bach’s cello suite no.1 in G major.”

Stiles’ face broke out in a grin. “Deal.”
“Two hostile takeover attempts in over a week, I think you might be cursed.” Coulson smirked, relishing himself in the groan he got as a reply. “I’ll book you an exorcism.”

“I don’t think that’ll work unless you want to drown me in holy water.” Stiles waved his hands lazily, his head still tucked into his resting arms. He could hear the laughter through the speaker of his laptop, Daisy, he figured.

Coulson smiled pitifully at him through the screen, having heard of the disaster in the Triskelion and the heroics of their new recruit. Coulson would be lying if he didn’t feel a tad bit proud and smug for that, after all, he was the one who found Stiles.

The doorbell rang, signaling a new customer entering the shop. Stiles apologized to Coulson, shutting down the video call from his team and closing his laptop to exit the office in the back. Since Director Fury had vouched for his skills and assigned him as an agent inconveniently after their last meeting (Stiles still swears that it was some form of punishment through a reward, but he still hasn’t figured out how that works out in the long run so right now it’s in the back burner of his mind).

He was given a week off celebratory vacation due to his help in the Triskelion, thus he went back to New York and was manning the bookshop while catching up with his studies at NYU. Stiles was thrown aback by his schedule; he really should’ve thought this through, being an agent means that his education was going to be in big jeopardy, he’s at a crossroads. But, since Stiles always liked to get an early start in his course, he wasn’t missing much at all.

Stiles closed the door behind him, “Hello, welcome to—“

“Is this an original version?” A man in a suit questioned, holding a signed first edition copy of Agatha Christie’s ‘The Murder of Roger Ackroyd’, standing next to the open glass book case in the center of the shop.

“Uh, that’s supposed to be locked.” Stiles pointed at it, dumbfounded.

“You mean this thing?” The man tossed the broken lock towards Stiles’ general direction, almost hitting the owner’s favorite vase before Stiles caught it with a flail of hand.

Sties inspected the lock in his hand, the old-model of the lock busted. “This was vintage.”
The man gasped in a loud breath, bending over to trail his fingers over a typewriter. “This is one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s typewriter, the edition he used in writing The Lost World.” He stood a little straighter, humming. “But it wasn’t really popular since it didn’t feature Holmes, but still a masterpiece on it’s own.”

“You broke a fucking vintage.” Stiles repeated, still a little dumbfounded. But, to his defense, the lock was made in 1976. It was a fucking antique padlock without a key—you’d need to turn the wheels to enter in a combination—and it was fucking cool, and it was fucking broken.

“How have I not heard of this place?” The man stood up in full height, turning around to inspect the store, his back still facing Stiles. “How much do you think I could buy this for? 35 million? Including all the antiquities of course.”

“This was Russian made.” Stiles trudged forward, waving the lock to the man’s direction. “A Russian made antique turner padlock, do you know how rare that is?”

The man turned, and Stiles was a little taken aback, but hey, his lock was broken. A crime is still a crime, his inner fangirl could wait a while.

“I’ll get you a new one, I have contacts in Russia.” The man in the suit waved the issue away with his hands, as if that was a consolation. “40 million?”

Stiles shook his head rapidly, squinting his eyes. “No one’s buying anything.” He snatched the book still in the man’s hand, caressing it in his arms once he had it. “Or touching anything.”

The man gave him with a look of curious amusement. “Do you not recognize me?” He looked around the empty bookshop. “I thought everyone knew me.”

“I don’t know, you’re a bit hard to recognize what with your inflated ego blocking most of your face.” Stiles snapped at the man.

“So you do know me.” The man smiled, fixing his suit as if he just took a compliment.

Stiles huffed to the top of his tuff sticking out from his beanie, moving past him to return the novel into the casing. “What do you want, Mr. Stark?”

“Please, it’s Tony.” Tony Stark stuffed his hands into his pocket, head pivoting to follow his actions. “Mr. Stark is my dad.”

“Who is no longer of this world, my condolences. Thus the title’s free to give.” Stiles placed the book back in it’s holder, closing the case as best as he can without a lock. “So, Mr. Stark, what can this lowly bookshop employee do for you?”

“Lowly bookshop employee?” Tony smirked, not buying any of his game. “If any lowly bookshop employee could hack through my firewalls, then I would not be a genius playboy billionaire philanthropist.”

Stiles narrowed his eyes at Tony. “You’d still be a playboy philanthropist which is much more than most people could say.”

Tony hummed in response, following the kid around through the bookstore. “So, how did you do it?”

“If I told you, I won’t be able to hack it anymore.” Stiles reasoned, busy shelving the books back in order. “So no, I won’t tell you.”
“A ha!” Tony snapped in front of him, causing Stiles to slam back into a bookshelf. There is something with this universe and throwing Stiles into rough platforms that goes hand in hand, and he’s had about enough of it. “So you admit hacking into SHIELD.”

Stiles smiled fakely, rather pissed at the mild ache at his cranium. “I’m sorry if you haven’t heard of the ‘operation’ that happened recently, but I didn’t hack into SHIELD servers, someone else did.”

Tony leveled him with a knowing look. “You and I both know that SHIELD servers weren’t hacked.” Stiles raised his eyebrow in a challenge, so Tony went on. “They don’t need to hack in if they’re already inside the system.”

Stiles whistled, making an action to move away from the bookshelf and slide out of Tony’s bubble of interrogation. It’s not like he committed a crime, so why was he constantly getting interrogated damn it? “Those are some big claims, Mr. Stark. You’re stating treason.”

“You said it first.” Tony blocked his way, trapping Stiles between the bookshelf and himself with his arms acting like cages. “In Fury’s office.”

“I claim my right to remain silent as stated in the law.” Stiles tilted his head, not even surprised that Tony Stark bugged the Director Nick Fury of SHIELD.

“Fine. But you still admitted to hacking into SHIELD before you were recruited. I checked my servers; you might have hacked into it but there’s nothing that goes on without my knowing.”

Stiles tilted his head further, challenging the man. “And here you are asking me something you don’t know.”

“This is an act parallel to treason.” Tony pointed his fingers at him, moving it around to somehow mess with Stiles brain. “Withholding information that could assist in preventing a disaster.” He clicked his tongue in disapproval. “Do you really want to be the reason SHIELD falls?”

“Tony Stark openly supporting honesty to the government. Scandalous.” Stiles retorted, crossing his arms to mimic the man’s posture. “What happened to discretion of the government?”

“It’s SHIELD, not the government.” Tony corrected him.

“It’s a free country.” Stiles shrugged.

Tony had this twitch in his eyebrow, not at all pleased that he could not get what he wants and Tony always gets what Tony wants. That’s how the world works. Unless the world is too busy caught up in another disaster.

Which was exactly what happened.

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It’s how things mostly starts in the life of Stiles, sudden and disastrous. One moment Tony and Stiles were facing each other with the weirdest case of nerd violence, and the next they were holding on to the bookshelves when they all started shaking and threatening to trip over them.
“Earthquake?” Both of them questioned at the same time, eyebrows lacing together at the common conclusion, but something doesn’t feel quite right.

When the ground wouldn’t stop shaking, they let go off the bookshelf. Running out of the way from the towering shelves, they were about to seek shelter when they heard the screams outside. They took one look at each other before running to meet the commotion.

The sight that met them was more than they expected. The asphalt was laden with large cracks that ran through the streets like lightning. But they kept growing, and the world kept shaking. Stiles looked to Tony with panic. “This doesn’t look like an Earthquake.”

That’s when the cracks grew bigger in one snap, but that wasn’t the worst part, no, of course not. Since when was the world that easy? No. There had to be something coming out of it. What looked like hands crawled out of the craters, but they weren’t human. The fingers were cracked and earthy—it looked like they were wearing a dry earth’s crust, covering their whole body.

Stiles muttered an incantation underneath his breath to harden the air around the bookstore, acting as a shield, because there are a lot of things in there that should not be destroyed, for the good of everyone. It sucked that he still needed incantations, but he was still rather weak in controlling the air element. He could do wordless manipulations with earth and water, and he’s gotten a lot better at it with fire. But air just seemed to disagree with him.

“Please tell me you brought your suit.” Stiles muttered to the shocked still Tony, who’s chin was pointed in his direction to nod but eyes never leaving the creatures coming out of the cracks.

“How do you know that they’re bad?”

Stiles gave him an incredulous eye roll. “When has glowing black eyes ever resulted in sunshines and rainbows, of course they’re bad.”

As if the world was trying to prove it’s point, the creatures started lurking at the civilians before making a move to attack them, all the while the shaking was still going on. Stiles would very much like to curse and blame this on someone. He really does. It’s his week-off, which he earned after saving a stressful situation. Only to land smack dab in the middle of another one, but with an amplified rate of danger. Why the hell does this keep happening?!

Tony instinctively pushed Stiles back, who squeaked at the action, calling out, “This’ll be a really good time to whip out your suit!”

The older man scoffed at the remark as if Stiles just said something incredibly stupid, “I don’t whip.”

Before Stiles could question and make fun of that statement, Tony dropped his briefcase stepping on it. The case opened to reveal a deconstructed suit that attached itself to Tony’s body, scaling his limbs with each mechanical part before ending in the mask closing in on his face. He blasted off the creatures coming their way with a brilliantly timed repulser.

He looked to Stiles with a smug expression, but then his attention got ripped away from him when he starts talking to no one in particular. Was he tripping? Stiles thought and waited a second in his mind, choosing his words carefully.

“Should I ignore whatever the hell this is or are you on something?” He waved to Tony’s general direction, watching the man look different ways while having a conversation.

“Oh, wait.” Tony lifts his arms and one of his fingers’s metal suit opened to reveal a tiny red
transmitter, he gave it to Stiles, gesturing to his ear. “Wear this.”

“Are you sure?” Stiles still took it and put it in his ears anyways; he’s a curious being, sue him.

“Well, you are a SHIELD agent aren’t you?” Tony reasoned through the speaker in his ears, flying away to deal with the creatures that kept coming from the crater.

Stiles scoffed at the question, running to help people out of harms way from the attackers. “What do you expect me to fight it with, my biting personality?” He shouted a warning at Tony to watch his back when more of the creatures appeared from the crater.

Tony let his tiny air missiles fly off to the crater-source, hoping to slow the rate these things were appearing at, his voice dubious. “Where are your weapons?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I forgot to bring my super expensive extremely retarded eye-nauseatingly colored but ridiculously awesome high-tech robot suit to my book babysitting job.” Stiles’ words dripped with sarcasm, dodging one of the creatures that went flying his way from Tony’s attack. “It’s in dry-cleaning.”

A burst of laughter sounded from his earpiece, Stiles having to take an abrupt stop in his path.

“Man, kid, you can’t seem to take a break can you?” Clint’s voice rang in his ear, referring to the situation they’re caught up in, yet again.

“Don’t.” Stiles snapped tiredly, wanting nothing more than to lie down and watch the world burn. “I am blissfully disregarding the constant attempts at my life that the universe keeps throwing my way—I have it down to a system, it’s called ignorance, let’s move on.”

The earthquake kept shaking in lapses of minutes, Stiles was worried it was not due to natural causes. New York has a lot of high-rise building, that’s a lot more dangerous than shorter ones due to the resonance. And he was right.

Buildings started to shake vehemently, and then one of them collapsed. “Tony!” Stiles shouted from his position, the man moving towards Stiles’ warning at one of the buildings. Ironman swooped down to the ground, holding a stationary post while blasting the rubble that came raining down to the civilians.

“Thanks, but we need you to fight kid.”

A red-headed woman landed next to him from nowhere, handing him one of her semi-automatic Luger with two rounds of magazine. “Here. Don’t mind Tony, he’s an ass.”

“A very successful charming hot piece of ass who happens to be the nation’s most beloved hero.” Tony stroked his ego, flying off to fight a horde of the earth monsters terrorizing people that crowded up in a coffee shop when the shaking momentarily stopped.

“Thanks, Agent Romanoff.” Stiles distractedly called out while ignoring Tony’s remarks, aiming himself in a hurry, running to the heat of the battle.

Natasha looked surprised at her name, looking to Clint who was perched on top of a bus. “Don’t bother, he just knows things.”

Stiles smirked at Clint’s reply, focusing his attention at nailing the creepy bastards with headshots, protecting as many civilians as he can. This is his life now, fighting alongside the Avengers. His mom would be so proud, or really worried, but mostly proud.
“Where’s Cap?” Tony asked from his earpiece.

Clint answered him in a grunt as he jumped and rolled from the creatures that were starting to morph their hands to sharp long earthy protrusion. “Mission.”

Stiles could literally hear himself whine. Don’t get him wrong, he respects every single one of the Avengers. But his grandfather was in the war, and he told Stiles stories about Captain America. The one time he meets the Avenger, and fight alongside them, and it just so happens that Captain America was not present. Story of his life.

“How about the big guy?” Tony asked again. “We could really use his help.”

His question was answered, this time by a deafening roar. Stiles looked up to the source of the roar, and yes, he looked up. Because there he saw a huge green blur flying past him to land on a bunch of the crawling creepers, squashing them beneath his feet. Holy shit, that’s the fucking Hulk.

“How about damn time.” Clint smirked at the destruction, nonchalantly shooting three arrows simultaneously to nail the incoming at his side.

With the hulk now on their aid, their destructive power had been multiplied tenfolds, but the fighting just stretched on. Their enemy’s numbers didn’t decrease. Stiles started to think, stopping in his tracks.

Natasha cursed when she barely avoided a swing from the crust swords—shut up, Stiles names things, it’s what he does—doubling back to kick two of the incoming in the sternum before shooting them in the chest. “Is it just me or are their numbers increasing?”

That’s when he noticed that the bodies of these monsters sank back into the ground once they were dead. And the annoying realization comes to his mind, that they were coming back through the crater, alive for a lack of better word.

He knows what they are.

The shaking started again, people shouting from the buildings falling onto the street. This needs to stop, Stiles knew that. Knowing what the supernatural monster could do, this needs to stop now, before more of them start coming.

Stiles ran towards the crater, which he noticed grew even bigger from the last time he saw it. His mind started racing to find a solution, his attention scrambled, maybe that’s why he didn’t see the enemy piling behind his back. He turned at the last second, a curse in his mouth and a late gun in his hand. He’s going to die.

Except he doesn’t. Because Hulk came galloping—yes, galloping, there’s no other word for it—his way down the street and knocked the bastard like bowling pins in a strike. Stiles looked up to the Hulk with awe in his eyes. The Hulk frowned at the look he was receiving, confused. So Stiles, albeit a really stupid decision, reached out and pat his legs because that’s where he stands at the Hulk’s terrifying full height. “Thanks big guy, I owe you one.”

Apparently the Hulk didn’t mind the skinship, since he only huffed a puff of breath and shook his head before running off to smash more monsters. Granted, it could be a breath of annoyance, but Stiles did not turn into a mess of bloody organs and bone crusted on the concrete so he concluded it a win.

“Guys!” He called out to the Avengers, an idea popping into his mind. “I think I found a way to stop this.”
“Yeah?” Tony flew in next to him, kicking down one of the creatures while simultaneously blasting off three offenders. “How?”

Stiles called to the magic in his core, he could feel the spark lighting up through his body. “Stop killing them and focus at the crater.”

Natasha frowned on the suggestion, skeptical. “Why?”

“Trust me.”

Surprisingly, that was all it took for the Avengers, even Hulk, to come to his side, all waiting on his order. “Fire everything you’ve got at the opening, as long as you can.”

Tony nodded, flying into the air, aiming the missile he’s got in every nook and cranny (seriously, where does he think of this stuff, I mean, who puts mini missiles on their elbows?). Natasha went to stand at one side of the crater while Clint fanned out to the other side, both sliding in a new magazine and nocking explosive arrows into their weaponry. Everyone went into position. Except for Hulk, he was just roaring—probably due to his order of not being able to smash anything anymore.

“No!” Stiles shouted, bringing on the massive destruction that the Avengers fired at the crater, causing an array of explosions and eruptions inside the abyss.

The rest of the monsters on the ground stopped and shrieked in pain, all snapping their crooked head and beady black eyes to their direction. Tony got the idea, deploying his shoulder-mounted guns and aimed the projectiles inside the crater for further damage.

“Hulk, keep them away!” Stiles yelled, focusing his energy to the ground. Hulk ran off, smashing all the creatures that were capable of attacking them, if not crawling towards them in pain.

The ground started shaking, but this time it’s not due to the earthquake. Stiles let the earth rumble underneath him, feeling it mend and obey under his command. His eyes started to change; the orbs and rings in his iris start to glow a crisp brown color. Clint noticed it first, looking at him with a second of surprise before nocking another arrow with his bow.

Stiles raised his hands when he felt the wave of his energy sync with the earth. The ground cracking around them, slowly lifting heaps of compact earth and crust to the air. Natasha and Tony gasped at the sight, looking towards Stiles with alert in their eyes. Stiles just kept on pulling more and more ground from the earth beneath him.

Then he pushed: all of the floating mounds of earth flying towards the crater, piling up. Clint and Natasha took a step backwards, their arrows and bullets depleted. Tony kept his stance in the air, looking around; the creatures were now screaming a high-pitched scratchy shriek, in excruciating pain, slowly sinking back to the ground almost forcefully.

When all the earth he pulled out has been packed tight in the crater, he solidified them as best he could, but there were still cracks in them. Stiles looked around to find beams from fallen buildings all around the road. His eyes changed to a ring of grey, casting words on his lips to manipulate the air around the beams so he could lift them up. The beams flew under his wave to fit jaggedly into the cracks of the pressed earth.

“Tony, a little help?” Stiles called out the man, who nodded and flew closer. Tony puffed his chest before firing his unibeam from his arc reactor towards the beams, melting them and molding them to hold. The dust finally cleared away after the beam stopped, revealing a perfectly sealed circle
mix of earth and embedded metal. "Thanks."

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It was over. Stiles could scream in relief, his body aching from the strength it took out from him. Clint shot him a cheer and placed his hands by his hips to lean in on himself. Tony Stark flew back down to the ground, his mask retracting back to reveal a brilliant smile. "I thought you said you didn’t have weapons.”

“I said I didn’t bring any weapons.” Stiles smiled back at him, shrugging his shoulders.

Tony laughed at his constant ability to comment on everything, ironically reminding him of himself. Stiles joined him at the joy, but their celebration was short-lived.

“Nat!” Clint howled, running forward to catch Natasha seconds before she hit the ground. He cradled her in his arms, looking for any wound when he saw the jagged piece of sharp earth-like swords from the arms of the creature protruding out her stomach. “Natasha’s hit!”

Stiles stopped dead in his laughter, replacing it with a string of curses. He ran to the two agents on the ground, kneeling to inspect the damage. He didn’t know much about the supernatural creature, but he’s heard of the deadly effects of getting scratched by the sharp-edged arms they weaponized. Natasha got stabbed by it. “It’s bad. We need to get her to medical, now.”

“The nearest hospital is—“ Clint started in panic but Stiles shook his head.

“No, they don’t know how to deal with this.” He looked to the Hulk who was huffing and puffing away at the corner, kicking away the rubble left behind in the destruction. “Hey! Yo, Hulk!”

The green giant snapped his head in his direction. “Where’s Banner?”

Hulk lunged and roared at him, loud and straight up in his face. Stiles almost swallowed his tongue —again, probably should’ve thought things through, but Natasha’s life was in danger, he’s got no time for rational thinking. “Give us Bruce Banner back!” He stilled. “Please.”

At the pleasantry, the Hulk seemed to calm his rage. Stiles took this chance. “Look, I know that you don’t like Bruce—“

“PUNY BRUCE!”

“Yes, yes, puny bruce, little old puny bruce, but puny bruce is smart.” Stiles slowly explained to the Hulk, inching closer to him with his palms up in the air with the pose of surrender. “Natasha is hurt.” He pulled his face in a grimace to act out pain and placed one of his hands on his stomach. “Natasha. Pain.”

The Hulk huffed another breath and shook his head a little like he’s clearing his mind. Stiles knows he’s getting through to him, so he nodded as he went on. “We need Bruce to help Natasha.”

He started over when Hulk did not react to him, flailing his hands. “Bruce help Natasha. No Pain.” Stiles could feel his brain cells deteriorating from the conversation itself. “Pain go bye-bye.”

Clint watched the scene from the side-lines in mock horror while Ironman stood slack jawed. The
balls on this kid never fails to surprise them.

“Help me.” Stiles pleaded to the hulk, reaching his palms out to take his ginormous hands. “Please.”

The Hulk slowly, but surely, extended his fist to Stiles’ direction, slowly opening it. For a second Stiles was afraid he was going to get slapped to the face of the earth, but the Hulk placed one finger on his palm. Then he changed, shrunken and de-greened.

“Dr. Banner?” Stiles tried.

Bruce Banner lifted his head up to meet the kid’s, panting. “Thank you.”

Stiles shook his head. “Don’t thank me yet, I need your help.”

Clint called from his position, clutching at Natasha’s elbows, not knowing what to do. “This is great and all, but Nat’s still dying.”

“Tony!” Stiles turned his attention to the man who flinched at his name. “Does the tower have a medical centre?”

Tony spluttered his reply, “Y-yes?”

The day started with the usual routine of getting his coffee and studying further ahead of his classes in NYU, that was normal. But normal was too overrated for Stiles, even though he did not make that decision himself. So now, he had fought with the Avengers and was about to save one of their lives. And it wasn’t even time for lunch yet. Jesus fucking christ, what is his life.

“Then let’s go.”
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“Agent Romanoff, you have to stay with me now.” Stiles called out to the barely conscious agent in Clint’s arms, pressing the elevator’s button to the floor. He checked on the woman’s wound, the skin around the embedded weapon turning a sickly dark colour.

Tony rolled on the ball of his shoes as best as he can—since he was still in his ironman gear—keeping a supportive arm on Bruce Banner’s hunched shoulders. “You okay, there? Not gonna go green again are you?”

Bruce rolled his eyes at the man, attempting to straighten his posture. “Unless you give me a reason to, no.”

“Can this go any faster?” Stiles pressed the floor button repeatedly in harsh jabs of his fingers, snapping his head to the man in the iron suit. “Tony, what kind of shit elevator did you build?”

Tony whiplashed his head backwards at the sudden comment, raising his hands up in defense. “I didn’t build this elevator, it was pre-made!”

Stiles cursed, his hands flying back to where they were hovering over Natasha’s body. The elevator doors finally opened on their floor. “Finally!” He rushed Clint out, following the man’s steady run to the medical bay.

Dr. Banner went in first, heading to the operating table in the middle to clear it. “Here!” He signaled to Clint who promptly laid her body down on it. The doctor moved in a haste to hook her up to the EKG monitors, inspecting the digital readings that came up. “Her vitals are getting real low.”

Clint stood by the doctor’s side, fussing over his actions. “Well do something! Get that thing out of her!”

“No!” Stiles came back from the prep room with a couple of gloves and a tray full of medical appliances. “You could kill her!”

“She’s already dying, what could get worst?” Clint hawked, cradling Natasha’s pained expression within his palms, worried for his best friend.

Stiles put himself to work, snapping on the gloves before handing it to Banner who did the same, preparing the vaporizer and the breathing mask. “Doctor, can you prepare a general anesthetic?”

Dr. Banner rummaged through the medicine cabinet, “Found it.” He grabbed the drug, attaching it
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to the vaporizer to wait a few minutes before slipping the mask on to Natasha watching her fall into a drug-induced sleep. “What do we do?”

“To my knowledge, a cut from this creature is fatal because it releases toxins from it’s crusty skin that works if it cuts into a bloodline—Natasha’s impaled with this thing, so she should be dead. The only thing keeping her alive could be the arm itself.” Stiles busied himself with ripping Black Widow’s clothing on her midsection, revealing her toned mid-riff. “Tony, do you have O type blood stored here?”

“Yes, Jarvis?” Tony called out to the ceiling while Stiles frowned at his action. Who the hell was he talking to—

“Sir, we have three blood packets in the fridge for emergency surgery.”

Stiles nearly dropped the needle he carried, “What was that?!”

Clint laughed a breath, nervous and hurried. “So there are things you don’t know, huh?”

Tony seemed to bypass his question, rushing to the fridge to pull two packets of blood. “What now?”

“Is it too much to ask if you have a dialysis machine?”

“Do I have a dialysis machine? Of course I have a dialysis machine.” Stark snarked to himself, shaking his head with the credibility of his own superior talent of having everything. He pushed the machine from the edge of the room directly next to Stiles, simultaneously pouring the blood to the containment.

“What are you planning?” Clint asked from his position by the unconscious Natasha’s side.

“We need to flush out the toxins in her blood stream.” Stiles clasped the necklace around his neck, a large round pendant, opening it to reveal a tube of black powder. He opened the powder in his hands, not sure if it was the right thing to do, before pouring it to the blood already in the dialysis machine.

Dr. Banner watched with his hands stringing a surgery-safe needle. “What is that?”

Stiles let the machine run to mix the blood properly through one round, bending down to watch the black particles infuse with the red liquid. “That is mountain ash. This will help kill the toxins in her blood and speed her healing process.”

“She’s slipping!” Clint disrupted their process, an eye on the monitor that started beeping erratically. “Bruce! Stiles!”

Tony frowned in distaste at hearing the name. “Stiles?”

The latter nodded to the doctor’s questioning glance, a secret understanding between the two as medical scholars. Dr. Banner moved forwards, Clint consciously moving backwards to let the doctor work. He snapped his gloves, handling a scalpel to cut the wound an inch on each side.

“Clint, the light please.” Doing as the doctor said, the archer pulled the overhead surgical lights down.

“Your name is Stiles?” Tony winced, both at the name and at everyone ignoring his question.
Bruce slowly taking hold of the arm crust sword piece before extracting it out of her abdomen, with Clint keeping an eye on the monitor to see her vitals spike even further. Stiles immediately injected the blood transfusion tube needle into Natasha’s vein on her left hand, taping the tube down on her arms, turning the dialysis back on.

“Stiles, really?” The Ironman tilted his head back, his tone incredulous.

“Will you just—“ The boy stressed, making a throttling gesture at the older man, who raised his hands up in surrender. Stiles calmed himself, raising his own hands in the air in a surgeon’s pose. “Doc, status report?”

“Vitals are still high but out of danger, for now. Her small intestines are perforated at the jejunum, extensive bleeding. We need to operate.” Dr. Banner looked up to see Stiles closing his eyes worry. He stopped his working. “Can you assist me?”

“I’ve never technically done it before.” Stiles admitted, his hands trembling in their own grip to each other. He was still in college learning medicine, for crying out loud. Although he’s way ahead of everyone on their studies and moved on to his third year curriculum, he’s still inexperienced. “I don’t know.”

Tony watching from the sidelines, approaching the boy before putting both hands on his shoulders. “You’re a smart kid, you either do it or you don’t. And I’m willing to bet I know which one it is.”

“If an avenger died by my hands, I’m so blaming it on you.” Stiles threw Tony off with a shaky smile, both knowing that he was grateful for the support. But seriously though, if an avenger died by his hands, he would have voluntarily go to the deepest darkest hole in hell, he’s pretty sure it’d be reserved for him.

Tony simply shrugged. “I have a pretty good lawyer.”

“You better.” Stiles huffed a big breath, steeling his nerves. “The least you could do is help us prepare.”

The two men standing idly grabbed surgeon gowns and helped the two men actually working put it on. Tony helped Bruce slip on his head piece and brushed strands of hair in his face to tuck beneath it. He smiled a little, hiding Bruce’s mutual smile as he tied the mask on his face.

Stiles gave the two curious looks but Clint tied the mask over his eyes, causing a rip of laughter from the archer’s mouth when Stiles slapped the man’s arms to pull it back down. Stiles met Clint’s eyes with determination—surprisingly from the older man’s eyes and not his own. “I trust you.”

“You barely know me.” Stiles chuckled, embarrassed by the sudden admission. He’s never had somebody say that to him without a hidden agenda, that was the life he lived.

“You saved me twice, that’s enough for me to know.” Clint returned his amusement, patting his surgeon gown down. “Besides, I still have that meal I owe you. I’ll get to know you then.”

Stiles chuckled, straightening his shoulders. “Remember, fancy french cuisine with five bowls of foie gras, one candle and a live recording of—“

“Bach’s cello suite no. 1 in G major, I remember. Which is how I know I owe you four bowls and not five, you sneaky little bastard.”

“It’s five if I’m risking my mentality to save her life.”
“Then you better not miss.” The archer repeated his line from when they first met, relieved that he could somehow take the pressure off Stiles’s shoulder when the boy smiled at his promise.

“Now get out.”

Tony and Clint stepped out of the medical bay, letting the two medical scholars handle their friend while they stood watching in the observing area with a full window paneled view. Stiles gave a short nod to Bruce, signaling the start. He turned on the assist machine by his side, walking to meet directly in front of the doctor, one of them one each side of Natasha.

“Suction.” Dr. Banner called out, Stiles grabbing the suction tube to draw all the blood out from the site of damage. The good doctor concentrated on the tools in his hand, clipping one of the perforated intestines in his clamp, looking to the younger. “Irrigation.”

Stiles grabbed the squirt bottle next to him, washing the intestine to clear the area, when the monitor started beeping again.

“It seems that her heart rate is spiking, Doctors.”

“Ok, who the hell is speaking?” Stiles restrained his shout by clenching his unused hands.

Dr. Banner simply pushed away the comment, snapping the kid’s attention back to the matter at hand. “Stiles, there are some still embedded in the folds of her intestines.” He inspected the wound. “I can’t get it out without causing more damage.”

“Oh, okay.” Stiles calmed himself down, reaching to his core to pull his magic to the surface. He’s never done this much magic at such close intervals, especially strenuous tasks that require attention like these. But hey, there’s a first for everything.

Stiles closed his eyes, shocking Banner with his actions when he raised his hands. He could feel the earth components in her organs, it was weird. Earth always felt warm to him, it was his major element. Then water, fire and lastly air. But he’s always been so in sync with the earth that he knew something was wrong. It felt dead, barren of life. Even in the smallest dirt, Stiles could feel a vibrant beat of the earth’s energy. Now it just felt cold and empty.

Well, this is new. And definitely not good. So technically, it wasn’t new. Because everything’s apparently never good in Stiles’ ridiculous life. He mentally sighed, frowning.

“Why? What’s wrong?” Bruce Banner snapped him out of his trance.

“Nothing.” I hope, Stiles faked a smile, inhaling a new air to cleanse the bad vibes in his system, finally opening his eyes. He continued to grasp the earth particles, lifting them out harmlessly out of Natasha’s open abdomen. The crust flying in the air, Banner’s eyes marveling at the sight of his eyes, letting it drop on the metal tray.

“Agent Romanoff is stabilizing, well done, doctors.” The voice came back, deep and laden with a British accent.

“I’m ignoring that.” Stiles muttered to himself, unamused by his constant inability to get answers, his mind still boggled by what he found out. He irrigated the open area, nodding to Dr. Banner to continue his operation.

With all the imminent danger out of the way, Dr. Banner could relax, clamping the ripped intestines together, working with Stiles assisting him to sew the intestines back up with attentive concentration. “Cut.”
Stiles switched his clamp with a long ended scissors, cutting closely to the sewing that Banner did, smiling when it was cut clean and they had finished the hardest part of the job. He looked at the monitor, breaking a huge grin. “Vitals stabilizing. Heart rate at 85 beats per minute. Blood pressure is 130/80.”

Behind the glass, Stiles could see Tony and Clint’s shoulder slump down with great relief, smiling at each other. Being the immature little shit he is, when the two men looked at him, he smiled and gave a grand bow, causing Dr. Banner to chuckle at his actions.

Stiles directed his attention to the doctor, laughing along with him. Bruce gathered himself, extending his hand out to Stiles. “We haven’t properly met, I’m Bruce Banner.”

“This is definitely the bloodiest introduction I’ve ever received but,” Stiles clasped Dr. Banner’s extended hand with his own blood-ridden glove. “Stiles Stilinski.”

He could hear the two barking laughter from the other side of the glass. Aiming a full fledged flare at the two men doubled over, he shouted. “I can hear you!”

“Stilinski, oh my god, that’s a good one.” Tony slapped Clint’s back in quick repetition, causing the man to choke on his laughter, his tone slipping into a serious one. “Oh god.”

“Yeah, you better choke.” Stiles raised his chin at the glass, Bruce shaking his head fondly at the three’s display of naught.

Well, Stiles took a serene breath, breaking a soft smile at the sudden positive change in the atmosphere, at least an Avenger didn’t die by his hands. A little humility won’t hurt.

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After Stiles and Bruce finished cleaning up, they moved Natasha to the patient’s room that doubled as an ICU what with all the equipment in the room—he learnt that Tony likes to go big in everything. He suspected it was some weird inferiority complex but with whom, he still hasn’t figured it out yet.

Tony finally explained Jarvis to Stiles, who took a moment to ask the AI ridiculous questions when he learned that he was everywhere (“Do you have videos of Tony in the shower?” “Stiles, what are you—” “Why yes, I record everything.” “Well then, Jarvis, would you mind sending it to me, I have a business preposition with Youtube.” “Jarvis, don’t you dare!”).

Bruce and Stiles busied themselves with keeping Natasha comfortable in her bed, checking on the IV drip and taking the dialysis machine off after it was done. Stiles added more mountain ash to the drip as a precaution but also to heal the woman faster—he’s going to need more of it and he’s not looking forward to the visit back to the supplier; the witch scares him.

Clint was halfway through talking Tony out off ‘upgrading’ Natasha—taking the tubes of suspiciously colored concoction out of his hand, throwing it out to the trashcan despite Tony’s cries —when the doors opened automatically.

“Tony! I heard Natasha was hit. What’s—“ Steve stopped in his gait approaching the room, his eyes focusing on the surprising guest. “Stiles?”
“Steve?” Stiles copied his tone, walking forward past Bruce. “What are you doing here?”

Tony frowned at the question, befuddled in the exchange between the two men. He looked to Clint for an explanation but the archer gave him the exact look back.

“I’m friends with Natasha.” Steve bit back a sour expression from the way his teammates were looking at him with growing suspicion. “How about you?”

Stiles nodded at his reason, shrugging, “Nothing. Just, you know, saving an Avenger after accidentally getting sucked into yet another crisis.”

“I’m signing you up to the Guinness Book of World Records for worst luck in consecutive days,” Clint commented from the sidelines, hands grasping Natasha’s to comfort her.

“Hey, maybe it’s the world telling you that you’re exactly where you belong.” Steve tried to spin his recent events to a better light, because that’s what he does. That’s Steve Rogers for you, and everyone else but Stiles.

Leaning against one of the counters by the wall, Stiles crossed his arms. “Well, at least I get to see the Avengers in action.” Earning a few triumph smiles from the team, he smiled. “Now, all I need to do is meet Thor and Captain America, then I can move on to my next bucket list of eating all the McDonalds menu from all over the world.”

Tony is visibly seen to be downloading and processing the information inside his head as he froze in his spot for a minute. Even Bruce stopped flipping through Natasha’s charts to direct his attention to the exchange between the two. Clint was the first to recover, “What are you saying, Stiles?”

“Oh, McDonald’s have special menus for every region that they’re in—did you know that Japan has shrimp burger? And that New Zealand has this thing called Kiwiburger, I don’t even know what that means but—”

“No, not that.” Tony’s eyebrow linked together in ridiculous confusion, because that’s what this is. “You—”

Steve coughed while passing by Tony, not-so-accidentally stepping on the man’s toes with all his might.

“Jesus!” Tony fell on his knees to clutch at his toes. “Ca—”

“Bruce!” Steve shouted, shocking the good doctor out of his skin, thankfully not into his green one, but shocking him nonetheless. “Tony seemed to have break his toes, will you please treat it?”

Dr. Banner was such at a lost that he just directed Tony to sit on the sofa at the edge of the room and inspected his toe, Tony’s face stuck at a perturbed open-mouthed stare directed at Steve.

“Do you still have a cold?” Stiles came up to Steve, hands coming up to check his temperature without realizing what he was doing. “You were also coughing the last time we met with Agent Coulson.”

Steve spluttered in the sudden action, his cheeks tinting with a dust of pink. Tony just sat, perched on his sofa, dramatically mouthing a ‘cold?’ at both Bruce and Clint, knowing that he’s not physically able to have a cold.

“Oh god, I think you’re having a fever, your ears are red.” Stiles worried, his hands latching on to
the side of Steve’s face turning it side to side to check his ears.

Giving him a shaky smile, Steve cleared his throat and met his eyes, finally making Stiles realize the close proximity they were in. “I’m-I’m so sorry. My hands just—My brain’s not really—It’s, I, just sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Steve brushed his blonde hair with his hand, ducking his head down before looking up to see his teammates startled out of their shells.

Clint laughed out loud when he finally got it, receiving a heated glare from Steve on his end while Tony and Bruce slowly caught on. Now it was Stiles’ turn to be confused at them, not finding anything hilarious to laugh about at the moment.

“You don’t know his last name do you?” Clint shook his head, wiping a tear from his eyes.

“Uh, yes. Duh, I do.” Stiles scoffed, his adrenaline still high off of his first medical practice, ending his sentence with a question and his hands perched awkwardly on his hips after flying around in different directions, looking to Steve. “It’s—it’s Bookworm?”

“That—“ Tony gasped through his laughter, things finally snapping into place when he shared an understanding look to Clint, “—Oh god, that’s gold. Steve Bookworm, you are one ingenious bastard, old man.”

Steve gave Tony his special no-nonsense glare that he reserved especially for Tony. Logically, Steve always knew that he was going to get caught in his lie, but it wasn’t a lie as much as withholding information. But, he just wanted someone that didn’t know him as Captain America and simply as Steve (bookworm).

“You’re moving in.” Tony calmed down from his high, inhaling big breaths, anticipating how long Cap could possibly keep this up without it blowing in his face. “I’m calling it.”

“Oh, no. I’m not. You’re not calling anything. I have a perfectly comfortable flat that I absolutely adore, plus I have to jump between the Triskelion in DC and my university here so, no. I’m not.” Stiles laughed the offer off, pushing his hands forward as if he was literally pushing the offer away, because he had a feeling Tony would be persistent. “To be clear, that was a definite no.”

Clint rolled his eyes, knowing how this goes. Tony gave him a smile that people would normally give to an ignorant baby that could not understand anything, which Stiles takes great offense to. “It’s cute that you think I can’t get what I want.”

“Not everything is about you, Tony.” Stiles scoffed, moving back beside Natasha’s bed to check the monitors. “There are laws in the universe.”

“You’ll see.” Tony jumped back off his feet after checking his phone. “But for now, Fury wants you in his office.”

“Oh, you’ve got to be kidding me!” Stiles threw his hands up, the only person getting his ‘excitement’ being Clint, who granted the boy an amused smirk. He was getting a little bit loopy from his magic use, it was tiring and he’s exhausted, and now he has to deal with another headache the size of one Nick Fury.

The archer rounded Natasha’s bed to sling a hand around Stiles’ shoulders, shaking the boy. “Good luck, kid.”

“We’re supposed to come with.” Tony update from his side, tucking his phone back to his pocket,
grumbling to Bruce about dealing with the director’s vain disposition.

“Can’t you just tell him that I’m busy here taking care of his agent?” The wailing kid tried to get away from the ordeal, who wouldn’t? Last time he went there, he almost got eaten alive—and that was only because he’d shown restraint (not the best, yes, but it’s the best he could do, leave him be).

Clint ruffled his head, tucking the kid into a short embrace of support, chuckling when the kid kept his face buried on his shoulders, unaware of the glare Steve was sending his way. “Nope, I got first class ticket to see this show, I’m not going to waste it.”

“I hate you.” Stiles mumbled, body limp as Tony clasped a hand on his wrist, dragging him out of Clint’s grasp and out the door. Dr. Banner followed them like an over-worked parent, exhausted and amused. Steve was still frowning.

Clint closed the door behind them with a cheeky smile and sighing to Natasha, “You’ll get used to it.”
“Agent Stilinski, we meet again.” Director Nick Fury swiveled in his chair once he settled in it, Stiles restraining the extreme urge to roll his eyes because seriously, can this man get any more enigmatic?

“I know, I know. I should have told you, SHIELD protocol, full disclosure, I heard this last time I was here which was very recent.” Stiles ranted off, waving his points in the air, tone going out of the ordinary. “But what do you expect me to do? If I’d told you then you’d put me under another interrogation and evaluation. Besides, you have a list of gifted people—which you will undoubtedly put me in. And then I have people prodding things on or in my body and take my blood with pointy needles, then I get tagged like a shark and left for free but then I’m not really free because then I’ll be living in a fish tank with all the supposedly-secret surveillance that you’ll have tracking my every fucking bowel movement—I’m an American!” Clint had to duck his way out of harm from Stiles’ constantly widening flailing hands, having made the bad decision of sitting next to him at the conference room. “I’m in New York, the land of the free and the wannabes. I deserve freedom!”

Tony was not so discreetly laughing out loud in his seat by the end of it, but Bruce was behind him clamping his mouth down with his palms, reducing the noise level. Nick Fury spared a thankful look to the doctor before turning back to Stiles. “Are you done?”

“I’m anti-shark violence, there are plenty other soups with vegetable bases that could easily replace shark-fin soup. Leave those sharks alone.” Stiles took a deep breath before opening his mouth to close it again. “Ok, I’m done.”

It’s as if Nick Fury was deliberately trying to piss him off, he swears. And it’s working. “You should’ve told me.”

Stiles grumbled openly. “Did you just call me in to lecture me about rules again? Because as eager as I am to go for a round two, I’m still rather exhausted.”

Steve was caught off-guard by the display of behavior the boy was showing towards the authority figure, but he should’ve known because this was Stiles. And Stiles makes no exception for anybody, to be himself.

Nick Fury ignored his complaining, instead he signaled Maria Hill behind him to tap her pad onto the projector in the middle, bringing up a holographic image of the creature they fought. “While we have tried to identify this alien, we’ve come up with absolutely nothing.” To which Stiles hid a smile to, because from his knowledge of the servers he hacked, they didn’t know much about the Supernatural world. “Again, it seems that you always happen to know things before we do.”

Stiles sighed, admitting defeat since he wasn’t really looking to pick a fight with the Director of
SHIELD, he wasn’t that crazy, or that powerful for the matter of fact. He simply wants to live. “That’s because it’s not alien.” He looked towards Tony before he could ask. “Nor is it an experiment.” Stiles looked back to the director. “It’s supernatural.”

Clint joked. “Supernatural? Like werewolves and vampires, supernatural?”

He weighed the options of telling them about werewolves, he wasn’t sure what to do. The constant hijacking that Stiles had gone through so far in SHIELD has made him wary; and the apparent conclusion that Tony also came to was enough reassurance for him to know that there’s something deeper going on that they’re playing into, one that they have no knowledge of.

“They’re called Skinwalkers.” Stiles started explaining, having the whole attention to himself. “They first appeared in the Navajo culture, depicted as a witch with the capability of turning into animals and taking their forms.”

“But they weren’t animals, they looked human but made out of earth.” Clint zoomed into the picture, showing the cracks in their dry skin.

“They’re wildling creatures, a primary woodland being—they’re not witches and they only turn into animals when they need to hunt for food or go into human population.” Stiles debunked the myth, pointing to the image. “That’s what they look like in their natural skin.”

Tony served through the images and footage from the public who filmed the whole ordeal, pausing on one to show to Stiles. “And these,” He gestured to the transformation of their arms to sharp sword-like spikes, “What are these?”

“Those are arms, Tony.” Stiles mocked the genius’ intelligence, receiving an unamused smile. “They have the ability of changing their shape to fit the animal skin they’re wearing, but they produce a toxin that’s deadly if they enter your bloodstream.”

Bruce readjusted his glasses, angling his head towards Stiles. “You used this ‘mountain ash’ to fight it off, I’ve never heard of this drug.”

“It’s not a drug, it’s the ashes of a burnt rowan tree.” Stiles rolled his tongue in his mouth, careful with his wording. “If made properly, it has high healing properties and almost immune to any supernatural toxins.” He kept the fact that it could be harmful to most supernatural creatures, taking precautions with giving deadly information to SHIELD.

Nick Fury nodded to Hill, who was updating the information into their data stream. “Why did they attack us?”

“I don’t know.” Now this, Stiles was really baffled at. “They’re usually very calm creatures if not provoked, they live underneath the earth’s crust completely isolated.” His fear was amplified with the fact that the energy of the earth from the woodland creature was dead.

Steve observed the frown from the boy, keeping his thoughts to himself as he listened on to the conversation.

Agent Hill whispered to Fury’s ears, backing away when she was done. Fury sighed. “Another matter is what we’re going to tell the public. They’ve already seen the footage online of this attack, and they’re all wondering about the magical user fighting alongside the Avengers.”

Stiles groaned into the table, his head smacking down onto it. Steve patted his back in a sense of comfort. “And?”
“I’ve kept the press on hold and forwarded it to Pepper to handle a conference naming you as an ally of the Avengers and an agent of SHIELD with anonymity.” Fury spared Tony a questioning frown. “Will that be okay to you, Tony?”

“Yeah, whatever. I’ve been keeping my mouth shut about it because of the whole Nat-almost-dying situation, but now I’m really curious—you have magic!” Tony bursts when the room settled down to a silence, his hands extending out to Stiles. “How?”

Stiles was dreading this. This is exactly the reason why he wanted to keep to himself. “Uh, I do.” He starts, prolonging his vowels to make time to think about what he should say.

“So, you’re like a magician? A wizard? Like Harry Potter?”

“Harry Potter!” Steve exclaimed, a chance to get into the conversation he’s been left out of simply because he wasn’t in the scene of the disaster. He was absent for a mission and another New York attack happens, figures. “I know that reference.”

Stiles hid his short laugh from the outburst of the man. “Not exactly like harry potter. But, sure. A magician, that’s me.”

For now, until he knew more of the bad feeling he’s got boiling in his gut, he’s going to keep as much to himself as possible. Call him paranoid, but he’s been a victim of following naive people around him who believes in too much good. He has a right to take precautions; he’s been possessed before, if that isn’t enough to make him paranoid, nothing will.

“How do you know of the supernatural, Agent Stilinski?” Nick Fury questioned him with a tilt of his head, his only good eye assessing the truth of his statements.

“I’m a curious boy with the tendency of getting in trouble no matter what I do.” Lying by omission of truths, it wasn’t really a lie just not the entire truth. Stiles smirked back at him, “You do the math.”

“Nothing to do with the fact that you have magic?” Fury analyzed his statements.

Stiles cursed to himself, the one-eyed snake was sneakier than he thought. He kept the staring contest between them. “My magic was an unprecedented event I encountered while I was in-the-know of the supernatural world. Now it has everything to do with it—not dying is a lot easier, for one.”

“Coulson said that he found you when you were three months in living here in New York.” Fury read of the file transcripts Maria Hill collected, sending him an eyebrow raise. “Is it right to assume that you knew about the supernatural prior to entering New York?”

“I can neither confirm or deny that statement.” Stiles leaned forward in his seat to cross his arms on the table.

Fury kept his eyes on the document. “It’s said here that you lived in Beacon Hills for all your life before New York.”

Stiles’ eye twitch without his permission, he has very little control over his actions and even less over his words; Stiles Stilinski is a man missing many brain-to-everything filters, so help him God.

“Hill, can you tell us a bit about Beacon Hills?” Fury angled his head to her direction without cutting their gaze.
Maria Hill moved forward from her stance behind the director, settling in a resting soldier pose. “Numerous cases of police file reports depicting murder, bombings, hijackings, grave snatchers, arson, serial killings, ritualistic sacrifices, animal attacks, kidnappings—“

“Sounds like a wonderful town.” Stiles snapped at the woman, memories building in the back of his eyelids. He could feel something boiling in his gut and it’s best if he doesn’t lose control. “I’ve heard all this from my recruiting interrogation ceremony, so why don’t you try something else, sir?”

Agent Hill held her own under the warning of Stiles’ glare, the atmosphere turning heavier by the second. “In the middle of every report, a group of teenagers were constantly present at every scene. Particularly Stiles Stilinski and Scott McCall, along with Lydia Martin, Derek Hale, Alliso—“

“Enough.” Stiles banged his hands on the table, startling everyone in the room when it shook with a force from the spark of his magic. His primary element, Earth, shaking the building slightly so the lights flickered off before turning back on. “Your point?”

“You are the point, Agent Stilinski.” Nick Fury changed the tone of his voice, taking on a softer edge with a heady burden behind it. “You seem to be ahead of every single thing that happened since you arrived here, and yet you keep everything to yourself.” He pointed to Tony with a condescending hand. “I’ve already got one self-assertive smug know-it-all, I don’t need another.”

Tony shrugged, accepting the title, looking at Stiles for his reaction.

Stiles sighed, his heart ridden with guilt of past failures. He doesn’t want a repeat of that. But he’s aware of the possibility that by doing what he thinks is protection, he might end up making it worse. “You don’t understand.”

Fury stressed. “So, help me understand what this is.”

Tony sat back in his seat, watching the interaction between the Director and the new kid like a tennis match—pitching back and forth in a smart dialect and fast paced intelligence. At first it was entertaining, but now his arm was under the desk, hands on his watch that contained his compact repulser glove. At the same time, Tony trained an eye on Bruce’s condition from the stressful situation. Stiles noticed it.

He really should think twice the next time he wants to snap, preferably not in a room with the fucking Hulk, his conscience reminded him.

Clint reached an arm underneath the table to settle on Stiles’ knees, hoping to calm him down. Stiles’s let his head drop down. Beside him, Steve gave him a look of concern, unsure of what to do. The scenarios ran in his mind like an old movie. Stiles made his decision, hoping for all eternity that he made the right one.

“I’ve told Phil that I would join SHIELD on one condition and that is absolute trust and loyalty between all parties.” He began with lifting his face, a blank expression plastered on. “Right now, neither you or I have given each other anything to build trust and loyalty upon.”

Stiles could see Fury blink in his uninterrupted stare, he continued. “I’ve failed before, due to blind trust and weak bonds. A naïveté that cost everyone everything. I can’t and I won’t let that happen again.”

“As a man, I respect that.” Director Fury nodded to him, but his tone didn’t change. “But as the Director of SHIELD, I can not afford to promise you full access of everything—“
“I don’t care about absolute disclosure, Director Fury.” Stiles could see Tony squint his eyes at the statement, somehow caught off-guard by the idea of Stiles accepting such terms. “It’s an intelligence agency, there’s bound to be secrets to uphold the hierarchy of command and security.” He was speaking directly to Director Fury but everybody in the room knew he directed his words to everyone present. “I don’t care about honesty because if or when I do trust you, all your lies become truths and I wouldn’t be able to discern which is which.”

Nick brought a hand to his head, running his palms over the smooth surface, stopping at the back of his neck. “So what is it that you want, Agent Stilinski?”

“Your promise.” Stiles handed him an honest clear look. “That you will try and trust me. That you’ll learn to be loyal towards me. And I will promise you the same.”

Taking Fury’s silence as a ‘yes’, Stiles smiled and broke the heavy atmosphere. The man was stoic as fuck, okay, he’ll never get a straight answer out of him. So the absence of denial is as much of an agreement that he’s going to get.

“I don’t know.” Stiles took his arms of the table, settling into a more comfortable pose, because hey, being intimidating is a lot more taxing than it seems. “Something’s wrong, that’s for sure. I don’t know what’s happening, that’s the truth.”

Fury tilted his head. “But I’m sensing you have a theory.”

“One. I think it’s somehow connected.” Stiles unconsciously flitted his eyes at Tony, who caught the stare and went into his own personal bubble of thought. “I’ll look into it.”

“Alright, Agent Stilinski.” Director Fury laced his fingers together, leaning back into his seat with his elbows propped at the hand rest. “I have my own condition: We’ll have weekly meetings, unmonitored. You and me. That’s my trust.”

“It’s not as much trust as it’s an alternative way you’re keeping tabs on me.” Stiles rapidly spoke through the mild accusation before buckling in a one thousand watt smile. “But hey, baby steps.”

Steve hid his smile with a duck of his head, eyes still trained on the kid. Clint shaking his head at the kid’s dangerous or amazing ability of fearlessness, it depends on each situation. Fury just sat there unamused and eyebrows still raised for his answer.

“Weekly meetings, I can do that. Fair warning though, people have been known to grow very vexed by me in a short amount of time.” Stiles ignored the fleeting sarcastic comment of Clint’s ‘can’t see why’ in the background. “So make sure you pop down the happy pills before every meeting. I don’t want bills or angry letters from your therapist coming to my inbox.”

“Yeah, about that. I declare full guardianship over this one right here.” Tony stood in his chair, fixing the sleeves of his long-sleeved graphic tee. “He’ll be moving to the Avengers Tower by the end of today.”

Stiles blinked, his voice cracking. “I’m sorry, what?”

Tony clapped his hands to dismiss them. “It’s settled! Let’s go, Avengers! It’s past our curfew!”

“You’re kidding right. You can’t let him do this!” Stiles stood in disbelief, everyone else standing along with him.

Fury rolled his eyes, nodding and going along with whatever Tony had planned—contrary to popular believe, he’d rather avoid confrontation with all Starks if he has the option. It was the
logical thing anyone would do, Director of SHIELD or not.

“Give it up, Stiles.” Steve stood behind him, secretly happy that he’d spend more time with the kid. His identity secret in the back of his mind, overshadowed by the excitement. “It’s more convenient for your studies so you won’t need to go back and forth between DC and New York.”

“Seriously, Steve, you’re on his side?” Stiles stared him down with a disappointed judgmental glare, to which the man softly smiled to. “Clint?”

“We don’t have a curfew.” Clint reminded Tony, facing away from Stiles, already on his way out the conference room.

Tony threw him an over-exaggerated look. “If we don’t go now, we will.” He dragged Stiles out the room before he could complain further, a fond Steve and an exhausted Bruce following.

Maria Hill closed the doors from their exit, looking back to find the director in deep thought. She bowed slightly, leaving him to his own.

In all his career, Director Nick Fury had built bridges and burned them down to get where he was. Not by his choice, but by the necessity of the path of career and vow he has to uphold. A man like him doesn’t get to where he was without at least a nation of enemies. And the chair he sits on is a powerful one, but a lonely one all the same.

If the Avengers were fond of him, Stiles Stilinski might not be that bad after all. Nick ran the thought through his mind once more, it’s either that or he turned out to be worse than he imagined —the Avengers were peculiar that way.

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By the time they’ve successfully kidnapped Stiles back into the Avengers tower, it was already past dinner time. To say that Stiles was surprised to find his belongings already moved from his old apartment would be a lie: he knew a losing battle when he saw one. Doesn’t mean that he didn’t put up a huge resistance though—the only thing that finally stopped him was Banner threatening to hulk up on him.

“This is the tenth floor, the common living room. The top 15 floors are ours and below that is SHIELD personnel base.” Tony showed Stiles around the high-rise space. “You’ve been to Banner’s medical bay, his lab and the patient’s ward is also in the same floor which is seven floors below this one. Above this floor is my penthouse, and the one above that is our locker room along with the quintet station.

“The entire five floors below this are the living quarters, one floor fits two tenants; there’s one empty floor and a vacancy in Clint’s floor.” The man continued into the kitchen, grabbing an apple from the bowl in the middle of a kitchen counter. “Gym’s on the first floor, shooting range on second,

“You should really put up a directory somewhere around here.” Stiles looked around, amazed by the view, stopping at Tony sitting in the bar stool.

“Jarvis is our directory. You can’t access the elevator without him anyways, so there’s no need for one.”
“You’re bunking up with me kid.” Clint called from the open kitchen, grabbing a drink for himself. “No complaints.”

Steve felt his eye twitch. He took an unconscious step towards Stiles. “Why?”

Clint placed the glass down. “What do you mean why? It’s safer to share a floor than live separately.”

“I’m fine with it.” Stiles patted Steve on his arms. “Besides, it’s your loss. I’m a living nightmare as a roommate.”

“I have a feeling we’ll get along swimmingly.” Clint chuckled, silently relishing in the subtle glare that Steve directed at him, directing his own cheeky glare at

“Please just don’t destroy the tower, again.” Tony whined, knowing well the damage that Clint Barton can cause on his own—he doesn’t want to even imagine the possibilities when Stiles is added to the equation. “We’re still making repairs from Thor’s last venture against the ‘mighty evil’ coffee machine, again.”

Clint snickered at the mischief he was undoubtedly planning to cause, avoiding the apple core that Tony threw at him.

“Well, I’ll head on over to my room then.” Stiles gestured to Tony. “Keys?”

“No keys; Jarvis controls all the locks and doesn’t use it unless he’s told to.”

Steve placed a hand on his shoulder, tilting his head as a signal towards the elevator. “I’ll show you the way.”

“That’s alright, I can just ask Jarvis.” Stiles shook his head, the idea of becoming a burden still a fresh pain in his gut. “Besides you need to get going.”

“Going?” Steve’s eyebrows raised to his hairline. “Where?”

“Home.”

“He is home.” Tony pointed out, his pointer finger on Steve’s direction.

Steve nudged Stiles to the elevator—which is rapidly becoming Steve’s favorite new-age invention whenever Stiles is around. He faced Stiles’ questioning stare. “Yes, well actually, I’m in charge of this kindergarten day-care with the exception that it doesn’t end at night, nor the days following after.”

“You? Managing the Avengers?” Stiles slowly felt a grin breaking in his face, playfully frowning at him, happily being escorted to the elevators. “Are you trying to steal Captain America’s job?”

Tony smirked, rolling another apple in his hands. “Yeah, are you?”

“I know you have the same name, Steve. But just don’t.” Stiles shrugged, enjoying the laughter Tony and Clint suppressed and Steve’s alarmed expression. “I heard he’s quite the fair fighter.”

“Fair fighter, indeed.” Clint narrated in a dramatic voice, his tone getting louder and louder as Steve shoved Stiles into the elevator and repeatedly pressed the close button. “Our beloved honor pride and joy of the team, Captain America. The great sentimental roman—”

Steve cut him off the same time the doors did, a laughing Stiles by his side. “Goodnight!”
Steve dropped Stiles off in the 6th floor that he’ll be sharing with Clint, excusing himself to the 3rd floor to check on Natasha and Bruce in his medical lab. The elevator opened up to a rather short but spacious hallway with one door on each wall, the end of the hallway acting as a window with it’s glass walls.

Stiles opened the door and backed his shoulders against it to close it once he was inside, before heading inside the short hallway. The hallway opened up to a huge flat—almost thrice the size of his old studio apartment. It had a mini kitchen bar and island counter and a sofa faced at a flat screen TV mounted to the wall. The open concept-living room was filtered with natural lighting from the tall windows that covered the wall; one of the windows multi-functioning as a sliding window to enter the short wide balcony along the window wall.

He took a minute to figure out where everything was: His clothes all hanged and folded into the wardrobe in his room, which was ridiculously awesome with the floor to ceiling bookshelf as walls and a library sliding ladder attached to it. His bed was directly facing the bookshelf wall, a queen sized deep blue and brown colour scheme on an oakwood bed frame with a mountain of pillows.

Stiles flopped down onto the bed, bouncing from the springs. This place was so expensive that he was sure he owed Tony his first born, if he were to ever have kids. He realized somewhere in the middle of the horror motion picture of Beacon Hills High that he wasn’t exactly a straight player. Women are amazing, Stiles agrees with that to the full extent, but they’re more of goddesses than lovers. Look at it this way, they’re all Beyonce—admirable but untouchable.

Beacon Hills. He hasn’t given the place much thought over the past few months. Stiles closed his eyes, sinking into the comfort of the bed before sitting up. It was no time to reminisce about the past. Especially if his hunch is right.

Taking his phone out of his pocket, he dialed a number he knew by heart. Waiting for the dialing tone, he got up and walked out into the living room.

“Hey, babe.”

Stiles smiled at the greeting. “Sorry to disappoint, it’s just me.”

“Yeah, I know. Babe.”

Letting the laughter soothe his nerves, Stiles huffed. “It’s good to know that some things never change. How are you, Chase?”

From the end of the line, Chase put his phone off speaker, taking it into his hands while closing the heavy leather book he had out. “Relatively fine. I heard things on your end has been rather interesting. SHIELD, huh?”

Stiles rolled his eyes. He should’ve known. After all, you can’t hide secrets from someone who sees everything. “Yeah, that happened, somehow. I figured I’m not going to think about it too much before I lose my mind trying to make sense of how all of this is happening.” He trailed his hands over the smooth wallpaper of the hallway from his bedroom and conjoining bath to the living room. “Anyways, I called to see if you’re free any time soon.”
Chase clipped the book back into its holding, closing the glass casing with a frown. “For you, always. But why?”

“There’s something I need to check.” Stiles stopped in his tracks, remembering something he had stupidly forgotten of in the midst of all the chaos going on. “I need to go. I’ll explain tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow’s fine.” Chase kept his frown, unsettled by the anxiety he could feel off the vibrations of Stiles’ voice.

“Okay, thanks again. I’ll see you then.” Stiles hung up on the man before he got a chance to respond.

Going out the balcony, he let the cold air of the night bite his skin. The night sky was lit up by the twinkling lights from the high-rise multimillionaire company buildings and blaring bright billboards. Stiles sighed. While the world is definitely beautiful, the little round bastard is trying to screw him over.

Staring into his phone, he scoffed a breathless nervous short laughter. Five months. Is that seriously the best he can get until he needs to deal with the hellhole?

He pulled out his wallet from his back pocket, flipping it open to take a piece of paper from one of the card holders. Slipping the wallet back in, he turned the paper around in his hands, eyes raking the city in vain for another solution.

“Fine.” Stiles whispered to himself, swallowing his emotions, opening the folded paper. With trembling fingers he typed the number in his phone, thumb stopping on the call button.

Then he hit it.

Honking cars, harsh winds and a loud gulp later, the call went through.

“Hello?” A voice he hasn’t heard in a long time.

“Who’s calling?” That husky rough voice he remembered changed a tone and mellowed out, he pointed out to himself.

“Is anybody there, hello?” The words are stuck in his throat, unyielding to his insistence. Why is this so damn hard?

“I’m hanging up now.”

Before Stiles could think it through, he bit out a small, “Don’t.”

The silence through the line was deafening for the two callers. Their breaths a tad bit louder than usual, heard on both ends of the phone.

A whisper. “Stiles?”

Even though he knew the other couldn’t see him, he nodded once, exhaling slowly through his nose. “Yes, Jackson. Hi.”

Back in Beacon Hills, Jackson yanked his phone from his ear, looking around the loft he was in for a pack meeting that hasn’t happened in a while. He made a split second decision and lurked off down the stairs to exit the building towards the parking lot.

“Hi.” The blonde gripped his phone in a tight hold, voice uncharacteristically soft. Jackson
couldn’t believe that Stiles was calling him, and neither could Stiles himself. After months of silence and trying to track him down, the missing person tracks him instead with a single call.

“Are you—” with the pack “—alone?”

The connotation behind the words, or lack thereof, was crystal clear between the two of them. “Now I am.”

Stiles looked up, his glassy eyes betraying his will power. Of course, they would still be together, going strong even without him. A part of him had wished that the pack would break themselves apart, slowly pulling at the seams, and he imagined that he was the cause of it—a rightful selfishness that he earned. Even now, that bitterness is still there. *Fuck his life.*

From the prolonged silence, the werewolf winced. Jackson was one of the very few who went against the pack’s common view of the boy; it pains him that they let him go that way. “Listen, Stiles—“

“Don’t.” Stiles snapped harshly at the sympathetic tone. It was humiliating and it was full of pity, condescending and despicable to his ears. “I don't want to hear it.”

Jackson bit back his whine the same way he did five months ago: forcefully.

He could almost hear the whimper in the speaker by his ear, but Stiles stood strong. He knew that Jackson wasn’t technically a part of what happened, in fact he seemed to be against it, but Stiles couldn’t deal with this. At least not now. “Look, I only called because I need you to check something for me.”

Pleasantly surprised at the feeling of being needed, Jackson rapidly shook his head up diagonally, desperate to win the boy’s favor back. “Yes, anything. Just tell me.”

Stiles closed his eyes, a little relieved but his voice still stone cold. “Find the Nemeton.”

Jackson pulled his phone away to physically stare at it with confusion before pressing it back to his ears. “Why?”

“Just do it.” Stiles knew that his tone was harsh and cutting, but he just couldn't help it. Biting his cheeks, he whispered, “Please.”

The blonde blinked a few times, slowly. This was the unapologetic boy he had known since he was a little child. He’s never said sincerities like that before, especially not to the jock who made his high school life a living hell until they banded together against evil. Shaking his head from the shock, Jackson continued nodding. “O-okay.”

Stiles didn’t know he was holding his breathing, the air piling in his lungs desperate for a way out. It left him in a rush as soon as Jackson agreed, the words that went out with it quickly sealing the exchange. “Call me on this number when you find it.”

“Stiles, wai—“

He locked his phone, ending the call in the process. Jackson’s voice hang in the air like the presence of a ghost. Or there might really be a ghost that Stiles wasn’t aware of or ever existing. Whatever the hell it is, Stiles hated it (and the ache in his heart wasn't really helping either).
Stiles turned the heat down from the stove, stirring inside the pan one last time before scooping the soup into the bowl he prepared. He bent down to grab a tray from the drawers and simultaneously checking on the garlic bread he popped in the oven a while ago.

No one seemed to be awake just yet, but that’s a given since he’s awake in the ass crack of dawn at 6 in the morning. But, he’s a student, so he’s gotta keep a tight schedule or else everything will fall upon him like a brick wall.

Taking the pan out of the oven, he arranged the bread on a plate along with two sunny side ups. He grabbed a mug from the overhead cupboard and poured in his special mix of tea. Tying his apron off, he balanced the tray in one hand and headed to the elevator.

“Good morning, Jarvis.” He called out inside the elevator, smiling at the ceiling—which is weird cause he knows Jarvis is everywhere but it just seemed like the thing to do (makes him feel less mental for talking to empty air).

“Good morning, Stiles.”

Stiles smiled in triumph at finally getting Jarvis to call him by his name instead of the overly formal title that he absolutely feels ridiculous about. “Take me to Natasha, please.”

“Gladly.” Jarvis started the elevator, which had no buttons so good luck to whoever tries to rob this building. Well, at least the one good thing that came out of that design is that no one will be able to hijack the tower. *Finally,* somewhere safe. “Dr. Banner’s lab and medical ward, level 3. Enjoy your day, Stiles.”

“You too, man. Thanks!” Stiles called out behind him, walking towards the patient’s room. He got a glimpse at the lab that Bruce works in, which is absolute heaven to a medical student like him. He’s definitely bribing Bruce later to play in it—maybe with some baked goods.

Knocking the door softly, he slid it open and entered the room. “Agent Romanoff?” Stiles saw the woman wide awake, watching the news in the television from her upright hospital bed. He bowed. “Your breakfast, me lady.”

The redhead broke a small smile in her beautiful features, returning the bow a nod of her head. “I’ve been waiting for hours, I’m famished.”
“I must not keep the lady waiting, silly me.” Stiles gasped in mock shock, pulling the rolling table stand from the corner of the room to fit into Natasha’s bed, placing the tray down in it. “I shall iron my hands so forgive me, me lady.”

“I need to know your name before I can forgive you.”

“The filthy servant’s name is Stiles, me lady.”

Romanoff placed her hand on Stiles’ hunched shoulders. “Rest easy, Stiles. You may call me Natasha.”

Stiles bowed a grandiose elegant bend, taking Natasha’s hands in his and placing a soft air kiss on it. “As you wish, me lady.” He took the cover off of the tray, gesturing to the food. “Comfort mushroom soup with a side of toasted garlic bread and eggs, to your preference—at least according to Jarvis—and a warm mug of specially brewed tea. Bon Appétit.”

“Splendid.” Natasha laughed at his act, finally breaking it when she started drinking the soup down with the bread. “What brings you up so early? No one usually gets up this early aside from Cap.”

“Well, I have school, for one. And I’m cultured and mannered, unlike those Neanderthals snoring off in their beds.” Stiles took a seat next to her in one of the soft arm chairs, rolling his eyes at the ceiling to the men upstairs.

Natasha gave an approving nod. “Finally, a proper gentleman.”

Stiles fiddled with his fingers, looking to his laps. “W-what about Captain Rogers?”

“He’s too much of a gentleman with women. He treats us like we’re made of glass, it’s seriously offensive.” The woman huffed a pained sigh, as if she was physically offended from it.

Stiles scoffed, stealing one of the garlic bread. “I can safely say you’re the only one that feels that way.”

“What’s this?” Natasha lowered her spoon, tilting her head forward to the boy. “You’ve got a crush on Cap, don’t you?”


Romanoff chuckled at the obvious denial, shaking her head. “Oh, honey, you’re going to be a splendid addition to the team.”

Trying hard to change the subject, he took something out of his pocket, unwrapping the plastic wrap. “Here, I’ve got a present to commemorate your healthy recovery.”

Stiles placed the small pot of dirt in front of Natasha, who gave him a weird look before she watched him raise his hands palms up and watched seedlings grow and fan out into beautiful pale purple flowers.

“Autumn Crocus.” Natasha’s eyes widen, hands reaching out to touch the petals. “It’s one of the most endangered plant species in the world. How?”

He simply smirked at her, widening the span of his fingers to grow more. “It’s a beautiful yet deadly plant; one of a kind. I felt like it was the perfect gift for the only formidable member of the Avengers.”
Natasha marveled at the flower, she’s never seen it before.

“Oh, and.” Stiles fan out both his hands around the plant, another flower growing taller than the others, bud bulging out more than usual. “Something special.” The bud opened to reveal a circle pendant with the black widow signature on it, a beautiful vintage version.

Natasha reached out and plucked the pendant out, pulling the chain from the stem before the flower burst into dust. She huffed a surprised laugh, turning the necklace around in her palms.

“That’ll protect you from things that will cause you unavoidable deadly harm like before.” Stiles offered a shy toothful grin.

“First you save my life and now you’re guaranteeing my life, it seems like I’ve got a new guardian angel.” Putting the necklace on, Natasha trailed her fingers down from her neck to the pendant, feeling a wave of warmth through her body. “Thank you.”

Stiles coughed awkwardly in return, mumbling a small ‘you’re welcome’ to her, making her laugh at his inability to deal with gratitude. “Uh, I’ll leave you to it, then. Got school.”

The boy could not rush from the room faster, leaving an amused and touched Natasha in her room. He shared a private smile with himself, pleased that he was able to cheer the deadly agent. Bruce was waiting next to the elevator when he got back up to the living room floor, smiling at him.

“What?” He looked around, confused.

Bruce waved his hand that had a StarkPad on a live footage of Natasha’s room.

“Of course.” Stiles rolled his eyes. “Is there anything that’s not under surveillance.”

“Sadly, no.” Bruce winced pitifully at the boy.

Stiles shook his head disapprovingly, “No wonder you have trust issues.”

The good doctor followed the boy into the kitchen. “It’s very kind, what you did for her.” Bruce complimented him, watching him scurry around the kitchen, taking out a batter from the fridge and a skillet from the pantry. “She’s very closed-off. It’s nice to see her being vulnerable.”

“It’s not just her.” Stiles mumbled, but it was heard by Banner. By the silence that went on, Stiles sighed as the butter sizzled off the pan. “Everyone here has kept to themselves. I know that cause that’s what I also do. The burden, the pressure, the responsibility of saving everyone is on each of your shoulders—and as hard as you try to control it, it’s eating away at you.”

Flipping one after another pancake, Stiles stacked them equally to different plates, different toppings on each ones also according Jarvis’ recommendation. He slid one in front of Banner who was sitting on the island counter connected to the open stove that he was working on, a plate of plain pancakes with chocolate syrup. “I’m trying to change that. Because I’ve seen what happens if it goes on like this, up close and personal.”

Picking up his school bag he left at the couch, he packed in his lunch and threw it over his shoulder, fixing a beanie on top of his hair. “Look forward to it, Doc.”

Bruce Banner was caught off-guard by the tirade of analysis Stiles threw at him. Startled by the amount of brutal honesty the young boy was able to speak with such confidence and calm. A strong personality and a headstrong mindset.
Tony walked into the living room to see stacks of pancakes on different plates. “Chocolate Pancakes!” He took the plate with his favorite all-chocolate pancakes and syrup. “Wait, Brucie, you can’t cook.”

Bruce shook his head at the statement. “Stiles made it.”

“I knew moving him in was the right decision, we finally have a decent cook in the house!” Tony cheered, shoving the pancake down his throat, stifling his moans. “What’s wrong?”

The doctor blinked away his stupefaction, softly grinning at what just happened. He cut into his pancake, a breath of relief washing over him when he tasted homemade breakfast that he hadn’t had in a long time. “Nothing.”

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“That’s all for today. I’ll be expecting your reports to be on my desk by tomorrow morning before 12.” The professor shouted in the middle of the chaos of students pouring out of the classroom at the end of their day.

Stiles went up to the professor, jumping his steps to skip the stair to go down to his desk. He pulled out his report from his bag, clumsily dropping most of his papers along with it. The professor laughed at him, used to the uncoordinated disposition his favorite student had. Stiles glared at him. “You know I can drop this class any time I want to, right?”

The professor crossed his arms, raising his eyebrow at him. “Really?”

“Yeah, you’re right, I can’t.” Stiles gave up, waving goodbye to his professor. He was used to submitting his work early, another advantage of being ahead of class is that he had more free time to take care of his other matter of business (debatably the more important one).

He rushed through the students in the hallway, greeting the greetings that the others called out to him, exiting the campus in a hurry. Stiles walked all the way to his next destination, brainstorming in his head.

The recent events that happened were relatively weird in his mind. He knew he was unlucky, but he can’t be that unlucky to have one after another disaster getting thrown his way in a matter of days. Once an accident, twice a coincidence, thrice a pattern. It was the most common rule of any investigation. He never thought he’d have to quote Ian Fleming in his life, but well, things happen.

Stiles reached the museum, casually greeting the security guard he’s friends with.

“He’s in the archeology section.” The security guard pressed the button to pass the turnstile.

“Thanks, Jerry.” Stiles rushed through the metal bar that rotated from his push, automatically walking to the section he was directed to.

The museum was probably the place he visited the most in his time in New York. It was the first place he visited when he settled—a quiet place to get away from all the crowd, to wallow in thoughts and drown in the history of it all. He spent the first month of his stay in New York in a turmoil—silent and unfamiliar to his usual bright and chatty personality.
“That’s never a good look.” A new voice interrupted his thoughts, turning around to face the first friend he’s made in the bustling city.

“Good to see you too, Chase.” His words dripped with sarcasm, smiling to see him healthy and fine. Chase reached for a hug which he returned, guiding him to his office in the back of the museum.

“So, what is it you want to ask me about?” Chase stopped in front of his cupboard, letting Stiles sit on the red vintage couch in the middle of his office. He watched the orbs glow different colours when he waved his hands to them, observing the mist that flowed inside the orbs as he read them.

Stiles never ceases to be amazed at the things his friend does—one of the most interesting magic to his knowledge. Chase is a mage with the gift of prophecy. He’s adept at doing protection magic such as shields and charms; the necklace for Natasha was a favor that he asked Chase. The man was one of the most renowned prophet in the supernatural world, that was something he learned after he met him. He hears and sees everything from the different orbs he has placed around—Stiles could not explain what he does nor understand it.

“Have you heard anything? Trouble or unnatural things?” Stiles asked him with caution, eyes trained at the back of the mage.

Chase slightly moved his head to the side, eyes lit up in white, frowning. “No, nothing.”

“Oh.” Stiles tried to mask his disappointment to no avail. “Well this was a bust—“

“No.” Chase repeated strongly, the dyed platinum beach white hair raining on his face from its man bun. “I mean I hear nothing. I see nothing.”

Stiles took a moment to understand what he said. “You mean, you can’t hear anything?”

The museum curator waved his hands to stop the glow of the orbs. Walking over to the wall that had a million boards and clock-like devices with pointers and numbers, keeping track of who-knows-what, he mumbled, “The gods have stopped whispering. There’s nothing—I can’t see anything. It’s as if there’s a barrier, something blocking the way.”

“Is that—bad?” Stiles stood up.

The orbs shook slightly, both of their eyes flitting towards the cupboard, stance anxious and jumpy. Chase was the first to recover. “Yes. Very.” He moved towards the stand in the middle of the shelves, looking at the big leather-worn book, flipping the pages to find it all blank. “Very bad.”

Stiles sensed the panicked state that Chase had spiraled into. “Why? What is that?”

“The Book of Horus.” The prophet stressed, flipping to random pages of the book to find it all equally empty. “It’s an all-changing book that records events around the world and calculates its actions and courses that will unfold. This is the only existing original copy of the artifact in the whole world.” He slammed the cover of the book down. “And it’s fucking blank.”

A deadly feeling creeped into his gut, somehow knowing that his hunch was right. “What does that mean?”

The lights above them flickered, their eyes now on the ceiling, then the light turned off. In the silence, Chase whispered, his voice wavering. “I don’t know. This has never happened before.”
Stiles maneuvered his way through the dark to stand by Chase, the latter instinctively pulling Stiles towards him and casting a protection shield around them. Stiles grabbed his arm, the lights turning back on. “What’s happening?”

“I—“ Chase cut his words short as the light's brightness escalated in its intensity, making both men wince at the harsh light.

“Chase, do something!” Stiles shook the arm he was holding to snap the man out of his reverie.

The lights burst, sparks flying throughout the room and bounced against the shield Chase casted around them. One of the orbs breaking in sync with the light, a green colored smoke escaping from the cracks and dissipating in the air. Chase dismantled the shield, rushing to the ground to pick up the broken pieces of the orb.

Stiles looked around the darkness, the only light filtering in was from the curtained windows. Glass shards scattered on the floor, some imbedding itself on the couch and rained on the desk.

“Chase?” He called out to the man in a stupor kneeling on the floor, shaking his shoulders with a gentle arm.

The ghostly look the normally charming and gallant man gave him was enough confirmation for him to know that his suspicion was growing more real by the second.

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“I’m sure he’s fine.” Tony repeated for the sixth time, crossing his arms in a show of confidence, but Bruce saw his leg bouncing up and down in agitation.

Steve and Clint were pacing around the room, worried for the late return of their newest housemate. It was way past 10 at night and Steve had called the campus to ask if Stiles was still there, but the university told him that the boy’s class ended way earlier at 4.

Clint spared Tony a blank glare, waving his hands around. “The kid is like a magnet to trouble. He’s been in three dangerous situations in all of one week; and the last one was a fucking invasion from a supernatural creature—which I still can’t wrap my head around.”

“He’s magic.” Bruce tried to reason, his fingers laced together propped on his knees from the couch he was sitting next to Tony on. “He can handle himself.”

“He can’t handle everything by himself.” Steve commented, walking back and forth in front of the elevators. “And how am I just now figuring out that he’s been through two hijacking attempts in SHIELD? How was he recruited to SHIELD in the first place anyways, he’s just a kid.”

Tony pointed an accusing finger at Steve. “First, he’s not a kid—he’s a legal adult by his age and far more mature than he should be. And second, why would we tell you about it? We didn’t know you knew him.” He shared a knowing look with Clint. “And we haven’t even touched the subject on why you’re keeping your identity from him.”

Steve glared at Tony—glaring was just a normal response when faced with Tony Stark. “He works at the bookstore I go to. It’s just a coincidence that he doesn’t know me and you need to keep it that way.”
Clint narrowed his eyes at the Captain, stopping in his pacing. “Are you sure that’s the only reason you’re doing it?”

Rogers turned a deaf ear on the question, continuing the choreography of a worried (boy)friend. Bruce shook his head at the antics of the three men, keeping his eyes on the StarkPad showing Natasha’s vitals and footage in the room.

“Tony.” Steve snapped, startling the man from his posture. “Didn’t you bug his phone or something?”

“The Cap is intentionally asking me to break the rules? What sorcery is this?” Tony joked only to receive judging stares by all three of the men present. “Okay. Okay, I did.” Stark reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded sticky note and the bug. “But he disabled the program and took the physical one off the inside of his phone.”

Clint snatched the note from Tony’s hand. “Try harder, noob.” He read, bursting into a harsh laughter, forgetting the tense atmosphere for a second. “He called you a noob. Jesus, he is something else.”

Steve was about to berate Clint’s behavior when the elevator dinged and opened to reveal a shell-shocked Stiles. The man sped his walk to take the boy into his arms, patting him down while Stiles could not say anything. “Are you okay? Where were you? We were all so worried.”

“Some of us were, I knew you’d be fine.” Tony commented from the back, receiving a punch to his shoulder from Bruce who caught his lie.

Clint dragged Stiles away from Steve’s mother-henning, who in-turn gave him the Captain America glare for stealing the boy from him. Clint made an expression to stress the older man to recognize Stiles’ state.

That was when the rest of the Avengers noticed that Stiles was quieter than before—in fact it was eerie. Clint sat Stiles down on the sofa next to Tony and sat beside him, a comforting hand on his back. Steve followed suit, crouching in front of the boy.

“Stiles?” Clint tried.

Stiles kept his eyes on his lap, still trying to gather his bearings from whatever the hell just happen over in the museum. “Yeah?”

Steve bent his head to catch Stiles’ shaky eyes, concerned. His voice was soft when he held the gaze Stiles gave him. “What’s wrong?”

“I-uh.” Stiles licked his lips, staring directly into Steve’s clear blue eyes, suddenly finding his throat as dry as the Sahara. “I don’t know.”

He came to the museum looking for answers because that was the only place he knew for sure he could get an answer from, always. But now, all he got in return was more questions and a truckload of anxiety to his already anxious self. What’s more alarming was that he wasn’t sure if he wanted to know the answers.

And what comes along with it.
Plot build-up yeah! So, I'm very sorry for the very late update. I was sick for around three days so this was delayed, again my apologies. I was also troubled by some aspects of the story as you reviewed, but I'm hoping it will all turn out smoothly as to not disappoint you~ But here you go, the next update-longer than I thought it'd be, but consider it my apology :) Subscribe, leave kudos and comment~~~ Love you guys for everything XD

Luckily for Stiles, he didn't have any school the next day—so he wouldn't need to embarrass himself in front of the whole school if he had a mental breakdown. Thus, he stayed back and unpacked all his things from the boxes he went back and got from his workplace. As paranoid as he is, he doesn't leave any important things in one place: he leaves them scattered in different places, the museum and his workplace being one of them. Most people might find this very disadvantageous, but it's the safest way to assure maximum security in the worst situations.

And with his life, you never know when that will be.

He only collected the things he thinks he needs, placing them all out on his living room at his own floor. Stiles had another cup of coffee running, taking his mug before walking forward to the glass wall. He sipped his coffee, reading all of the notes he had scribbled on the wall, a black whiteboard marker spinning on his finger.

Stiles placed the mug down on the coffee table in front of his couch, moving the laptop to the side. Jarvis had connected his laptop speakers to the in-built audio system of the walls, and from it the words surrounded him, "I've been in contact with dreamcatchers, they're not seeing anything either."

Writing the update on the board under the creature's name, Stiles sighed while looking at the laptop's screen that was directed at the writings on the glass wall. "Another dead-end, huh?"

"Seems like it. I'm still waiting on the nymph and the merman, how's your side?" Chase crossed his arms on the table he set his own laptop on from his office.

"The Elven Kingdom finally replied." Stiles moved away to the wall again, wincing a little from the strong ray of light that passed from the glass. Taking a red marker from his back pocket, he traced a line from the dreamcatchers to the Elven Kingdom. "They said regulating the weather is difficult these days; their Celtic Compass isn't fully working."

Hearing the toaster call out his breakfast, Stiles sped walk to the open kitchen and spread strawberry jam on the burnt toasts. He stuffed one into his mouth, slipping the red marker behind his ear and carrying the plate with his free hand.

"Is that all you're eating?" The prophet questioned him when he entered the range of the camera from the video call.

"It's this or more cups of coffee." Sliding the plate on the couch, since the table had no more space,
Stiles wrote another link in the mind map. “How about the Fae Council?”

The platinum white-blond huffed in frustration, holding up the beacon transmission of the faes. “Their world is in a turmoil, I can’t contact any of them. But, I’ve heard rumors that their Mother Tree has stopped producing fairy dust.”

“Shit.” Stiles furiously scribbled the information in, chewing down the rest of his bread in his mouth. “This is worse than we thought.”

“It’s catastrophic.” Chase nodded along to Stiles, popping a cherry tomato from his abandoned omelette. “If we don’t figure out what’s happening, there will be consequences waving through this world too.”

“At the very least we know that it only seems to be affecting supernatural beings in their own realms, which will explain the skinwalkers’ incident, but what’s the connection to SHIELD?” Stiles took a blue marker from his pocket, slipping the black one he had between his pinky and ring finger, and circled the highest point of his mind map which he kept for the organization.

In the screen, Chase ruffled his hair, letting his hair loose from the messy hair-do. “It’s like white noise. It’s worse than silence, I swear.” He went off-screen to grab the Book of Horus from the stand. "Feels like I could almost hear the words behind it, but I can’t.”

Stiles spiraled into his own mind, looking at all the webs and legs of the mind map that crawled over the glass surface, doodling the scenery over New York in bright red blue and black. All of it links back to the center, the crucial piece he needs. Inside the center, circled in a red marker numerous, was one word: “Nemeton.”

The prophet untied his hair from the bun, letting his curls fall to his shoulder. Shaking his head to comb it over, he peaked up in interest at the barely heard whisper. “What about the nemeton?”

“I’m supposed to be receiving an update from—” Stiles bit back his words, considering it very carefully “—a colleague.”

A series of loud bangs on his door disrupted their discussion. Stiles snapped his head to the direction, simultaneously checking his watch that read it was 7:32 a.m. Who was visiting him this early?

“I’ll talk to you once I hear from them. Jarvis, end call.” The boy rushed from one corner of the living room to the other, pulling the curtains so they meet halfway in the middle, submerging the notes and the room in darkness.

He tried his best to clean out the mess he made of his living room but gave up when the series of knocks kept on coming. “Jesus, I’m going.”

Of the things in the world that made Stiles speechless, there aren’t many that still exists. He gasped when he first went to the museum, he cried when he got his first laptop and the path to his googlefu, he maybe-really-kinda gave himself a concussion when he first tried out his newfound powers. Point is! There’s been a few that made his jaw drop.

Not like this one. Not when he opened the door.

“HELLO, SPARK!”

Stiles thought that his voice was louder than the speakers he was just using for a video call, which makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.
“Oh yes hello, hi.” Stiles gave himself a whiplash with how fast his turned his head to face the intruder in his flat who was already making himself at home. “Wait, what did you say?”

His intruder turned around to face him, confusion in his eyebrows. “I said a greeting, little spark.”

The words processed in his brain, trying to remember a time he outed his magic identity specification, but he didn’t. “I didn’t tell any—Wh-what are you doing?” Stiles looked up to see the blonde freely moving around his place, touching things that really shouldn’t be touched. “Just be careful, okay?”

With all the mess on the floor and around his living room, his guest paid no mind to his steps when he stomped over a glass mason jar. “I hope that wasn’t anything important.”

“No.” He could almost see his lie meter breaking off the charts, Stiles’ voice a pitch higher than before. “The dragon wing is not important at all, there’s just gonna be one less dragon in this world—which is apparently none because that’s the last.” Stiles hurried his speech, internally cursing himself for the crack in his voice.

Unable to pick up the desperate and sarcastic tone in the boy’s voice, his guest trudged on and continued picking stray objects, including an antique husk of a fae’s wings. Stiles bit back a whimper by hurriedly sipping his coffee when it crashed in his hands, nodding to the apology the man gave him.

*Jesus*, this guy has no regards for antique history preservation.

The god continued to grabbed another one—for some reason, obviously not learning his lesson—and Stiles choked on his coffee.

“No! Put that down.” Stiles reprimanded the long haired blonde, nearly slipping over his cape when he took the dark metal cube out of his grasp. “What the hell are you doing?!”

Looking confused, the man simply nodded and moved to pick another object—a teardrop shaped blue stone.

“Woah! Careful there Pantene, this you can *not* break.” The boy snatched the item from his hands, cradling the box and the teardrop in the crook of his elbow, setting it down very carefully on top of the shelves that lined the wall. “Unless you want a demon hole sprouting right here next to my newly acquired typewriter set after Tony broke my last one.”

The man seemed to be taken aback for a second, crossing his arms. “I am Thor, son of Odin, who is this Pantene you speak of?”

Stiles blinked. “Wow, I uh—nope, that’s not gonna work.” This was definitely not how he expected his first meeting with the god going, if not ever. “I’ve never had my sarcasm fail me due to lack of common knowledge before, that’s a first.”

Thor smiled contently at himself, offering a small nod of the head to the statement. “You’re welcome, I’m glad to be your first.”

“It wasn’t a compliment but thank you.” Deciding it would be better to just go with it, he conceded. He’s a god for god’s sakes.

The door opened again, revealing a barely awake Clint still in his pajamas—very much naked from the torso upwards. “Your first what?”
“Clint don’t you start—“ Stiles turned to look at the new guest before hurriedly turning back. “Oh, seriously? Put on some clothes old man.”

Clint chuckled, striding to the younger and sliding an arm around his shoulder, taking his coffee from him. “Don’t deny it when you know you like it.”

“I’d like it if there was a bruise in your sphincter.” Stiles raised his elbows, prepping to jam it into the man behind him.

Good naturedly, Clint ruffled the kid’s hair, unwilling to let go of the boy in his grasps. “I’d believe that if you had more muscle mass, you little punk.”

Feeling left out, Thor moved towards the two, taking his cape off in the process which caused Stiles to gawk like a deprived-puppy because, holy hell that should not be as hot as it is.

“Thor, what the hell are you doing?!” He was turning into a broken radio; the effect of Thor, ladies and gentlemen. Witness and marvel.

“The man of birds told me that skinship is of human nature.” The son of Odin continued to take off his armory, seemingly unaware of the colour slipping from the boy’s face. “I welcome you to our humble abode with one, my friend.”

Stiles was slack jawed. “Is this a strip house? Has my life really become the set of a b-rated porn hub?” He struggled in Clint’s hold, tilting his head towards the ceiling to avoid any eye contact because he thinks his eyes will break, “Oh gods, please put that back on.”

Thor took the words as nil, because he simply wrapped both his arms to Clint and Stiles’s squished mess of limbs, none realizing that the door clicked open again.

“We’re having a welcome party and no one told me?” Tony barged into the room, helping hold Natasha’s weight beside him.

Stiles raised his hands in defeat, incredulous by the action. “Does anybody knock?”

Natasha took pity on the boy, knowing first hand how hard it was to deal with these clingy creatures. “Sweetie, Steve just wanted me to call you up for breakfast.”

“Right. Yes. Breakfast!” Stiles quickly took the invitation and squirmed out of the embrace with ease of the distraction. Making a break to the door, he rushed out as fast as he can, leaving the member of the avengers behind him.

Which, oh right. The avengers. His room. Bad Idea.

He went back as fast as he can, slamming the door open to see the gang touching his stuff and rummaging through the boxes, startling all of them.

“Really, Natasha.” Stiles leveled the woman who seemed to be perfectly capable of walking on her own by the way she was stretched to the ceiling knocking any empty spaces open. “I expect this behavior from these—” He gestured to the “—barbarians.” Stiles ignored the string of protests coming his way. “But you?”

Natasha found no regret in her actions, shrugging her shoulders. “Hey, you’re the one with mysterious secrets including ways to know our secrets. I’m a spy, it’s my nature.”

Stiles gave up on negotiating further, waving his hands in a circle to gesture them out. “Well take
your nature up and away from my personal space, please and thank you.”

The Avengers filed out of his room with slumped shoulders, glancing back to look at his living room like it’s the pandora box of their dreams, but Stiles shut that down with his glare. He looked to Thor, who stood beside him smiling innocently.

Without thought, Stiles draped Thor’s forgotten cape on the floor over the god’s face before pushing him out of the room and closing the door behind him. “Children.”

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The defeated bunch was herded to the room by one mentally exhausted Stiles Stilinski (“Ha! That’s one monstrosity right there” “I’ll show you monstrosity if you don’t shut up, Anthony”).

Steve was manning the stove while Bruce helped plated the simple bacon and eggs for everyone to take. Stiles replied to the greeting he received from the two men, sharing a secret smile with the latter from the conversation they had the other day, to which the older man shook his head fondly at.

Moving to stand behind the kitchen counter, he smiled to the current chef. “I didn’t know you could cook?”

Steve faked offense at the accusatory question, pointing his spatula towards the younger. “You didn’t ask. Besides, I could do some simple everyday foods, nothing too advanced.” He lifted the pan to slide the omelette to Bruce’s plate. “I had to learn how to do it back in the old days.”

Steve couldn’t see the frown growing between the younger’s brow, of doubt and suspicion. Tony saw it as clear as day and made a note to ask him later, while everyone made haste of their breakfast, breaking in small private conversation on their day itinerary.

Stiles could see Tony scheming behind his actions, deciding to move on as fast as he could. “You gotta love a man with an apron.”

The splutter in Steve’s action was caught by everyone but Stiles, the youngest turning his back to grab juice from the fridge. Natasha shared an obvious smirk to Clint and then down his way, to which Stiles just frowned on.

What is with these spies and their secret eyebrow language? And where can he get a crash course on it? Seriously. Wherever he goes, he’s always got a Der—

Stiles stopped in his pouring, rewinding what he just thought of in his mind. That’s a name he hadn’t thought about in a while. He scoffed, realizing how pathetic he was that he can’t even say his name. It felt years since what happened happened but at the same time it felt like it was just yesterday.

His brain was struggling to keep the topic out of his mind but his stupid heart just kept on pushing it forward.

Thankfully, before Stiles could breakdown in a mental panic in front of the Avengers—which wasn’t any better than having it at school—Steve shook him. “Stiles?”
“Yeah?”

The older man searched his eyes for any sign of what he was looking for. But Stiles kept his gaze steady and strong, he’s learned how to lie to Werewolves—he’s basically the only functional model of a supernatural lying machine (which does not sound as cool as he thought it’d be). “Are you okay? You seem out of it since yesterday, which you still won’t talk about.”

Stiles felt guilty under the gaze of Steve, but he persevered. “Nothing, for now at least. I’ll tell you once I know more.” He could practically feel the stern observatory glare that Tony directed to him, ignoring it as best as he could.

“So, Thor, son of Odin, sponsored by Pantene.” Stiles swiftly pivoted towards the god sitting on the island bar, leaning on his elbows to the man shoving eggs down his chin. “What brings you to the mortal world of weakling idiots?”

Tony was the only one who found the humor more enlightening than the general insult, the rest pinning Stiles with a straight face.

“This Pantene must be an honorable fellow.” Thor smiled to Stiles, unaware of the sly grin he received back. “But, I am here on official business.”

Natasha piqued her interest, her senses spiking in the connection of the origin of her injury and Thor’s visit. “Official business?”

“The balance of Midgard has shifted.” Thor stated with a sense of urgency, dropping his fork as gently as he could to the plate (meaning resulting in a crack on Tony’s newly replaced tableware). “I do not know of what the cause is, but I have come to formally investigate on this occurrence.”

Stiles let the information sink into his brain; balance. That’s true. Everything he’s collected on this weird phenomenon had led to the conclusion that the balance of the supernatural world had tipped to a more sinister scale. The reason was still unknown however, and it still wouldn’t explain what was happening with the constant attack against SHIELD.

“What do you know so far?” Clint continued the line of questioning, folding his arms together.

Thor shrugged, taking his cup of coffee down in a single gulp—his Adam’s apple, *Jesus*. Focus, Stiles!

“So far, we’ve narrowed the problem to come from deep within and not from external forces.”

Stiles paused, the words echoing in his mind. Deep within?

“Tony.”

“Stiles.”

The two men looked at each other the same time they called each other’s attention, both having formulated the same hypothesis. Tony cleared his throat to dissipate the weird looks thrown their way, especially the intense one from Steve. “I remembered that I haven’t shown you my playroom yet.”

Stiles got with the programme. “I don’t need to know about your sex dungeon, Tony, I have ideas of my own, thank you very much.”

Steve choked on his eggs while Clint burst out laughing, Bruce suspiciously red, the tension gone
from everyone’s mind except for Natasha.

“While I would love for you to see that, I would still very much like to use it for my own self-preservation.” Tony quipped back, careful from the burning glare Steve shot him with. “Come on, I’ll show you my lab instead.”

Stiles playfully considered the offer before accepting it, walking with Tony to the elevator. “As long as I’ll come out the same state I did entering, then why not?”

Tony crossed his hands behind his head, winking at him. “No promises.”

“No funny business, Tony!” Steve called out behind him, weirdly constrained in his voice.

“If I’m not back in an hour, send back up.” Stiles called out before the doors closed, catching Steve’s warning to be careful.

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When they arrived at the fourth floor mechanics lab, Tony spent a while pointing to projects that he was working on, pleasantly surprised on the inputs the young genius had to say about it. “Is there anything you can’t do?”

Stiles inspected one of the repulser that Tony had been fixing. “What do you mean?”

Tony scoffed. “You cook, you’re smart in every aspect, you’re loyal, brave if not ballsy, a medical student and you’re fucking magical for christ’s sakes.”

“It seems that way, yes.” Stiles nodded along to Tony’s string of praise, trying hard not to blush.

“But in reality?” Tony tested him, watching Stiles walk around the room looking for something. The boy ducked underneath desks and checked behind cupboards, pulling down panels that extended from the ceiling as holographic glasses. “That we’ll see soon, won’t we.”

“If you’re looking for bugs, I can assure you that you won’t find one.” Tony piped up, crossing his arms. “This is a secure facility.”

Stiles leveled him with a blank poker face and a tilt of his eyebrow, fumbling his hands on the glass casing so he could access Tony’s father’s SHIELD temporary badge.

The older man warned him. “Be careful with that.”

Contrary to the words, Stiles pried the metallic insignia open despite the outrageous cry Tony let out.

“What did I just sa—“

Stiles shut Tony up by holding up a blinking red light attached to the bug that had been inside the badge. The older man frowned in shock while Stiles turned the bug around, examining the design. “Soviet made. I’m guessing it’s been here the whole time.” He threw the bug on the ground, crushing it beneath his boot.
Tony took a seat on one of his swivel chairs, hands running through his hair. “Well, now what? I’m guessing you did that because you’re thinking of the same thing I am?”

“Yeah, Thor’s words just clicked somehow.” Stiles leaned against one of the worktables, hands tinkering with a rotor. “It came from within.”

“From deep within SHIELD.” Tony theorized, pulling up on of his hologram monitors, his Stark Pad controller in his hands to track his update. “It’s not just in the system, it is the system.”

Stiles watched the man do his job and he is not afraid to admit that he’s kind of star-struck by watching the genius work. It’s his weakness, okay? He has a lot of weaknesses for a lot of things, especially towards hot older men (in particular one book nerd, but he’ll never say that out loud).

“I’ve been running a program on the origin of the hack according to online fingerprints, it’s a new system I’m working on—basically analyzes the patterns and sequences of how each operative normally works with and identifies them.” Tony explained, eyes switching between the screen and Stiles. “I’m tracking the plane and Triskelion hijacking, which I’m supposed to get the results right about now.”

The screen rolled with commands and lines and lines of codes from Tony’s one press of a button, opening different windows and matching systems of digital signatures, finally stopping at one restricted access command.

Of a level 10 operative.

Stiles and Tony stopped their administrations on whatever they were doing. Eyes freezing at the analysis conclusion, unable to fathom the implications.

“Wait, that can’t be.” The younger muttered.

“Just to be clear, we’re thinking Fury right?” Tony broke the silence. “That man’s always rubbed me the wrong way.”

“I’m not going to question the word choice, but I don’t know.” Stiles shook his head, turning to face Tony with fear in his eyes. “There’s just something about Fury that I trust in—despite the constant infuriating one-eyed gaze of enigmatic ‘big brother-ism’.”

“You’re right.” Tony sighed in defeat, turning the holograph off to somehow push the revelation away. “It was worth a try.”

Stiles took a moment to consider all possibilities, starting with Tony. “Why did you show me this?”

Tony squinted his eyes at the suspicion rolling off the boy, a little bit annoyed but also rather impressed by the sharp instincts the kid’s got. “I’m truly offended that you would think I’m one of the bad guys. But, you’re the only other person I know who’s alright with doubting SHIELD ever since our first meeting. You said it yourself in Fury’s office, remember?”

Wincing with shame, Stiles grunted. “I know.”

“And why did you call me out and not Steve?” Tony hid his smirk under a tight lip.

Stiles ignored the sly tone Tony asked him with, clearing his throat. “You’re the only one not directly involved with SHIELD. Others could be blinded by their sense of loyalty to the organization.”
Tony nodded. “What about Bruce?”

“I do trust him, but I didn’t peg him as one for the conspiracy trouble theorist.” Stiles waved his hands, sliding back to sit on top of the table, swinging his legs. “Oh, and what is it with you and Bruce?”

The older man had the nerve to openly smirk at him. “What about me and Bruce?”

Stiles competed with Tony for a minute or two with unblinking staring, but decided to shove the childish behavior for a more appropriate time. “Whatever, we need to figure this out now.” He cursed when he remembered another detail. “Preferably before I have my weekly meeting with Director Fury.”

“Tough luck, kid.” Tony tried to lighten the mood, leaning on his chair while throwing a rubber ball upwards and playing catch with it. “I’d offer to come but seeing that man is only good in small doses, I for one would very much like to keep my mentality sane.”

“Jerk.” Stiles wallowed in his misery, his brain unable to keep up with the fast development. What must a man do to get a single holiday of peace and freedom? He sincerely needs help.

The room echoed with the ringing from Stiles’ phone and with the boy being too absent-minded to check the caller, he accepted the call. “Hello?”

“Stiles?”

The voice shook him from his trance, his spine straightening like a bolt that jolted Tony from his seat.

“Stiles, are you there?” His caller repeated with a shaky voice. “It-It’s me, Jackson.”

Stiles stood from his seat on the table, straightening his shirt even though he couldn’t see him. “Yes. I’m here. Did you find it?”

Jackson let out a breath of relief, he seriously didn’t think Stiles would answer. But then again, he did ask for it so. “It’s good to hear your voice again.”

The silence that came from Stiles was uncomfortable to everyone, including Tony who could hear the conversation from the stark echo from the speaker of his phone. Stiles waved the pleasantries off, unable to handle it. “Did you find it?”

“Yeah.” Jackson’s voice trembled with disappointment from the rejection. “It took me a while and well—you need to see this. Will you switch to video?”

Stiles considered it. He really considered it. His heart ached to see the blonde jock once more—the pack bond, in it’s absent, throbbing wildly from the emptiness. His mind fighting against the pain that will come from seeing him.

But he couldn’t be so selfish as to refuse answers that could explain the situation because of his absurdly frail feelings. So he accepted the video call request, turning his phone horizontally.

Even from the small frame of his phone, he could see Jackson’s features clearly. He’s grown; his bones more defined and his hair shorn close to his head at the side with a styled tuff at the top; he looks good, but he lacked his soul. The shadow beneath his eye lobes, the hollow stare of his orbs before looking at Stiles and the longing behind it when he did.
“Hi.” Jackson’s voice was so uncharacteristically soft and grateful. It was just too much.

And then Tony just had to storm in and blow it up in proportions. “Jarvis, connect the call to the screen.”

Before Stiles could argue against the decision, his phone blanked and the table screened out a holographic projection of the video call; everything becoming so much more clear in it’s high-tech resolution, that it almost knocked Stiles to his feet.

Jackson gaped at the change of view, standing beside Stiles—who had filled up to his potential, as bright and attractive as ever before, maybe even more—was honest to god, Tony Stark. “Stiles, is that—“

“I’ll explain that sometime later, just show me what you promised me.” Stiles cut him short, Tony looking at him with a weird concern laced in his eyebrows.

Jackson nodded once. “I don’t know what happened. But it was like this when I found it.”

The werewolf quickly shifted his camera to point at the Nemeton—or what was supposed to be the Nemeton. Stiles instinctively clamped his gasp back in his mouth with his palm, his other hand reaching out to touch the intangible image.

The Nemeton, which was once a tree then a stump, was now a blackened short stunted tree; the branches sprouting from the short trunk like octopus arms, curling towards the ground, dripping black unidentified goo.

“When?”

Jackson’s reply was a short voice of one, “I don’t know.”

Tony mumbled underneath his breath, completely ignored by Stiles. “What is that?”

Stiles repeated his words with more coherence. “When was the last time you checked it?”

The confusion behind the werewolf was grating at Stiles’ nerves. “Not since the last time we found the chimaera’s Parrish brought to it.”

Basically, since the Dread Doctors. Since Stiles left, which was now roughly six months ago.

“You fucking idiots.” Stiles snapped before he could think it through. For once, he’s glad he didn’t have any filter because someone desperately needs to tell them that.

What kind of stupid irresponsible being would not check on the one thing that signaled and warned them of incoming danger? Especially the kind of danger that can affect the entire world.

The pack. That’s who.

Jesus, he knew that they’d be in a turmoil now that he’s gone and fuck themselves over three ways to kingdom come—but he didn’t expect for it to be this soon with immediate effects that affect him too, and of course, not to mention, the whole fucking world.

What the hell was Peter doing? Thinking of Peter, he made a separate note to discuss it with him, most likely the only person he still trusts fully in the pack.

Jackson was silent the entire time, having switched the camera back onto himself, shame evident in his pulled face muscles. Because apparently the world is ridiculously unfair that all werewolves
have incredible muscles in any place imaginable—every place.

“Take this to Peter. Tell him I’ll be in contact soon. Don’t tell anyone else but him, do you understand?” Stiles commanded Jackson, unbothered by the guilt ridden in the werewolf’s sullen expression because he deserves that damn it—no amount of puppy face can save him this time.

Jackson rapidly nodded, resolved not to disappoint the boy. Stiles ended the call without saying goodbye again.

Tony was a still stone figure beside him, watching Stiles with wary eyes in case the boy spontaneously combusts in the middle of his lab. Because if that happens, he knows he’s going to get hell from the tenants above their floor, from every single one of them.

“Tony, you’re coming to the meeting tomorrow with Fury.”

“Okay.” The older man could do nothing but nod from the absolute command that left no space to argue. “Mind if I ask why? We’re not planning of straight-up accusing him are we?”

Stiles blinked at the question. “No! No, it’s not that. Maybe, I don’t know. This is something potentially bigger than that.”

Tony was stern in his words, waving for Stiles to evaluate. “Which is?”

“Something’s playing with it. Disturbing it.”

“Disturbing what?”

“Exactly what Thor said.” Stiles dead on stared at Tony with conviction that Tony knew no child would ever have without going through terrible things—that no child should ever have. “The balance of the world.”
This was a really late update I'm sorry guys. And oh my god, the response for the last chapter was so amazing you guys are the absolute best!!! I feel so blessed and yet sad because guysss this story is getting much more love than ever could (more than I think it deserves) so all these comments about all that are really heartwarming but pls don't feel sad or regret or anything like that--your comments and you reading this are all I need to go on. MOVING ON! This chapter was complicated as hell, but I think I'm getting somewhere so I'll just see the feedback and run with it from there... yeah. Oh and, I have no idea how long this story is going to be guys, because we're 10 chapters in and it's already 30,000+ words and we're not even at the AU yet so ha ha I'm screwed. Is it okay if it's super long or do you guys want short or split works??

I'll stop my ramblings now and let you enjoy the update. Till next time ;)

Stiles sighed perpetually because why in the holy hell was he back here again? There’s just way too many things that he’s supposed to be ‘not-okay’ with, but he’s been through the ‘greater good’ protocol so many times that he won’t even try to argue against it.

Still though, him in his past life must have been one hell of a serial killer because whatever the hell he did to be on the receiving end of Fury’s intense gaze this often in barely the span of two weeks—he didn’t want to know but it must be pretty damn bad.

“So.” Stiles cleared his throat to diminish the awkward situation they were once again caught up in. He pointedly glared at the audience in the room. “It seems that this meeting turned into a conference, seeing that we have five too many participants than promised.”

It was Tony’s fault, really. And the man knew it from the sheepish look he gave him. They’d meant to do this discreetly; inform the head of SHIELD of the discovery and then not-so-subtly beat him down to submission of truth about the rats possibly hiding amongst the agency.

But then, the meathead decided to sleepover and have breakfast in Stiles’ floor instead of the common floor and thus brought in Clint, who smelled the eggs benedict from his own room—then brought Thor, who smelled the food from his floor two floors above him—and then came Natasha, who Clint called down to join them—and then Bruce and Steve went in when they were suspicious of the empty common floor. And that just led to the two being unable to escape the premises together without questions, so they all tagged along.

Wait, that means it’s his fault for cooki—let’s just stop there. Ignorance is bliss, especially when guilt is involved.

“I was under the impression this was a personal meeting, in which I remember to have specifically mentioning.” Nick Fury looked exactly like he did—mentally exhausted and one scream away from an entire breakdown.

“Yeah, so was I.” Being the mature one (when did that happen), Stiles went past the complication. “Moving on to our discussion, I followed up on that theory I told you about.”
Fury gave him the approving eyebrow—at least Stiles thinks he did, he still hadn’t tracked down a 101 introduction on eyebrow language—and he linked his StarkPad to the hologram projector in the table.

“In the supernatural world, there are some certain rules that exist to put order to the unseemly chaotic mess that it runs with. One of those rules is that all supernatural power can be controlled in its balance and pulled from by what’s called ‘Ley lines’.” Stiles brought up the image of the world in the holographic display, the globe spinning around slowly before lines started crossing each other and spreading from each continent to another like the largest spiderweb.

“These Ley lines run all over the world and all lines are connected—but there are some special instances where these lines intersect in multiples. There are three places where this happened; Kyoto, Japan, London, England, and…” Stiles reached out to spin the globe to where he wanted to direct it, zooming in to the places he mentioned. “Beacon Hills, California.”

“Beacon Hills?” Clint repeated under his breath, trying to remember why that sounded familiar. “Isn’t that your hometown?”

Stiles nearly cringed at the word use. “It’s my birthplace, yes.”

“What’s special with these cities?” Fury jumped back into the boat, eager to find out what’s causing the constant stream of events.

“It’s not the city, it’s what’s in it.” Stiles nodded to Tony for him to bring up case file reports of each of the city. They’ve spent the entire night working on locating the other two Nemeton, which was a lot harder than it sounds. “When these Ley lines are connected they share their power streams—it’s like the stem of the central nervous system in our brain—and they become a sort of pillar for a supernatural beacon in the form of a huge tree.”

Natasha surveyed the reports, finding similarities in the cases. “They all have the same crime patterns; animal attacks, disappearance, strange deaths.”

“That’s why you’re involved in all those police files.” Bruce nodded along, finally getting the bigger picture. “That means Director Fury was right, you have been involved in the supernatural world since long ago.”

“That’s not even the half of it, but that’s a story for another time.” Before any of them could hitch on the not-so-amusing rollercoaster ride of Stiles’ home movie of horror and trauma, he quickly refocused their attention. “Like I said, supernatural beacons, all supernatural creatures are attracted to it. They’re called Nemeton.”

“Nemeton.” Thor suddenly spoke in his loud booming voice. “I’ve heard of them—they’re branches of the Yggdrasil.”

Stiles frowned at the new information. A branch of the Yggdrasil, as in Yggdrasil the all powerful magical fucking tree that connects all nine realms, which was not so insanely real after all. “That actually makes a lot more sense now.”

“I’m guessing whatever happened so far is due to this Nemeton.” Steve piped up from his seat, his curiosity getting the better of him.

“Yeah.” Stiles signaled Tony to pull up their next document. “I reached out to a colleague in Beacon Hills to check on the Nemeton.” He took a deep breath. “And this is what we found.”

With a swipe of his hands, Tony broadcasted the still image of the abnormality of the Nemeton—
they’ve tried to figure out what could be affecting the Nemeton to react this way but they’ve pulled on loose strings so far and gotten nothing of use.

"Any chance that's just a questionable new seasonal look it's trying out?" Clint tried to no avail.

Judging by the look of shock from everyone’s face and the horror from Thor’s, they’d be expecting an explanation. “Sorry guys, me and the kid wrecked our brains last night trying to figure this out but nothing. Nada.”

“You think the recent beef with the walking dead was because of this?”

“That’s just—No. I mean yes. Skinwalkers, yes.” Stiles looked at Clint with the most ridiculous expression he could make, scoffing. “Zombies don’t exist.”

The norse god lifted his hand, “Actually—“

“Not now, Thor.” Stiles shut him up. If zombies actually do exist, he’s going to flip his shit—doesn’t matter what anyone says, even if he sees it right in front of his fucking eyes, zombies aren’t fucking real.

Tony squinted his eyes at the kid’s childish behavior. “Anyways, from what we’ve gathered so far, this is turning the supernatural world inside out.” He waved his hand to dismiss the hologram, leaning back against his chair. “According to Stiles’ informants, they’re not ‘functioning’ properly; out of order and in panic, which I personally thought was their normal order of business.”

“That’s why the skinwalkers attacked us.” Steve followed the thought, linking all the pieces together. “They’re scared?”

Fury kept his expression controlled and stoic—something Stiles would swear to break one day just because. The director had a lot in his plate and now he might have to deal with more. “So, you’re saying there could be more.”

Stiles caught Tony’s sour look and mirrored it himself, biting his lips before facing the man. “It’s very probable yes. And there are immediate repercussions that could wildly affect our world.”

“As in?”

Stiles looked to Thor. “Well, the supernatural world and our world is interconnected more than anyone thinks it is. Just like Asgard protects the peace of nine realms, the supernatural realm protects the order of our world.”

“Basically, what he’s saying is that the supernatural world regulates our nature; such as tidal waves, growth of greenery, seasons, natural disasters. Each and every one of them has their role.” Tony summarized Stiles’ vague description, tilting his head because he still couldn’t understand the science between such things. If this were true, his life had been a goddamn lie.

Bruce, who had been quiet for the most part, piqued his interest. “You mean that werewolves and vampires have purpose in their life?”

“Werewolves helps the moon cycle by calling to it every full moon and protects the woods of their territory.” Stiles almost winced at the statement, feeling a bitter pain of irony. “Vampires, I haven’t got a clue. And I don’t want to because they’re all fairly dicks in my opinion.”

It was nice that the good doctor found it all so interesting by the way his eyes lit up with the new knowledge, but seriously, Stiles just needed rest right now. He’s not up to anymore discussions or
brain debates—a whole night with Tony is more than his mind, body and soul could take.

Nick Fury nodded, concluding the briefing of information, moving on to the next big problem. “How should we proceed with this information, Agent Stilinski?”

“You know, that hasn’t come up yet.” Stiles’ voice sound strained and higher to himself, awkwardly pointing his hands to state a point he doesn’t have. “I just thought you’d figure that out for me.”

Stiles could tell he was getting better at reading eyebrow because of the unimpressed notion he understood from Fury’s brow raising. “Hey, I’m just here as an Agent giving you information. You’re the Director.” He waved his hands in a grandiose manner. “Go direct things.”

Tony snorted out loud, earning a stink eye from Steve.

“If you haven’t noticed, Agent Stilinski. Our agency has been attacked consecutively in the last month alone, I have bigger matters to attend to.”

“What matter is bigger than ‘the whole world is at fucking stake of supernatural invasions’?” Stiles could not believe this guy, seriously. “And excuse you, big guy, I was there for both times of the attack and the one saving yours truly, you’re fucking welcome.”

Fury smirked smugly. “Therefore you have proven yourself more than capable of handling situations including ‘the whole world is at fucking stake of supernatural invasions’ ordeal.”

“What!? You can’t use my own actions against me, that’s just dirty!” Stiles dropped his mouth on the table, voice flying different tones and pitches, fingers pointing straight at the blinking poker faced man. “Don’t turn my coincidence into some self-serving justification for your lazy ass. You’re dirty.”

Unaffected by the tirade, Fury bargained. “The Avengers will be at your disposal.”

“That—“ Stiles instinctively argued but stopped to think about it “—wait, what do you mean by that?”

“Exactly as it sounds—since Coulson is now no longer in charge of them, you’ll be our new intermediary between SHIELD and the Avengers.” Fury ignored the look of pleasant surprise from the rest of the team. “They’ll help you with any occurrence that happens in the crisis.”

“That sound likes I’m getting more work and responsibility—which is the complete opposite of what I want.” Stiles vainly pointed out.

But it was of no use, because now the Avengers were chatting animatedly amongst themselves about the new development and throwing out congrajulatories. Apparently whatever Nick Fury says, goes.

And just for that, Stiles kept the ‘compromised SHIELD’ gold information a secret from the Director. It was probably not a good idea, but for the time being, Nick Fury could suck it. Maybe next time, he’d actually learn to express gratitude in a non-douchebaggery manner.

It was for a good cause. Ish.

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Going back to the tower was Stiles’ walk of shame—he branded everything in his head to make it easier on his collective unconscious to filter things. The team were talking excitedly over how much fun it would be to have Stiles working under them, which was really an insult because they’re working under him—at least officially, but in reality, yeah they were right.

That still meant Stiles had basic human right that is exactly why he flipped his shit when they brought up the idea of training.

“No. Nu-uh.” Stiles shook his head violently. “You are not going to make me do all that gung-ho up close fighting, no.” Clint raised his brows to his hairline but Stiles kept on going. “I am the sidekick of all sidekicks and you know what sidekicks do? They stay on the side and kick ass from the sidelines.”

This is one thing Stiles could never stress enough—there was a reason he avoided all the pack training sessions even when Lydia was participating, well, other than the factor that they tried to push him out of it, which—Oh, it all makes sense now.

So the pack was already disavowing him from the team since long before the Nogitsune happened. Yee-ouch. That hurts more than he thought it did.

“But what if you need it?” Tony went behind the bar, pulling out a shaker from the counter. “Or you run out of bullets and the enemy's in close range.”

“I wont! I'm like the sniper dude who stays away from all the heat of the action a few blocks away from a high rooftop.” He flopped on the couch, unapologetic in his actions of body slamming into Steve who was reading his book. “Hell, I'm already doing more than that guy by staying closer to the fight on the ground, so gimme a break.

If there was a single explanation for Tony, it would be that he’s stubborn. Either that or a jerk, discounting his genius. “Clint’s the sniper in the family, except with a bow. And he knows how to fight as good as Natasha—”

“Yeah, no.” The woman raised her glass from the island bar stools, to which Stiles saluted to because that woman is badass.

“—So, what's your excuse?”

Stiles almost scoffed at how ridiculous that sentence was. “Clint doesn’t count, he practically lives in the gym if he's not crawling in the vents or lurking in high spaces. Plus, he's an Avenger!”

Bruce pointed his finger at him. “So are yo—“

Before he could finish the sentence, Stiles rose from the couch with his hands up in the air. “I am not an Avenger, I am a normal college soon-to-be-dropout-if-i-don’t-stop-skipping agent with enhanced powers that occasionally helps the world fight off supernatural threats.”

The team took his words into consideration, looking at each other with a knowing glance when Tony broke the bubble. “That is one hell of a denial, Freud would be horrified. We should add him to our group therapy sessions.”

Steve placed his book down, giving up on pretending to read. “We don't have group therapy sessions.”
Tony waved a grand hand at Steve, as if his comment supported his statement. “Exactly!”

Clint ignored the confused look Steve gave at that, focusing on the boy still slumped over the arm of the couch. “Look, Stiles, we just want you to be safe.”

“I am safe!” Stiles stressed out. “In the safety of the sidelines! With my magic!”

“Well, we've seen what magic exhaustion can do to you.” Bruce added his own penny to the dime, crossing his arms at the boy. “You can't use it all the time.”

Stiles does admit that, yes. He had to tell them because suddenly collapsing on the way to the directors office after fixing Natasha up was enough to shock them all—it never happened for that long but it does happen.

“I won't be using it all the time, because I won't try to actively seek out danger like you guys.” The argument was weak, Stiles knew that but he’s running out of bones to feed the hungry dogs here. “On the contrary, I try to stay as far away from it as possible.”

“But you're always in dangerous situations.” Natasha chuckled at his weak attempt.

Sighing, Stiles cursed, his hands an uncontrolled series of waves and angry jabs at empty air. “I know. I said I 'try', but it never really works.”

“Come on.” Steve nudged his legs from where he was perched on, flashing him his one thousand kilowatt smile which is illegal, he swears. “Please? You’ll be training with me, it'll be fun.”

Tony noticed the falter in his expression, either by the word choice or the meaning behind the words but he noticed it. Still, however, Stiles stood his ground. If he were to bend his knees and sway by a pretty face, he would’ve been dead long ago. Something about werewolves and their unfairly perfect genes.

“You are not taking me to combat practice or any workouts, no.” As if making a point, Stiles readjusted his seat upright on the couch. “I am perfectly fine here with my-hey what-whoa!”

His perspective shifted a good 180 degrees as he was lifted off the couch. Steve hurled him over his broad shoulders like a sack of potatoes, which Stiles should not have found hot as fuck. He has a weakness against power, okay, sue him. Focus, Stilinski!

“What are you—“ He started to splutter when Steve started moving, forcing his head to slump over to a wall of muscle, oh wait no that’s “—Oh my god, your ass is in my face!”

Tony smirked over his margarita. “Stop complaining, we know you like it.” Natasha gave him a toast.

“I—what, no—you—“ Knowing a lost cause when he sees one, Stiles flipped his fingers at the pair. “Whatever, let me down, Steve!”

Clint occupied the seat Stiles previously took, waving at them. “Have fun!”

“Clint! Please, Tony, no!”

The two men winked at him.

“Steve!!!”
The next morning, Stiles woke up with sore muscles in places he didn’t even knew had muscles. He spread himself eagle on the cover of his bed, sliding over to the side to take his phone off the charger and saw the messages bombarding him from a certain historian.

Half-assing his shower because he really couldn’t be bothered to reach places on his body more than a forearm lift away, Stiles got dressed in casual clothing which he’s not ashamed to admit are baggy sweats.

He’s lived all his life with men whose bodies are like Romanian sculpted marble statues, he does not need a stark comparison of his own body to them in skin tight clothing. He still has some pride, regardless of how little that might be.

“Jarvis.” He called out in the elevator. “Take me to the lobby please.”

“As you wish, Stiles.” The AI complied to his command, the gravity shifting at his feet. “May I ask the purpose of your leave?”

Stiles checked his watch, it was barely 8 in the morning. “I’m meeting up with Chase, he said it’s urgent.”

“Should I wake Sir up?”

“No, it’s fine, Jarvis.” They reached the lobby, the doors opening to reveal a bustling floor. “Thank you.”

Stiles greeted Happy Hogan on the way out, seeing agents coming in for work. The man was a complete ironic existence to his name and appearance. Checking his phone once more, he dashed to run to the coffee shop.

Spotting the eye-catching man bun in the midst of the crowd, Stiles sat right in front of the man. “You ordered for me?”

“Yeah, figured not to waste our time.” Chase pushed the iced americano towards him. “I’m surprised you could come, what about your lectures?”

Moaning at his first coffee of the day, Stiles spoke with his mouth full. “My professor’s out for a conference in London so I’m free today.”

The smile he got from the question was worrying. “What’s wrong?”

Chase sipped a scalding mouthful of his black coffee before answering the question. “I heard back from the sea creatures.” He took out his phone. “Turns out they’re worse off than we thought; their numbers are rapidly decreasing due to a poisonous substance spreading through the water at a breakneck speed.”


“They don’t know.” Chase typed in his phone. “The Eternal Fountain stopped flowing which means that there aren’t any protective borders against hostiles anymore. And with their decreasing numbers, the sea is vastly getting harder to control.”
“All of them?”

The man looked up from his phone to stare him down. “Merpeople, nymphs, water druids, everyone.”

Stiles looked up from their table to the television playing, the volume drowned out from the bustle of the coffeeshop. The news reported sea water levels rising and icebergs melting, rapidly.

Chase nodded to the unvoiced question that Stiles was about to ask. “Yeah, it gets worse.”

Frowning, Stiles took the phone that the man handed him, eyes unsure. Chase started explaining before Stiles even took a look at the phone. “One of my contacts snapped this shot the last time they checked on the Eternal Fountain.”

The pictured showed the back of a uniform with an insignia—one he recognized intimately.

Snapping his head up, Stiles widened his eyes tenfolds. “You think a SHIELD personnel is behind it?”

“You wanted a connection, there it is.”

“No, no that can’t be right.” Stiles dropped the phone on the table, frowning even more. “I mean, yes, there are a few rogue agents in SHIELD but they’re only hostile towards the agency—Chase, think about it, what possible motives would they have to destroy the balance of the world?”

“Look, Stiles, I want to help, I do. But I honestly don’t know.” Chase rubbed his temples as if the thought physically hurts him. “And frankly, I don’t care about motive—this needs to stop.”

Detecting the hostile tone in his words, Stiles backed in his chair, hands still precariously holding the phone. “What does that mean exactly?”

“It means that I won’t be responsible for what happens when this gets out.”

“Chase.” Stiles tried to smile in hopes of easing the man’s growing tension. “We can’t jump to conclusion, we still don’t know a lot of things.”

“Stiles, every kind of supernatural creature we know of are running around like chickens with their heads cut off. They are going to be looking for retribution.” Chase inched closer to Stiles over the table, his hands grasped tightly in a fist on the table. “Especially now that the Nemeton is in such a state.”

Unafraid to back down, Stiles inched closer on his own. “We don’t know if SHIELD is responsible for that, and let’s not condemn the entire agency for the actions of a few agents; that’s one hell of a generalization.”

“You said it yourself, SHIELD is compromised—you can’t trust any one of them, Stiles.”

“I’m one of them.”

With that, both of them settled in their emotions. Things like these shouldn’t be hashed out with unstable feelings and instead rational thoughts, but it’s easier said than done. Stiles sighed.

“Okay, please. Chase, I’m begging you, don’t tell anyone yet.” He tapped the table softly so that the man would look at him, but somehow the tired gaze in his eyes was worse than the anxious smile he had in the beginning of their meeting. “Give me a day—I’ll figure it out.”
Stiles knew it was a huge debate in Chase’s mind. A prophet like him was used to knowing outcomes or at least parts of it—he can’t imagine what the man must feel like when he can’t see anything. Nevertheless, Chase nodded to his favor.

“But if you don’t, one way or another, there will be a full-scale war of the supernatural against SHIELD.” Stiles watched the man stood up from his seat, his hands reaching out to firmly grip his shoulder before he left, in a manner Stiles wasn’t sure what to make as. “Make sure you’re on the right side of it.”

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Slipping through the entrance, missing the unusual amount of personnel in the tower, Stiles took the elevator up to the roof. He took a quick look around to check that the rooftop was clear and whipped his phone out, dialing the only number he had saved from his old phone.

Waiting for the call to connect, he sat on one of the benches strewn around the place. This was a mess—his head hurts, he’s exhausted and his muscles fucking aching isn’t really helping either.

“Hello?”

Stiles almost sighed in utter happiness when he hears the voice. “That’s a voice for sore ears.”

The well-aged deep voice could be heard chocking through his spit before finally uttering a “Stiles?!”

“Missed you too, Uncle Creeper.”

“Jesus, where are you?” Stiles laughed at the worried tone Peter adopted once he confirmed. “Are you okay? Why didn’t you call me?!?”

“I’m calling you now aren’t I?” Running a hand through his unkempt hair, Stiles leaned on his hands behind him. “Believe me, I almost didn’t.”

Peter sounds as demanding as always. “Why?”

“After what happened with Malia, you left. And I figured that I couldn’t drag you back in this mess, you sounded happy the last time you checked in and you deserved it.”

“Being happy?” The older man scoffed from his end. “I’m back in Beacon Hills, so I was dragged back in regardless.”

Stiles smiled at the unchanging satire in the man’s language. “How is it?”

“Well, happiness was fun while it lasted.” An understanding laugh later, Peter rubbed his lips with his palms before broaching the subject. “Stiles, I’m so sorry about the pack—they shouldn’t have —”

_Hell, no. “Peter. You know why I called.”_ Stiles internally praised the guy for his knack of picking up undertones. “I’m going to skip over your blatant idiocy of handling things in home sweet home because that place is a hell hole all on it’s own.”

Peter winced, remembering the content of the last two-day revelation. “Jackson’s told me. I’ve
“Apologizing is not a good colour on you, Peter. Stop it.” Stiles wasted no time on getting onto his motives, because he really has none to spare. “Do you know what caused it?”

“No, I’m afraid I don’t.”

He figured it wasn’t going to be that easy but it still sucks to be given nothing. “I need to know if you’ve seen anyone suspicious recently in Beacon Hills.”

The older werewolf rolled his eyes so hard, Stiles could almost hear it. “Someone suspicious in Beacon Hills—that narrows it down to about everyone.”

Stiles rolled the words in his tongue, being very careful with his word choice. “Someone official—perhaps affiliated with a certain clandestine agency.”

“Stiles. What have you gotten yourself into?”

Ignoring the question because he himself didn't know exactly the answer to that question, Stiles pushed on further. “Well, is there?”

“I don’t think so, no—why?”

Weird. “Has anything been happening back in Beacon?”

“No. Not anything out of the ordinary.”

Even weirder. “Nothing?”

“I’d take that with a bit more positivity, knowing our history with unpleasant situations.”

The scene of the crime, or the city in this case, was completely unaffected by the disastrous state of the Nemeton. Stiles swore that Beacon Hills would be ground zero for all things catastrophic when he found out about the Nemeton—which was why he found it completely ridiculous that no one’s noticed, but now he knew why.

The more he finds out about it, the less it makes sense. Stiles grumbled, figuring his next move. “Peter, just be careful okay?”

Peter Hale gave him silence before he honestly replied. “Stiles, you’re starting to scare me.”

“I wouldn’t be doing my job if I didn’t.” Stiles dropped his head on his shoulders, closing his eyes to breathe. “Stay alert and find out what’s happening with the Nemeton.”

“Stiles, you’re cuttin—” Peter’s voice became disgruntled, static overpowering the line. Stiles took his phone away from his ear, calling out Peter’s name again only to hear static. “I can’t—Stil—”

The line cut. Stiles pulled his phone away to see that it was off, which was weird because he’d sworn to charge it fully in the morning—in a life like his, the goddamn phone was his life. Standing from his sitting position, he made for the elevator to find that it was shut down and wasn’t responding.

“Jarvis?”

The British-accented calm voice he expected to hear did not sound, instead he was met with silence. And that, is never a good sign.
Stiles ran to the side of the building, inching himself over the edge to see the building in it’s full prospect—but the angle just didn’t work. He leaned back inside the safety of the railing before he remembered that to his side was a million other skyscraper—one with reflective glass panels acting as mirrors.

He ran to the west of the rooftop, bending over the railings to catch the sight reflected in the skyscraper.

The Avengers building that once had windows as shiny and clear as other high-rise building in New York had, was now a black tower. That can only mean the place was on lockdown.

Before he could panic, he took a step back and calmed himself. “It’s probably just nothing—it’s not like nothing’s working, electricity-wise or connection-wise, except that that’s exactly what’s happening.”

Taking a few deep breaths, he reassured himself it’s probably just a malfunction. Right? The world can’t be that much of a dick towards him, can it?

Except it can. And he just saw what he needed to see to confirm it.

In the reflective panels of the buildings, the pitch black inside the tower. Except it wasn’t just inside. It was an aura around it. Shadows. Moving shadows.

He knows those shadows. ‘He’ led them before. And he knows that with the building’s shutter lockdown in place, the whole damn place is plunged in darkness. Their perfect battleground.

With no escape.

Now would be a very good time to panic.

“Fuck.”
Shadows

Hello, hello back at you with the continuation. Apparently y’all were outraged at the cliffhanger--thus I have come to a conclusion--IM GONNA DO MORE CLIFFHANGERS!! Soooo, do those pull-ups, you’re gonna need it for the row of cliffs you're gonna be hanging on *evil cackle*. Anyways, here you go, without further ado, the continuation of the cliff.

This didn’t make sense, did it? Stiles kept thinking inside his brain, wrecking it for information and a way inside the tower—which he really needs to be in right now. No one has any idea what they’re up against.

Technically speaking, there are only two creatures known to existence that takes form out of shadows and they’re both of Japanese origins; the Enenra and the Oni. Still, none of them are exactly friendly beings, he’d specifically testify for the latter. And he still has no idea what they actually do, save for what Kira’s cryptic mother told them in an even more cryptic matter, but even then he hadn’t been listening as he wasn’t exactly conscious now was he.

He needs to warn them. They probably don’t even have the notion that they’re under supernatural attack and not military.

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When the shutters dropped down the sky windows, Thor cracked his mug and Natasha brandished the closest knife she could find. Tony exited the bathroom with his hair still dripping wet. “What the hell is going on?”

Natasha moved forward cautiously, all their eyesights adjusting with the drastic dimming of the lights. She placed a hand on Thor’s, stopping him from calling Mjölnir. Dropping her useless phone on the table, she made a move to Tony. “Communication’s down.”

“Electricity too.” Tony grumbled when the elevators won’t work. “Jarvis!”

“What is it, Stark?” The Asgardian placed a hand on the man’s tense shoulder, hoping to asses the situation.

Tony Stark made a mental list of what he needed to check on to see for damage. “We got hit by an EMP.”

“Electromagnetic pulse.” Reading Thor’s confused expression, Natasha brought it to herself to explain the technology while arming herself with a glock she pulled from her boots. “It disables all electronics and they probably put a scrambler to mess with our communications. The whole city or just us?” She directed the last at the man who was currently prying open one of the panels on the wall.
Tony served her a sarcastic look as he waved to their now opaque windows. “That’s gonna be hard to determine since I can’t see anything.”

“Is the lockdown normally activated in cases like these?”

Tony mulled over the question, trying to remember if it did. “No.” His eyes met Natasha’s. “This was an elaborate attempt of trapping us in here.”

Thor let his hand drop from Tony’s shoulder, expression no longer confused but solemn. “Who?”

Natasha’s eyes shifted from Tony’s features to behind him, her instincts recognizing something off. With the darkness that surrounded them, she narrowed her eyes to focus on the seemingly empty space. Before it moved. “Not who, what.” She clocked her gun in a split second before firing at Tony. “Duck!”

Luckily for him, Tony’s used to getting things pelted at him at a dangerously high critical speed (mostly by Pepper but also by his enemies), so he dodged the bullet in time. “Nat!” He shouted when he saw the gun was still aimed at him before he had the idea to turn around.

“Uh, did we travel back in time and not—” Tony couldn’t even finish his sentence when he had a samurai katana swinging at him, nearly missing his head. “Woah!”

While Tony jumped out of the way, Natasha fired another shot at the dark masked samurai. Only now they all saw that the bullet simply passed through their body; the body mass parting way for the bullet to fly by and hit the reinforced double paneled glass behind it.

“Okay, that’s definitely new.” Tony’s eyes tracked the movement of the creature, that seemed to be smoking dark clouds. He made a move to run to Natasha’s side but stopped when the dark mist grew in front of him, and from the shadows, another one emerged. Then another one.

Natasha slipped her hands behind her jeans to pull out another loaded gun, pointing it at the opposition of Tony while Thor reached his hands out. Tony clicked his tongue, putting on the detecting bracelets with minimal movements, wary of the opposition. The tell-tale magnetic ringing of Mjölnir could be heard deafeningly in the silence, followed by the loud clash of things breaking in it’s path.

Tony activated the bracelets and stood still, waiting for it to come to him. “Where’s Banner?”

Natasha winced at the sound of the ceiling two floors above them breaking. “With Steve.”

The shadows moved forwards in one synchronized step, the three Avengers instinctively taking a step back. Tony fanned his arms out, the bracelet lighting up in red blinking shine. “Any smart ideas on how to fight smoke?”

They watched all three of the shadows poising in a strike position with their katanas raised. Thor tilted his body down in preparation to strike back. “Just.” He felt mjölnir’s power coming closer, his hands stretching to have it in his hold. “Keep.” Natasha trailed her fingers on the trigger. “On.” Mjölnir broke through the wall and flew into Thor’s grasp, he smirked. “Fighting.”

Thor shifted on his legs, dropping down to his knees to slide down from the swing of the sword and tried to knock the creature’s footing loose but his hammer passed right through the limb.

Tony ducked an attack directed at him, his body pushed backward from the suit attaching to his body part-by-part. He twisted his body to blast a repulser at the shadow, only for it to go through and hit the TV instead.
The shadow dropped the sword at Natasha, backflipping dangerously close to the shine of the bad before gripping the handle of the sword and placing the gun right at it’s head and shooting.

All three of the Avengers stopped their actions when the bullet simply ricocheted against the eerie ceramic mask they were wearing. Natasha made a face at the faceless shadow. “Really? Nothing?”

Tony thrusted forward in the air to pick Natasha up and away from the deadly retaliation from the shadow. Hovering in the air, dropping Natasha back on her feet to land a kick on another shadow.

“This might be a problem.” He quipped, pulsing blasts aimed uselessly at the shadows who kept evading them.

Thor frowned, raising his arms up, his hammer sparking with electricity. “Enough!” The walls licked with the lightning generated from the thundering tell-tale sounds of dark clouds outside the tower, Tony biting his weep for the amount of repair from the damage about to be made, catching Natasha mid-air from her jump.

Then he swung down—lightnings striking from the ground to every inch of the place—filtering the place with blue-white light. But instead of taking damage from the expensive lightning, the shadows disappeared into the dark.

Tony landed back on his feet with Natasha by his side and a confused Thor in front of him. The quiet silence an ironically loud presence in the destruction of their common floors.

“What the hell just happened?”

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Steve was too late when he threw one of Banner’s metal bars to the closing doors, hoping to block it. Banner was too shocked from the sudden darkness and the sound of the metal shutters raining down the window of his lab on the 3rd floor.

“Are we under attack?” Banner calmly processed, grabbing his phone to find it pitch black and unresponsive. “Nothing’s working.”

Banging at the door, Steve tried to use his strength to wrench it open. Bruce waved a hand for him to stop. “Those are magnetically locked, you have better chances breaking the window.”

Steve ran a hand through his hair. One thought in his mind. “Where’s Stiles?”

Bruce stopped in trying to make the electronics work to spare Steve a questioning look, suspiciously laced with a smirk. “Stiles?”

“Yes.” Steve paced to the elevator, jamming his button into it.

“He just got back so probably in his room?” Bruce leaned on one of his lab counters, toying with a gadget. “Why?”

Steve pinned Bruce with a knowing look, but Bruce kept on with a knowing smirk of his own. Most of the building had figured the soft spot the Captain had for the boy, even though he kept his
identity a secret from him.

“Steve, if you don’t mind me asking.” Bruce tried his hardest to focus his gaze on their leader even in the dark. “Why won’t you tell him?”

The captain stood still in his pacing, dreading the time when his team mates were gonna pop the question. “This really isn’t a good time for that, Bruce. We could be in danger.”

“We’ll deal with the threat if it comes, but now’s a good a time as any.” Banner tread carefully to the man in question, trying to intimidate the answer out of him when they felt something in the atmosphere change.

Out of all the Avengers, besides the apparent God, Steve and Bruce had the most heightened sense as they were admittedly a lab experiment. Thus when their eyes met, they immediately turned to the direction of the disruption in the air.

“What was that about a good time?” Steve harshly whispered at the doctor, his panic doubling in the amount for the boy who could be alone in the middle of whatever the hell this is.

Bruce chose to ignore the sarcasm for a more technical approach to the uncanny being they were facing. “Where’s your shield?”

Steve nearly rolled his eyes, a habit he picked up from being around his team too long. “We were researching on supernatural creatures and their abilities, why would I bring my shield?”

The two entities in front of them moved to unsheathe their swords—to which Bruce and Steve shared a look on—and took a step towards them. “Is this a code green?”

Steve grabbed Bruce’s upper arm and moved backwards. “We’re inside the tower.”

“You didn’t answer my question.”

Before answering his question, Steve grabbed the closest thing he could—a microscope—and threw it towards the samurai demonic beings. To both their surprise, the object permeated through them and landed on the ground with a harsh crack.

Steve shrugged, face contorted with panic. “Maybe.”

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“Ow, fuck.” Stiles yelped in pain when stubbed his toe in the dark enclosed space he was in. His curse echoed through the narrow abyss.

Without a better plan on getting inside, he pried the elevator door open—which he spent the last hour alone doing, with the help of a lot of boulders that dented the doors enough for it to leave a gap for which Stiles could squeeze his body mass into.

He nearly fell to his death entering the empty elevator shaft but quickly found his footing on the side ladder of the shaft. Stiles should really think about his plans thoroughly before he decides to execute it.

But at this point, he really doesn’t care. The world won’t let him die anyways, it enjoys tormenting
him more than eternal sleep—and it needs him to be alive in order to do that. That’s the only upside of everything.

Through the echoes within the shaft, he could hear the attack unfolding in their 10th floor common room and the shouts down further on the SHIELD working floors below the top fifteen floors that belonged specifically to the Avengers. He reached the 10th floor faster than he expected, but scaling down 5 floors in a dark ass tiny never-ending shaft is fucking hard.

“I hope this fucking works.” Stiles conjured his flames, his hands lighting up underneath the skin like magma was flowing in his body. He placed his palm out on the metal and let it his hands flame.

The metal started to melt underneath his palms, Stiles moving his hand to draw a circle on the elevator doors. He removed his hand and retracted his magic before jumping and catching the bar above the doors. Stiles swung back, nearly crying at carrying his full bodyweight with his arms alone—he knew he should’ve done more pull-ups—, and slammed his foot into the circle with the momentum, sliding his body through the new hole.

No matter what they did, the damn things just kept coming back. None of them knew why it disappeared the first time but it reappeared just as soon as it did. Tony jumped at the sudden flying circle metal that was previously his elevator doors. He doesn’t even know why he bothered repairing the tower countless times to have it destroyed in various ways again and again.

“Little spark, watch out!” Thor called out a warning but Stiles ignored him.

He got up from his drop, staring the Onis down right in their sinister mask. A shuddery breath escaped his lips, but he couldn’t afford to break down now. But the tickle down his spine came back and he was back in that dark hole.

Tony saw Stiles froze. Acting quickly, he threw a blast at the creature quickly approaching the boy before dropping down in front of him. He faced the boy, metal hands on his shoulder to shake him out of it.

Stiles came back to the sight of Tony in his IronMan gear. Closing his eyes at the rush of memories coming back, he barred up a wall in his mind and pulled at his fire once more.

“Light!” Stiles shouted while throwing his hands in front of him, lighting the ceiling above him on fire—the stark brightness from the flames causing the Oni’s matter to falter. “They can’t fight in the light!”

Thor caught up on his idea and swinging his hammer to gather the lightning once more before directing it upwards like Stiles—taking advantage of the metal paneled ceilings to act as conductors to keep the electric currents running enough to power the lights.

As soon as the lights lit up and flooded the room with actual light, Stiles stopped and blew out the flames with a spell for a rush of air. Natasha dropped into one of the surviving stools while Tony flipped back his mask.

“Where have you been?” Tony crossed his arms.

“Seriously, that’s the first thing you say to me after all that?” Stiles let his arms fly wide, scowling at the elder, but answered his question regardless. “On the rooftop, I was dealing with something.”

Thor clapped his back suddenly, causing him to nosedive into the floor. “Splendid job, little spark!”
Natasha laughed at the boy’s weak stance, reaching down from her stall to help him up and pat him down. “How’d you know the light was the trick?”

Stiles tried very hard to not let that damage his pride, coughing from the fall. “Silver.” He got back his bearings and tried to shake the fear out of his system, simultaneously ignoring Natasha’s question. “We need silver.”

Tony held back his remarks about what happened in the fight. “Silver?”

“It’s the only way to kill them—pure silver in any form.” Stiles walked back to the ruined elevator doors, looking back. “I have a few silver bullets in my room.”

Natasha frowned at the statement and the backhand she got at her previous question, Stiles almost felt sorry but he just couldn’t take a trip down memory lane—ever. “Why do you have silver bullets?”

“Precautions like these.” Stiles snipped the truth short, but all three of them noticed the tone of the answer. Hoping to rid the suspicion, Stiles strong balled it. “Well, anyone coming?”

Natasha stood from her seat, moving towards Thor. “Take Tony with you, I’ll take this one here to company me up to 14th floor.”

Tony nodded, pushing Stiles to move. “They’re going to try and turn the backup generator on for the lights.” He turned back to Natasha. “Oh, and if that doesn’t work, try shutting down the lockdown protocol—get the windows open.”

With that, Tony picked Stiles up in a bridal carry. Which, by the fucking way, hurts his manly pride because it’s a fucking bridal carry. Before Stiles could complain however, Tony pushed his thrusters and flew through the whole and descended down the shaft, slowly.

“You’re totally doing this so you can embarrass me aren’t you?” Stiles accused the man, fully knowing that he could just fly down faster.

Tony smirked down at him. “Maybe.” He decreased his thruster power, making them descend even slower than before, proving Stiles’ point. “But also, don’t you think it’s weird?”

Stiles frowned. “Yes, I’m a fully grown adult male getting carried by another fully grown adult male for the purpose of ego bloating on your part and emasculation on my part.” Tony leveled him with a serious expression, causing him to adopt a similar one. “It is. The supernatural invasion, I get. But the lockdown protocol, the EMP and the scrambler—it’s an inside attack directed at SHIELD, specifically the Avengers.”

“We need to tell Fury. SHIELD is compromised, and it runs deep judging from what just happened.” Tony stopped at the 6th floor mark, shifting Stiles to a one-arm carry—which impossibly made it more embarrassing and he knew it from the smirk that grew on his lips. He aimed his laser at the door and did the same exact thing Stiles did.

Stiles let Tony work, but his mind kept racing at something. The scenario was as they discussed it was. But there was something with the whole timing that didn’t make sense. He just couldn’t figure out what it was.

When Tony got the doors open, he manhandled Stiles through the opening like some fucking artifact on display—it was dehumanizing, really. He growled at Tony, but the man just smiled at him.
Down the shaft, they heard an actual growl, familiarly loud and reverberating down their bones. Tony and Stiles shared a look of panic. “Is that—?”

“God, I hope not.” Tony cursed under his breath in vain—knowing full well the extent of the damage his tower will be in, once more. “I’ll deal with it.”

Tony disappeared down the shaft while Stiles conjured a ball of fire in his palms to light the short hallway to Clint’s and his door. He spared a glance at Clint’s door before heading to his own opposite of it.

Breaking the door open with a blast of concentrated air force, he rushed to his room. Grabbing one of the boxes aside, he opened it to find the wooden box.

His hand trailed the triskelion sketched into the wood, forcing the miserable hiccup down his throat. Opening the box to find all of his 30 rounds of silver bullets perfectly in place, his eyes stopped at the cloth at the edge.

Stiles picked it out of the box and unveiled it in his palms. He took a moment to sink down to his knees. Hands trembling as he grasped the object in his palms—hard enough to draw blood.

A silver arrowhead.

It was impossible, but Stiles swore he heard the sweet laughter of the huntress he’d grown to love and grieved to lose. It was your fault. The melodious sound rang in his ears, the only clear sound from the deafening noise of his blood rushing.

Before he completely succumbed to a panic attack, a loud ping echoed through the room. Stiles blinked from his reverie, harshly wiping the unshed tears from his eyes. He looked around and went to his table, the single source of light in the darkness.

It was the satellite phone Coulson gave him—in case of emergency only.

Now he knew. The incessant bone-chilling feeling he got at the beginning of all this wasn’t due to the Oni or the deep trail of traitors inside SHIELD. Although maybe a part of it was.

But, definitely not what he thought it would be.

The text was short, brief. As if it was sent in a hurry—just enough time to evade something or for it to come through. Coulson was always straight to the point, but he would at least call instead of text.

“Found buried in SHIELD servers. Be careful.”

There was a file attached, a link to a server. Stiles pressed it on instinct, not knowing what to expect.

Back then, if he hadn’t clicked that file, he could’ve avoided everything that will happen. He could’ve lived under the pretense that maybe everything was mutually exclusive and stayed ignorant towards the blatant discrepancy of dangers few people live to know exist but still suffer through.

But still, if he had known what pressing the file would’ve done to him, he’d still have opened it regardless. It was wired into him. After everything, he’d be damned to let this happen or at the very least try to stop it.
Maybe it was him seeking penance for all he’s done. But it didn’t matter.

He pressed it.

His satellite phone screen went black. At first Stiles thought that it was a virus, but then the screen turned back on with data lines and finally stopped at boxes with alternating letters that finally made up the sentence;

OUT OF THE SHADOWS, INTO THE LIGHT

Stiles laced his brows in confusion, this was in the SHIELD servers. Before he could question anything, his breath left him in a rush after getting his answer when the screen changed to a five letter box that slowly revealed the source;

HYDRA
This was supposed to go up by the end of this week but I sped it up and delivered this right to your doorstep!!! This was supposed to go off-the-rail and a much more well overwhelming--but I'd thought I'd save that for later. Gear up, guys. Because this is going to get a lot more a lot faster. Once again, immensely grateful for the amount of love this is just receiving. I am mindblown, happily so. Happy almost Valentines for those who're celebrating it, and happy almost Chinese New Years for those who're celebrating that, and happy almost Ash Wednesday for anyone who's celebrating that. I'll stop spouting things and just let you on with the chapter. Comment, Kudos and Subscribe~~ Let me know whatcha think (they're sooo sooo helpful, you wouldn't believe it)

New York City has been subjected to many horrors in the span of a short time—the center of an alien invasion, a supernatural invasion and the occasional run of the mill crime. When that happens, they were handed a solution: SHIELD. And then came the Avengers, along with every other nightmare that came true for any working adult. The Avengers tower was considered somewhat of a beacon of hope. That exact beacon of hope was now a shadow in the midst of civilization. A dark black mass of fog swirling the tower, clinging on the walls that was blocked off by metallic shutters.

New York City was in a panic, yes, but Washington D.C. was a catastrophe.

~~~

Stiles stood frozen in his tracks, holding the wall for support as he exited his room. *Hydra*. Stiles cursed. *Hydra is in SHIELD*. He didn’t know how deep the breach was. He didn’t know what’s happening, especially now that Hydra might be the one behind this attack—that means there *are* Hydra personnel inside the Avengers tower. Maybe had been there all along.

Fuck. He wasn’t going to panic, no.

A plan. He needed a plan. A plan and a team. Stiles calmed his breathing, bracing himself on the busted doors of the elevator. Logically, to fight multiple enemies in a situation this complicated, one would need a solid team.

But the question remain, now that Hydra finally released the trojan horse, there’s no knowing how to tell SHIELD from Hydra apart. Stiles held his breath in an attempt to slow his rapidly inclining heart rate, lifting himself over the hole and back inside the deep shaft.

Who the hell can he trust?
Tony stood from his position, bent over Bruce who was struggling with his breath. Steve kneeled to pick up a fallen chunk of wall blocking the busted elevator doors, sighing as he did so. Stark silently took in Steve’s condition—he was holding off the Hulk without his vibranium shield, the man was lucky to only attain bruises from the debacle.

“Thanks for this.” Steve shrugged the shield slung over one shoulder, tending to his arm with a fast-acting medicinal spray that Banner specifically concocted for super-soldier injuries.

“Not a problem, Cap.”

Steve tossed a salve to Tony who got a scratch on his face trying to put the Hulk to sleep, pacing his way to the elevator. “Where’s Stiles?”

“He’s fine.” Tony stopped the blonde by pressing back against his chest. “He’s getting weaponry suited to fight the creepy Japanese shadows.”

“What were those things?” Steve forced himself to restrain his panic for the lone boy in the tower infested by those things. “We can’t seem to land a decent attack.”

“We’re hoping Stiles could fix that. He said something about silver bullets.” Tony off-handedly replied to Steve’s question, still tending to Bruce who was down for the count. “For now, we’ll just have to light this place—“

The broken elevator doors burst open even more, sending one of the door flying between Steve and Tony, barely avoiding Bruce. Stiles jumped through, his phone in one hand and a box tucked under his arm. Disheveled and panic-struck, he went straight for Tony.

“Tony, have you seen this?” He shoved the phone at the man’s face, still catching the older men off guard. “This is so much worse than we—“

Before he could finish the sentence, or anyone could reply, Stiles noticed his surroundings. The place was ripped apart, dents on every wall and overhead lights busted though force of strength. Bruce was curled in the corner with withdrawals, Tony’s ironman suit had seen better days and Steve—Steve was standing there, bruised and battered, with a look of relief fondness in his eyes directed at Stiles.

But all Stiles saw was the red, white and blue star-spangled shield on his arm.

“Steve?”

The man frowned at the curious yet slightly affronted tone Stiles spoke with before he realized his eyes were staring at his arm. Steve snapped his eyes back up at Stiles’ face who was looking straight at him. “Stiles, I—“

Tony and Bruce were watching from the sidelines with a small grin ready to break out into full laughter, expecting the revelation to incite a hilarious shock and episode that will last them decades of embarrassment.

What they weren’t expecting, was for Stiles to suddenly take a step back, shaking his head vehemently. When Steve approached him to try and assess the problem, Stiles ran back to the elevator and fled with a burst of wind.
Confused and hurt, Steve looked at Tony for help. But Tony just about had the same amount of answers he did, maybe even less.


Fuck. Stiles levitated himself up and into the common floor, depleted from his energy of using his weakest element frequently. He stumbled into the side of the kitchen island, a hand on the cold marbles surface for support. Jesus Fucking Christ.

Stiles breathlessly laughed in heightened panic, not knowing how else to react. There can’t be any other explanation than that. Other than that he was ridiculously fucking obliviously stupid for goodness’ sakes. (Blond charming well-mannered Steve Bookworm living in the Avengers Tower managing the Avengers was Steve Rogers, the hunk of America. Who fucking knew?)

Steve lied to him.

But why?

There was no reason he’d lie to him, right? If it was change of behavior that he was worried about, he’d seen Stiles react to the entire Avengers ensemble the same way he did to himself, so what else could there be—

Unless.

Stiles shook his head. No, that can’t be. He fished his phone out, trying Coulson’s direct number a few times only to receive nothing. Tapping a quick code sequence to access the SHIELD headquarters frequency on radio waves to intercept any news or command, he listened in.

The crackled voice echoed loudly in the darkness of the floor. He kept the phone pressed tightly to his ear.

“Captain America is now a wanted fugitive from SHIELD. I repeat, any and all personnel are to apprehend him as fast as possible. Captain America is compromised. I repea—“

Locking his phone to stop the connection, Stiles let his phone drop to the floor. Fuckity fucking fuck. His breath caught in his throat, lungs burning with it.

“Stiles?”

Fuck. The uncoordinated spark fell to the floor with the sudden voice, recognizing it.

“Stiles?” The man repeated.

Stiles scrambled on the floor to get up but couldn’t from the sudden move the man made to help him—or attack him—so he shouted. “Don’t touch me!”

Steve retracted his hand back in shock. “Stiles, what’s wrong?” Tony flew in behind him, back-carrying Bruce who went in before him.
“Stay back!” His voice sounded painful even to his own ears.

Tony gently dragged Steve by his elbows backwards, slowly approaching Stiles in the process. “Stiles.” He made his voice a pitch lower and softer, a comforting tone. “Calm down, it’s me—Tony.”

Stiles snapped his eyes up into Tony’s, his speedy backward crawling slowed down just a tiny bit to shakily whisper his name. “Tony.”

Stark nodded, getting closer with his arms up in an unharmed pose. “Yes, that’s right. We’re all scared here, it’s okay.”

Rushing his words, Stiles coughed at his tongue shoving itself in his throat. He opted for movements instead, rapidly shaking his head and widening his eyes as a warning to Tony to stay away from Steve.

But what if he had gotten the message and was still defending Steve?

That could mean that Tony’s in on it.

Is he?

_Crap._ He can’t figure this out. What he wouldn’t do to replace this problem with a fucking rogue werewolf. Fuck, he never thought he’d say it, but he missed his old life’s simple problems.

“Little Spark?” Thor crashed through the elevator, meeting the scene with a wary expression, having heard the commotion with his sensitive ears. Tony looked shock to see him there, to which he promptly explained. “Natasha’s getting the power back on, but it’s going to take a minute or two.”

If Tony is in on it, then what about Bruce. What about Thor? He couldn't fight a god even with all the firepower in the world. Natasha or Clint? They were SHIELD agents, that means they’ve probably gotten the directive. Clint. Right, where _was_ he?

“Stiles?” Bruce tried.

In fact, everybody tried. His name was mentioned in so many different tone and volume to reach him, it sounded like a live auction. Stiles couldn’t handle it.

“Stop!” Stiles held his hands in front of him, a wave of harsh wind forcing them all backwards at least 5 steps. “Go away. All of you!”

Steve pushed through Tony to meet him directly. “What’s wrong, Stiles?”

He nearly scoffed. The man should consider a job in acting from the way his brows scrunch of worry for him.

“Stiles, please talk to me. What did we do?” Steve tried again, desperate for why the boy they’d grown to adore was behaving this way.

“What did you do?” Stiles increduously questioned them, in a hushed rushed tone. “You pompous bastard, are you still going to play ignorant?”

Everyone took a moment to reel in their shock, especially Natasha who slid into the room from the elevator at that moment, this was the first time the boy had ever said an insult and mean it. This
was without the sassy sarcastic bright implication—it was spiteful and loud.

When no one answered, Stiles took the moment to trudge on further, unable to keep his rage. He was sick of it, of being betrayed.

“You fucking lied to me.”

After a small momentary silence, Steve spoke out. “I’m sorry.” He hung his head. “I’m sorry for not telling you, I didn’t mean for you to find out this way.”

Stiles clapped in a sardonic manner, unable to comprehend how confident the man would be in trying to redirect his attention by a show of weakness. “Will someone give this man an Oscar?”

“Stiles, please.” Steve sounded so desperate, Stiles almost believed him.

But he knew better. Fuck, he was just too fucking soft. You’d think being shunned out once was enough to make him wary enough to avoid another situation of being blindsided but guess again. In the life of Stiles Stilinski, up is down and down is nowhere to be found—because logic was fucking nonexistent. “You kept that a secret from me, what else?”

“Stiles, what are you saying?” Tony came forward to try and help him, but it only adds assurance to the scenario Stiles had already formed in his head.

This doesn’t make any sense. Why was Tony helping him?! He should’ve seen the message inside the SHIELD servers. And Natasha, she should’ve been aware of the new command against Steve. The reasonable explanation would be that—

"No." Stiles’s voice broke in a hoarse crack, walking backwards one slow pained step at a time. "You're in on it too."

Without leaving any time for them to defend themselves, Stiles continued.

“Was this the plan all along? Dragging me into this for my knowledge of the supernatural, was that it?” At this point, he doesn’t even care if he sounds desperate. He just wanted a slither of honesty, was that really too much to ask? “Fuck. Chase was right.”

“Stiles—”

“When did it start, huh, Steve?” Facing his betrayal towards him, Stiles winced. “Fury's office? Triskelion? The bookstore?”

Steve stood there, taking all of the rage Stiles threw at him. And he took it with a soft understanding yet confused expression—and that just wasn’t fair.

“Was I that easy to lure that all you’d need to do is flash a smile and gush about Dr. Seuss with your unbelievably ridiculously over-flowing charm?”

Even Bruce, the least judgmental from them all, was looking at Stiles like he was a mad man—and he was certainly starting to feel like it.

“Please.” Sighing, Stiles just gave up. “Please just tell me this isn’t true.”

Still, all he got was silence. Deafening painfully loud and damning silence.

“Tell me!”
Steve jostled by the sudden scream. “I—“

“Stiles! This is crazy! Steve would never do that!” Tony tried to reason with him, moving closer to Stiles.

But Stiles kept his attention at Steve, who was looking even more confused by the second. “Stiles. I’m lost. You need to tell me what’s going on.”

“You’re HYDRA!” Stiles shouted, breaking the damn of controlling his emotional outburst because he’s not exactly subtle if anyone hadn’t noticed. “For fuck’s sake, it’s him, Tony! The 10th level operative we’re trying to track.”

“Wait, Tony?” Natasha immediately shifted her attention to the man who was as shocked as everyone else at the accusation.

“It’s a long story.” Tony waved Natasha off dismissively, turning back to Stiles. “What do you mean Hydra?”

Natasha kept persisting, taking a more hostile attempt as she placed her hand on the gun at her belt. “Make it short.”

Tony scowled at the demanding agent, narrowing one eye at her. “Aren’t you supposed to be getting the power back on?”

“It’ll take five minutes to reboot.” The woman inched closer to the man that was suddenly avoiding the question. “Tony.”

To be fair, Stiles felt a tid-bit guilty for outing their mission, but he couldn’t care less if it was all for nil.

Tony let out a grieving sigh, rubbing his eyes and gesturing at Natasha. “We found the base cause of the constant attacks against SHIELD, linked it to a level 10 operative inside of SHIELD. Long story short, your agency of secrecy has more secrets than you bargained for.” He swiveled back to Stiles. “Now, what the hell is this about Hydra?”

“And you didn’t think to tell us?” Natasha was indignant in her voice, tilting her head accusingly towards the two perpetrators.

“Well, we were investigating any compromised agents within SHIELD. You didn’t really fit the profile for our team.” Tony snarked at her, pissed at the interruption he keeps getting under. “For the love of god, can we please get back to Hydra!”

Natasha frowned at him, then at Stiles. “There’s nothing to go back to. They’re gone.”

Words won’t help him, Stiles knew that. So he simply sent the server link Coulson sent him to Tony, who projected his screen phone into a hologram so everyone could see the hidden message routing and cycling inside the SHIELD buried servers.

“No.” Steve let his mouth gape apart inch by inch, discombobulated by the irrefutable proof yet still refusing it. “This isn’t possible.”

“Coulson sent me that.” Stiles knew that would solidify the accusation, but they didn’t seem guilty. Granted, they were all different degrees of shocked. But it wasn’t of being outed or exposed—it was genuine shock. “Those traitors we discovered in SHIELD, they’re Hydra.”
“Sleeper agents.” Tony concluded. “But why would you think Steve was Hydra?”

Stiles switched the connection back online on his phone, letting the narrative run for itself from the automated command on a cycle. “How was I not supposed to?”

The expression between the Avenger’s features darkened minutely, synchronized in their alert and speed in which they all looked at one another.

Bruce surged forward, grabbing the phone from his hands to listen to the announcement at length. “Stiles. Where did you get this?”

“The intercom over at Triskelion.” Stiles was beyond perplexed, not knowing what to believe even though he really really wanted to believe them. “What does it—“

Tony lifted his head from the bow it had, going over the command. “That’s not SHIELD. That’s Hydra.”

Natasha caught up with his train of thought quickly, nodding to her points. “That’s why they targeted us and put us on lockdown. Why they released this message now. Why they set off the EMP.” She shared a knowing look to Tony, who urged her to finish. “They didn’t want us to interfere.”

Stiles raised his hands in an aborted attempt of annoyance at being left out. “Interfere with what?”

“They’re planning a hostile takeover on the Triskelion in DC.”

At Tony’s clarification, Stiles hung his mouth open, unable to form words or comprehension over the surprisingly logical explanation. So, that’s the logical part he forgot to take account for. He knew he was missing a piece of the puzzle but—

“Not planning.” A new voice entered their constant revelation, dropping in from one of the vents. “It’s already happening.”

Tony chocked. "What?"

“Clint.” Natasha spared a smile at him, glad to see that he’s uninjured. “You missed out on a lot.”

Dropping a gravely damaged StarkPad, Clint reached over to Stiles and briefly hugged him. “Got caught up fighting off some thugs who realized I recalibrate this to analog signal to spy in on the Triskelion. Turns out they were Hydra agents inside SHIELD; there’s an all-out war in Triskelion between them and SHIELD; our agents have no clue that Hydra’s back and are very much confused and torn between following Alexander Kirk’s command or staying loyal to the Captain.”

Stiles struggled to lift his head under Clint’s hold, but Clint got the message and let Stiles go to an arm’s distance. The archer heard the heat of the battle from the echoes through the ventilation shafts. “It’s Alexander Kirk. We’re not hydra, kid.”

The boy was pulled from Clint’s arms to face Steve—in very close proximity with very strong arms on both his shoulders. Stiles could see the unfiltered look of complete honesty and transparency in Steve’s eyes that he nearly keeled over.

“Stiles. I went in the ice because of them.” Steve searched his eyes for confirmation of his understanding. He stated firmly. “I am not Hydra.”

Natasha smirked, a playful snide shared between her and Clint. “Besides, he’s not even a level 10
operative, Stiles.”

Steve took the remark with a chuckle, and boy, does that affect Stiles. “If I were, I’d gladly let you accuse me and place me back under.”

Staring and falling into Steve’s clear blue eyes so painfully filled with honor, Stiles nodded absentmindedly. Even in the darkness, it shone through Stiles’ heart like an arrow.

Arrow. Right.

“Wait, Hydra being behind the lockdown and EMP, I can understand.” Stiles mulled it over out-loud, unwilling to let go of Steve’s hold over his arm but turned to face the rest anyway. “But the Oni, that can’t be a coincidence—what does that have to do with Hydra?”

“Oh?” Bruce stood up in his stupor, stretching his back into place from the recent transformation, rightfully attentive to the disturbing notion the question was getting at. “What the hell is an Oni?”

Stiles froze, detecting the drop in the atmosphere before they could even appear. He’s way too familiar with it. He raised a finger, pointing behind the Avengers. “That.”

Each of them pulled their weapons out before they turned, facing the ominous Japanese shadows with nothing short of determination—even knowing that they couldn’t possibly kill them. Stiles looked around to spot the bullets on the ground next to the kitchen island, having left there after his panic. Stupiiiiid.

His life was stupid.

The attack began on their side, Tony blasting off repulser shots to light up the room, but his suit was damaged so badly that he couldn’t get one bright enough. Natasha assisted in front of Bruce along with Clint—they couldn’t afford a green disaster the second time around. Thor relentlessly tried to hammer the fuck out of them but constantly failed to do so.

Sties. Well, Stiles was just stuck at his feet. Steve stopped his shield that ricocheted back to him to move into Stiles’ vision line—his eyes two worried blue orbs. Stiles noticed his own erratic breathing and then noticed his hand being pulled up onto Steve’s then straight on his chest.

“Wha-“

“Listen to my heartbeat.” Steve calmly spoke in the middle of the chaos. “Breathe.”

Stiles could feel the strong thrumming of the super soldier’s steady heartbeat. Right. He could do this. His breath slowed down, his heart steadying at it’s rhythm. He clenched Steve’s shirt once before letting go, dropping his arms to his side and walked forth.

He ignored the warnings from the rest of the Avengers when he walked right to the group of Oni. They stopped at his approach, creepily turning their whole body to him in a synced choreograph. Steve was ready to jump in but then the Oni stood still.

And they bowed.

Briefly stopping in his track, Stiles took a deep breath before moving past them, ignoring the looks at his back by the Avengers. He bent down to collect the box, opening it and slugging 6 bullets into his gun.

He settled the wooden box onto the marble island, turning back to face the Oni. He aimed and shot.
One by one. Without resistance from the Onis, each bullet cracked their mask and they burst in black dust that settled on the ground before magically sweeping away.

Under his breath he whispered after his last shot rang through, dramatically and unexpectedly loud in the darkness. “That’s for Allison.”

Stiles knew that their deaths weren’t exactly, well, death. They were just going to be reborn into another one—and the cycle goes on. He’ll never escape them.

But it was poetic in a sense. And even though it wasn’t justice, not nearly anywhere close—but it was somewhere there.

Steve was there to catch Stiles when his knees finally buckled, murmuring a soft thank you before he blacked out. The super soldier bent down to hook his arms underneath Stiles’ knees and carried his weight up.

For all the audience in that room, Steve figured it wouldn’t hurt to softly smile at the feeling of Stiles in his arms. A warm comfort to hold and protect.

Then the light turned on.

And Steve looked up to find all five of his smug shit grinning team mates shooting him the sly eyed lip quirk. He rolled his eyes.

“Fuck off.”

At the very least, Tony did looked absolutely horrified at the profanity.

“Language!”
I am so very sorry that this is very late, I am swamped in the middle of exams. Literally dying in the pile of work and studying, so I'm very very sorry. Thank you so much for the support, and I will definitely try my hardest not to let you down! Here's a little something for Steve and Stiles after what's been left off~ Oh and should I get a beta? This is my first fic, I have no idea what I'm doing T^T.

The faint hum of well-constructed engines were the first thing he heard. Fluorescent lights beneath his eyelids, a warm red shine on his brown golden orbs were the next thing he felt. Cold hard surface on his back and a warmth encasing his hands. Stiles blinked a few times to adjust to the environment, opening his eyes.

“Wha—“ Was all he was able to utter before the overwhelming numbing dull throb ran though his bones and muscle. “Fuuuuuuck.”

From the side, he could hear Tony and Clint snickering at his pain while Bruce was being more sympathetic and slapping their arms to shut them up. Stiles couldn’t even roll his eyes without feeling like they were going to pop out of his sockets; but he did it anyway because he's as mature as the rest of them—who stuck their tongue out at him.

When Stiles took the liberty to try and sit up, he was softly restrained by a hunk of an arm stretched over a very familiar blue and red sleeve. “Stop it. You're still suffering from magic exhaustion.”

He shifted his head and his vision blurred out before focusing on hard sculpted features that may or may not have made a guest appearance (or star role) in most of his dreams—undisclosed for public comfort purposes. Stiles looked down to see that Steve was holding his hand.

For a moment there, Stiles nearly jerked out of his body because Captain fucking America was holding his hand—then he remembered, Steve was Captain America.

And it didn’t fucking help.

“You—you’re—“

Tony sighed. “Here we go.”

“I thought he already knew?” Clint frowned, obviously missing out on a detail somewhere there.

Natasha blew on her nails, two of them chipped from holding the generator in place when the Oni stroke back at the wiring that almost collapsed the entire system. “Oh he does—he just hasn’t processed it yet.”

Stiles sneered at them before going back to Steve, fingers unconsciously coming up to trail the bridge of Steve’s nose. “I just thought that with everything, God would be merciful and gave nation’s first hero a less than flattering face—but no. You just had to be goddamn perfect do you?”
The silence rang like a sly demon, Tony breaking it by snickering loudly while Clint laughed in a sudden shock. Natasha plucked Steve’s ear, which was growing red and redder by passing second and that’s when Stiles realized what he just said.

“Fuck. Did I say that out loud?” Stiles groaned when his face palm felt more like a jackhammer at his nose. “Sorry. Sorry. That was the magic exhaustion talking.”

“Right. Magic Exhaustion.” Tony patted Steve on his back, bracing both his hands on the table Stiles was laid on. “I didn’t know hormones had a new name.”

To his credit, Stiles opted to ignore the man for his and Steve’s respect. He looked around, finally noticing where he was—which was a big question mark. “Where are we?”

“The Avenger’s Quinjet.”

Stiles faced Clint who generously answered his question, and he was momentarily struck for the second time that day. He was in the Avenger’s quinjet for fucks sake. This was the top of his list of things he would never get away with stealing but really wanted to be in—right next to Nick Fury’s bedroom. And no. No, not in that way, you fucking perverts. It was a curiosity that will get him killed; but he would gladly trade something else for a peek at Fury’s perversion. Because that, my friend, is something no one in the world can know without either death or a really fucking amazing kink of whatever that guy’s into.

“Thor?” The god was missing, if his eyes were properly working.

Natasha smiled at him, filling bullet rounds on her gun. “He’s gone back to Asgard, said he needed information on our attacker and something about answers.”

Stiles bolted up in his seat, and this time, Steve gave up on restraining him and instead helped him transition positions. “Where are we going?”

“The Triskelion.” Clint left out the ‘if it’s still there’ bit, but they all knew what he meant, even Stiles.

“Isn’t it too late?” Stiles blurted out before he had considered anyone’s feelings. “I’m sorry. But, Clint, you said that it was underway when we were stuck at the tower.”

Tony stood from where he was leaning on Stiles’ makeshift bed, making his way to his suit mounted on the wall. “We’re not going as a rescue.”

Stiles swung his leg, promptly landing on the ground and nearly stumbling over if it weren’t for Steve holding him back. He sighed, despising the sentiment. “We’re going as aid relief.”

Natasha got up from her seat as well, patting his shoulder on her way to collect her armory. “Suit up, we’re almost there.”

Saving one last look of despair to Steve, Stiles nodded and watched the Avengers all zipping up into their combat gear while he himself gave a silent prayer.

Please. Be merciful, world, for just one fucking time.
Religion was a thing of wonder—but it all depends on constant changing variables for every single person. Stiles was conflicted. He didn’t really believe in one religion in particular—but he does believe in a form of higher power. Because if there wasn’t a higher power somewhere out there that he could eventually ask to explain all that has happened to him; he would’ve given up a long time ago.

Still, he didn’t know why he was prompted to say a prayer. Maybe it was a calling of some sort—the higher power’s way of telling him everything will be salvageable.

It’s times like these that prayers do get answered.

Stiles and the Avengers arrived at the scene of destruction—shocked at the state that the Triskelion had been left with. They were expecting a disastrous outcome, but that doesn’t mean accepting the reality of it was easy, even more so when they were filtering through the rubble once they head inside.

They were just about ready to give up hope when they found a familiar man standing in the midst of all the horror.

Tony broke out into relieved burst of laughter. “Should’ve known you wouldn’t die.”

Phil Coulson stood shellshocked by the surprise appearance of the team, then he zeroed in a boy he had not think he would’ve seen again. Grinning widely, the agent side-stepped against the rubble to greet the boy with a hand on his shoulder. “You got my warning.”

Returning the smile vibrantly, Stiles nodded. “There were some complications, but yes. I did. Thank you for that.” He waited a moment for the scoffing from the Avengers in regards to his wording to pass, looking around in expectation of the rest of Coulson’s team, but they were absent. Stiles met Coulson’s eyes. “Where are—“

Stiles was new to this whole agency professional game of poker faces, so he couldn’t really read the expression Coulson sleeved himself into. It was his typical ever-present smile and a hard look in his eyes.

“Coulson?”

He could only see the man barely open his mouth and vaguely pointing behind him when he felt his knees buckle from the sudden force behind his back. As he fell to the ground all Stiles could think was ‘attack, fucking attack dammit’. And he was about to set his back on fire to catch the enemy as well, but then he heard the familiar shriek piercing his ears.

“Stiles!”

Blinking, he whiplashed his head backwards. “Daisy!”

The woman let go of her hold on him, letting Stiles properly embrace her and returning it back with a crushing grip, “You’re okay! I thought you didn’t make it when I saw the footage of the Avengers Tower circling the media.”

It seems like the world never wants him to respond or get any answer, because every single time one of the two were about to happen, chances are he either gets: a) violently mauled into another rough situation or b) just plain ridiculously disturbed (usually in equally violent manner). Either ways, he always gets hurt one way or another so it’s good to know that the world’s still all and the
So, yes, Stiles gets tackled to the ground shortly after getting up from Daisy’s attack—this time by two brainiacs that talked over each other in their ears, streaming out blessings of his wellbeing. Unable to respond, Stiles just hugged them back while wheezing for his life because two human beings weigh a lot more than you’d think they do.

When they finally let go of him, Stiles rubbed his chest vigorously. “I mean, everybody loves the love—but maybe a little less tough love will be good, thanks.”

Coulson and the rest of the Avengers watched from the sidelines with a look of grateful fondness—in the midst of all the destruction, they could use a little happiness to get them through the day.

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The Triskelion, although mostly intact, was still crumbling bits of debris from the wreckage of one helicarrier lodged right in the middle of one of the three pillar-like structures. Some SHIELD agents had been evacuated by the organized routine of Coulson’s team. Stiles helped Fitz and Simmons create a perimeter around the Triskelion with the help of local police while Coulson and Daisy were briefing the Avengers of what exactly went down with Alexandre Kirk. Thor was out of the picture, and Bruce was helping tend to the injured.

“So, what exactly happened inside the tower?” Fitz slid next to him, helping him direct the crowd away from the scene despite their avid curiosity shown through holding their phones right at their faces.

News stations were parked right outside the perimeter, hoping to get coverage on the disastrous outcome of a SHIELD facility and catch the Avengers on tape. Apparently the only way they could’ve made the crowd worse was with their own appearance—so that was a strategy that was not thought out very well.

Stiles evaded the question Fitz threw at him with busying himself on manning the crowd who were pushing against each other to yell their admiration or hate at the heroes. Fitz and Simmons got the memo without Stiles having to explain himself.

Because the truth is, he didn't know exactly what happened either. But he had a theory—a disturbing theory, yes, but a theory nonetheless. It’s also disturbing that none of the Avengers had bombarded him with the question yet—accounting the fact that they’re all nosy do-gooder meddlers—but he’s learned to not look a horse gift in the mouth.

It didn’t matter that he’s grown up or matured or whatever the fuck has happened over the years—one thing will never change, and that’s his motto. Ignore a problem until it eventually goes away. Welcome to the life of the irresponsible master procrastinator, Stiles Stilinski.

“Stiles!”

The boy turned around at his name being called out.

“Chase?”

The platinum-haired man rushed through the barricade with the permission of the guards who
backed down after seeing Stiles’ reaction. Well, it’s not much of a reaction rather than a body
instinct of running through the unstable pile of concrete to climb the man as if he was that last
fucking boat piece of the titanic.

Steve turned around simultaneously the moment he heard the boy’s name being called out. The
man wasn’t an idiot—he’s old-fashioned, not some dumb retard with no social cues. He and the
rest of the avengers knew there was something wrong with Stiles. With everything happening so
far, they knew he’s hiding a lot more than he would prefer to tell them. And what just happened in
the tower, with all the knowledge he seemed to have about the shadows that attacked them—the
Avengers were bound to try and get the answers out of him, and honestly he is too.

So, seeing Stiles interact with Coulson’s team was a small relief—seeing him smile even after
what happened was a relief, if not a concern for his seemingly stable state of mentality despite
everything the young adult has been through. Steve knew that. And yet, he just can’t seem to hide
the frown that pulled on his eyebrows when he saw Stiles jumping into the arms of an attractive
white-bun-haired muscled man clad in a ridiculous striped red button down and a grey sweater.

Rationalizing everything was Steve’s way of dealing with his emotion. It’s a 1940’s thing—it’s
completely understandable.

“That’s definitely the most warm welcome I’ve ever received from you. And not that I hate it—in
fact I absolutely want you to do more of it—but what’s wrong?” Chase let him down, keeping his
arms braced on Stiles’ shoulder, gaging his expression.

Stiles shook his head, aware of the audience they were attracting from the amazingly nosy heroes
of the Avengers. “Nothing. I’ll tell you later. More importantly, how are you here? In DC?”

“I saw the news on what happened in the Triskelion and the Avenger’s tower, figured you’d be
here.” Chase dropped his hands and stuffed them into his pockets, eyes flittering around to scan the
crowd. “I asked Trevor for a favor.”

“Jesus, I don’t know how you deal with him—he creeps me out.” Excessively writhing, Stiles
could literally feel the goosebumps blooming down his skin. “I still can’t look at a whisk without
shivering.”

“As long as he can teleport me wherever I want to go, I’m fine with paying the price.” The prophet
cought the wary eye of a certain blonde and the rest of Stiles’ teammates on different degrees of
calculating stares. He gave a general nod to their direction before focusing back on Stiles. “So are
you okay?”

To anyone else, the abnormally long period of silence Stiles took to answer the question might be
unsettling. However, Chase knew Stiles better than most people.

“Yeah.” Stiles sighed the answer, reluctant on trying to deal with his clusterfuck of emotions at the
moment. He looked up in a careful manner, Chase picking up on it immediately. “We’re okay
right?”

Softly smiling at the spark’s unnecessary concern, Chase ruffled Stiles’ brown locks. “Yeah.”

It was as if this burden just lifted off Stiles’ shoulder, his head rolling back in exasperated relief.
“Oh thank god, that fight almost killed me. I don’t know what I’d do if I lost you as a friend.”

Chase took this moment to place both his hands on Stiles’ cheeks, cradling his face so that he
would look straight at him. For a moment, Stiles was nearly spooked by the amount of seriousness
the usually casual man was giving. But, Chase wouldn’t be Chase if he didn’t. “You’ll live.”

Alright, that’s it. Steve power walked to the pair, shield braced on his arms as if he needed to show some sort of authority towards the lesser physically threatening man, eyes strictly trained on the hands on Stiles’ face. “Stiles?”

The younger’s head tilt had the unknown man’s hands falling off from it. “Oh, Steve. Right.” Stiles turned to Chase, gesturing between the two men. “Steve, meet Chase Byrnes.”

Being the man of honour he is, Steve politely shook the hand this ‘Chase’ guy handed to him. “Pleasure to meet you.”

“Wow, you really are as gentlemanly as the painted you to be.” Chase smirked at the captain, earning him a very stern look from Stiles.

“He’s a mage and a prophet. He’s very useful when he’s not insulting people and disgracing human kind.”

“I’m a historian—records show that the human kind disgraced themselves.” Smirking the rude commentary off, Chase tilted his body to face Stiles. “Anyways, I just dropped by to tell you that the Japan nemeton’s been releasing a weird pulse of energy according to my contact there. You should give a call back home, see how thing’s are.”

Without meaning to, Stiles frowned at the aspect of having to contact Beacon Hills again. Calling there three times in the span of a month was monumentally bad, accounting that he has never called once for the past 7 months prior to the current month (by far, his worst month, in his life, ever—and that’s something that has merit). “Okay, fine. I’ll let you know once I hear back.”

Nodding to his confirmation, Chase pressed on the jewel on his bracelet—spontaneously whisked (Trevor, that’s a fucking whisk!) away in a grey cloud. Steve immediately drew back his shield in preparation to fight, which was admittedly so damn adorable—No, Stiles! Bad thought.

“Hey, woah, Captain, it’s just remote teleportation. Tone the aggressive.” Stiles lowered down the shield that was blocking his way, eyeing all the other Avengers. “You too, Romanoff!”

Natasha winked at him, suddenly appearing right by his side. Damn agents and their subtlety, and that was not Stiles’ jealousy speaking. Definitely not.

“Hey!” Ironman flew down from the building, landing in front of the crowd gathers around Stiles. Tony retracted his face mask, a serious look painted on his frown. “There’s still some agents unaccounted for, we need to scout the building.”

Clint slung his bow on his back, hopping down from his perch on top of the security post. “How many?”

“Rough estimate, thirty-fifty agents.” Tony reigned the attention back to his voice, frown growing even deeper. “But that’s not all.”

Tony Stark is a bearer of bad news, Stiles concluded. Someone should really take that job away from him—he does not have even the least bit nuance of comfort.

“Director Fury is missing.”
It was in his best demeanor, that he did not squeal like a rubber ducky every time a part of the ceiling collapsed or chunks of the floor giving in. No, he remained steadily masculine through looking for survivors—especially one missing director of SHIELD.

Whilst mumbling to himself reassurances of not dying in one hell of a wrecked clandestine agency’s dope ass building—although it would be a cool obituary recorded forever in his life’s history, which sadly wouldn’t even be the weirdest thing in his file—he didn’t bother to notice that his very first fear was happening.

A whole block of solid cement ceiling with a layer of sheen grey paint crumbling down in front of him.

The moment he looked up, he realized he just jinxed himself. Well, fuck. He could see his headstone already; the (un)luckiest idiot that ever ran with the fucking supernaturals.

“Stiles!” He felt himself being forcefully grabbed by his waist and into a brick wall—at least that’s what it felt like—at the exact time the ceiling fully collapsed and took the parallel piece of ground down with it.

The dust of cement clouded the area, seeping down to both their lungs. Coughing haphazardly, Steve waved his hands around to clear the cloud, keeping Stiles pressed to his chest with an arm around his waist.

“Stiles?” Stiles stood frozen in his place, ears against the pounding rhythm of the captain’s heart.

By instinct, Stiles jolted backwards and pushed his way out of Steve’s hold, as if he was burned at the touch—which, in Stiles defense, is a reasonable excuse because holy smokes that man is burning.

“Burning?”

Oh fuck. “I just said that out loud didn’t I?”

Steve chuckled despite of his blushing ears. “You should really stop cursing.”

Well, there goes his agent training—he has absolutely no tact for discrepancy, like zero. It’s a miracle he’s survived high school.

“I found that it’s the only thing that constitutes as therapy at this point, so if you don’t mind Mr Captain America, sir, I’m going to continue using my colorful vocabulary.” Alright, he’ll admit that it’s a shitty thing to do, attacking Captain America. But hey, he had one hell of a reason to so Stiles is perfectly happy to assume innocence and a free pass because he deserves it.

As expected, Steve’s smile of amusement fell into a discouraged grimace. Stiles didn’t bother to look at his reaction further than that and continued walking in the building, up the stairs and onto another floor.

The captain followed the boy, helping carry chunks of fallen walls or ceiling off to help the agents trapped underneath it while Stiles hauled them out. They worked in silence.

It was fine, Stiles was fine. Until, of course, Steve wasn’t.
Setting the busted metal doors down after prying it from blocking the hallway, Steve offered a hand to Stiles for him to leverage on of scaling the rubble—of which he ignored and went up himself.

Steve sighed, looking at the back of the young man who was slowly walking away from him—in more ways than one. “Stiles, I’m sorry.”

Well, the silence was good while it lasted.

“Sorry? What for exactly?” No one ever claimed Stiles wasn’t immature or passive towards bitterness; his middle name is ‘bitter’. And ‘sarcasm’, and ‘revenge’, and ‘awesome’, and in surprising cases ‘dangerous’—point is, he has a long weird ass fucking name.

Steve closed in on Stiles, who was looking right to left, blatantly ignoring the man trying to get his attention. “I didn’t mean to—” Stiles walked into an open room, cutting Steve but he followed anyways, “I didn’t know—”

Stiles looked down. “Hey, someone left a hundred bucks!”

“Stiles, please!”

The boy stilled in his awkward knee bend position, a crumpled hundred dollar bill in his hand, a shocked expression hanging on his lips.

Steve sighed, hand rubbing his temples while his eyes shone of regret. “Stiles, I don’t know what else to say but I’m sorry.”

Okay, yes, anyone who made Captain America’s eyes look like that deserves a special place in hell—they’re basically a national treasure. But, this is Stiles.

He’s got a bloody electric chair in hell with his name on it. And he’s just about begging for an upgrade.

“Steve, I don’t care for your apology!” Standing up, his hands flew in a frustrated gesture. “That word doesn’t mean anything to me, okay, it’s lost its purpose years ago.”

Closing his eyes for a brief moment, Stiles let his emotions loose. “I haven’t had the best track record with trust. Learned that the hard way.” He opened his golden honey brown eyes to meet sincere clear blue ones. “You lied to me.”

The captain winced, reaching out to him. “Stiles, I—”

“No, you betrayed me.” Stiles took a step back away from him, his voice cracking from the desperation and volume he was speaking at. And hell did that stab the captain’s heart.

“I trusted you, and you betrayed me by lying about who you are. Must’ve been fun ain’t it?” The younger man shook his head, raising the pitch of his voice as a theatrical emphasis. “Poor dumb Stiles Stilinski blindly pining for the great Captain America while he was standing right in front of him, innocent and unassuming as the charming Steve Bookworm. What a joke.”

Steve frowned, shocked by the statement, his own voice raising. “It wasn’t a joke! How could you think that it was a joke?” This time, he moved forward without stopping. “I care about you, Stiles. I’m sorry I betrayed your trust, but I didn’t do it on purpose.”

Breaking with the closing distance, Stiles really wanted to believe him. He wanted—well, he didn’t
know what he wanted, but he knew that he didn’t want to lose Steve.

Feeling his knees give out, Stiles sat on a desk, hands on his lap and weariness in his voice, cracking. “Then why’d you do it?” Shaking his head, Stiles breathlessly chuckled. “Why’d you lie to me about who you are? I just don’t get it.”

Steve took a minute to find his answer while Stiles was boiling in his own personal torture of curiosity and expectations. Finally, the super soldier closed the distance between them and knelt down at Stiles’ feet. Surprised by the action, Stiles made a move to stand but the captain simply shook his head and stayed there.

With his back straight, Steve was at same eye level with Stiles sitting on the broken desk without legs. “Honestly, I don’t know.” Heaving a deep breath, he smiled. “It’s complicated.”

Stiles scoffed. “Well, you’re gonna have to do better than complicated cause I know complicated.”

“Ever since I woke up from the ice—“ Oh, wow, we’re going there “—I lost all my friends. I woke up in a new world with new people and a new battle to fight. But I didn’t just lose my friends, I lost something far greater. Ever since I woke up, I was Captain America. Only Captain America.”

Steve saw Stiles’ frown letting up, realization dawning in, and breathed out a sad mirth. “Yeah, you’ve got it. I lost Steve Rogers. I lost myself, buried underneath the super soldier that the world needed me to be. Everyone I knew, I knew because of my duties as Captain America. Every one of my friends, I knew because of their initial alliance with Captain America. Every part of my life was revolving around the super soldier that I was made to be.

“And then one day, I met this ridiculous quirky librarian—“

“Not a librarian.”

“—honorary librarian,” Steve shot him a soft warning look, “and for some reason, he didn’t know who I was. He was my first friend. Steve Rogers’ first friend.” Clapping his hands together, as if to clean it off dust, he fumbled with his fingers. “I guess, in a way, I didn’t want to lose that—even though I knew you wouldn’t treat me differently even if I were to reveal my SHIELD identity.

“You’re the only part that Steve Rogers has, in a world that needs and only sees Captain America.” Crossing his hands on each other, Steve looked down from Stiles’ subtle observing gaze. “I know that’s selfish, and nothing should be an excuse to cause you pain, but that’s my selfish desire as a scrawny pale man that was left behind in the war.”

*Crap. That’s not fair. This was such a losing battle. What was he thinking, battle of emotions with Captain fucking America? Nothing gets past those blue eyes. Nothing. Not even Gordon Ramsay —if Steve stared him down, even with a burnt dish, that man would keel over and cry.

Sighing along with the super soldier, Stiles closed his eyes in painful consideration before opening them up in a light new manner. “Against my better judgement, I believe you.”

The tense nerves on Steve’s shoulder dropped meters down, relief washing over him. “I wouldn’t want to insult your better judgement but I fully concur.”

“Yeah well, my better judgement is in the form of squealing ramblings from a 7 year old girl of monsters under her bed.” Stiles shrugged, the smile slowly returning in his cheeks. “Technically, I was right about the monster part but not the ones I was thinking about. The real ones had a much more imminent danger and life threatening consequences than good old ghosts do. Hey, I even met this one ghost—the correct term is ghouls, which by the way, why does no one ever get that right?
It’s not that hard to remember: ghoul and ghost. It’s like racism, or wait is it not racist? If you simply categorize them all under one blanket term instead of grouping them separately then oh my god that’s our humane problem! We—"

“Stiles, breathe.” The sparkling—yes, it was sparkling—wide tooth smile the captain had adorned makes Stiles stop and breathe, for completely different reasons.

Sucking in a lungful expanse of oxygen mixed with questionable air particles, Stiles calmed his incessant brain rambling. “Right. One question.”

With the nod he got, Stiles leaned on his knees with his elbows, imitating a daunting pose. “Do you seriously like Dr. Seuss or?”

Steve laughed, taking the blundering depressing mood away with it.

“No, cause if you don’t, I’m going to be very pissed.”

~~~

Yes, prayers do get answered. Miracles do happen, and hope lives at the end of the day. However, that’s something of a minority of rare occurrences—not when most outcomes were far more often bad than good.

Sometimes—no, most of the time—prayers fell on deaf ears.

The sharp ringing of Stiles’ phone cut through the peace the two had reconciled. Stiles dug in his back pocket to fish his phone out, throwing a look of confusion at Steve when he saw the caller ID.

“What? Who is it?” Steve stepped down from the makeshift rubble chair he sat on.

Stiles kept staring at his phone, unsure whether to pick up or not. “It’s my contact from Beacon Hills. But I haven’t even called them about the nemeton yet.”

“Answer it.”

And so he did.

“Peter?” Stiles skipped the formalities, his curiosity and anxiety getting the better of him. This is exactly why he might’ve survived high school life—he was rightfully paranoid.

“Thank god, you picked up.” Peter’s voice sounded nervous, fast and in short breaths. Stiles could hear a commotion behind the older man’s voice. “We saw you in the news in DC on a report about an aircraft crashing into a building. I thought you were injured or worse.”

“Oh, no, well, I’m fine.” Blinking a few times, Stiles got distracted from the myriad of noises coming out of his speaker. Which he just now finally realized. “Wait, Peter. Who’re we?”

After two seconds, Peter came clean. “The pack.”

“Peter!” Stiles barked at his mic because Jesus, Peter Hale has successfully regressed in his intelligence. There goes the last brains of Beacon Hills, discounting Lydia if she’d only stop caring
so much about what other people think.

Damn it, just one phone call and he’s back to unnecessary petty insults.

That place is toxic.

Peter’s voice brought him back from his thoughts, panicked and accosted. “No time to explain, I—Hey!”

The line went rowdy and scrappy for a while, which Stiles winced and frowned to before it came back on but with a different voice. “Stiles!”

His brows flew up to his hairline—what the fuck was going on. “Jackson?!”

Jackson breathed haggardly over the speaker of his phone, as if he was cupping his hand on his own mic and speaking in a very controlled baritone voice. “Stiles, you need to come back.”

“Come back?” He’s just had about enough confusion and anxiety for the whole fucking day—jesus, he can’t believe that the Onis was still an occurrence that happened this morning on the same day—he just snapped. “Jackson, what in the ever loving fuck is going on?”

Steve steeled his stance in response to Stiles’ growing panic and restlessness. He can’t blame the super soldier, because the thought of just going back to Beacon Hills scares the shit out of him.

“The nemeton. Stiles.”

Japan. The nemeton in Japan.

“It’s the nemeton.”

And now, Beacon Hills.

“Stiles, help us.”

Chapter End Notes

GET. READY. FOR. THE. BEACON. HILLS. CHAPTTTTERRR!!!!! y’all been asking for it so much and I was so excited to write it ;)}
Suburbia Blues

Chapter Notes

The beginning of the Beacon Hills arc! AND OMG GUYS!!! 1,000 KUDOS <3
Damn, I was nearly moved to tears when I saw it T^T AAAAA!! I don't know what to say but thank you thank you thank you XD Oh, and to celebrate I wrote down the longest chapter to date, 6300 words. Still stumped with exams, I'm gonna try to do the next one as fast as possible!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If Jackson were to describe Beacon Hills in one word—it would be ‘hell-mouth of all the things even Hell rejected.’ He was aware of that being more than one word, but that’s as short as he can simplify the repertoire that is Beacon Hills’ description.

When the doors shut on their faces that day, the last thing any of them saw of Stiles was the tense high shoulders of his back. Jackson looked around with his lips firmly on the terrible decision of staying quiet. He found Cora and Liam with their heads bent down—the former’s in plain frustration and the latter’s in a shameful state.

They looked at their Alpha and the shameless bunch of followers behind him. They looked to Theo, who was smiling as if he had gotten everything he wanted. Cora looked to Derek, quiet and brooding all on his own.

“I can’t believe he just left like that.” Kira, being the naive girl that she was, broke the uncomfortable silence in the air.

“Good riddance.” Theo justified their actions, wrapping his words around the daft ears of the pack. Jackson sneered at him, Cora right by his side.

“He left because you pushed him out.” Unable to bite his tongue any longer, the kanima-turned-werewolf nearly lounged at the bastard.

In an instant, the heads turned and glared at the lone wolf, Cora having the nerve to sneer back at them in a feral manner. Liam simply stood closer towards the girl, having formed a sisterly bond towards her.

Derek pushed himself from the wall, crossing his arms. “He left because he’s a burden who can’t do anything and he knows it.”

Cora looked at him the way she would look at a stranger—and Derek simply strode past them and up his bedroom through the spiral staircase.

That night, Jackson had an arm around Liam, leading him out of the loft with the pack following after them. That night, nothing was ever the same in Beacon Hills, and for better or worse, they never saw Stiles again.
The moment the pack bond that they had with Stiles snapped—Jackson keeled over in pain. Liam thrashed around in his bed screaming, Cora holding him down from scratching everyone else above her own internal wolf clawing at her skin to rip out and howl for the loss of a pack member.

At first, they all thought that Stiles died as that would be the most reasonable cause for the break in the bond—but it was after a momentary notice that they realized it was due to the fact that Stiles had left the pack permanently.

Although the prospect of Stiles not dying had caused them immense relief, however, the fact that the rest of the pack didn’t even seem to care that Stiles might be dead when the pack bond broke—judging by the way they turned a cold shoulder towards that conversation—was just unacceptable, especially to Cora.

She barged into Derek’s room in the loft that night, fuming from her ears and nostrils enlarged, a blue beta tint in her eyes. Derek greeted her with an exhausted roll of his eyes, used to his sister’s fits of emotion. “What do you want, Cora?”

“What do I want?” Cora scoffed, power walking her way in front of him to where he was seated at the edge of his frameless bed. “What I want is to know where my brother went, because this heartless douchebag sad excuse of a disgrace is not him.”

Derek flipped a page in his book, nonchalantly ignoring Cora with minimal attention. “What do you want, Cora.”

Irritated with the behavior that his brother adopted, Cora kicked his bed with full strength, sending it crashing against the wall with Derek on it. “What the hell do you think you’re doing, Derek?!”

Exasperated with her actions, Derek closed his book on the bed and fixed his footing on the ground. “Trying to fucking read before rudely interrupted.”

“How can you just be fine?” The woman threw her hands at him, leaping across the room to catch his collar and roughly shook him. “Stiles could’ve died for all we knew and you all were acting as if it was fine! The pack bond is gone, Der!”

For a few long seconds, Cora thought she had finally gotten through Derek from the pondering look on his face. Until he replied, “So?”

Without thought—or with as much thought as she could—Cora punched Derek straight from the jaw, watching him get thrown off to the side from the sheer power of it. She backed off almost immediately, reaching for the limited furniture and item that Derek had collected.

“After losing a pack or two, you would think every single one of them matters to you.” The woman grabbed the row of books on his shelves, throwing it across the room in every direction and pointedly at her brother. “Does he mean nothing to you?!”

Marching to the drawers, she pulled each one of its hinges before throwing it at her pathetic family, one of the only two she had left. “I saw you two, I know you cared for him!” One shelf after the other, bolts flying wild. “The way you smiled whenever he was around! You were opening up to him.” Cora shouted in a last attempt, simultaneously using that power to throw the entire dressing cabinet down. “What the hell happened to you?”

Derek stood there taking the heat of the argument as he always does, frowning and brooding. He ducked and dodged the things that nearly hit him in the face. Silently boiling in his own personal
hell. Until Cora reached the wooden box he kept on a short cabinet near his full-length mirror.

“Derek!!” She lifted the box in an arch.

Derek stood up in alert, hands out to catch the box. “Cora, stop!”

But he was too late. The box crashed to the ground, the impact of the wood breaking and the screws clattering on the sleek wooden floor like shell casings falling. Derek dropped on his knees to collect the item that fell out of it before Cora could see it, but she did.

She saw and her mouth shut, clamped by the utter shock.

Derek saw the expression in Cora’s face fall, a look of regret. He cut her off before she could say anything. “It’s none of your business.”

Biting her lips, Cora tried to reach for his shoulders. “Der—“

“Get out, Cora.” Derek turned, her back towards her, holding the item to his chest and dusting it off.

“I—“

Harshly snapping, he glared at her. “Get out!”

Cora flew out of the room, closing the door behind her in a mix fluster ing emotion of anger, sadness and a pitiful realization. She had tears in her eyes, heaving in short breaths of the tirade she just went on about in her brother’s room. With hesitant steps, she trudged down the spiral stairs, slumping down in the middle and sitting on the steps with a hand covering her eyes, hiding the tears and break in her tough character.

“Shit.”

~~~

Ever since Stiles left, the supernatural shit storm went away with him. For some inexplicable reason, they had no big-bad of the month to deal with, no rogue werewolves, no weird mind bending magic of supernatural incidents—not even a fucking car crash or theft. Everything just became quiet.

Except if they counted the moment Peter came back from his travels and found Stiles missing—then found out that he was kicked out, and threw the most violent and reprimanding fit to date. Scott still has the scar on his collarbone to prove it, and he’s an Alpha. Needless to say, Peter didn’t loiter around them anymore nor associated with them outside of Cora and Jackson, and maybe even sometimes Liam when he’s just too fed up with Scott despite his fear of Peter.

Then one day, Jackson gets a call from Stiles when he least expects it. At this point, only he, Cora, Liam and Peter were looking for Stiles. The pack gave up in even trying to locate him further than the Beacon county when they realized he’d disappeared. His own father didn’t even budge to locate him further either, as he’d gotten used to ignoring the boy and coming home to a quiet house. Jackson despised the Sheriff ever since, moving on with Scott’s mother and barely spending any time in his actual house anymore.
Jackson was breaking out in tears of happiness after that first phone call—Stiles was alright, he needed his help. He didn’t know exactly why he didn’t tell anyone, including Liam, Cora and Peter, but he just wanted to keep Stiles’ attention to himself. To repair past mistakes.

That’s why when he found the Nemeton, he realized what a dumb mistake it was to blissfully accept the abnormally long time of peace they’d been having. Jackson saw Stiles when he reported his findings, saw the healthy shine in his skin, the newfound happiness and a worldly surprise of Tony Stark standing next to him. Jackson was glad Stiles moved on—yet also heartbroken.

He took the news to Peter, and brought Cora and Liam in the loop. Investigating further on their own, although rather sloppily as it was their first run in months—thus why the pack somehow found out about the state of the Nemeton. Of course, one could only tell how it went from there.

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To no one’s surprise, the first thing Scott did was put the blame on someone else. He didn’t exactly have a figure to blame thus he resorted to denying responsibility.

Cora nearly tore his head off when he started blaming it on Peter playing lacky on them to go on a very well-deserved vacation, only stopping when Jackson had to physically restrain her.

While the pack was bantering on the blame game and petty accusation pumped with hormones, Peter was preoccupied with the news—watching a live footage from the scene of the destruction in New York and DC.

That’s when he saw Stiles along with a Scottish fellow that was holding back a cross line from the crowd. The footage was shaky, but he was certain it was Stiles. Before he could shut the TV off, Jackson doubled over the back of the sofa he was seated on—breaking to a stop near the TV.

“Sti—mmph.” Jackson got a handful of Peter’s, well, hands, on his mouth, shutting him up effectively. The latter turned the TV off, facing the now curious faces of the pack with a guilty innocent smile.

Just as Scott was about to spout more nonsense in blaming Peter along with his weird behavior, the weirdest thing happened. A pulse of energy rushing through their bodies, in and out. As if they were cut in half where in the passing of the energy lingered, the pulse swept through the whole town.

Shock and slack-jawed, Peter and Jackson were the first to recover, immediately looking towards each other with only one thought of where that could possibly come from. The Nemeton.

Rushing out the loft and into the woods, the whole pack reluctantly followed the two wolves and what a sight they were met with.

Lydia opened her mouth only to close it, before starting again, “Is that—“

“The Nemeton.” Peter cursed underneath his breath, digging into his pocket for his phone in a loss. “Shit. This is bad.”

Jackson and Cora were the only ones who dared to step forward, Derek and Lydia right behind them trying to hold them back in vain. The former kanima kneeled down to inspect the increasingly
deteriorating Nemeton, one quarter fascinated and the other three quarters sanely terrified.

“Thank god, you picked up.” Peter’s voice broke through the eerie silence, fast and in short breaths after their rapid run. “We saw you in the news in DC on a report about an aircraft crashing into a building, I thought you were injured or worse.”

Scott angled his head to look at the rest of the pack and Peter separately. “Who is he calling?”

Peter ignored the Alpha in preference to replying into his phone, “The pack.”

The Nemeton pulsed in a sickly violet purple colour from its darkened charred long windly dead state. Glowing and stopping. Glowing and stopping. Cora turned to Jackson for an explanation, but both of them came up with nothing short but ‘disastrously bad’.

Peter’s tone turned into something the pack had rarely heard, panicked and accosted. “No time to explain, I—“

The glow grew brighter, the short stunted ‘tree’ vibrating in kinetic energy. Jackson acted quickly, grabbing Cora by her waist despite her protest and knocking into Peter who was closest to them in the proximity to the Nemeton. “Duck!”

“Hey!”

Then, the pulse released itself—blowing them all back with an inexplicable force, a barrier-like force. Which is never anything good. Peter’s phone had dropped on the forest floor of detritus, giving Jackson the chance to steal it before the older man could take it back.

“Stiles!” Jackson breathed haggardly over the speaker of Peter’s phone.

The pack’s eyes widened one by one, in trance by both the pulse and the name that came out of Jackson’s mouth. Scott was the first to break. “Stiles?”

Internally cursing his adrenaline, Jackson cupped his hand on the mic of the phone, speaking in a very controlled baritone voice. “Stiles, you need to come back.”

The Alpha turned his head around to anyone who was willing to answer or listen to him, his expression sour and confused. “Is he calling Stiles?”

Lydia frowned, mouth open in a gasp. “What the hell, Jackson?!”

“Why is he calling Stiles?”

“Shut up, both of you!” Peter glared at Lydia and Scott’s repetitive questions that got annoying real fast.

Jackson sent a look of gratitude to the older wolf, focusing back on the matter at hand. “The nemeton. Stiles.”

Hearing no reply, he urged on. “It’s the nemeton.”

“Stiles.” The young wolf ducked his head down, a small whimper and a ray of hope in his voice. “Help us.”
The request rang in his hear like the toll bells of your very own church wedding—he figured, or imagined, because he’s technically never been married, unless his father has some explaining to do. Two words: Help us. Help Beacon Hills.

Stiles felt his hand slack, the grip on his phone nearly dropping if it weren’t for Steve’s hands settling on his shoulders to shake him back to the world of the conscious. His heart leaped. They needed his help.

Jackson, on the other end of the line, spoke over the commotion on his side. “Stiles?”

They need his help because of the Nemeton in Beacon Hills. “Stiles, the Nemeton, it’s releasing a —”

Stiles cut the wolf off, heaving out a breath that he hoped would fix the slowly growing erratic breathing of his lungs, to no avail. “Let me guess, a weird pulse of energy?”

“How did you know?”

Steve mouthed ‘nemeton?’ to him, Stiles nodding in confirmation of the super soldier’s suspicions. First, Japan. Now, Beacon Hills.

“Stiles, you need to come back. Please.” He could hear Jackson sighing over the voices on the line, undoubtedly the pack raising hell about his involvement. Contrary to the pack’s belief, Stiles is actually very adept at listening and not just talking without stop. He could make out words that was said between them, all voicing different levels of hostility towards him.

Stiles blinked back to Steve’s face which was riddled in worry and painted a wary smile. Shaking his head, he forced his heartbeat to simmer down and his lung intake to calm itself. This was his decision. Not anyone else’s.

With that spur of the moment caught in a hailstorm of lingering emotion, Stiles answered. “No.”

He could almost hear the drop in Jackson’s expression, and what he wouldn’t give to have the rest of the pack listening in for once, because he needs to set this straight.

“You’ve been doing fine all along, didn’t even notice there was anything wrong with the Nemeton until I clued you in. “

Tony flew in their level with his suit partially on, headpiece removed. He was about to ask on the state Stiles was in but Steve shut him up with a firm look and a brisk shake of his head.

“I won’t help you even if you begged.” Taking a deep breath, Stiles steeled his voice through sheer power, unwilling to let them think, for even a second, he’d come running back to them the first chance he got. “That was my term of leaving after you so graciously kicked me out of the pack.”

The silence on the other end of the line was gratifyingly more satisfying than Stiles would have thought it’d be (while ignoring the stabbing pain in the middle of his puny heart). Oh well.

Suck it, Losers. “This was your mistake, you fucking fix it.” And he hung up the phone.

There was an awkward pause starting from the second Stiles ended the call to the cough Tony Stark let out without any subtlety. The guy didn’t even pretend to cover his mouth in order to pretend to cough—he was just faking outwardly, that lousy faker.
“Well.” The man in the suit started. “We sort of found Fury. Actually it was Hill who told us that Fury went in hiding, with the public presuming he’s dead underneath all this rubble so before they get any ideas on the truth—which will debauch the purpose of media—we should go.”

Rolling his eyes, Stiles grabbed Steve by the arm and dragged him down the stairs, sparing a look to the floating man. “And what will debauch your exquisite sarcasm?”

Tony winked. “I’ll let you know when I find out.”

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Miraculously, nothing reasonably dramatic came to pass after that whole debacle and Stiles survived the night to meet another day. Waking up felt like the relinquishment of heaven, because falling into the bed the other night was the most blissful thing he’d ever experienced—except for maybe one thing, but he has classes in under two hours and he really can’t be distracted.

Moving on. He rushed past the common floor, grabbing a paper bag and tossing his pre-made turkey soy-mayo sandwich and a bag of Reese’s in it. Natasha and Clint watched him fumble over the furniture with a pitiful look on their faces—which was very offensive, he didn’t choose to be clumsy thank you very much.

Barely avoiding the flying banana thrown his way, Stiles caught it before it hit the wall and made a mess which would piss Tony off (although he was tempted to, but didn’t want to clean afterwards). “What the hell, Clint? You ran out of actual arrows or are you practicing your next circus act?”

Clint playfully sneered at him. “I’m saving your health, kid.”

“Why thank you, kind sir. Good day to you, me lady.” Running out into the elevator, Stiles barely caught their farewells before he was swooped down into the basement by an overly enthusiastic Jarvis and out into the road with his bicycle.

Needless to say, he barely made it into class within minutes to spare. Plopping down in his seat, Stiles chucked his shoulder bag on top of the table and laid his head to rest.

Beacon Hills. Beacon fucking Hills. Technically, Stiles knew that he was being rude—was he? Seriously, was he though? His conscience keeps telling him to help, and yes, his rational part of his mumbling jumbling mess of a brain is corroborating that consensus as well.

But, can the world please give him a fucking break?

After all he did for them. After all they did to him. They only need him when they see it fit. He feels like a fucking Vanilla Ice song. An overly used one-hit-wonder that people only play when they really need to, not for enjoyment no—but for the good old joke of tradition. Don’t fucking argue with it, if you need a fact—who knows the entire lyrics of Ice Ice Baby?

And no, it does not only consist of “Ice Ice Baby” and over-exaggerated possibly publicly-illegal moans.

The Nemeton isn’t his responsibility. It’s not. No, sire. Hell to the no. Scratch that, Purgatory to the no. Because everyone knows Purgatory is way worse than Hell. Assuming it exists, which it probably does considering his luck with these things.
It’s not. It’s not. It’s… Damn it. Now he feels bad. Oh, he knew he shouldn’t let his conscience out, that frail little prick.

A loud bang woke him from his little personal dimension, jerking his head up so fast he might’ve sprained a neck muscle. “Jesus, Parker, you scared me.”

“What’s that say about you if I wasn’t even trying to scare you?” The short curly haired brunette sat down next to him, his trademark blue fashion of a plaid over-shirt flaring out in the seat.

Stiles sat back further in his seat, hugging his bag with him. “Fuck off, Parker.”

Chuckling, Peter Parker clapped his back when he saw the teacher enter the lecture room. “Don’t start with me, Stilinski.”

“You wimp.” Too tired to come up with a better insult, Stiles took out his books in preparation for class. Head way too preoccupied with dilemmas, but hey, the best way to clear your head is with advanced microbiology.

And to think he was so naive once to consider AP Calculus as a hard subject. Jesus, save him.

Parker raised an eyebrow at him, half distracted by MJ, who he was waving to. “Was that an insult about my height?”

Stiles hid a short burst of laughter when the girl simply flipped him off with a smile, watching Peter’s face contort back due to the casual treatment in disappointment. “Hey, you said it.”

Before the lecture could properly start, the temperature suddenly started dropping. Which was weird, because Stiles could swear it was at least 5 degrees hotter like a minute ago. He turned to Peter to find him unrolling his flannel to the tips of his fingers.

“Did they finally upped the budget for air conditioning?” Stiles rubbed his hands together, breathing on it to generate some sort of heat. “I mean, I’m grateful not sweating my ass of in my next pharmacology class, but this is way too cold.”

Peter rubbed his hands up and down his arms in a similar aim. “I think it’s broken.”

And that’s when Stiles looked to his hands and saw his breath clouding. As in clouding from the stark difference in temperature, the way it would when you’re outside on a freezing night. Turning towards Peter to check if he’s noticed it, he found the boy staring outside the wide windows behind him.

“Parker?”

All Stiles got was a slight part of his lips and his finger raising up, pointing in the opposite direction. So, he slowly rounded in his chair, expecting some sort of funny prank done by the post-graduates in the courtyard or even a flying robot—at this point, anything could happen.

And boy was he right, about the ‘anything could happen’. Because outside the window, honest to god or any other beings in the sky, it was snowing.

No, seriously though, someone fucking save him.
Peter jolted up from his seat, still unable to say a word, while next to him, Stiles was already gone. He followed the boy, who was running outside to the inside courtyard. “Stiles, wait!”

Stiles craned his neck uncomfortably in order to see the sky, the dark grey cloud stretching over it. “It’s snowing. It’s fucking snowing in the middle of summer.”

“Global warming?” Sighing to himself, Parker, even though incredibly smart and adorably cute, could still be a fucking idiot sometimes.

Well, truth be told, everyone is a fucking idiot half of the time. No exceptions. Except maybe Stevie Wonder. That man is a gift from god.

Stiles traced the expanse of the cloud, but something was gravely wrong. “Wait, it’s only snowing in certain parts. Look the cloud divides and separates but it seems to be originating from—”

The only good side (?) of this, was that they didn’t have to wreck their heads for an explanation of what the motherfucking hell was happening. Because then, they’d be too busy preoccupied with the—and stay with me now—snow piling up in large, curiously human shaped pillars that suddenly melted to reveal a nearly naked haggard old man with chunks of his flesh missing.

And his brain just snapped. “Are you fucking kidding me? Zombies, seriously?” Stiles looked up towards the sky once more, referring to the last topic of conversation they had. “Thor, I blame you for this!”

Peter snaked his hand onto Stiles’ bicep, pulling him backwards with him while simultaneously shaking him to bring his vision to the approaching horde. “I—I fully agree with you on the—the rotting bitten flesh parts, but I don’t think they come out of snow, Stiles.”

By now, the student population were all either outside or peering through their windows, and queue the piercing screams because what would a horrifying scene be without a good high pitched scream?

Still, of course, because it’s Stiles’ life—it wouldn’t be that simple. The presumed zombies start hobbling their way to the University, Stiles backing along with Parker, and all of a sudden, they stopped.

And they grew.

Taller and taller to the sizes of full grown birch trees. And that’s a tall ass fucking tree. Their skin became grey, coated in dead leaves and white from snow. Also, their numbers keeps increasing. So yeah, there’s that.

Parker barged into Stiles’ analyzation of the creature to try and figure out its species. “Uh, Stiles. I don’t think those are zombies.”

Restraining the urge to slap his face, Stiles slowly matched the pace of the creatures in front of them. “You think?” He was sure that it was supernatural—it was picking at the back of his head, because he’s sort of seen this creature before in his bestiary. Which would probably be helpful as fast as possible, because whatever the hell this new supernatural nightmarish creature is, they’re starting to swipe at humans left and right.

“Stand back!” “Stand back!”
Peter and Stiles turn to each other in their clashing of voices—standing still in the midst of all the chaos of people running around them to save their lives.

“What?” “What?”

Both men retreated their heads back in surprise, frowning slightly, people bodily knocking into them.

“No, you stand back!” “No, you stand back!”

Peter squinted his eyes in confusion, opening his mouth to retort.

“Ok, stop!” Stiles clamped his hand on the boy’s lips before he could say anything, Peter’s eyes growing wide from the sudden restriction. “This is pointless! Stand back before you hurt yourself!”

“Before you get hurt, you mean! Stiles this is dangerous!” Forgetting about the danger around them—admittedly not the best option—Peter pulled Stiles behind him harshly. “Leave this to me.”

Utterly confused and growingly annoyed, Stiles brushed his shoulders against Peter’s to gain the advantage of position in front of him. “You? What the hell can you do?”

Having nearly the same mental age as Stiles, and the same age as him, Peter puffed his chest up as if he was proving something. “What can you do?”

As if the world was reprimanding them for the worst time appropriately used for a childish debate, two creatures swung their huge elongated hands, coming down at them at breakneck speed.

Instinctively, Stiles brought up an air barrier with a swipe of his hands and one word spell—he’s gotten relatively better at them—while Peter shot a string of white spiderweb (?) at the creatures’ feet making them stop in place and fall down, their hands hitting the barrier of Stiles’ making.

The two university friends looked at each other with surprise in their eyes. Echoing the same awkward recognition of, “Oh.”

Before they got any time to re-introduce themselves—and Stiles has a fuckload of questions—the creatures recovered almost immediately. Most of the university students were out of the courtyard where the danger was centered around, but a good part of them had collapsed or stood frozen in fear.

Wordlessly agreeing, the two parted their ways, Stiles to the left and Peter to the right. Stiles conjured his fire spheres and threw them at the ice monster that was grabbing two collapsed women with each hands. Successfully gaining its attention, Stiles looked around for a weapon to use but hey that didn’t matter because if fire couldn’t injure ice—then what the fuck would?!

He needs to identify this creature, fast. Maneuvering the two women to lean on his shoulders, Stiles wrapped an arm around each of them and dragged them into the building; at the same time creating a wall of fire to hamper the line of, well, fire from the creature’s point of view. He dragged more unconscious people inside with the bought time while Peter was distracting the horde.

That’s when he saw the situation from a wide viewpoint. There were eight snowy giants slowly towering in the spacious courtyard of NYU, in a snowfall in the middle of summer. Safe to say, he’d never thought he’d have to say, nor even think about, that.

Then, like a lightning bolt, Stiles finally figured it out. The creatures weren’t trying to violently
attack humans—they were trying to grab them. And judging from the way they keep inching the human bodies to their mouths, they were trying to eat them. They were cannibals—giant winter cannibals with the appearance of old men with missing flesh or a big dirty beast.

Wendigos. Not exactly Wendigos, but a species related to the Wendigos. Originating from the Wabanaki tribes of the most northern part of the United States; Chenoo. Or the Kiwakwa. Or Apotamkin. Depending on the culture the supernatural being was spotted in or discussed about.

A sudden realization hit Stiles. The Chenoo was human once, becoming monsters due to cannibalism and deserted in the winter. Their heart turned ice cold and—that’s it.

Their heart. They need to kill its heart, buried deep inside their chest. And if he remembers correctly, there’s only one thing that’s poisonous and can melt the thick iron ice skin of the Chenoo.

“Parker!” Stiles shouted across the yard, uprooting a tree from the ground and throwing it against the creature behind him. “We need to go to the Kitchen!”

Rolling on the ground from a backflip over the Cennoo, Peter shot another web string to bind the three monsters he’d been jumping around from. “Have you gone absolutely mental?!”

“Salt!” Okay, he was aware he seems to be making no sense, but Stiles does not have time to loiter around and discuss the utter ridiculousness which is the supernatural world and their weird lame ass weaknesses. “We need to go!”

Biting his lip, Peter decided to go with it. Running away from the creatures, who eventually followed him, Parker knew the distance will close real fast. Reaching for Stiles, he slipped a hand on his waist, carrying him up and making Stiles hold on to his neck for security. “Wha—“

“Hold on!” Was all the guy had warned Stiles before the air pressure around him shifted, pulled into the air by Peter’s absurdly strong web strings. Shoot, attach, pull, glide like a fucking badass, and repeat. From the different campuses in NYU, they finally reached a dorm with the largest kitchen.

Crashing through the windows to access the kitchen immediately, Stiles rolled and tumbled with Peter by his side. “Jesus, you—“ He heaved a breath, feeling the prick of the glass shards on his shoulders. “You need to work on your landing.”

Rolling his eyes, Peter pulled Stiles up before rushing into the pantry. “You know you love it.” Finding one whole bucket of salt, he held it up for Stiles to see. “Didn’t know they bought in bulk, but does this work?”

Stiles could hear the heavy footsteps of the Chenooos coming closer, nodding rapidly to Peter, who immediately threw the bucket of salt towards him. Pouring the salt on the ground, Stiles ignored Peter’s squawk of befuddlement and opted to focus on the air particles around him.

If he can do random levitating jujus with mountain ash—salt has got to be a lot easier, in technicality. The Chenooos tore down the walls of the dorms, flooding the place with sunshine and fresh oxygen. Smirking at the cannibalistic beasts, Stiles raised his hands up, the salt floating around him in a swarm.

“Time to feed, boys.” Stiles pushed at the air, the salt surrounding each beasts in hefty amounts around their chest. Then hit them with an added strength of firepower—through fire power in the form of constant streams of flame directed at their chest.
When the ice on their torso melted, the stone cold heart was in perfect view. Without having to be told, Peter launched himself on the half-ceiling, carrying a bunch of knives with him, before throwing them in perfect aim to each of the eight heinous monsters.

Stiles stopped the flames from his hands, reigning in his magic and calming his nerves. Slowly walking towards the fallen creatures, the two undergraduates watched as the beast morphed back into their eerie human state of rotting flesh, and finally bursting in a heap of snow.

Looking at each other after a couple of minutes regaining their breaths, Peter broke out in a smile. “So, winter, huh?”

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The police came an hour after the incident, along with scientists from different lab research facilities and ambulances. By the time that they were all finished with their statements and compulsory check-ups, it was night fall and the snow had just stopped falling. No one had died, thankfully. And for the most part, people were too preoccupied with being scared and running for their lives to see Stiles and Peter in action (“You’re called Spiderman?” “Yea.” “Why? Did you get bit by a spider and get these powers?” “Uh, yeah.” “Wait, what?”).

Clint and Bruce came to pick Stiles up, with the secret agenda of taking samples of the snow from the creature and the snow from the actual snowfall on Bruce’s part. While Bruce looked around after making sure Stiles is fine, Clint shook his head disapprovingly at him. “It hasn’t even been a whole 24 hours, Stiles.”

“Do you think I like to be in near death situations every single day of the week?” Stiles slumped back down on his ‘trauma blanket’—which he initially rejected but now can’t let go off due to his ironic nature—feeling as if 10 years had been shaved off of his life. “Blame the universe!”

Clint patted the boy on his shoulders, silently comforting him. “Hey, Steve told me about what Chase said about the nemeton. And Tony gossiped about your phone call. They wanted to be here, but Fury called them in for a secret meeting.”

Smiling at the sentiment, Stiles sighed. “This is the Nemeton’s work.” He sipped the hot chocolate that was given to him by the nurses. “Weird phenomenas happening in all parts of the world—it’s a global destruction of balance.”

“What are you going to do about it?” Clint sat down next to him, watching Bruce compile the sample in his myriad of test tubes or cylindrical container.

Leaning subtly against the man’s shoulder, Stiles smiled reassuringly to Clint, but mostly to himself. “What I need to.”

The archer hummed, leaning his own head at the extra weight on his shoulder. “And that is?”

“Visiting Beacon Hills.”

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Back in Beacon, the pack met up back in the loft right after, barreling Peter and Jackson and even Cora with excuses. Liam also joined Peter’s side eventually, and Scott had the nerve to feel betrayed by his decision, even though the Alpha was the one who had neglected pack relationships every since Stiles left—only focusing on Kira and Malia.

“We don’t need his help!” Scott stressed out, glowing his red eyes at the four ‘traitors’ of his pack order. “He can’t do anything, Jackson.”

Fed up with the naiveté of the prematurely childish and dumb Alpha, Peter snapped his jaw. “He was the one who knew, even before we did. He’s way better at this than any of us, and he’s not even a werewolf. What’s your excuse, O True Alpha?”

Cora could literally see the fumes come out of Scott’s ears, playfully smirking at Malia who’s sneering at her as if she was the last raw meat in a grocery sale. Scott straightened his back, hands holding both Malia’s and Kira’s. “Doesn’t matter. No one contacts Stiles. Ever.”

With that, Queen Bee and his three dumb bitches and a guy escort strolled out of the loft—Cora’s words. And after a while, Jackson and Liam left too, the older promising to take the younger home.

Peter retreated back into his own apartment while Cora barricaded herself in her room.

Derek stood there in the silent emptiness of the loft. Trailing his hands on the metal railings of the spiral staircase leading up to his room, the brooding wolf maintained a solemn expression of perpetual frowning.

He closed the doors behind him, leaning against it for a while, before pushing himself off of it and towards the desk. Wrapped in a soft old blanket, the item that broke out of the wooden box Cora destroyed sat innocently, placed on the center of the clean desk.

Carefully, almost hesitantly, Derek unfolded the blanket to reveal the item, breath instinctively stopping at the sight before inhaling. His sensitive nose picking up the distinct scent that he had preserved ever since he took possession of it. His fingertips remembering the touch of the soft fabric.

The fabric of a red hoodie.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it! Revelations, revelations, y’all still rooting for a hundred percent Stive (Stiles x Steve pair)?? It’s gon’ get really messy and complicated real soon. Till next time ;)


Second Chapter of the Beacon Hills Arc!!!! I'm so sorry for the late update--I was fixing the plot and I think I've gotten the plot down to a T so I'll just see how it goes from here on out~ SO! Apparently, the majority wants a Stive endgame rather than Sterek. But don't worry, polls are still open, the plot is still young, there is lots of time to decide but Stive will definitely be a canon ship in this story! Also!! THANKYOU SO MUCH for the amazing response for the last chapter and the whole story in general T^T HAPPY THREE MONTHS ANNIVERSARY GUYS!!! we're at 1100 kudos, 19700 hits and 320 bookmarks and 270 comments--I AM SHOOK. I don't check the status often and I only reply to comments so yeezus, I think I'm gonna cry. SSOO!! I want to make this even better and I think I'm thinking of getting a Beta. Not sure what a beta does--but if it will improve my writing or my English, then I want this to be a story that meets all your expectations. If you have any recommendations for betas or if anyone wants to volunteer to beta, I am significantly grateful!!! Do you think I should get beta? I'm not sure aaaa dilemma. ENOUGH RANTING. ENJOY THE LONG AWAITED CHAPTER (here's to Stiles' pain--the driving force of this story).

“Absolutely not!” Surprisingly, it was Tony who was excessively vocal about his stance against Stiles’ decision. “You want to go to ground zero, you’re gonna have to bring one of us with you.”

Clint nodded his head aggressively, although Stiles couldn’t tell if that was just for fun or if he actually genuinely agreed with Tony. Steve was silently frowning behind Tony so, Stiles could most likely count him down to Tony’s side. Bruce was also behind Tony—since those two came in a weird pack—which he classified as a weird science bromance, although he wouldn’t mind seeing more. Point is, it wasn’t their choice anyways.

“You guys do realize I’m legitimately an adult right?” Stiles sidled closer to Natasha, who was the only member of the Avengers who’s not visibly against him.

“A-ha! ‘Legitimately’!” Tony launched from his bar stool that he was half-perched on, his pointer finger wagging itself ten inches from Stiles’ face. “No one would ever use that word instead of ‘legally’ if they weren’t trying to fool himself or other people when he actually isn’t an adult.”

Stiles had to physically restrain himself not to contort his face so far back that it would disappear into a tiny point where his nose was (his dreams are very vivid, don’t ask). He opted to swat the offensive finger instead. “They’re fucking synonyms, what are you saying?”

Caressing his rejected finger, Tony appropriately took a few steps back to join his posse of anti-Stiles-treated-as-an-adult-which-excuse-you-he-fucking-is alliance. “Intertextuality, Stiles. You’ll learn it when you grow up.”

Stiles rolled his eyes at Tony’s antics—which was also coincidentally how he’s learned to deal with the oversized baby with an IQ and Ego too high for anyone’s good. God must be repenting, bless him.
It’s probably best to give context to this debate. Initially, Stiles was never going to tell anyone about his visit back to Beacon Hills. But, Steve already vaguely knew from his phone call with Jackson and the message from Chase. And Clint was there when he had a rare moment of truth to himself, but he was exhausted from fighting giant cannibalistic wintercultural-type Wendigos, damn it—maintaining confidentiality wasn’t exactly his biggest priority then.

And it just spread from there into this wildfire and ended here. Honestly, he wasn’t ready to bring his past into any part of his new life. He wanted a clear big ass wall between past and present—one so big that Trump himself would be jealous and try to claim it as his own. That wall was his thin line of holding on to his mentality and well being. That wall ain’t going anywhere.

But as much as he tried to avoid it, his past and present clashed violently when that cursed Nemeton decided to be a bitch. Thank you, you useless piece of bark.

“I’m just going to assess the situation there and come straight here.” Stiles had to resort to using his arms to act out his plans, which was condescending on both of their parts. “No fuss, no harm.”

Tony copied his action, using his infamous pointer finger to direct his tone. “That’s a lot of fussing, and harm always finds you—there have been no exceptions wherein that wasn’t true.” Using both his hands, he crossed them directly in Stiles’ face. “None.”

Jerking back from the continuous attack that was Tony’s hand, Stiles spluttered but his argument was slowly dying and he knew it. “That’s not—It’s—well, yeah. I can’t argue with that.”

Nodding to himself, Tony looked around the room with a look of accomplishment. Defeated, Stiles turned towards Natasha, flashing her his world famous kicked puppy eyes. That’s the only beneficial thing he’s learned from his decade-long friendship with the disappointing personification of a kicked puppy—Scott.

Fuck no, Stiles. No, reminiscing until you actually get to Beacon Hills.

But, fuck that too.

Taking pity on him, Natasha turned from her place at the dining table, a bowl of Stiles’ homemade chocolate mousse in her hand. “Boys, despite how he looks, Stiles is very capable.”

“That was an unnecessary description but thank you.” Stiles grandly gestured to the deadly lady with a chocolate-covered spoon hanging from her lips. “Listen to the voice of reason, my friends.”

In fear of pissing the voice of reason, the lesser men of the Avengers saw to Natasha’s advice and finally calmed down. Hugging the hell out of the woman with the melodious voice of reason, Stiles smacked a sudden kiss at her cheeks, surprising all of the men and woman in the room.

“My Lady, you are of perpetual exemption. I’ll go pack and leave for tonight.” With that, he dashed out of the common living floor and down to his shared floor with Clint.

Natasha was left smiling from ear to ear with a hand on her cheek, simultaneously chuckling at the flabbergasted expression of the Avengers on the nerves the boy had to smooch affection onto the most intimidating woman alive.

Also, it helped that Steve was stuck somewhere between extremely jealous and infinitely befuddled—definition: adorable.
Stiles got off from the elevator at the 12th floor, containing the Avengers locker room and the Quinjet station. He passed all of the individual rooms of the Avengers wherein they store all sorts of their personalized weaponry and suits. Hitching his duffel bag up his shoulder, Stiles stopped directly in front of the metallic doors that opened up to the station, his hand paused for a second on the button.

*Deep breaths, one, two*—oh fucking hell, that never works.

Pushing the button to open the doors, he lifted his head to find Steve sitting on one of the boxes containing spare Quinjet parts. Stiles noticed the duffel bag he had with him, and oh *no*.

“Steve.” Stiles started with an exasperated tone because at this point he’s getting rather annoyed and that is never a good sign for anything.

“Before you say anything,” Steve stood up with one hand in the air and the other behind his back, before presenting a plastic cup of his holy grail, “I brought you coffee.”

Stiles scoffed for a good minute but his hand was inching towards the bribery. Curse his hand. Curse that bastard. Begone you foul part. Praise be. Praise be. And curse that megatrillion watt smile. Curses.

“I know you don’t talk about your past.” Stiles nearly choked on his cup of iced black coffee, but preserved his nonchalance anyways. “And I won’t push you to tell, but I know the look of someone who’s running away from it.”

Slipping his cup from his mouth, Stiles looked at his reflection in the blackness of the beverage. Steve scratched the back of his neck in that adorable way he does when he’s embarrassed or unsure. “We’re living in a tower full of them.”

Offering a shaky smile, Stiles bit his lips. *He wants to tell him.* For the first time, he actually wanted to be honest with someone—about everything. His dark past, his troublesome past, his broken past. And that’s a scary thought.

But not now. Not like this. Not yet.

“Then you know that I need to face the demons of my past. Alone.” Stiles sighed and pushed the half cup of coffee back to Steve’s hands, lingering his fingers on the warm skin of the supersoldier. “Give me one day. If I’m not back by the next day, you can burst your way into Beacon with the full wagon of explosions and pretty costumes complete with your tiaras.”

Steve broke a small smile at the corner of his lips, his hand turning upwards to catch Stiles’, the other hand taking the coffee cup away. “It’s a crown, Stiles. Tiaras are for children.”

Unsuccessfully hiding his grin, Stiles coughed instead, eyes focused on the warm embrace his hand was in. He’s taking his words back. His hands are not cursed. It’s blessed. Very blessed. Praise be. *Blessed.*

The Quinjet garage doors opened—well, he calls them ‘doors’ but truly it’s more like a ramp of some sort—literally blowing the mood out of the two of them. Chuckling at the brilliantly timed ignition of the engines, Stiles reluctantly pulled his hand back and smiled reassuringly at Steve before running up the tram and into the awesomeness that is the Quinjet.
“One day.” Steve called out after him, his hand still holding the rejected bribery. “And make sure
to check in with me—I mean, us!”

Sparing the guy (and himself) from more embarrassment, Stiles waved him a short goodbye just in
time for the ramp to close.

And, now he’s back on his way to yet another hell.

Curses.

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So here he was. Beacon Hills, the home of the uncanny and the unimaginable coming alive and
haunting you like a moth to a flame. But in his case, even the flames hurts him because he's not fire
fucking resistant.

Technically he is, but only to his own flames or when he counters other flames with his own. But,
point stands.

Yup, this was starting to feel like a monumentally bad idea.

Suck it up, Stilinski. You’re here for the Nemeton, nothing else. Just avoid and ignore.

That being said, it’s pretty easy to make your mind up when you’re literally in the middle of
fucking nowhere. He's not kidding—he’s in an abandoned field surrounded by the forest. He’s
literally in the beginning of his own horror movie, and based on his past luck and experiences, he
probably fucking is.

The Quinjet was invisible at this point, because it has a cloaking tech. Stiles made a note to bother
Fitz about that when he gets back—correction, if he gets back.

Praise be. Praise be. Let him go back safe. Praise Be.

Well, what can he do about it now except for doing the job as fast as he can and hightail the hell
out of this literal hell hole as fast as humanely, or elemental sparkly, possible.

And there’s wherein another problem lies—does he disclose that he’s an elemental spark or should
he keep his powers on the down low? Thing is, Stiles was not even sure why he’s skeptical about
revealing his abilities. Call it paranoia or self-preservation or the biggest case of karma, he’s just
reluctant to share his own supernatural inclination.

Yeah, he’s aware it’s hypocritical, he’s aware and he’s accepted it, move on.

Talking to himself only provides help to a certain extent until it actually stops being helpful and
instead mentally insane. Stiles had been waiting for an hour or two, wandering aimlessly in the
forest that he’s successfully avoided for the entirety of eight months.

He’s not going to find the Nemeton. Not alone, anyways. With a reluctance of a five year old,
Stiles grumbled as he pulled out his phone, dialing the number he’s saved in case this ever
happens.

Five minutes in and he’s reverted to his useless lone self.
Home sweet fucking home.

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Peter flipped the pages of his magazine uselessly before eventually throwing it aside, shocking Jackson and Liam out of their skin. They were peeling apples in the kitchen counter in Peter’s apartment. Jackson was crashing with Peter due to the clear distinction between the pack. Hearing of the news, Liam decided to join the party and basically, Peter’s apartment became a werewolf daycare camp overnight.

When Peter nearly resorted to take up murder as a hobby sport (again), his phone rang. Rolling his eyes at the scene in the kitchen, Peter didn’t even bother to catch the caller ID before grumbling a harsh, “Hello.”

Jackson turned his head in time to catch the expression in the older wolf’s face change minutely into possibly one hundred different faces ranging from surprise, happiness, confusion and excitement.

The call ended as soon as it started, leaving Peter bouncing on his heels with an alert disposition and a smirk on his lips. Before Jackson could even ask what the hell was going on, Peter rushed out of the apartment. In a split second decision, Jackson and Liam followed Peter.

Jackson was sort of concerned for Peter’s sanity when they were running in the midst of nowhere in the bulk of the forest. Liam shared his look but kept following the manically grinning creeper wolf.

Tree after trees after more trees later, the forest cleared up to an empty field. Peter stopped and turned around in his spot rapidly, 360 degrees to each and every direction and Jackson was almost certain that Peter had finally snapped.

That was when he heard it.

“Chasing your own tail, Peter? Really? I thought you grew past that already.”

Peter stopped and focused on the direction of the familiar voice, happily dashing his way over and hugging his old friend.

Stiles returned the hug as hard as he could. This was probably the only regret he had in leaving Beacon Hills. Leaving Peter behind, knowing how shit the pack treated him. But he had sincerely hoped that Peter would find somewhere to relocate permanently in his travels. Sadly, he came back. And almost ridiculously, Stiles did too.

It was the curse of Beacon Hills. The “Leaving Beacon Hills. Come back again soon!” sign posted at the border of Beacon was not a nicety but an evil curse. Seriously, though, it’s a malignant curse. You won’t know it’s in effect until you somehow find yourself back here for whatever reason—and no one ever seems to notice.

Praise Be. Praise Be. Begone Beacon, you foul devil—all the foul devils.

“I didn’t think you’d show.” Peter let Stiles go but kept him at an arm’s length, checking the youthful face he hadn’t seen in nearly a year. “You look good.”
Stiles smiled at the perceived compliment, noticing Jackson and Liam behind Peter. Looking down momentarily, he could hear the young wolves’ whimper at the avoidance. *Be the better man, Stilinski.* Sighing internally, Stiles ate his pride and looked back up, offering the two a small smile.

“Can’t say the same for all of you.” And Stiles really couldn’t—they all looked like shit. Like they haven’t been sleeping, physically and mentally tired or possibly dead. Stiles could vaguely relate, but at the same time really couldn’t.

Hey, the guy’s been through a total count of five major crises of deadly encounters and that’s only in the span of time he’s spent with the Avengers. The other three months prior to joining SHIELD, he had lost count of how many small jobs he had helping locals and sometimes intercontinental supernatural mishaps.

And he looked ‘good’, relatively. So how the hell did they look nearly dead when all of absolutely nothing happened?

Do all werewolves just naturally have a 5 o'clock shadow and brooding painted on their face? It is a very unfair attribute to have, because socially, one would be more inclined to help a social reject or a lone wolf. It’s somewhat of a misconception of privilege, being the only one able to connect to them.

But boy, did that have their own special set of consequences which ranges from fear-induced insomnia to institutionalized mental damage, or in surprisingly large cases: death. Take your pick, he’s gone through the entire choice list, he’s a fucking veteran, that’s what he is.

Jackson looked at him with this look in his eye that Stiles didn’t really want to identify. Liam and Peter did so too. And Stiles. Well, Stiles has a very high affinity for feelings and pitiful creatures.

So, *hell no.*

Before they could recite an entire Shakespearean word barf of feelings, or basically the entire script of Romeo and Juliet, Stiles shut them down. “So, the Nemeton. Lead the way.”

Slightly pouting and frowning from the not so subtle evasion, Jackson tried to initiate the first step. “Aren’t you tired? You don’t want to rest—“

“Nope, I’m as fit as the proverbial fiddle. Just point the direction to the Nemeton and off we go.” Stiles made a point to gesture at the surrounding area.

In an attempt to reel back, Jackson moved forward with his hands out. “Here let me take that—“

Instinctively, Stiles jerked back harshly and away from the incoming hands, gripping his duffel bag strap tighter. If that didn’t kill the mood, Stiles didn’t know what could. He instantly regretted his stupid *stupid* instincts but they’re instincts—it’s something that is completely out of his control, up there with emotion and sass.

Sighing heavily, Stiles was just done with treading on glass. “The Nemeton. Please.”

Peter placed a hand on Jackson’s shoulder, and the retreating hand of Jackson’s defeated will was even more painful to watch. But, other than that;

This could not have possibly gone *worse.*
Stiles is completely dumb-struck. In all of his completely misguided life lessons and downright ridiculous hardships, he somehow never seems to learn the one most important skill.

Never, and he means never, jinx anything. Even if it was a seemingly harmless comedic comment—just swallow that damn remark, swallow your whole tongue if you have to, absolutely do not let that jinx out.

Jinx is like a verbal karma. No, wait. It is a verbal karma.

Meaning, it always fucking happens.

See exhibit: Stiles. Not all of 10 minutes ago, he said an off remark in his mind. Nevermind, it doesn’t matter if it’s not verbal, just the thought could trigger it. It’s basically karma. Someone should put up motivational posters on not jinxing or so help him God, someone get him a duct tape for his brain.

As soon as Peter stopped and notified that they were near the Nemeton, the pack found them.

He had one job. Technically two, but the Nemeton wasn’t a job it was a requirement of his visit. So, he had one job. Ignore and avoid. Two jobs. Maybe that’s why he failed but there’s no excuse of failing both jobs.

Self passive-aggressiveness was a trait well executed in Stiles Stilinski—he’s a self-sustaining karma-inducing equally damaged and damageable elemental spark of a human being. Bless him.

Cora was the first to burst through the myriad of trees, stopping right at her tracks when she saw him. “Stiles?!”

The rest of the pack stumbled their way to a stop behind and next to her, all different versions of shock and anger. Here we go.

“What is he doing here.” Scott bit through his teeth, glaring down at Peter and Jackson and especially Liam, who were all in a pretty compromising position situated right beside Stiles.

Now, he’s resorted to complete rejection of Stiles’ existence, well done Scotty-boy. He’s reverted back the childhood stage of lack of object permanence. It wasn’t a surprise to Stiles because the guy still has profound egocentrism even as an Alpha of a werewolf pack.

Despite fighting the urge, Stiles quickly scanned the pack, observing their state. He stopped at one face. A brooding face that seemed as if he was struck by lightning. Stiles hadn’t even attacked him yet, but it was still a complicated reward of some sort.

“I told you not to contact him.” The childish man-boy with the glowing red-eyed appearance of an Alpha continued his rampage. “I’m not surprised by Peter and Jackson, they were never loyal to the pack. But Liam!”

Seeing the victims called out like that and noticing the instinctive whimper the youngest beta let out, Stiles snapped from blasé ignorance to royally pissed.

“I didn’t come because they called.” Stiles’ voice cut through the tension like a butcher knife through butter. Yes, it was that aggressive. “I came because none of you apparently learned basic
“Life-sustaining lessons and world-protecting decency.”

Lo and behold, to Stiles’ great magnificent surprise, Theo fucking Raeken was there.

Scoffing at Stiles, he presumed, Theo placed his hand on Scott’s shoulder as if feeding him moral support through his fingers—which if he was a decade older, would perfectly constitute as pedophilic behavior that would throw his sorry ass in jail. But this was Scott, so he would probably not file charges or claim it was consensual (which honestly, probably is).

“Oh no, Stiles. You came back because even though you ran away, you knew you couldn’t live without us. He wants to win us back by gaining points and coming to our beckon like some deprived lap dog.”

Here ye, here ye, the voice of personified axe-drenched jockstrap quarterback has spoken. What a majestic wisdom.

“Seriously, lap dog?” Stiles squinted his eyes at him, shaking his head disapprovingly. “So it’s fine if you guys make dog jokes and it’s racist when others do it?” Scoffing, he pretended to think. “Are you even a race or are you really just an abomination? Maybe ‘massive fuck-up’ would be a better justification.”

And who would it be but Lydia who would counter him—that was rhetoric and everybody knew it. “What do you know, he never changes.” She sneered and smiled at the same time, a skill that Stiles will mark as a qualification for Queen Bitch. “Sarcasm and sass is still your only defense. Stop pretending to be strong, Stiles. Don’t act as if you’re fine and not desperate to belong again.”

It’s good to know Lydia still has her cat claws. Not really good for his defense though. Ignoring any of his personal feelings, Stiles crossed his arms. “Oh Lydia, I see you’re still denigrating other people to feel superior. I could’ve sworn you were better at it, now it’s just pathetic.”

Glowering intensely at him, Lydia was about to snap back but Stiles turned his back to her, effectively shutting her down. Instead, he focused on the suspiciously quiet Peter, who was known to at least make one snide sarcastic remark in any battle especially a heated roast battle like the one occurring—it was the main reason why he favored Peter a lot. Tapping his shoulders, Stiles frowned. “Peter? Hey.”

Peter just kept up his confused glaring at the ground. Rolling his eyes, Stiles tapped his foot. “Peter, just lead me to the damn Nemeton. I’ve wasted enough time squandering with these animals.”

Stiles could hear Scott, Malia and Isaac growl at him—but that just proved his point even more. Still, Peter was unresponsive, his mouth even gaping a bit. Something was very wrong. “Peter. The Nemeton.”

“It’s—“ The ingenious wolf with the most brilliant manipulative mind on words was stuttering on a mere pronoun. Something was horribly wrong. “It’s—“

“It’s what, Peter?”

Finally, Peter’s voice raised a few octaves and a few hertz, hands coming out at his side to gesture at a plot of land in front of them. “The Nemeton!”

Wait, what.

Everyone was flabbergasted at Peter’s exclamation, even Theo, who Stiles low-key suspected to
have been the root cause of all this clusterfuckery. But, Peter didn’t seem to want to elaborate on his reverse (I)eye-spy moment.

As slowly as he possibly could, Stiles repeated the words he had been repeating all day. “Peter, where’s the Nemeton?”

The older wolf looked straight to him, hand still directly pointing to an empty plot of land. “There.”

Stiles blinked once, twice and even tried to enlarge his eyes, looking back and forth from the empty land to Peter. “Peter, there’s nothing there.”

The man nodded unenthusiastically. “Exactly.”

Trying, and he means desperately trying, to form words, Stiles just ended up making various shapes with his mouth before shaking his head and wrecking some sense of logic to—he can’t even what. “It—there’s—uh. Are you sure?”

Pointing to a tree next to them, Peter nodded rapidly, seemingly losing his capability to speak. Stiles was definitely not judging. He has his own word sickness wherein which he loses all capability to form complete intelligible sentences.

So, he simply followed the line of sight to the tree which was—honest to god—carved with the message ‘Nemeton. Don’t Touch.’.

He was surrounded by idiots. Dumb stupid dense absurd fucking supernatural idiots. Jesus.

The Nemeton was gone. Repeat, the Nemeton was bloody gone. This was way past wrong. This was catastrophic.

Physically forcing himself to remain calm despite the obvious red flag, or should he say missing! red flag, Stiles chose his words very carefully after a very long painful pause. “How?”

When he received no answer, the thin thin tether he had to his zen cracked. Afterwards, he’s an overflowing keg of oil to an open fire—fantastic.

“You had one fucking job: watch the Nemeton!” Throwing his hands in the air, Stiles nearly combusted in flames if not for the risk of causing a forest fire. “How in the holy hell did you uncultured idiots manage to lose a fucking magical dying stump of a tree.” Shaking his whole head, his hands came up to massage the incoming migraine the size of Texas. “Then again, I’m asking the obtusely blind people who didn’t even realize anything was wrong in the first goddamn place, my bad.”

Somehow still having the nerve to lash back, Scott preferred to turn the direction of the conversation to, who would’ve thought, him.

“You’re blaming us? Stiles, don’t you get it, you’re the problem.” Theo’s hands on his shoulders encouraged him stronger and Scott stood taller, the passion in his eyes flaming. “You’re always the problem. Everything would’ve been fine if only you’d just stay away from our lives! I would’ve never become a werewolf. We wouldn’t have to awaken the Nemeton. The Nogitsune would’ve never possessed anyone. And Allison would’ve never died!”

And that, was nothing short of a wet slap in the sunburnt face. Strike One.

“You said that death happens to everyone around me.” Lydia tilted her chin upwards even though
Stiles still towered over her. Her voice dripping in the poisonous sweetness it had always been lathered with. “But, Stiles, honey. Death revolves around you. Why did you think the Nogitsune possessed you instead of everyone else?”

Strike Two.

“The sooner you’re gone—” Scott had stalked the short distance between them and had now occupied the entirety of his personal space, “—the faster things will be back to normal.”

Strike Three. And, you’re out.

Taking the deepest breath he could possible gain with the neat trick of his air element filtering only oxygen into his lung, Stiles momentarily closed his eyes before opening them slowly. “I’m only here for the Nemeton, which you have somehow lost.” His voice was low and steady, as if it was vibrating through everyone’s bone, a chilling sensation. “I don’t give a flying fuck about your pack or your slanted opinions manipulated by your new Führer over there.”

Stiles was the only one who saw Theo smirk, maybe Peter, Jackson or Liam did, but he was the only one who ever saw it. With added strength of sheer force and his air element, Stiles placed a hand on Scott’s chest and pushed with every syllable of his words.


“And what the hell do you think you can do, to us or to the Nemeton?” For any reason of pride or prejudice, Scott exerted his Alpha red eyes. “Human—werewolf.” He gestured between them, smirking as if he’d proved something significantly game-changing. “I know you’ve stuck around because you want purpose and meaning in your boring human world—but that’s it Stiles, you’re just a passenger.” Smiling smugly, Scott imitatively pushed Stiles back with his hand on his chest. “You can’t do anything.”

Chuckling softly, Stiles really couldn’t care if he seemed like a total maniac. Even Peter looked worried for his mental health. Now, he really didn’t care. Coming back was a goddamn mistake.

It was his fault for trying.

“You don’t know jack shit about what I can do. Oh, you don’t want to know.” Catching the retreating wrist of the Alpha, Stiles gripped it with force and let his fire elemental burn underneath his skin. He pointedly glanced at the ‘traitorous trio’ of werewolves on his side. “If you lay one hand on them—if you so much as fuck anything up—the next time I come back, you’ll see the full extent of what I can do.”

The heat in his skin was dangerously high enough that Scott could feel his wrist burn even with his Alpha werewolf healing from the way that the latter jerked his wrist back and held it protectively.

Stiles put on the best glower he could possibly intimidate him with. “So go ahead, piss me off.”

Peter watched with silent admiration and unconscious fear irking at his inner wolf. The boy had changed, oh, has he changed. He listened with every fibre of his being, the power emitting from Stiles’ voice. The boy’s last sentence hung like the justice of a gavel struck. Consequential and promising.

“I’m dying for a good fight.”
Despite hashing out and putting a show of power, Stiles still ran away from the heat of the battle and ended up in the creek. He found this place a year into the supernatural madness that his life somehow spiralled into, and he kept it a secret ever since. It had a serene lake flowing from a river and a view of the deceivingly peaceful nature.

It was a beautiful escape.

Stopping the treks of his footsteps, Stiles breathed erratically. The breathing turned into coughs of heaving, his chest painfully suppressed and his tongue stuck in his throat. His hands balled up into fists in the lapels of his shirt, pulling it away from him.

He ripped his long-sleeved T-shirt off from his body before head-first diving into the cool body of water. Feeling the stark difference of the hot burning emotion pulsing through his body and the cold soothing chill of the water, Stiles could feel his heartbeat slow and his lung finally calming down.

Closing his eyes underwater, he almost felt like everything was going to be fine. How could he not? The refraction of the light in the water, splitting it a thousand different ways, painting translucent white streaks of light waving on his skin and on the water around him—it was an entrancing wonder. A simplistic beauty.

Water was one of his most prominent elements. He could hold his breath underwater for quite a long time, having formed a bond with the element. Thus why he could spend an otherwise humanely impossible time underwater. And for that reason alone, was how he found a crucial piece of the game he was unknowingly playing in.

Stiles was diving deeper down into the surprisingly extensive lake, when he found a gleaming object radiating of magical energy. Pushing his limits, Stiles dove to the bottom of the lake and picked the object into his hands. He thrusted himself out of the water with his magic when he felt his oxygen run scarce.

Thrown into the ground by the sudden catapult of the pressurized water, Stiles coughed out the water he had swallowed. Once he regained his composure, he opened his fist to reveal a small black orb emitting powerful energies of magic.

But that wasn’t what shocked Stiles, no.

The orb gave off a rather familiar magical energy. A sinister type of magic. It was something he felt vaguely. But most prominently in the dirt of the dead skinwalkers, the first time he encountered them in the supernatural invasion back in New York.

What the hell was it doing in the bottom of an isolated lake in Beacon Hills?
I AM ULTIMATELY SORRY THIS HAS BEEN SO LONG!!!! I'm in the middle of preparing for my end of the year exam, so! This has been very late. Sorry. Sorry. And thank you for waiting! So! This is seriously one huge mess of a long ass fic. I'm not kidding, we're 60,000 words in and we're still in chapter 16 of the Pre-Apocalypse tag. If one chapter is 3,000-5,000 words, then this fic is gonna surpass 100,000 to 200,000 words. I'm seriously not joking. SO! What would you have me do? Do I split it into two works in a series or is that too complicated? Tempted to make it one long fic cos its easier. And I wouldn't have to write the 'please read prequel before this sequel, which I know could be annoying and discouraging to some readers. AND~~~If you guys haven't noticed, pay attention to the chapter titles--they're sometimes hints to the big plot ;) Please leave your thoughts and comment~~~ LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH AND IM SORRY UR STUCK WITH A SLOW ASS INDECISIVE INCOMPETENT WRITER LIKE ME UwU

Stiles rolled the orb in the palm of his hands, feeling the energy compressed in it gravitating around him. He could literally feel the energy seeping and leaking out of the pure black swarm inside the orb. A sort of sickness spreading and infecting the air around him.

“So, what is it?” The holographic screen in front of him faltered, the voice rippling from the speakers, echoing through the metallic walls of the aircraft. Stiles was back in the Quinjet, the holographic table screening a video call to Bruce Banner and Tony Stark.

“I was hoping you might know.” Finally setting the orb in the center of the table, Stiles leaned back against the counter behind him. “You’re the scientific experts on all things weird and immense power, do your mojo using your thingymabobs.”

Back in the Tower, Tony made a face at the large screen showing Stiles' face. “It’s a bit more complicated than just stuffing it into our array of ‘thingymabobs’.” He reached out to place the holographic replica of the orb scanned on Stiles' part, turning it around in his hand to inspect the build. “It’s made out of a pure energy level—no chemical match or electron dispersion forces matched on the elemental scale.”

Banner played with his spectacles, rubbing it with his shirt in his hands before putting it back on. “Is it Asgardian?”

Tony expanded the sphere on a molecular level, his hands flying to his sides, the orb now stretched and magnified. “No, Thor gave us the technology that identifies any Asgardian materials present, but it didn’t hit any matches.”

Stiles mumbled a string of curses under his breath, ideas speculating inside his head but not exactly going anywhere. “There’s something familiar about it, undoubtedly.”

Bruce pulled up a data analysis app from the hologram, scanning the orb for any familiar materials or energy levels. “Does your prophet intellect mage know anything about this?”
“Chase?” Stiles tilted his head to the side, hands clicking on the glass of the bannister he was leaning on. “No, he said he’s not familiar with it.”

Shaking his head, Tony passed enlarged orb to Banner who instantly tinkered around with it. “So, how’s the Nemeton doing?”

Well, now, isn’t that the golden question. “I’d love to know the answer to that.”

At the perplexed expression of the two men staring at him, Stiles ran a hand through his hair, huffing out loud. “The Nemeton’s not here.”

Bruce spared Tony a look they both shared, frowning in confusion. “Didn’t you say Beacon Hills hosts one of the three Nemetons?”

Stiles’ tone was dripping in exhaustion and a fake veil of happy optimism, instead of the utter lifeless frustration he was boiling with. “No yeah, it did.”

Rolling his hands to urge him to explain, Tony leaned forward. “Did?”

Smiling enthusiastically, Stiles made jazz hands. “It’s gone.”

Both men in Tony’s Laboratory looked to each other before pinning their youngest member on the screen with a look bordering on mental. “Gone?”

“Yup, uprooted and erased as if it’s never been there in the first place.” Stiles made gestures with his hands, mirroring whatever he was saying—too big of a smile plastered on his face.

Bruce’s breath stuck on his throat, unsure of how to go about the topic. “So it’s dead?”

Stiles blinked. “No, it disappeared.”

Tony inclined his head and his hands bloomed open as if pushing compensation food towards Stiles—which would totally not work, because one it’s invisible and two, Stiles only takes bribes and compensations in the form of comic books or Reeses. “So does it still exist?”

He blinked again, shrugging for extra measure. “Not sure.”

“And you’re—“ Tony licked his lips in attempt to choose the right vocabulary, “—fine with it?”

“Absolutely not.” Stiles played with the tone of his sentence, prolonging the vowels and accenting the consonants. “It’s just that thinking about it causes me more physical and mental damage than not, and I’d really rather not lose control or lose my temper especially in a place like this. So, I’m just going to ignore it until it eventually goes away.”

Chuckling inappropriately, the billionaire fondly sighed at him. “Your philosophy never ceases does it?”

“Nope.” Stiles popped the ‘p’ syllable, balancing on the balls of his feet, teetering on his toes.

Before they could carry on with the conversation, Bruce’s monitor piped up in a continuous ping. “I couldn’t find a match to any database. But it has a similar energy level to the Skinwalker’s arm sample we had—the one that was stuck in Natasha’s—“

“Yeah, we know, we remember it quite vividly thank you very much.” Stiles waved the memory away from his head because that is something traumatic that should be locked into the deepest recess of his mind, holy jesus, he cut into a woman, a woman member of the Avengers. The only
woman in the Avengers, *breathe.* “Are you sure?”

Bruce flipped the holographic screen around with the swipe of his hands to show Stiles the perfect wavelength of energy and molecular composition. “This is the only thing remotely similar to each other—the movements of these foreign particles, it’s insanely advanced from anything we’ve developed, almost like it was—“

“Alive.” Stiles unconsciously pulled himself closer to the screen, hands reaching out to touch the data but his hands passed through the screen like air—because, it technically is that.

“Are you sure?” Tony marveled around the data, touching it precariously only to watch it bounce back on each other.

“A creek. It’s one of the water sources in Beacon Hills.”

Bruce’s eyes lit up like a thunderstorm, dashing to another monitor to look up the county of Beacon’s map. “Where is this creek?”

“Up in the mountain—why is this so interesting, it’s a creek.” Stiles shook his head at the good doctor, eyes speculatively frowning and hands flustering. “The god damn name insults itself.”

“Stiles, it’s a water source.” Stiles raised his eyebrow at Bruce’s mode of ingeniousness, the latter going on about his theory. “Water is one of the factor to almost anything. If it’s a source, and this object contaminated it, the water could possibly carry the energy to other places—or people.”

Slowly understanding the conclusion Bruce was arriving to, Stiles forced himself to think back on any details he might miss. “But, my source here said that nothing weird has been happening except for the Nemeton.”

“The Nemeton is a tree.” Tony turned to Bruce, pointing at him as he smiled. “It thrives on water to live.”

“And the water came from the creek.” Stiles’s eyes flit across the walls as if drawing a mind map in his brain. “Is what you’re saying?”

“Yes.” Bruce resolutely broke in a triumphant grin, but still under the pretense of an upcoming sense of danger. “Can you go back and check the water pathways? I’m not finding anything in the county database.”

Nodding absentmindedly, Stiles bit on his lips. “Now that you’ve mentioned it, Chase also said something similar.” Grabbing his personal notebook from his bag, he flipped onto the date he met up with Chase. “Something was contaminating the water, a substance of unknown origin—poisonous, as much so that it’s killing off supernatural life.”

“Only supernatural life?”

“I’m not sure, he didn’t specify.” He turned to Bruce who was further back in the screen, still on the monitor accessing maps of Beacon Hills. “All I know is that it happened once the Eternal Fountain stopped flowing.”

Squinting his eyes as if he couldn’t believe it, Tony scoffed. “Eternal Fountain?”

Stiles rolled his eyes, because he’s aware of how stupidly majestic it sounds. For all his years in the world of the uncanny and horrifying, he still hasn’t figured out who came up with all these ridiculous names. “It’s a fountain that flows through every body of water, giving it protective
barriers and properties like healing and well, life.”

Both men widened their eyes, surprised at the fact that they weren’t aware of such a drastic development. Tony was the first to break. “When did you get this information?”

“Right before the Avengers Tower got attacked.” Stiles flipped through the book again.

Crossing his arms, Tony disappointedly looked at him. “Why didn’t you share it with us?”

“Because—“ Even through a high tech incorporeal screen, Tony’s glare still had such a strong condescending effect on him. Damn, if he had that skill he would be so invincible to all those years of pressured stares. “—Chase showed me a picture of the last person seen in the Eternal Fountain. It was someone wearing the SHIELD uniform.”

Stiles should really discern which of his statements help make a situation better or worse, because apparently, as he continues to grow into a questionable adult, his brain to mouth filter effect decreases—if it’s not already completely depleted.

“And you actually doubted us?” Tony jerked back as if it had physically shocked him like electricity. “We both agreed that Bruce was unlikely to be Hydra, but me? Seriously? I was with you from the very beginning.”

Bruce sneered at the two. “So, you had to think first to reach to that conclusion about me? Wow, I feel greatly appreciated.”

Ignoring the jabs of commentary, Stiles stubbornly insinuates complete innocence—which with his track record, he has a right to be paranoid. “My mind has a very short circuit, okay? I’m sorry. It was a stressful time and my reactions are severe and paranoid in the presence of an overload of cortisol and adrenaline, give me a break.”

"Fine. We know that Hydra is in SHIELD. So we're assuming that SHIELD personnel is Hydra, right?" Reluctantly closing the topic of doubt, Tony ruffled his own hair in frustration. “Then, can we rule this out as a Hydra plan?”

“That’s my hypothesis, yes. I don’t have a clue why they’re doing this or what they can get out of it. Because the Nemeton going missing, or even worse, eradicated, is not a good thing for anyone.”

Which was the ultimate truth. He could understand acts of evil such as murder or supernatural invasion or even creating chaos as a diversion to do something worse—as immoral and wrong as it is, he could still understand the motives behind them. Selfish or even mental reasons. But this. This affects everyone in a devastating way—why would they cause something like this if they don’t benefit from it in any way?

Bruce donned a miserable expression, exhausted and royally doomed. “Balance of the world?”

Stiles nodded. “You’ve seen the news right?”

“Tidal waves rising, the Sahara desert growing uncannily colder, animals berserking, fucking snowing in them middle of summer, supernatural disasters everywhere.” Tony listed off on the top of his head, and what’s worse is that that isn’t everything. “What are we missing?”

He was so tempted to bang his head on the glass wall. “More intel is what we’re missing.”

“Then we’ll get more. We’ll reach out to the contacts that your mage friend gave us, check on the Nemeton’s in Japan and England. We’ll figure out what happened to it. You’ll go check our theory
of the water pathways and we’ll try and compile it together once you get back.” Tony grabbed his StarkPad, writing their plan down to ensure maximum efficiency (a concept that is unfamiliar to Stiles, because nothing ever goes as fucking planned).

Nearly crying at the thought of simply going back to his room and flopping into his bed, diving into the world of sleep and ignorance. “At this point, I’ve no idea when that’ll be.”

“It’s tomorrow. Morning.” Bruce reminded him, eyes still focused on the orb. “You get back here tomorrow morning.”

Bouncing his head from side to side, along with his flimsy limbs, Stiles played with the prospect of going back the next day. “With what’s going on? I think it might take a bit longer than that.”

Acting as if he was considering the option, Bruce hummed. “Well, nevertheless, it’s still tomorrow morning.”

Blinking rapidly to process the situation, Stiles frowned. “Why?”

“We’re getting sick of all the moping and the heavy stench of sadness and utter pathetic vibes that is currently suffocating the common floor.” Tony chipped in his own penny to the conversation, his tone set as if he was saying something so clearly obvious.

Okay, now Stiles was really confused. “But I’m not even in the tower.”

Tony briefly and harshly chuckled, taking amusement in the naiveté of the boy. “Exactly.”

“Wha—“

Tony took his chances of replying away and clapped loudly. “Anyways, contact us when you have something new, we’ll see you tomorrow. Get that, it’s tomorrow. Or else.”

Stiles was left in the silence of the Quinjet, the screen now gone and an orb in his hands that he absolutely had no idea what to do with.

Or even if it’s safe to touch.

But he hasn’t grown an extra limb or had a sudden urge to go on a killing spree and skin someone half to death, so he figured he’s at least safe for now.

It’ll be fine. (Oh shit, that’s not a jinx is it?).

~~~

Nevermind. He takes everything back. Maybe the orb is affecting him. Because that killing urge had come and graced him with it’s beautiful quench of revenge and bloodlust.

Then again, it could be the natural pheromones coming off of these mutts.

“I told you to leave.” The major mutt gritted through his teeth.

What in the holy hell did he do to receive this severity of a punishment to deal with the dumbest werewolves ever known to the supernatural world? Somebody tell him and stick him in Hell or
something, anything is better than this.

Anything. He’ll even go on one of those monk excursions, deprived of everything. Shave his head or something—just get him far far away.

Ignoring the pack’s advancement on him, Stiles kept tracking through the forest verging on uphill to the mountain leading to the creek. Naturally, the pack followed him like the lost duckling they were, continuously spitting insults at his back as he ignored their mere existence.

Jackson and Peter were directly behind him, Cora and Liam teetering close to them. Stiles seriously had no idea how they found him this time, he’s supposed to have a charm that nullifies his scent—if that witch fucked him over on this damn charm, she’s going to have hell to pay for.

“Are you deaf now too?” Lydia snarked at him, pissed because her heels were getting dirty from the unruly ground of the mountain. “You just don’t stop deteriorating as a human being do you?”

Rolling his eyes so far back he could almost see his brain, Stiles succumbed to the pull of childishness. “And you? Deliberately following someone you want gone, can you be more ironic? Choose one will you, Jesus.”

Clicking her tongue, she was about to reach forward and yank his hair but Scott got to him first, with means to intimidate him from the back. “We wouldn’t have followed you if you’d just leave.”

“And how is it that you followed me?” Stiles focused on trekking the unstable ground to the creek, not even one bit flustered from the attempt of asserting dominance. “I have a scent protecting charm, so unless you were stalking me, I’d better start coughing up excuses before I report your creepy ass to jail.”

Grabbing his hand out of spite, Scott turned him around with a force of strength, a bruising grip as if it was denting his bones. “You reek of the scent of danger. You being here is pulling all sorts of evil energy, Stiles. Maybe the Nogitsune isn’t dead after all.”

Stiles’ eyes snapped a shade darker, his face muscle tense from keeping still. “Let go.”

Scott refused to back down. “Then get the hell out of my territory.”

“You’re deterring me so that I can’t leave, you self-centered bastard.” Forcefully removing his hand with help of a burst of wind to Scott’s sternum, Stiles glared at the naïve leader. “If it really is your territory, you would’ve noticed something poisoning Beacon’s water source, consequently affecting the Nemeton and causing it to wither and fucking disappear.”

At the information, every pack member looked to each other to confirm the story, bearing the same perplexed complexion. Peter was the one to approach him about it. “Poisoning?”

Stiles was too tired to explain further and took the orb out of his bag. “This. I found it in the bottom of the water source of Beacon at the creek.”

Peter nodded to the orb to ask permission to touch it, every other pack member inching closer to the orb as if on instinct. Stiles precariously handed it over to him.

And then, the weirdest thing happened.

The orb was somehow affecting them. All the wolves drew closer into the circumference of the orb—and the orb itself, swirling inside as if a storm was inciting in the sphere. The wolves’ eyes all
glowed a momentarily colour of purplish black, all unresponsive to Stiles’ beckon.

In an instant, Stiles took the orb away from Peter’s hand. The werewolves all blinked simultaneously, as if they had no idea what just happened. Stiles stared intensely at the orb in his hand, putting it away.

“What is that?” Jackson broke out of his stupor, his voice so strained that he had to cough up an invisible force that was blocking his throat.

It hurt his pride to say it, but the truth is the truth. “I don't know.”

“What are you doing with it?” Peter carefully walked towards him, a vainly hidden fear underneath his tone.

Taking a hostile stance against Peter’s tone, Stiles backed away from him, glaring. “I’m going to find out more about it, starting with the creek it originated from.”

Everyone looked towards each other than back at Stiles. And for the first time since Stiles had been back, Derek finally had the balls to talk to him. “There’s no creek.”

Unsure of how to respond to a) Derek talking to him b) Derek acknowledging his presence and c) the ridiculous lie, Stiles came up with the best he could do—a simple: “What?”

The sourwolf’s eyebrow ticked as if he was the one talking to someone oblivious, which was infinitely more frustrating than anything he’s felt before. “There is no creek in the mountains, Stiles. My family’s been here for generations, the only water source is directly from the downtown river—nowhere near here.”

And Stiles laughed. Why? Because it was hilarious. *How dumb must these werewolves be?* Stiles kept on walking with the pack following behind him and as soon as he reached the circle of trees bordering the creek, he stopped and inclined his head towards it.

“Stiles.” Derek repeated, even Peter and Jackson was looking at him like he had gone insane. “I told you.”

Frowning, Stiles spun backwards to the creek and back again to the pack. But no one seemed to realize the presence of a fucking creek behind him.

Slowly walking pass the trees and stopping in front of the creek, he grandiosely waved his hands—even twirling for an extra measure—around the body of water. “It’s right here.”

The pack’s eyes went wide with shock. *Finally, someone slapped some sense into them.* Wasn’t werewolves supposed to have better senses than normal humans? Seriously what was wrong with them. Stiles knew they were kind of mental and unbelievably brainless, but this was just ridiculous.

“Stiles.” Jackson stepped forward, hands outstretched in front of him, catching empty air. “Stiles!”

“What?” Stiles stepped a synchronized step back, because he was starting to scare him.

“Stiles!” The blue-eyed wolf straight out howled his name, causing Stiles to shiver. The blonde looked back to the pack, Peter in particular. “Where is he?”

*What? “I’m—I’m right here!”* Stiles waved his arms above his hand, eerily creeped out by the entire situation.
Did he accidentally pissed off some god or did the natural balance of the world fucked up so bad that it erased him from existence? Or maybe he fucked up so bad that the world had to erase him from existence?

With his life, you never know what is which and who is when or how is what. That sentence didn’t even need to intelligible for it to make sense.

When Peter shook his head, Stiles stood frozen. They can’t see, hear or sense him. How?

Taking the orb out from his bag, he expected the wolves to react to it again. But they didn’t.

What the hell is going on? The orb was so powerfully affecting them before, what’s different with —

Stiles looked to the only difference in variable. The creek. The pack didn’t know the existence of the creek, nor the orb—which was definitely powerful enough to attract them, it would’ve been impossible for it to be hidden all this time. But all this time it was in the creek.

Decisively testing out his theory, Stiles stepped out from the ring of trees surrounding the creek, orb in his bag for safe keeping. The pack’s eyes instantly snapped towards him, a look of shock, confusion and fear mixed in their eyes.

Feeling something grab his shoulder, Stiles stared directly at the sudden contact, staring into the abyss of green emerald eyes. Derek scanned Stiles with his eyes, his hands on the side of Stiles’ arms, trapping him in place. “Derek.”

When the older wolf wouldn’t respond, Stiles shook his body. “Derek, let go!”

The wolf finally snapped from his daze, hands flying away from him as if he’d been burn—and no, Stiles wasn’t using his fire element, although he really wanted to. Patting himself down, Stiles straightened his shirt.

“What just happened?” Peter voiced out softly, unsure of what to do.

Grumbling, Stiles just wanted to pass out and be done with it. “Something inconclusive, as always.”

Petrified out of his mind, Stiles ignored the confusion the pack was in and headed down the mountain. Staying here just brings more question than answers, he didn’t know what he was expecting.

Before he could fully escape the forest though, Peter caught up to him and just because it’s Peter, Stiles acknowledged his presence.

“Are you going back?” The most likable Hale asked in an uncharacteristically shy and hesitant voice.

Stiles nearly considered the option of staying but he wasn’t going to do that to himself. “Yes.”

“Oh.” Peter thinned his lips and shortly nodded. “Well, I just wanted to let you know that—“

The pause and prolonged emptiness in his sentence irked at Stiles nerves, he’s tired and wasted—he literally has no patience. “Just spit it out, Peter.”

“Your dad.” Stiles blinked. “He’s doing fine.”
Swallowing his turmoil of emotion, he couldn’t deal with that right now. His tone was clipped and short. “I didn’t ask.”

“I know, I just wanted you to—“

“Wanted me to what?” Stiles abandoned all manners and nuance. The way Peter was acting—carefully and cautiously as if he was stepping around broken glass, as if he was that fragile—wasn’t really helping either. “You wanted me to know? You think I want to know?”

Peter’s expression fell instantly. “Stiles, I just wanted to he—“

“If you say help, I swear to god Peter, I might actually punch you.” Stiles bit out the words forcefully from his tongue, he could feel his magic grow unruly. “To make it absolutely clear, I have worked my bones off to get as far away from this place as possible.”

“This is hell—for me, Peter.” Stiles felt a punch in his gut when Peter’s eyes slowly turned glassy, and he bets that his own eyes were mirroring that exact expression. “You should understand that best.”

“I do.”

“Do you?” Stiles frowned at him in pain, scrunching his eyebrows in frustration. “I wouldn’t have gone back if it were my choice—but unlike Scott and that idiotic pack of his, I know where my priorities lie. Honestly, I wouldn’t even have contacted you, Peter. Ever, if I could.”

The elemental could see the wolf swallow his own tongue, physically restraining himself to utter even a single sound. Blinking away his emotions and reeling in his hostility, Stiles coughed and cleared his throat, avoiding his eyes from Peter’s figure.

“Sorry. You didn’t deserve that.” Stiles heaved a long breath, holding in his waterfall of emotions back in his bursting cage of a fucking heart. “I’ll contact you again if I need to.”

Swiftly turning his back on the elder wolf’s sullen face, Stiles forced himself to walk those steps back into the Quinjet and off to the sky.

Looks like he’s going back home in time for tomorrow morning after all.

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Updating his journal of mysterious happenings—or what he likes to call, his Diary—Stiles stopped writing and just—stopped. He could feel a panic attack building in his nerves, pulsing erratically through his body, only stopped by the sheer amount of control he has on holding things in.

Leaning against his safety belt, he closed his eyes to focus on his breathing. He couldn’t be bothered by this—he shouldn’t be. There’s other things he needs to worry about, much more important and severe things. And he needs his mind in the tippiest of the toppest condition it can be in (his brain ignores grammar and intelligible words, we’ve established that by now).

Trying to formulate and scribble down the connection between all the variables, Stiles chewed on his pen and kept on chewing. Nothing makes sense and yet everything seems to be connected with each other. Which makes absolutely no sense altogether, but in a way it sort of actually does—
because it would make sense if everything didn’t make sense in the world that is the supernaturally weird and uncanny.

Right. Okay. Now where do you go from there?

“Oh, who am I kidding.” Stiles mumbled to himself, shoving the book into his bag, resolutely promising to figure it out once he’s back in the Tower.

At that very moment, Stiles phone pinged. A message from Tony Stark, his phone reminded him. Stiles could barely read the first sentence of the message—‘Stiles. Get out from Beacon Hills. Now.’—which was totally not ominous or anything, until he lost the grip of his phone.

Because the Quinjet lost it’s balance of gravity as it rolled over.

Body violently shaking to the turn of the plane in his seatbelt, Stiles gripped his chair. “Jake!” He shouted to his pilot of the Quinjet. “What’s going on?!”

“Turbulence! Stiles, hold—“ And then his voice stopped after a loud crash in the cockpit. The plane was still tossing and turning, loud banging of something crashing against the surface of the aircraft.

Stiles gritted his teeth. “Fuck.” Carefully undoing his seatbelt, he nearly got smacked up into the ceiling if not for him holding the seatbelt wrapped around his arms. Using the momentum of flying in the air, he let go of the seatbelt, free-falling into the cockpit when the plane dived downwards.

Crashing into the cockpit's wide-window, Stiles hit all kinds of buttons he wasn’t supposed to—because what would his life be if not for a little flair of dumb accidents. Cursing his way through buckling himself into the co-pilot seat, he tried shaking his pilot awake. “Jake! Wake up!”

He was unresponsive and Stiles went through enough med school to know that the man passed out from a concussion, if the huge bruise in his head is indication of anything. “Oh, are you kidding me?!”

The plane was still going out of control, flying here and there, but Stiles couldn’t control it with the console wheel—because it was perfectly still. And it wasn’t the plane that was malfunctioning—not due to a hack like the last time (oh right, there was a last time, who would forget that?), but instead due to a much more worrying cause.

Because as Stiles looked out the wide view of the cockpit, he was amazed of how dumb he was for not noticing the obvious reason. There was a whirlwind of a tornado, no scratch that—multiple tornados that seemed to open up from the sky and down to the wide expanse of ocean that stretched for miles and miles over the horizon.

Yes, he said tornados. And not Hurricanes. Because as shit as he is in controlling the air element, he is far more familiar with wind speed and strength than even experts in the area of expertise, due to his inclination and connection as an elemental. And this whirlwind catastrophe was at least 450 mph—almost unheard of in any part of the world. Hurricanes are only up to 180 mph, 200 in worst case scenarios. But that wasn’t the weirdest part, no.

Because this was a tornado. In the sea. Tornadoes only occur on land and are no more than a quarter mile wide. This was wider. Almost five times the normal size.

And the knocking banging sounds on the airplane? Yeah, those were rain. Fucking heavy rain. Wait no, it might be hail—he can’t see the skies very clearly because oh right—did he mention?
The window was fucking white from all the whatever the fuck was hitting it, dropping from the sky, with such intense force that it formed so many hairline fractures that the entire double-tempered glass window became nearly wholly white from the cracks.

Stiles did as best as he could to stabilize the plane with the limited knowledge he has of piloting—he turned off the thrusters to limit any resistance, positioned the wing-flap according to the wind direction and set the controller on stable mode. Because if fighting against it is going to cause more harm, he’d rather just bear through it. Plus, if he did try and fight against the tornado, the controllers, engine or flaps might break off due to the resistance so—

He’ll take his chances going with the flow, thanks.

Due to that, the plane flipped, turned, rolled, shook and ricocheted everywhere in the scope of the wind cone. “Shit, Fuck, Shit, Holy Shit.” Stiles pressed himself into his seat as to minimize the backlash of the movement on his joints and limbs, all the while placing a headset on his head and turning on the radio.

“This is SHIELD 316. SHIELD 316. Calling to Base. Does anyone copy?” Half shouting and half cursing, Stiles stressfully sent out the SOS, repeating his sentence over and over. “Does anyone fucking read me? There is a, uh, Tornado in the, my god, Pacific Ocean. Requesting—oh what the fuck do you request, just, Help! I repeat!”

All he heard was static from the other side. Jesus, he was going to die in a plane crash.

In a last ditch attempt, Stiles repeated the coordinates he was in, the wind direction and speed he recorded and the nearest site he located—until the radio frequency eventually went dead. Making up his mind, after repeating to himself how crazy suicidal it was, Stiles unbuckled his seatbelt and catapulted all the way to his previous seat.

Grabbing his backpack, securing it tightly to his body, he let the gravity take him to the loading hatch doors of the rear end.

“I am going to die. I am going to die. I am most definitely going to die.” He repeated like the world’s most unhelpful mantra ever—which it probably is—but in his mind he only had one goal: This orb was the most important key to the puzzle that they had no clue in trying to solve.

He’d be damned if he died before getting it somewhere safe and attainable.

And that, unfortunately, doesn’t involve being crashed or mushed in a plane wreck—with metal steel traps spelling out your grave or even worse, crushing the orb to pieces.

“Oh well, the world won’t let me die like this—undramatic and painless.” Stiles vainly calmed himself with intakes of breath that did absolutely nothing. “That’s sad but also a reassurance.”

With a last minute split second act of bravery—or utter stupidity, it's a coin toss, really—Stiles opened the hatch and was promptly sucked into the mayhem vortex of harsh wind and hard as rock hail and cold ass freezing rain (It was both. It was fucking both), clutching to the orb that might actually be the last lifeline to solving whatever the fuck was happening.

Gods help him.
In the same time lapse, in a place farther than imagined, a drastic change was unfolding. Little
gasps of air—not as much oxygen as foreign elements—echoing through the otherwise perpetually
loud silence. Heaves of hope leaving his discolored lips.

“How—“ Coughing, heaving, tearlessly crying. He was caught by surprise, stunned to no state,
from what just happened.

A gaping hole in his back, blackened blood oozing out of the wound into the grey surface of the
terrestrial land. Particles of blobs of blood, levitating itself naturally of the lack of gravity. Naked
nerves twitching, painfully exposed to the open air, for the most important specialized organ that it
was previously nesting. Dying, slowly—he was slowly dying.

His white eyes focused on the azure sphere in the distance, his gaze filled with regret and sorrow,
and most prominently, remorse. For what he was supposed to do, and what he was supposed to
protect, and the meaning of his existence for such a long eternity—was all taken from him in one
unprecedented moment in time that was like a spec of dust in contrast to the entirety of his long
long life.

Gradually, his hands unconsciously reached out to the beautiful round treasure he was supposed to
protect and look over for, account and record for, and to preserve. Scratching at an empty vacuum
of air, his movements slowly died.

Along with his hope for the thing he was supposed to protect, obliviously and innocently awaiting
the disastrous and apocalyptic fate that the thing had in store for it.
Bruce ran his hand through his hair for the millionth time, irritatively frustrated. “I can’t find anything. I’m not hearing anything back.”

It was somehow weird—seeing Bruce, the usually calm component of the equation that is this mess, act so uncharacteristically un-calm. Tony, however, could very much relate. They had been up all night attempting to reach their contacts in Japan and England on the Nemeton, but they’ve been dead silent for the entire day.

“If the Nemeton in Beacon Hills did disappear—this might not be a good sign.”

“Having no cereal in the morning is not a good sign. Stubbing your foot in the door is not a good sign. This?” Tony ranted on, phone in his ear, dialing tone playing like a lullaby. “This is a nightmare on elm street.”

Bruce was about to counter Tony’s negativity but finding it hard to do so, luckily for him however, his phone finally rang through. He jerked out of his slump and picked up the phone. “Hello?”

“Moshi-moshi?”

Frowning, Bruce pulled his head back. Tony raised his brows.

“Dareka iru no? Moshi-moshi?”

The doctor placed his hand on the receiver, whispering to Tony. “I think he doesn’t speak English.”

Tony grabbed Bruce’s phone and plugged it into his station. “Jarvis, translate please.”


Jolting a little, Bruce unconsciously stepped closer towards the phone. “Uh, hello. Who is this?”
There was a slight pause in the receiving end, in which came off as hesitation to answer. But, the voice came back eventually. “Nemeton.”

Both geniuses looked to each other and back to the phone. “Yes, Nemeton.” Bruce nodded rapidly despite being unable to be seen by the caller. “You’re the one protecting the Japan Nemeton, yes?”

“Yes. No. The Nemeton. It’s gone.” Tony went away from the station with a loud curse on the tip of his tongue, Bruce simply closing his eyes in remorse. “It suddenly disappeared without a trace, we’re all in a state of unrest. Yours?”

“Gone, as well.” Sighing seemed to be the only appropriately calm thing to release stress at this point because, anything else would result in destruction especially for these two. “Do you know how?”

“No. Nothing’s happening.” As if the world was trying to prove something—in which case, wouldn’t be so surprising even if it were—the change came immediately. The line went scratchy, ringing and pinging loudly. “Kousuke! Shit!”

The alert resonated in Tony and Bruce’s faces, the latter coming closer to the phone. “What’s going on?”

“The ground! It’s... rumbling.” The voice grew in its pitch, loud screams coming over the in the background, loud enough to echo in Tony’s laboratory. “It’s swallowing everything! Get out—“

The line cut before they could hear anything else but a painful screech from the caller himself. The contrastingly deafening silence compared to the loud chaotic mess before that was even more eerie than Bruce or Tony would’ve liked it to be.

When both of them faced each other, they linked in their only remaining thought. Stiles. Tony rushed to his own phone at the station on the opposite side, hashing out a text message to warn Stiles to get out of the site, unsure of what exactly just happened.

Just when they thought nothing else could possibly go wrong, Natasha barged in to the lab with a StarkPad held tightly in her hands. She dropped it on the table on which Bruce was leaning on. Heaving a loud breath once more, Bruce lazily picked up the dropped tablet, analyzing the data shown.

In an instant his eyes snapped up to face Natasha’s. “Is this—“

She nodded without hearing the rest of his question. Turning to face the man texting rapidly on his phone, Natasha called out to him. “Tony.”

Feeling irritably worried and upset, his voice came out harsh. “What!”

“Get Steve and Clint.” Glaring at the StarkPad Bruce was holding, the woman bit her lips. “They need to see this.”

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Steve impatiently paced back and forth in his place in the 12th floor. Clint watched from behind, leaning against the doors separating the Quinjet station to the locker rooms. The super-soldier
checked his watch for the seventh time in that hour alone, and Tony was just about to lose it.

“Seriously, Cap?” Clint rolled his eyes, but the consistent tapping of his fingers on his crossed arms was enough to show that Clint was just as worried as Steve was. “Looking at it every 5 minutes won’t make the time go faster—stop.”

They had a very good reason to stay this way, you see. Because it was 10 a.m., two hours passed the meeting time set of when Stiles was supposed to be back by. Given that the trip from Beacon Hills California to New York using a Quinjet was relatively short in time taken, this was especially worrying.

“What if something bad happened?” Steve gritted his teeth, imagining worst case scenarios in his brain.

Clint scoffed but didn’t dismiss the possibility because it could very much be the reality, seeing as how things have been the past few weeks—which was the entirety of how long they knew him. The boy was ridiculously unlucky and very attached to danger. Even more so than they were.

Before fixing up some reassuring lie to Steve, Clint fell backwards from the sudden opening of the metallic doors into the floor with a crashing thud. Tony took one look at the mishap on the floor and turned towards Steve. “You need come with me.”

“Way to ignore the injured man on the floor.” Clint grumbled through getting back up all on his own, following the men to the elevators that took them down to Tony’s lab.

The entire cast roster of the Avengers were present, including a very pissed off Natasha and a twitchy Bruce. Instantly, Steve knew something horrible had happened, yet he was still afraid to ask.

“It’s Stiles, isn’t it?” Clint subbed for him instead, the frown in his face etched deep in lines. He took one look around the holographic monitors that were pulled up and a map that was blinking. “What is that?”

Natasha took pity on Bruce and took over for him. “We lost track of his Quinjet the moment he left off of Beacon County.” At the silent response, Natasha trudged on with the domino of bad news. “If he was on the right track and nothing had happened, he was supposed to arrive here almost 6 hours ago, judging that he left the county at approximately 2 a.m. in the morning.”

“What happened?” Steve snapped at Natasha, fully aware that what she was doing was to prolong the conversation and a completely vain distraction.

“We’re not sure. But it doesn’t look good.” The woman stepped up to a counter and pulled up a looped radio connection linked to the Quinjet. “We received this right before the connection crashed and we’ve lost all tracks to the Quinjet.”

“This is SHIELD 316. SHIELD 316. Calling to Base. Does anyone copy? Does anyone fucking read me? There is a Tornado in the Pacific Ocean. Requesting—oh what the fuck do you request, just, Help! I repeat!”

The mood drastically plummeted, goosebumps raising along the skin of every member—fearing for the life of their newest addition. Tony and Bruce were the two who were profusely confused above their shared panic.

“Did he just say Tornado? In the Pacific Ocean?” Tony squinted his eyes, listening to the recording on a loop.
Bruce nodded unsurely, fixing his glasses and making short stunted gestures. “Technically they’re called Tornadic Waterspouts. But they only occur in the subtropical areas.”

“What are the chances that he’s mistaken? Maybe it’s a hurricane?”

Shrugging, the good doctor slumped into a swivel chair placed next to the counter he was in. “Well, the only way to know would be measuring the windspeed—so could be?”

“No, he’s an air elemental—we’ve done some previous tests with windspeed and he measured everything rightly.” Clint shook his head at the notion, knowing full well the extent of how accurate Stiles’ powers are.

“But there’s no warning anywhere—not on the media and not on our governmental notice board or even NASA.” Bruce flipped through screens, keeping note of the absences of notices popping up on any media platform.

Natasha pried her eyes off of the scientific debate, focusing on the man who hasn’t uttered a single word since the news broke. “He’s a smart kid, Steve. He’ll be okay.”

Absently, Steve gave Natasha a less-than-reassuring smile. His hands were holding the other with a trembling disposition. Even though he knew Natasha provided a more than convincing argument, he just couldn’t shrug this feeling that something terrible was happening.

Tony looked to Bruce in a secret manner, as if they were hiding something. And, secrecy was one thing the Captain hated more than dishonesty. “Tony.”

The billionaire knew the tone that Steve was using and he knew that resistance was futile so he slumped in his seat next to Bruce. “We think it has something to do with the disappearance of the Nemeton.”

And that was when the mood took another 180 degrees flip, as did Natasha and Steve’s stomachs did. In hindsight, maybe they should’ve told them, but the time just never came up.

Still though, that made no excuse in a woman’s wrath.

“What?!” Natasha raised her voice in both pitch and volume. “When did this happen?”

Bruce winced at the sheer power in her voice but answered regardless. “Yesterday.”

Steve struggled to keep his voice composed when all he wanted to do was scream. “And you kept it to yourself?”

“It just never came up, okay.” Tony crossed his arms, knowing he was the one at fault but not backing down due to his personality. “We weren’t even sure what was happening so we’d hope that Stiles would be the one to explain to us.”

Deciding to just come clean with everything, Bruce went on in the explanation. “We had instructions to wait and contact the other places of the Nemeton, and we came through with Japan.” Looking at the expecting faces of their two fuming members, Bruce lowered his eyesight in a manner that showcased his sorrow. “Apparently, their Nemeton disappeared as well. And before we could heal the full explanation of it… something happened.”

Steve’s frown was dragged further down his brow, face muscled cinched with worry. “Something?”
Tony scratched the back of his neck, eyes avoiding them as well. “He said the ground was swallowing them. But we couldn’t hear anything because of the overlapping sound of—“ Wincing again, he blinked. “Screams.”

Natasha turned her back swiftly at them, although the look of shock was apparent enough that they caught it before she could hide. Steve stood stoically, a frozen expression chiseled into his features, barely reigning in his anger. “And when did you get this?”

“Just now.”

Pacing back to a farther station, Steve hung his head downwards, hands fisted at his sides. “We need to go get him.”

Tony rubbed his temples, headache pulsing in his skull. “Don’t you think we want to? We don’t even know where he is!”

“Start at Beacon Hills and we gather information from there.” Steve crossed his arms, willing composure into his posture and an authoritative voice that he only used as Captain America.

“Stiles didn’t want us to go there.” Bruce tried to reason with him, knowing well how careful Stiles was with tip-toeing around his hometown.

And fair enough, everyone was curious about what happened with that story—but they all respected the boy enough to give him privacy and freedom in when he chooses to tell them the truth. However, at this circumstance, they really have no other choice.

“Fine.” Tony stood from his seat, patting his legs down. “Let’s go, right now. We might be able to—”

Just like everything else that involves the soap opera that is Stiles’ life, thing just got infinitely more complicated with just one continuous abrupt alert from the main server. Everyone stopped in their tracks of heading to the elevator, and Tony went back alone to his desk, checking the alert.

That one click brought a map to the big screen, a red pinging dot blooming where Japan is. Tony rapidly typed in the keyboard to find more information on the severity of the alert, and that’s when footages popped up from live recordings at the scene from the social media to news report articles.

Shocking didn’t even begin to describe what they were seeing. The news showed the greatest ‘earthquake’, for a lack of better word, ever recorded. However, it was none of those, because the footage showed that the ground wasn’t shaking. It was moving. Rippling and opening up as if it was alive, and the word ‘swallowing’ definitely did it justice.

“What in the world is that?” Bruce had to take off his glasses, choosing to come forward near the screen. “Is this the Nemeton’s work?”

“I—“ Tony shook his head vainly to clear his thoughts. “I don’t know.”

The ground was deforming and even rising in extraordinarily eerie shapes, destroying the landscape of skyscrapers and roads. Bruce watched the horrific scene until he caught something that caused him to shout. “Stop!”

Tony paused the footage that Bruce was pointing towards, enlarging the picture and sharpening the image.

“There.” Bruce whispered in the silence of shock, as the picture slowly enhanced itself in the
program Tony developed for clearing pictures.

In the screenshot of the footage, they could see it clearly. A large hand emerging from the ground, made out of the same earth that was ripping, crushing down a building as the video played on. Tony looked around the room, finding each of his members stuck in place. “Is everyone seeing this?”

Bruce nodded slowly, his voice deep and breathless. “We need to go.”

“Go there and do what?” Tony yelped.

The scientist shook his head, providing no help, but his resolution stayed the same. “I don’t know but we need to go and help!”

“What about Stiles?” Steve spoke up. “Are we not going to help him?”

Bruce hanged his mouth in the open air, unsure of what to do. They had two very grave situation. Lives at risk in Japan from an unknown calamity and Stiles’ life at risk from yet another unknown calamity. “Steve. We can’t turn a blind eye on this.”

“Are you suggesting we’re turning a blind eye on Stiles then?” Steve raised the tone of his voice to the person he least expected to do it to—the patient and rational Bruce Banner.

At the statement, Bruce nearly snapped but restrained as his consequences of losing temper weight far more than any others. “You’re not the only one who cares about him, Steve. But we can’t abandon our duties to protect this world because of our emotional value on one crisis compared to another.”

Steve fumed in his spot, standing still in the runt of the lecture from Bruce that he knew was right despite of his heart’s rage burning up in the cage of his ribs. Gritting his teeth with too much force than necessary, Steve didn’t bother looking to the rest of his teammates before storming out the lab.

Natasha let out a breath that she was holding, a loud exhale in the silence of the room. She spared Bruce a pinned glare. “Did you really have to do that?”

Giving Natasha a guilty look, Bruce turned away from her heated stare. “I didn’t do it because I want to.”

The rest of the Avengers were split with the decision, and Natasha could see the burden that Bruce took for doing the ‘right’ thing. Sighing once more, Natasha stepped out from the lab and down the elevator to her room. Grabbing a small backpack, she stuffed in the things she thought were needed and headed back out to the elevator to the floor she knew he’d be in.

Once she exited the elevator and into the locker room of level 12, she saw who she was looking for. “Going somewhere?”

Steve froze, head unwilling to turn to his apprehender. Even without looking at her, Steve started a defensive stance. “I’m not going to abandon him, Tasha.”

Natasha smiled at the supposed hostility directed towards her, even though it was laced with reluctance in the use of her nickname. “I don't expect you to.”

Slowly, the super soldier turned around to see the dangerous woman leaning at one of the walls, a backpack held in her hands. Before having the chance of inquiring her, Steve caught the bag that
was suddenly hurled towards him. Questioning her with a look and a tilt of his eyebrows, he opened the bag with a look of surprise.

“Go get him.” Natasha crossed her arms, pushing herself off from the wall. “I’ll deal with things back here and in Japan.”

Steve was at a loss of words, he didn’t know what to say. “Tasha.”

“There isn’t a single of us who doesn’t want to go out there and save him.” Natasha lowered her voice to barely a whisper, knowing fully that the man could still hear her.

Stuffing the bag into his duffel bag he had ready since the moment Stiles departed, Steve took a long moment of silence to finally nod in gratitude. “Thankyou.”

Natasha watched the back of Captain America as he ascended up the ramp of the Quinjet. Just before the doors closed, she could see him turn back at her and gave her a hint of the resolute fierce look in his eyes.

“Bring him home.”

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Steve walked with his cap pulled down his face, blinking out the irritation that the contacts caused in his eyes. He was pleasantly surprised at the collection in Natasha’s ‘wardrobe’ that she managed to have brown contacts, a one-time wash black hair dye and black glasses that seemed to fit him perfectly. With that, in the bag she also packed a pair of tight-fitting jeans and white v-necks that fits him like a second skin.

Steve didn’t know how she got those measurements exactly and honestly he didn’t want to know. Things are better kept in the dark, especially regarding that woman.

He strolled around the small, seemingly peaceful town of Beacon Hills—the place in which Stiles grew up in. It was fascinating to see how such a bright and intelligent personality grew up in the dead quiet and demure atmosphere of such a secluded town.

But Steve wasn’t ignorant, no. He remembers the tense meeting with Fury and Hill in the conference room—he still recalls the horrifying events that has riddled this town and how Stiles had been a part of every single one of them.

Looks can be deceiving—he’s learned a lot about that in not the most pleasant ways. He went on to the Stilinski household on a whim, not knowing where to start.

Now, to those without context, this seems like a harmless plan. Steve thought it was a simple reconnaissance trip of finding Stiles' whereabouts. Well, he will be gathering information, perhaps more than necessary and more than comfortably digested, but not that of which he was looking for—or was actually looking for for a much longer time.

Upon knocking on the doors of the Stilinski household, he was met with quite a man. A well-aged man in his mid-forties or early-fifties, clad in a boring brown cop uniform with a Sheriff’s badge proudly displayed on his chest.
“Excuse me, sir. Is this the Stilinski house?” Steve greeted the man without removing his cap, blinking once.

The man nodded, hands on his hip in defense of the suspiciously handsome young fellow who was at his doorstep. “Yes, I’m Sheriff Stilinski. This is my house the last time I checked. Who’s asking?”

Steve smiled a little, familiar with the defensive humor that the man had—Stiles’ father, he was guessing. “I’m sorry, but I’m looking for Stiles. I’m a friend of his.”

The expression in the man’s face dropped and Steve instantly thought something bad had happened to Stiles, silently panicking. Steve didn’t know what he was expecting but he was prepared to receive the worst news possible—but he certainly did not expect what happened next.

“I don’t have a son.” Was the short clipped stunted reply he got, with an instant glare and a door shut on his face.

Steve stood there on the porch of the Stilinski modest house, confused and slightly shocked. He was sure that the man was his father—he could see the subtle resemblance in the speech and the crease of the eyebrows, although there wasn't much of a physical resemblance.

In short, he left there with an unsettling fire at the pits of his stomach and still no clue to where Stiles went to. At this point, he has no other idea except to start looking for the Nemeton. Steve faintly remembered Stiles going off about how he liked to explore the woods and how almost every bad shit happens in the blinds of the forest—so that’s got to be where the Nemeton was.

Walking through the woods, he felt oddly nostalgic—smelling the nature-filled air that Stiles grew up breathing, touching the rough barks of trees that he could imagine Stiles falling over or climbing on. He kept trekking on his own. Enjoying the small sense of peace and calmness, even though it was short lived.

“What are you doing here?”

A deep voice rang out from behind him, Steve turned.

“This is private property.”

He was met with a brooding man, stubbled and midnight black hair with piercing green eyes. Steve instantly felt something off with him. “This is a forest, how can it be private property?”

The brooding man gave him no reply but a strict glare in return. Steve was familiar with these kinds of men—tall, dark and mysterious, always looking for dominance on every situation believing that they were indeed superior to everyone.

“I’m looking for someone.” Steve decided to give up on trying to deal with him. “Maybe you might know him.”

The man raised his eyebrows, which Steve took as inquiry to whom he was looking for. “His name is Stiles.”

In an instant, Steve could see the recognition in his eyes, lighting up with a storm of emotions he couldn’t really specify in detail. The man finally spoke up. “Who are you?”

“I’m—“ Steve hesitated, unsure of what to tell him. “Doesn’t matter who I am, do you know him?”
The brooding man intensified his glare at Steve, hoping to break an answer by intimidation, but Steve had stared down face-to-face with men a million times more intimidating than he was, including Fury and Red Skull (and the most intimidating one of all, Natasha Romanov).

Steve really didn’t know what he was expecting when he went into this town looking for Stiles, but it certainly didn’t include being pinned to a tree, hard rough bark digging into his brand new t-shirt. Steve was caught-of-guard, so much so that he allowed himself to be immobilized by this stranger if not for the sheer amount of strength the man seemed to possess.

“Who.” Steve frowned at the proximity of the man to his own face. “Are.” For a second there, Steve swore he saw a glimpse of the sharpest elongated canine poking out of his lips. “You.”

Even though Steve would give credit to the stranger’s strength for being able to push him back, it still wasn’t strong enough compared to his own strength. Pushing off the tree and prying the man’s hand off of his neck, Steve watched as the shock and wince of pain blossom in the brooding man’s expression.

“I don’t remember hearing an answer from you either.” Steve applied a strong grip he had on the man’s hand, slowly turning it in a painful direction. “But I’m going to assume you do know him.” Pushing the man backwards with enough strength to knock him back a few steps, Steve crossed his arm. “Tell me where he is, and I’ll go away.”

The man simply caressed his wrist and continued glaring, but inclined his head in the way that he meant to follow him. Steve was a careful guy, but he figured that he could handle the weird inexplicable things that this town might throw at him.

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Steve had spent the entire day in Beacon Hills lost and confused, and although the day was almost over, there is still plentiful time for it to get even more downhill from lost and confused to utterly disgusted and angry.

Which seemed like the most probable direction it was heading when Steve, who had been waiting in a dimly lit and scantily decorated loft for an hour, was bombarded with a group—or should he say gang—of a racially diverse decently attractive bunch of young adults with emotions boiling underneath the vainly concealed glares.

“Derek?” A red-head petite woman faced the hostile stranger, whose name was apparently Derek.

“Lydia.” ‘Derek’ replied to the ‘Lydia’ woman. “Scott. This is the guy.” Derek spoke to a man with a crooked jawline and tanned complexion, Steve made a note of everyone’s name.

This ‘Scott’ came up to him and, without being provoked by Steve, glared all on his own accord. “What do you want with Stiles?”

Steve detected the bitter and hostile tone—apparently a county characteristic that everyone has—directed at him. “I just want to know where he is.”

“Why?” Derek called out but was instantly shut down by Scott.

“What does it matter to you?” Steve shot back at the guy in front of him—who was puffing his
chest and crossing his arms to accentuate his arm muscles even though Steve clearly had the upper hand in every single aspect in terms of body muscle weight and attitude.

Scott squinted his eyes at him and for a second, he sighed before shaking his head. “We’re just looking out for you, man.”

And Steve just officially lost all sense of logic—what in the world was happening with this sudden change of tone and unfounded worry?

Lydia stepped out next to him. “You seem like a decent man with principles, so let me offer an advice to you—stay away from Stiles.”

Steve frowned at that. “Why?”

With a devilish smirk on her blood red lips, Lydia batted her lashes. “He’s trouble. More than he’s worth.”

Well, Steve couldn’t really argue with the ‘trouble’ aspect, as Stiles seemed to be brimming with it what with trouble following him around like a pertinacious fever. But that last part wasn’t really necessary. “He does attract trouble, but he’s worth so much more than all of it combined.”

A new brown-haired tall girl approached him, a rather rough demeanor surrounding her. “Are you his new friend?”

Steve raised his eyebrow. “And who are you?”

“He didn’t tell you about me?” This new girl scoffed in a manner that Steve didn’t find funny or manner-ful at all. “I’m Malia—his ex, unfortunately.”

At that, this inexplicable fire in his pit from the beginning of this trip grew and flared. Suddenly, Steve was defensive and stood a little taller, his tone criticizing and hard. “Unfortunately?”

“Of course.” Malia looked confused as if she had said something wrong. “ Wouldn’t you if you found out you’ve been dating a murderer?”

If he had a proverbial glass, he would’ve dropped it in the amount of fervent shock that caused everything in his body to slack. “A murderer?”

Lydia came back into the spotlight and stared him down even though he was towering over her. “Death follows him around. He’s a mass murderer, littered with blood in every cell of his body. He’s a monster—he even killed his own friend—my best friend, his best friend’s lover, without remorse.”

Scott flinched at the memory, and Steve could connect the dot on who’s who. Steve could vaguely remember the names that Hill listed—Scott McCall, Derek Hale, Lydia Martin and Allison Argent. And by the way that Scott has been calling the petite black-haired asian girl next to him ‘Kira’, Steve figured that Allison Argent must’ve been the one Lydia was referring to.

Steve turned off his brain, impossible as it may sound, but he didn’t want to process the information he was receiving. He didn’t want to make any assumptions or any decisions that he might regret later. His mission was to retrieve Stiles.

“Where is he.”

Derek snarled at him—snarled, Steve swears up and down. “We’ve told you don’t come near to
him! He’s dangerous, he's an uncontrolled psychopathic monster. It would be better off for everyone if he never came back at all.”

There was a lot of things Steve didn’t know, but what he does know is that Stiles doesn’t deserve this witch hunt. No wonder Stiles was so closed off about this place—it was a horrible town. And he was done playing civil.

Steve stalked forward to Derek and promptly grabbed his collar to slam him to the brick wall. As the group behind him step forward to try and stop him, Steve raised his hand and swung it down right next to Derek’s face.

The resounding crack didn’t come from Steve’s knuckles, but from the brick wall that shattered in a huge round broken impact from the force of his punch. Derek’s eyes could be seen trembling in it’s stress to look at his peripheral vision, breath ragged and hitched.

Steve? Steve was furious. He was furious and he was absolutely fed up with the hostility of the pack of animals that Stiles was associated with. And most of all, he was angry at himself for being so confused.

“He’s my friend. And I won’t tolerate anyone who speaks of him like that.” Steve bit out, words strong and sure. “You leave him alone. And you stay away from him, you hear me?” Steve turned his head around to face the group behind him. “Or next time, I won’t hold back.”

Letting go of Derek, Steve shouldered his duffel bag and stormed out of the loft and made his way back to his Quinjet. Throwing his bag to the side, he ruffled his hair and threw his glasses to his bag. Going to the vanity cabinet, he took off his contacts and gripped the counter, closing his eyes.

“Stiles. Where are you?” Whispering to no one in particular, Steve ran his hand down his face.

When he thought all hope was lost, his phone rang. Picking it up with haste movements and spiteful tone. “What?”

“Cap?” Natasha sounded surprise by the harsh tone she was receiving and was instantly on guard. “What happened?”

Steve scoffed at the loaded question because somebody please tell him what indeed just happened? He doesn’t even know where to start. “Nothing. Absolutely nothing happened—No one knows where he went. Tasha.” He forced himself to take a deep breath, grateful for the silence that his friend was giving him. “I don’t know where he is.”

“Maybe you don’t.” Was the unhelpful reply Natasha misleadingly started with. “But I do.”

Steve blinked his eyes open. “What?”

Natasha chuckled at the sudden hopeful tone that he instantly snapped to, her fingers flying on the keyboard. “I stayed back in the Tower to monitor everything while the boys go to Japan to handle the situation, I’m going to meet up with them later. So, thankfully, we were able to track the Quinjet’s location up until it went offline, and I got the coordinates. Then it was all algorithms of wind patterns and speed of a Tornado and probabilities of the closest location and a lot of other things you probably won’t understand—” Steve was grateful for the humor Natasha threw in there, because he really needed a splash of laughter in his dull depressing day. “—and I narrowed it down to a five mile radius.”

“Tasha, I don’t—thank you.” Steve nearly wanted to cry. “Thank you.”
“I’ve sent you the coordinates, you can thank me when he’s safely back home.” Natasha smiled over the phone. “Now, go. I need to catch up to the members—god knows what has happened.”

Slipping himself into the pilot seat, Steve turned on the engines, setting the coordinates. “I will. Good luck.”

Without answering, Natasha hung up the phone. And Steve didn’t mind. Because they both shared the same sentiment, and now they have to make sure their team is alright.

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Stiles has had a lot of bad shit happen to him and a lot of less than favorable situations and a whole lot of utterly ridiculous. But this just has to be really really dumb. On top of getting whipped all kinds of direction from the unruly wind that is a fucking tornado on the middle of the fucking ocean, and nearly smacked into mountains or flying flapping school of fish in the air, he’s now stranded in the middle of an island in the middle of fucking nowhere so.

To say he was in a bad mood was a fucking understatement. He was wet, bruised, tired and angry and also carrying a very important orb of which he does not know anything about but seems to be related with everything going bad in the series of events he’s been through—he was one inch away from a pathetic death.

Like seriously, couldn’t he be dropped in a sunny island? With coconut trees or exotic berry bushes? At least then he would be warm, fed (he vehemently believes that he wouldn’t die by poisonous berries because it just wouldn’t be a death befitting of all the shit he’s gone through so far) and relatively safe. But no, he landed in some freezing cold ass island, where everything was barren because life couldn’t fucking grow in a climate this fucking cold.

Plus it didn’t help that he was wet—and now cold—he was sure to die of hypothermia if not for his fire element warming him up from the inside. Oh, and he’s barely holding on to his consciousness because that magical exhaustion of flying upstream (it’s the best comparison he has—he has literally no motivation to formulate a logical allusion, let him be) drained all his energy, he thinks it’s draining even his life force.

Snuggling into his flannel—god bless flannel, its warmth is the reason for his existence—he grasped the orb in his hand, turning it around and around and around. But still, he was lacking that Eureka! moment that he was hoping to achieve simply by staring at the sphere—at least that’s what happens in most mystery thriller and sci-fi plot but well, although his life may very well be a mystery thriller sci-fi horror tragic and comedic story of ridiculous proportions—it’s definitely not a movie. Because in movies, everyone knows that there will be a relatively happy ending for the protagonist.

He’s not sure about any of the part which involves happy or protagonist, but at least the ‘ending’ part is right. Memento Mori, everyone. Remember that someday, you must die. It’s a comforting pattern of life, in the simplest sense.

“Dying, huh.” Stiles mumbled, breath fogging up in clouds in front of him, looking at the orb with swirling darkness. “Is that what you are, death incarnated in a sphere?” Turning it around, he inspected the black swarm inside the sphere. “I’ve never seen anything black and wiggly like you be anything but death—so I’m 99% sure you’re something bad.”
Now, you might think he’s lost his mind but mind you—he’s a very social person, so social in fact, he talks to everyone, even himself. It’s a sane thing to do—*isolation* is one of the causes of mental disorders or permanent brain damage, it’s a proven psychological fact thank you very much. If not, why does prison even have isolation bunks? It’s especially reserved for the worst of the worst—a list that Stiles very much thinks that he has a special place in.

Stiles closed his eyes, leaning back on the rock partially covered with snow if it weren’t actually covered in ice. “Something so little—causing so much trouble.”

“Yeah, that pretty much describes you.”

Blinking in shock, Stiles snapped forward and was immediately met with the owner of the familiar voice causing butterflies flutter down his stomach. “I—wha—how?”

“Doesn’t matter how.” On a whim, Steve brushed the cold-induced red blush on Stiles’ cheekbones, somehow hoping to bring heat into them. “I’ll always find you.”

Stiles was loopy, tired and a bit high on magical exhaustion—and in desperate need of warmth. And if anyone asks, *that’s* what he’ll blame his actions on, when he decisively lunged and plopped into the bracket of Steve’s wide chest, curling his hands against it. “You’re so hot.”

While Stiles was regaining his warmth and swimming in the hormones of looniness from his exhaustion and isolation, Steve was overheating—which might be the reason why he was so ‘hot’. Unsure of what to do, and what to do with his furiously beating heart, Steve wrapped his arms around the boy, patting his back in a wavering tempo.

“I’m not little.” Stiles murmured into the thin lapels of Steve’s white v neck, the first remark Steve said since finding him still bothering his hormone-drowning mind. “You’re just too big.”

Blushing madly to match Stiles’ cold blood-rushed blossoming cheeks, Steve inclined his head up towards the cloud in an attempt to conceal it from Stiles, his voice a soft whisper like the translucent puffs of breath he was whimpering out. “I find it quite endearing.”

Stiles snuggled in further, brows frowning in strain to hear. “What?”

“Nothing.”

~~~

Yes, Stiles was safe. Yes, Steve rescued him. And yes, the orb was safely in their hands, leading them into the right direction in unraveling this huge catastrophe of mysteries. However, I must warn those who are spectators in this series of events, you in particular, of the less than adequate proportions that this whole journey will end up venturing to. If perhaps, you’re looking for a happy ending, a stop to everything bad and horrid that has happened—this is not where you should be. And if you still somehow choose to accompany them on this journey, then be warned and be prepared.

For this, was beyond what anyone expected it to be.

When Stiles got into the Quinjet, he finally fainted from all the magic he exhausted in trying to
survive the whole ordeal. He was fast asleep and dreaming away to a harmless flowery plot of sunshine-filled land where he was also sleeping because running just seemed to much like a bother and he’s not a big fan of fitting into the cliché.

He was expecting to be in the Avengers Tower, researching about this orb, when he woke up. But he was still suspiciously in the air when he did. Staggering towards the cockpit where Steve was decked in, Stiles was still half-asleep in the way that his voice drewled its vowels. “Where are we?”

“Still in the pacific ocean.” Steve swiveled in his pilot chair to face Stiles who was sitting in one of the retractable seats behind him.

Stiles frowned, his eyes still blurry from sleep when he looked at the digital clock. “Still?”

“We’re heading to Japan to pick up the rest of our team.” Steve monitored the flight route and the controls, smiling shortly to the sleepy elemental.

Even though he was still half-asleep, he knew he didn’t hear wrongly. “Japan?”

Steve waited before he replied, pointing out the window when he took over from auto-pilot to descend the Quinjet. “Yeah. Look outside.”

Stiles frowned and followed his instructions. Stopping, he blinked a few times. He looked back to Steve before looking out the window again, this time with his hands vigorously wiping the sleep out of his eyes. “What in the holy hell happened?”

And that was still a big question because from an aerial shot, Japan looked like what would happen if Bigfoot had ran a marathon through it and if Bigfoot was a 5,000 ft tall creature with feet the sizes of Burj Khalifa. More than half of the architectural structure was destroyed throughout the country, and the earth looked as if an abstract painting came to life—all weird shapes and textures and different levels, waving in out, popping in out and breaking apart.

Steve landed the Quinjet on a plot of land in the woods as instructed by Tony. As soon as they got out, Stiles saw the destruction up close and he was speechless. Upon walking to the scene where his team were, he was swiftly pulled into Tony’s tight hug.

“Thank god you’re safe—we thought something bad would happen to you.” Tony patted him up and down and turning him around while Natasha, Clint and Banner all showed different levels of affection in checking up on him.

Stiles wasn’t as concerned about his health as he was with whatever the fuck this was. “What—the hell happened here?”

A Japanese man, rugged and stubbled with streaking white and grey hair blended somewhat artistically into his ash-black hair, came forward to answer his question. “The Nemeton.”

Even though Stiles has never met him before, he could recognize that voice. “Kousuke?”

Smiling at the recognition, Kousuke wince in his attempt of a smile due to the huge cut on his lips. “Hello, Stiles.”

They had been talking about the Nemeton since the moment Stiles located the Nemeton in Japan—keeping a close connection and twice-in-a-daily update about the situation in their respective Nemeton location.
“Kousuke, what happened to you?” Stiles turned around to emphasize the utter amount of confusion he was in. “And here?”

“The Nemeton happened.” Kousuke sighed, switching his weight to his non-injured foot. “It was weirdly pulsing for days and then it just stopped—we thought it was fine until it just disappeared and then this happened moments later.”

“Fuck.” Stiles knew, rationally, that the chances of the Nemeton disappearing elsewhere was also high, but still, hearing it was a completely different scenario. “What exactly happened?”

“The earth started… moving. And it destroyed everything—it was as if the earth had turned into waves.” The man felt shivers running down his spine, vision still littered with the recent horror that had just passed every time he closed his eyes.

Stiles stepped back. “The Nemeton did this?”

“We think so—that’s why I sent you that message.” Tony spoke up from his position, still in his IronMan suit save for his face.

It struck him like lightning. “Beacon Hills.” The horror in his face as he imagined what might be happening. His feet instantly turned and made for the Quinjet but Steve stopped him. “I—I need to—”

“Stiles.” Steve’s voice rang like a clear bell in silence.

Stiles took a deep breath to calm his nerves, Steve’s voice grounding him from a panic attack—of which he really wanted to have because the situation doesn’t just call for it, it’s screaming for it. “The Nemeton in Beacon Hills disappeared as well.”

Kousuke wallowed in his own self-misery, losing all hope for the city and an empathy for the boy. “How about our friends in England?”

Tony and Bruce’s shoulders drooped, the latter fixing his glasses who is still in a pristine state as he stayed in the Quinjet the entire time. “We can’t get a hold of them.”

“We need to warn them.” Steve nodded to himself, looking up at his battered teammates.

“What if it’s too—” Before Stiles could finish the sentence, he felt—more than saw—his jean pocket glow. Reaching in, he pulled out his orb, which was now glowing a sickly dark purple hue with the black warm inside it rampaging and storming against the walls of the sphere.

Bruce inched closer to try to inspect the sphere. “What is it doing?”

“It’s—” Stiles brought it closer to the two of them. “—resonating.”

Both looked at each other and then snapped the other way, looking around in the far distance until they found what they were looking for. Running to the destination, the team followed in their hurried footsteps, both ignoring the calls from their teammates.

Once they reached the nearby stream they located, Bruce jumped into it without a second thought with Tony yelping out beside Stiles.

“Bruce!” Tony tried to go after him but Stiles stopped him. “What the hell is he doing?”

“Just wait.” Stiles gritted out to Tony.
Indeed, Bruce came up after just a little over one minute with a huge gasp for oxygen and his right hand clutched in a fist. Stiles walked towards him in a synchronized step as Bruce inched closer to him. They extended their hands together and opened up their fists to reveal the exact same orb in Bruce’s palms.

“We were right.” Stiles cursed, his own breath unsteady and airless similar to Bruce’s sharp and short intakes of air. “This is what caused the Nemeton to die and disappear.”

Bruce looked towards Tony, chest heaving up and down. “We need to warn them to find and dispose this orb before it’s too late.”

“Well, we can’t reach them so I guess we’re going to England.” Tony looked to Steve for confirmation.

Just when they all thought that they were one step closer to figuring out what’s really happening with the confirmation of the orb—a source, a target to eliminate and to blame—and just when they thought nothing else could possibly go wrong in this miserable horrible information-filled (for some people) and revolting day. Lightning strikes again.

And this time, it was in the literal sense. As lighting did rumble and crackled before it finally struck down in the middle of where they were all huddled up in the woods, a rainbow like lightning carving up the ground in an intricate pattern.

“Thor!” Stiles shouted in shock—more like squealed but at this point who cares (he cares)—at the sudden appearance of the Norse God, all clad in his warrior gear.

Tony took one look at Thor’s frown and hung his head. “This doesn’t look good.”

“Aye, indeed my iron friend. I came with alarmingly bad news.” Thor boomed out in his majestically loud voice.

Rolling his eyes, Stiles mentally punched himself in the face to see if it wakes him up in case this was a very long nightmare, his voice dripping with sarcasm—because he is never too tired for sarcasm. “Of course. What other types of news could there even be?”

But it really wasn’t the time for jokes, or sarcasm. It really really wasn’t.

“Well, this is worst.” Thor seemed rather confused with the sarcasm he could not comprehend.

No one dared ask, especially Stiles, because they weren’t really keen on jinxing whatever the hell it was—and they all silently hoped that it wouldn’t be a big of a ‘bad news’ if they didn’t provoke it.

Stiles should really learn his lesson he’s been trying to teach himself on jinxing things—even mentally—because it always always seems to backfire.

“The Casket of Ancient Winters was stolen.”
Sties has a few if not a sufficient amount of days where he absolutely felt like collapsing all the way to China. And, of course, like everything else in the life of a Stilinski—that was the absolute opposite of a hyperbole, which means the reality was even worse, in which case means that ‘a few’ translates for every single day of his puny little life.

For the twentieth (?) time that morning—yes morning, it took Steve nearly the whole day to find Stiles and then collectively go to Japan together—Stiles sighed. Tony was manning the Avenger’s main Quinjet with Clint lurking behind him. Natasha and Bruce were analyzing the specs of the black orb while Steve, him and Thor were decked out in their seats, bringing Thor up to speed with what has happened while he was gone.

“So, the Triskelion was completely destroyed although Coulson and his team were a part of the survivors, almost half of SHIELD operators were deceased, including Fury but he really isn’t.” Thor waited for the confirmation from Stiles in the form of a nod. “And you got attacked by a winter species of wendigos called Chenoos because it snowed in your campus in the middle of summer.” Stiles winced, but nodded anyways. “Then you went to Beacon Hills because the Nemeton was faulty and found that it had disappeared.” Stiles went overboard and spread his hands out in a jazz-hand extravaganza, Steve just shook his head. “You found a black demonic orb and was impended by a tornado in the ocean—“

“Waterspout!” Tony shouted from the pilot’s seat.

“—Waterspout, and got stranded in a freezing island until Steve rescued you. And while all this was happening, Tony, Clint and Bruce went to Japan because the Nemeton there disappeared as well and the ground became the sea and swallowed everything up.” Thor’s eyes were now staring off into the distance as if reminiscing about something, but Stiles really wanted him to stop because for one, it was really distracting because those eyes, those eyes. And two, well there is no second reason, Thor was just too distracting in general.

“Yeah, that’s about it.” Stiles ticked his hands off to recount the events, but one of them popped out to him. “Wait a minute.” He shifted his body to look at Steve sitting behind him. “How did it take you so long to find me, I gave you my coordinates.”

Natasha chuckled. “Coordinates, honey? If you did, we wouldn’t have had a whole debate about it.”
“Debate?” Stiles frowned, shaking his head. “No, I listed off the windspeed and my coordinates before the radio went off.”

“We didn’t receive it.” Bruce muttered, hands still toying with the specs of the two orbs in the holographic scan.

“Then how did you find me?” Stiles looked at Steve once more, waiting for an answer.

Bruce stopped moving, blinking once before picking up another set of data. “He went to Beacon Hills to search for you.”

Stiles froze in his seat. *Steve? In Beacon Hills?* His eyes drifted back to Steve’s and found that it was avoiding his stare. *How much does he know?*

“And now we’re going to England to search for the remaining Nemeton.” Thor concluded, oblivious to the elephant in the room and nodding to himself in a grim disposition. “This is all kinds of horrifying in it’s own right, but on top of that, we have another grave problem at our hands.”

Thor was right. This was no time to dwindle around with his feelings. Get it together, Stiles. Leave your emotions until you’re locked in the bathroom alone. Breathe.

“The Casket of Ancient Winters.” Stiles recalled the name of the object Thor said was missing. “I can’t believe it actually exists.”

Steve tilted his head, confused. “Pardon, but what exactly is it?”

Thor looked affronted, which was hilarious although it shouldn’t be. “The Casket of Ancient Winters is a relic and weapon of the Frost Giants in Jotunheim. It holds the fury of a thousand killing winters and the infinite icy cold of Jotunheim itself. If opened, it will freeze and destroy anything in its path. Used to obliterate enemies, armies and conquer realms.” The god of thunder closed his eyes, his Mjolnir resting against his thigh. “For years it has been safe in Odin’s Vault in Asgard, and now it’s been stolen.”

“That’s not ominous at all.” Stiles smiled forcefully, clapping his thighs in a comedic purpose. Happy thoughts a day keeps the mental doctors away. A life motto worthy to live by.

Tony set the auto-pilot on, unbuckling his seatbelt before leading Clint down to the holographic table in the middle of the Quinjet where Bruce and Natasha were analyzing data. Clint crossed his arms, leaning against the table. “So, any ideas who might take it or where it might be?”

“I vote Hydra.” Tony raised his hands.

Now, Stiles could see a logical reason behind why that may be so. But the prospects of it actually happening was somehow not right in his mind. “Is it though?”

“Stiles, Hydra has been relentlessly targeting S.H.I.E.L.D, who else could it be?” Steve spoke up, standing from his seat to meet the rest of the group gathered around in the table, leaving Stiles sitting with Thor.

“Besides, we’re all agreeing that Hydra was behind poisoning the Nemeton, right?” Clint added to the theory, his hands pointing forward in a suggestive way. “Your friend had a picture of a Hydra agent under-cover as SHIELD near the Eternal Fountain.”

Stiles couldn’t really argue with that, because it *is* logical. But something just didn’t feel right—as
if it was too easy blaming it on one enemy. “Okay, let’s say it was Hydra, how did they even get into Asgard?”

Everyone pointed their heads to Thor, looking for an answer. “Well, in my knowledge, only BitFrost grants passage to Asgard.”

Stiles frowned. “And there’s no other way?”

“None.” Thor shrugged, shoulders hunched, eyes staring off into the distance again before suddenly he sat up straight as a needle. “Except—“

The god of thunder raised his head and met his eyes with Tony’s, and collectively the rest of the Avengers understood what he was saying, no—not saying. Except Stiles, of course. Because he’s the new guy who missed out on that first office party where everything worth remembering happened and now he’s that one outsider left out of an inside joke.

It’s a shitty feeling, he can give you that.

“What?” Stiles urged Thor on to answer.

Before he can get his answer though—because when is it ever so easy for Stiles to get anything he wants even if it’s just one fucking name—the Quinjet beeped erratically and a minor turbulence shook through the aircraft.

Stiles instinctively held on to his seatbelt. “Again? Seriously?”

Tony rushed to the cockpit, turning off the alarm. “Relax, Stiles.” He buckled himself in and brought up the holographic panel to inspect what just happened. “There was a signal disruption. Our contacts are sending out powerful radio wavelengths to their location.”

“Why don’t they just text like normal people do?” Stiles grumbled, hand on his heart to forcefully stop the loud harsh beating of his organ that was trying to escape the safety of his ribs.

Bruce—who was not bothered at all by the turbulence—placed both orbs back on their respective cases. “These two are definitely the same—every component, completely identical.”

“100% identical?” Tony squinted his eyes, because the specs of anything being 100% identical to another is scientifically unsound. See, even mass-produced items are not 100% identical. The chances of random errors or modifications even just by the slightest is very high.

“Everything.” Bruce shrugged, wiping sweat from his brows with the back of his hands. “Every molecule, every small detail in the sphere and even every discharge from each particle. Exactly the same.”

Stiles took note of that eerie fact, still unsure what to make of it. “And anything other than that? The origin perhaps?”

“No.” Bruce looked to Natasha who also shook her head from her place at her chair, StarkPad in her hands searching for database matches. “We were hoping in obtaining another sample, with the differences we could compare and maybe draw a conclusion from two samples instead of one and gain more information. But it’s exactly the same, identical—even if we have two objects, it’s as if we’re looking at the same sample.”

“Well, it is supernatural and it is related with the Nemeton and Beacon Hills—so hey, uncanny and weird is kind of the normal around here.” Stiles bounced his head from side to side, smiling too
wide for anyone’s comfort. “If anything, I would be more worried if it wasn’t weird.”

“That’s kind of the spirit!” Clint slapped Stiles back with so much effort that Stiles catapulted all the way to Natasha’s seat, face mushed into her stomach.

Natasha smiled down at him, ruffling his hair before helping him up. “Maybe a third sample will help. That’s why we’re here right?”

In the cockpit, Tony flipped switches on the top panel, pushing buttons and pulling levers to prep for landing. “Among other things, yes.”

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Once they’ve descended from the Quinjet and into the country where royalty was still a thing—Stiles was confused but he was open to all interpretation—the Avengers made their way to the address of their contact.

“Is England always this— Tony paused to search for the right word, “—empty?”

And he was right. The streets of London seemed deserted, barren from it’s night life. Ignoring the glaring eerie difference, they arrived at a small secluded Chinese restaurant. Bruce looked around and did a double turnover. “Is this right?”

Steve took out the note, checked it with the number on the wall. “Yes, apparently so.”

Stiles and Tony, on the other hand, went straight in—because Stiles is brave, if not reckless, and he doesn’t really think much and just does in general. If there’s anything he’s learned in his life in Beacon, is that if bad things are bound to happen—there is no amount of precaution you can take, no amount of fear, or any time of delay that is going to prepare you or stop it from happening.

Life, man, it sucks.

“No one’s here either.” Tony popped his head from the kitchen area, picking up random utensils, playing with a whisk in one hand. “Where is everyone? Do Brits have curfew that we don’t know about? Is it even business hours?”

“It’s nearly 10 p.m., Tony.” Clint scoffed, going back out from the store to canvas the streets. “It’s prime time business hour for the Great Britain.”

Steve shifted the weight of his SHIELD to his other arm, his right hand now free to access his phone to call their contact in the supposed area. “I don’t think they’re even here.”

“I don’t like this.” Stiles felt a chill run up the back of his spine, and a very well-deserved one indeed.

London, England, is a very beautiful city in it’s own right. Amazing construction and architecture, rich and painted with victorian era history and questionable flyers posted up everywhere. Stiles has never been to England, but he’s pretty sure it’d be a marvel in the day.

Unfortunately though, he’s here at night.

And the buildings—yeah, they’re not really helping disperse the creepy ass aura that’s mystifying
over them (that’s a word. that’s totally a word). “Anyone else getting the feeling Jack the Ripper might just pop up if we say his name three times?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Stiles.” Tony scoffed, arms crossing one another. “Jack the Ripper doesn’t do that—the Candyman does.”

Steve frowned, following the three men outside. “Who is this Jack the Ripper?”

“A serial killer who famously targeted women and terrorized the streets of Victorian London. Basically, the Bond villain that never happened.” Stiles commented half-heartedly, eyes still wary and on the lookout. “See, they’re both British—it should’ve been a thing, why is it not a thing?”

“Or Sherlock Holmes, Doyle should’ve featured Jack the Ripper in his stories.” Clint added his own penny to the thought.

“Speaking of Holmes, did you know that there has been some speculation that H.H. Holmes might’ve been Jack the Ripper?” Which was a thing, it really was. Stiles didn’t believe it though—what he did believe was that Jack the Ripper might’ve been more than human, if you get what he’s getting at.

Natasha smacked both Tony and Stiles’ head from behind them. “You do realize you’ve said his name more than three times right?” At the incredulous expressions being shot at her, she rolled her eyes. “We’re here for the Nemeton, not talk about ghost stories. You can do that in your girly sleepover along with the rest of your mani-pedi and braiding sessions, later.”

“I’ll have you know that I am an expert at braiding hair.” Stiles jutted his chin out, not wanting to lose even under an insult. “Thor, did you hear that? We’re grooming each other in a sleepover tonight.”

“Excellent!” Thor boomed, his voice a grand echo in the dead streets of London. “Grooming like the Apes, your ancestors.”

At that, Stiles, Tony and Bruce winced and looked several which ways, not sure where to start with that statement but collectively decided to drop it. Tony blinked away his stupor of confusion, widening his eyes and to somehow adjust his brain like it even worked that way. “Okay, let’s go to the woods, said no living soul that came out unharmed, ever.”

That seems like the logical plan—it does. But remember that lesson learned, yeah. Nothing logical ever seems to work so Stiles does not want to touch that, no.

“No, wait.” Stiles bit his tongue, because somehow he knows this is going to bite back hard. “I think I’ll stay here while you guys look for the Nemeton.” Before anyone could argue, Stiles held his hand up. “I feel anxious and queasy leaving here—which are two emotions that’s usually a warning for something disastrous.”

Tony was about to raise three arguments to counter that, but Steve held him down by his shoulders and walked towards Stiles. “Then we’ll split up. I’ll hold down here with Stiles and you guys go find the Nemeton and the orb.”

Any other time, if he’s offered alone time with Steve—like literally any other time—and Stiles would’ve been elated. But there’s just one huge elephant between them with a neon sign spelling out ‘Beacon Hills’ hanging by its trunk.

“You know, maybe Tony could stay.” Stiles avoided Steve’s eyes, to the extent that he had to tilt his head in an uncomfortable position.
Tony shrugged. “Yeah, I mean maybe that’s better because—“

Steve roughly coughed, interrupting Tony and getting his attention simultaneously before glaring at him with such intensity that even the Tony Stark stuttered in his words and pedaled back faster than you can say race-car backwards.

“—no. Because no, it’s not better. Steve should go.” Tony nodded rapidly, hands reaching out to gather Bruce and Clint who turned around to watch the conversation. “Steve and Stiles stays. The rest of us, out. Two-thirds of the Avengers, Un-Assemble, let’s go!”

The only thing that could’ve possibly happened that would make that situation even more awkward is if somebody started singing shampoo’s ‘trouble’—on any side really—and Stiles was really tempted to.

Oh, he really really wanted to.

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Because the streets of London was so uncharacteristically silent and eerie, Stiles and Steve decided to patrol the streets in case they see anything. And in this case, unlike so many other cases, Stiles actually wished something would happen.

“So.” Even then, silence was still his worst enemy, and anxiety’s getting the best of him. “Have you ever been to England before?”

Steve lifted his head from its bent position of unease, “No. Didn't have the time or the option to.”

Right. You idiot, what were you thinking. You’re talking to Captain America—the guy whose live was known only in war and in the Avengers. Wake up, Stiles.

“Well, back then in 1940s, Britain or Europe in general wasn’t such a great place to be. I’m pretty sure you knew but Europe had Germany to deal with and Britain was just relentlessly bombed or ‘Blitz’-ed—as is now popularly referenced to.” Stiles was obsessed with History at one point, okay? It was fascinating to see how even back then, fuckery still happened on a ridiculous scale.

Hey, if one man can cause that much destruction—he feels quite a burden lifted up from him as his actions, or really they were disasters, didn’t result in that much of a fuck up.

And at least when he has a moustache, it wouldn’t be whatever the fuck was happening with that sad patch of hair. He has class—he’s going for a trim and proper caveman beard.

(Yes, in hindsight, he realized he had just compared himself to a Nazi, which really wasn't a standard of comparison for anything—that’s way too low of a bar).

When Steve wouldn’t even raise his head to offer that rough sarcastic humor he usually does when they’re alone together, that’s how Stiles knew that avoiding the problem until it goes away won’t work—not this time, at least.

“Steve.” The tone in his voice changed, which was probably why Steve decided to look up and face him. “If there’s anything you want to say or ask, just do it.”
The look in Steve’s face fell even more, and Stiles didn’t really know what to expect.

“You went to Beacon Hills.” Stiles threw it out there with no intonations. “And that’s not a place you can visit without learning something new or leave without a thousand questions.”

Steve didn’t exactly know where to start. Because Stiles was right, he did learn a million things and left with a billion more questions. “I met your dad.”

“Oh!” Stiles laughed without mirth. “The old Sheriff Stilinski. What a bundle of joy, how’s your meeting him?”

By the flood of sarcasm, Steve knew that the hunch he had was right. “I didn’t. Or at least, I tried, but he shut the door on my face when I said I was looking for you.”

“Ouch.” Stiles kind of had to physically restrain his eyes from watering up by thinking happy thoughts—but nothings coming to mind. “Has he been drinking again?”

“Met your ‘friends’ too, for a lack of better word.” Steve’s brows slanted downwards even more, trying to keep a lid on his emotions, which doesn’t really work because that man wears his heart on his sleeves.

Stiles winced but hid it under a coo as if he was talking about a baby. “How are they? Last time I saw them, they were still so immature and childish.”

“Stiles, stop.” Steve snapped at him, shocking the younger straight through his backbone and freezing him in place. “How can you be joking about this?”

“About what?” Stiles shrugged, still acting nonchalant about it, hoping that Steve would just drop it.

“How they treat you!” Steve stepped forward with every inclination of his voice. “How they insult you and cast you out when you’re the only person trying to help them!”

Stiles smiled, but it was watery and wavering and both of them knew it. “It’s called hormones, man. Twentieth century friendships are tough.”

“They called you a monster. An unwanted psychopath.” Steve reached out for Stiles, his hands slowly coming up to catch his hand. “A murderer!”

And maybe he shouldn’t have done it, but Stiles stepped backwards and Steve’s hands fell short. Facing the super soldier with a cold hard intensity in his eyes, Stiles smirked. “So?”

Steve stared at the young man in front of him in horror. He thought that the Spark would at the very least defend himself, and yet he’s just taking it as if, yes, as if he was repenting for something. And Steve knows those eyes better than anyone.

“Stiles.” Taking a different approach, Steve lowered the tone of his voice to soft and emphatic. “I don’t know what happened, but I know you. You’re not a murderer.”

“You’re right. You don’t know what happened.” Stiles shook his head, slowly, repeatedly, as if hypnotizing himself into a trance of his own emotion and guilt. “You don’t know what I’ve done. You don’t know how much deaths—all those deaths—happened because of me.”

The atmosphere around them dropped, the air felt a little colder and the clouds drawn a little lower. Both were inhaling and exhaling at a speed to fast to be normal—their visions clouded over. Stiles
cleared his throat unconsciously before trudging on. “You don’t know me. Not all of it. Not the person who came before. Not like they do.”

“I don’t believe them.” Steve continued his path forward despite Stiles constant backing. “I trust you, Stiles. You won’t hurt me.” Finally reaching him, Steve grabbed Stiles’ hand and pulled him in a jerk to prevent him from moving. “So, please tell me the whole truth.”

Stiles couldn’t say anything, as if something was blocking his throat. Coughing to clear away the blocking, Stiles realized he couldn’t stop coughing. And realized that his vision was getting blurry. “Steve.”

“No.” Steve shook his head, closing his eyes as if he was shutting out everything Stiles was about to say. “I won’t believe them, Stiles. You’re not a bad person—“

“Steve! Look!” Stiles grabbed his face with both his hands, forcing Steve to open his eyes and look around.

Before any of them knew what was happening, the streets that was clear and empty was now riddled with low hanging clouds. Dark grey and hazy fog cursing through the entirety of the city— partially blinding their sight and clogging their oxygen pathways, making it harder to breathe.

“Shit!” A voice rang through their ears.

Stiles and Steve was instantly on guard, unaware of anything.

“No!” Another voice blasted in their ears.

Steve squinted his eyes. “Tony? Bruce?”

They were greeted by silence, but then the voice came back. “Yeah, hi. Uh, your intercoms were on, so.”

Are you fucking kidding me? Stiles instinctively reached for his ears and yes, the blasted thing was there. What would his life be without public embarrassment? No seriously, he’d really love to know.

“What happened?” Steve tried to casually wave off their ‘conversation’ that the rest of the team might or might not have heard, while also physically waving the air in front of them to clear their sights a little more.

“The Nemeton!” Bruce came back on the coms and Stiles could hear a string of curses from Thor in the background. “It disappeared right in front of us, before we could reach it.”

A static noise sounded before another voice popped up. “Guys.” It was Clint this time, noticeably out of breath. “Me and Nat found another Orb. We’re too late.”

Well, fuck. All three Nemetons are gone. What do they do now? Stiles cleared his mind. “Okay, let’s just meet back up in the Quinjet. The nights of London aren’t really being hospitable to us either.”

Maybe that wasn’t really the right word to use, as Stiles and Steve were now coughing haphazardly from the intense fog that came out of literally nowhere. He felt betrayed, because one, Steve happened. And two, no one told him that England was this bipolar with their weather. It’s not Canada, for crying out loud.
“Are you two alright?” Natasha asked out of concern, because their coughs was still going on like the world’s worst choir ensemble.

They couldn’t even answer. It felt like something was creeping down their throats and scratching at their lungs. Steve fell on one knee next to him, hands clutching at his chest. Stiles reached out to him. “Ste—”

And the most ridiculous thing happened. He’s aware that he’s abused the word ‘ridiculous’ so many times, that he wouldn’t be surprised if a lawsuit slid underneath his door pertaining to a restraining order against a fucking vocabulary. Actually, that sounds like a delight compared to what’s about to happen.

It started with a noise. A weird, out of ordinary, noise that sounded like hard concrete moving—like the sound of tombs opening up in an Indiana Jones movie or the scene where that giant boulder started to move and pursued to roll one over the adventurer (not really the appropriate time for references but he’s panicking okay, let the man think). Cracking noises and heavy thuds.

That wasn’t even the weirdest part, no. That would be the fact that the noises were coming from above. And so, Stiles looked up and wow. He’s officially lost his mind.

“I think this fog may be cocaine powder.” Stiles drawled out his words in a whisper because his voice ran out of it’s box.

Steve gave one last cough before pulling his strength and look the way Stiles was facing, slowly standing up. His jaw dropped. “Are those—”

The noise amplified, and the next thing they knew, they were being chased.

By fucking gargoyles.

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One thing a person might ask when they’re being chased by a fucking gargoyle is how the hell did you fucking get here. Because see, not a lot of things makes sense at that point, and Stiles is really confused beside of the fact that he wasn’t even aware that gargoyles were supernatural creatures, let alone real.

One good thing might be that, no, London wasn’t deserted. The good people of London were all just hiding in their homes due to the recent boom in fog appearances. So yay, civilization lives on —royalty and tea, long live.

Anyways, back to the point. What was it, again? Right.

Gargoyles.

“Steve!” Stiles grabbed the man who was still hunched over, trying to recover from the harsh coughing, and ran with the slumping man leaning at his side. “Come on!”

The screams of the British were filling the streets, running out of their houses whilst being chased by flying gargoyles with sharp horns, claws, teeth, toenails (ew, no) just sharp everything. The fog wasn’t really helping either because not only can they not partially see, they can’t partially breathe
—and thus can’t partially run anywhere without colliding with another person. Partially, fucked in every non-partial way.

Oh and partial, Stiles will be expecting your lawsuit too, please and thank you.

“What’s going on? Stiles? Steve?” Clint ran through the woods, speaking into his coms, half shouting. Because if anything, screaming in the background and Stiles don’t mix well together.

Stiles stopped, because running would be useless at this point, and gathered his earth tether to pull out chunks of brick in the architecture to launch at the incoming gargoyles. “Uh. How do I say this.” He paused to duck and a swooping strike from the concrete bastards. “Gargoyles!”

With no further explanation, Stiles ignored the rest of his team mates’ tirade of questions and instead pulled Steve up. “Are you okay?”

The super soldier nodded. “Yeah, just shocked.”

“Okay, just.” Stiles conjured a balls of flaming fire and lopped them at the incoming devils. “Help me out here?”

Stiles didn’t need to convince the man further, Steve was up and running straight into the fog with his shield bared at his hands and ready to be catapulted. Stiles went back to guarding people the best as he can, but the fog. The fucking fog. He can’t see anything, let alone aim properly.

Ripping off a whole wall from a red brick apartment complex, he manipulated his elemental power to drop it straight on top of a swarm—breaking the wall a part after that and aimed it at several positions, acting as a barrier for the mass of scared British against the Gargoyles. “Go! Run!”

Facing them right up and personal was a whole ‘nother experience. Stiles stared straight to the red beady eyes of the concrete creatures, unsure of what to do when three of them swooped down and landed on the ground, preying on him. “Good gargoyles. Good boy.” He cooed, hands in front of him. “Or girl? No sexism here.”

Then, in a blink, he was carried up into the air by a metallic arm. “Kid, you need better battle tactics if that was your escape plan.”

Scoffing in relief (Stiles has figured out the art of that, you’re welcome), Stiles poked Tony in his arc reactor. “You should’ve gotten here faster.”

“So, gargoyles are real, huh?” Tony landed back down next to Thor and Clint. Stiles watched as Natasha ran and helped Cap round up the people. “Any tips on how to defeat them?”

And well, he should have known right? Because of course he’d predicted that fucking gargoyles were real. Then again, he knew about the Chenoos—so it technically was a good question as to why he’s never bothered researching about gargoyles.

“Nothing can’t be stopped by my hammer.” Thor brandished Mjolnir, leaping up into one of the high victorian buildings. Stiles loved seeing him fly and all, because whew those muscles and the cape—and that hair, oh my lord—but no, he has to be rational.

“Thor, come back down!” Stiles shouted after him, thinking of a plan. “You can’t possibly aim in this fog, you’ll hit one of the citizens!”

Tony and Clint were long gone from his side, running through the clouds of doom and helping people out of harms way while he was constantly levitating brick walls and concrete roads to act as
Clint unfortunately ran out of arrows, and at one point, a particularly nasty wave of fog hit him right in the face and next thing he knew, he was being stared down by a gargoyle, fangs pointing out right in his face.

Perhaps it was kind of inappropriate for Stiles to be thinking that, hey, for once—it wasn’t him in a ridiculous situation. But, watching Clint punch the gargoyle due to the lack of his weapon of choice, was pretty damn hilarious if not ridiculously terrifying.

Because not only did it do zero damage to the gargoyle, Clint was also thrown back airborne by the intensity of the roar the creature let out. Stiles managed to catch him by manipulating the air, but not before laughing—which, he’s got to admit, was a pretty dick move. “Nice hit.”

Clint scrambled his way onto the ground, patting himself and ditching his bow for a gun thrown to him by Natasha. “You try punching 800 pounds of fucking concrete!”

“Someone has to do something with this bloody fog!” Thor boomed from his position somewhere in the distance—because the fog was admittedly very thick and obtrusive for any kind of view.

Looking around, Stiles agreed with Thor. This wouldn’t end, not with the fog still messing up their senses and choking them. Well, he’s never technically done this before but, life’s all about new experiences.

Softly chanting an air spell he vaguely remembers—which is not a good sign, because misspelling in a spell is really disastrous, you have no idea what he’s been through—before sucking in a lungful of air, and blow.

Gushes of wind blew from his mouth with the strength of a pipe hose, and Stiles could feel his lungs burning from the extent it was going to. But it was working. The fog was slowly dissipating and they could see better without the veil of questionable air particles.

Feeling lightheaded from the air exhaust, Stiles stopped and inhaled as much as he can, as fast as he can. Thor landed down next to him with a huge crack on the road, patting him on his back—which excuse you, Thor, undid his inhaling by knocking all of the air straight out of his lung again. “Thank you, Young Spark.”

“The fog may be gone, but we’ve still got a nasty—“ Steve leapt from a telephone box, latching onto the back of one gargoyle, “hard—“ throwing his shield to knock out the gargoyle next to him, he caught the ricochet of his shield and jammed it into the head of the devilish monster he was riding on, “problem in our hands!”

“Without context, that would be very wrong.” Tony pointed out.

Stiles looked around, noticing something amiss. “Where’s Bruce?”

And maybe it was something close to fate, but Bruce Banner appeared then and there. Not as the Hulk, no. Which was probably a good thing, because the streets of London was pretty much destroyed seeing as how he has uprooted the architecture and infrastructure to act as shields and projectiles (sorry England, but gargoyles were your inventions, a little destruction won’t hurt).

But just appearing there, running and out of breath, stopping beside Stiles and holding out the black orb, Bruce Banner somehow managed to be of greater assistance than Hulk.

Because as soon as that happened, all the gargoyles screeched—loud and piercing—before flying
up and away into the far distance, out of their reach.

Stiles looked to Bruce with a cautious expression, to which Bruce reciprocated to himself. Steve dropped and rolled back onto the ground, running up to them along with the rest of their teammates.

“Thank you.” Thor pointed out to the good doctor, apparently not understanding how weird what just was.

“Uh, you’re welcome?” Bruce tilted his head, glasses tipping off the edge of his nose, while also turning around to face the rest of them with a confused expression and a mouthed, ‘what?’

All everyone could do was shrug and just be hopeful and grateful. At the very least, that was one other problem off of his hands, and they’ve all learnt not to look a gift horse in its mouth.

Or something.

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“I won’t know anything until we get back in the lab, but according to the timeline that we established, Natasha and Clint took the orb out of the water source before the Nemeton disappeared.” Bruce handed out water for everyone in the Quinjet.

They were on their way back to the Avengers Tower, the aircraft set on auto-pilot by Jarvis on a course headed home. Everyone save for Bruce was down for the count, still coughing due to the after-effects that was flooding over them now that the adrenaline rush was over and done.

“And that implies?” Stiles waved his hands to move the conversation along.

“No idea. But that’s a different variable that wasn’t present in these two, so I’m hoping to see a difference in some sort.” Bruce scratched the back of his neck, looking to Tony for back up.

“What happens now?” Stiles threw up the question, but he was still looking at Bruce, rubbing harshly at his eyes and dragging his hands down his face. "All three Nemetons are gone."

Tony felt pity on Bruce and came up to Stiles. “We’ll figure it out, kid.” Patting his back, Tony shook him in an affectionate manner. “We always do.”

Steve was pointedly staring dead-straight at Stiles, and Stiles was pointedly avoiding his gaze. Hey, no one ever said he wasn’t petty.

And he didn’t really have to bear with it for long. Because apparently, there was a recurring sound in his life that signaled everything bad—like that grandfather clock in your childhood home, terrorizing you in the middle of the night with those echoey loud gongs marking the countdown to your sleepless night (that’s a thing, right?). But in his case, it was the oh so familiar sound of a panicked dying screech of a monotone weasel, also known as the Jarvis-issued alarm.

“What is it this time? Another signal disruption?” Stiles rolled his eyes in a half-joking manner, half expecting it to be true.

Tony threw a smirk in his direction before going to the cockpit to check if anything was in distress.
He came back with a StarkPad in his hands and a frown on his face.

Stiles and Clint shared a foreboding look because a silent frowning Tony is never a good Tony. Natasha was the first to ask. “Tony? What’s wrong?”

Without answering, Tony simply stopped by the holographic table and tapped his StarkPad to sync the data. What came up was truly a mess. Stiles watched as the world globe was projected, and footage after footage popped up in different locations all over the world.

Videos and live recordings of floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, rampaging animals and array of supernatural attacks ranging from rogue packs of werewolves to swarms of flying pixies (they are so much worse than their Disney animated counterparts, so so much worse).

“Everything.” Tony muttered, his tone unsure and shocked, eyes flitting from one disaster to another. He blinked rapidly, wetting his dry lips with the swipe of his tongue, looking around to each of his members. “Stiles?”

Contrary to popular belief, he doesn’t know everything. He may seem to, but he really doesn’t. He knows a lot of things yes, thanks to his special mastery in google-fu, but that range is not as wide as people may think, despite his appearance as a lanky nerd with a blabber mouth.

Why the world is now somehow fucking broken, sadly, is not one of them.

“I don’t know.”
Beginning of the End

Chapter Notes

First and foremost, please take my utmost sincerest apologies. I am very sorry. I have been stumped with everything, from exams, to graduation, to prom, to post-graduation vacation, and I have not been able to update this at all. I'm so so SORRY. BUT THANKYOU FOR WAITING. AND BEING PATIENT. IM SORRY. IM BACK IM BACK IM BACK FOR GOOD. UPDATING EVERY WEEK AGAIN. STARTING NOW. Because I'm absolutely free now~ :) Anyways, THANKYOU AGAIN FOR THE LOVE <3 <3 <3 1500 kudos and 30000 hits, this is crazy guise T^T I could've never imagined this amount of love but hell am I grateful for it. I love seeing your comments, and they make me post and write faster and it is just the most wonderful feeling when I see that 'new comment' notification~!!! It literally is one of my staple events of happiness XD!!! Anyways!! Enjoy the next chapter and I will be back before you know it!

Get ready, we are now entering the apocalypse tag, after 19 fucking chapters, whew, I have no sense of organization :')

There are many perks of having magic. Who was he kidding, there are a million gazillion superfucking trillion perks of having magic, albeit not Harry Potter-like abilities and no specific wand of his own. It’s a known fact—that’s why fantasy is a popular kids genre, if not it would just be a weird kink in the realm of adults where costumes and questionable objects are put in play in a whole new light. See: roleplay.

But, there are still many downsides in having magic—and one that hits like a bitch is magic exhaustion leading to complete unconsciousness. One minute you’re up, the next you’re down like Dorothy in the deadly poppy fields. In Stiles’ case, however, he was in the Quinjet one minute, and in the Avengers tower in the next.

Now, this might not seem like a problem—but with the context that they just received, it really really was.

Storming out into the living quarters, Stiles found the members of the Avengers circled around each other in the couch, talking in hushed voices and rapid eyes.

“Uh. Yo, breakfast bunch!” He called out in a less-than-polite manner (if he ever had one to begin with). “What’s with the conspiracy circle?”

Steve looked up from their bent circle of heads first, craning his neck left and right to get rid of the crick it had formed. “Nothing, how are you feeling?”

“Great.” Stiles nodded with a blunt expression. “Yeah, I would be much better though if we were not here dwindling our thumbs while the world is fucking burning out there.”

Bruce cleared his throat. “We’re waiting for the results of the orb analysis to come back, Stiles.”

“We can wait for it on the Quinjet, on the way to—you know—saving the world.” Stiles placed
both his hands on his hips, trying to procure the authority figure stance—but he wasn’t as muscle-
full as the rest of them, not even Natasha who has a slimmer figure. “Isn’t that what you guys do?”

The good doctor coughed suddenly, inching his body towards Tony to gesture for him to take over
—which was all kinds of weird and somehow sensual (Stiles could definitely get behind that, in
more ways than one)—to which he did. “There isn’t much we can do, Stiles. There’s way too many
places and too little of us.”

Stiles frowned. “Like that’s ever stopped you before.”

Natasha placed her hand on Tony’s knees to stop him from continuing, facing Stiles with a
conviction. “We can’t leave this place.”

Okay, maybe before he was slightly taking a comical aspect to this confrontation, but now he
knows something was really up—a serious kind of up.

“Why the hell not?” Confused and slightly scared, his tone raised to an offensive stance.

Thor stood from his seat at the couch, crossing his arms straight at him. “Because this place is the
target.”

“Target?” Stiles blinked, obviously not expecting that reply, looking to others for confirmation.
“Of what?”

Sighing, Thor looked up the ceiling before facing him. “The Casket of Ancient Winters.”

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Japan has experienced another tsunami, leveling entire cities after the destruction of the earlier
inexplicable, what seems to be supernatural, incident—

Click.

Here in Africa, our southern borders are under a heavy snowstorm. We have just got the news that
a hail, is close and coming soon.

Click.

People have been disappearing in a steadfast rate, most of the victim’s family claiming that it was
due to the dust storm that has veiled over half of South America.

Click.

As of now, Russia, China and New Zealand joins the countries facing a mysterious phenomenon.
Experts say that some are due to the cause of rapid global warming, while other experts choose to
believe a higher power—extraterrestrial powers—are responsible for the supernatural
occurrences and reports of ‘monsters’ reigning over the cities.

Well, here in CNN, we believe that we do not know enough to make a conclusion now do we,
Anderson?

We should remain as open to figuring out how to control this situation. Just in, we have received
reports that the population in Japan, Italy and New Zealand has reduced almost nearly in half.

Good lord, what is happening?

Whatever it is, Paula, this does not bode well for any countries. We assure you that many of international agencies are working to solve and prevent upcoming disasters, such as NASA, the UN, the EU, and our very own CIA and NSA agencies.

What do you suppose they could do?

We’ve yet to know, but if this really is due to an extraterrestrial or supernatural cause instead of a biological weapon or the course of nature taking its toll on global warming, then we need to redirect our sources and then the remaining question will be: where are the Avengers?

“Well, Andy, my handsome fella, I have the answer to the million dollar question right there—sitting back and relaxing at the spacious living room of the, guess what, Avengers tower!” Stiles snarked, smiling way too widely and sarcastically at the members of the team scattered around the room. “Who could’ve guessed?”

Steve took the television remote from him and turned the device off, giving Stiles a look that he couldn’t really classify between stern or sympathetic. “Stiles.”

“Yes, Steve, Captain America, leader of the absent dilly-dallying team of the Avengers.” Sitting straight up with his hands properly resting between his thighs, Stiles mocked a formal pose.

“Okay, that’s enough.” Tony stepped in before anything could progress further, understanding the emotional weight on them two. “Stiles, we can’t leave and that’s final.”

“How the hell are you okay with that?” Stiles nearly screamed, frustrated that no one would understand his point. “Did you not hear the news? People are dying and we’re here protecting a fucking building from a Jotunheim weapon that might or might not even strike here.”

Tony kept his tone stable but his voice grew louder. “That’s not fair and you know it.”

“You won’t even tell me how you’re so sure the Avengers tower is the target!” And that’s the truth. Technically, he knew he was being irrationally harsh on them, but being in the dark and not knowing anything was one of Stiles’ biggest fears.

Thor planted his hammer on the table, resulting in a tremor across the room. “The target is not the tower!”

The Avengers collectively turned their attention to the Norse god, all very tense in what the man was going to reveal. Clint bounced his eyes back and forth between the god and the elemental, managing the situation. “Thor, I don’t think—”

“It’s not us either!” The hunk of a blonde hair god kept on going, his voice itself causing Stiles to shut his own mouth and simply listen.

“Thor!” Clint warned, only to be unheard.

Walking forward to Stiles, Thor calmed his voice down (as soft as it could get because normal for him was loud for everybody else), “It’s what we’re keeping—in this tower.”

Stiles took a moment to let it sink down. So what they were doing were protecting something in this tower that might be a target. Only thing he doesn't know is—what. But he knew one thing for
sure, if Thor was willing to get this upset over something, it had got to be something Stiles definitely doesn’t have the clearance to know.

But hey, SHIELD is partially gone—technically gone underground, but still not in the public eye so that counts as gone (Stiles is adamant on that, don’t try and change his minds, vocabulary is there for a reason)—and there’s no such thing as clearance anymore if there’s no agency to uphold the hierarchy so—

“I want to know.” Stiles stared the god right back at his full height (falling short by a lot, he’s ashamed but the guy’s a fucking Norse god, so its not that big of a blow to his ego).

There was a silence that lasted longer than Stiles was comfortable with, but Stiles never really did well with silence either so he’s not the best judge on that. Steve let out a long heavy sigh, placing his head in the cusp of his interlinked hands before standing up to take Stiles out of Thor’s personal space.

Stiles followed along with the movement but then realized that he was being dragged somewhere. “Wait, where are we going?”

“You said you wanted to know.” Steve replied without looking at him, and the rest of the Avengers followed them and stopped in front the elevator.

Bruce and Clint stayed back at the doors, not approaching any further. “You guys go, we’ll keep track of the orb’s research.”

In the elevator ride up to the 13th floor, Tony, Natasha, Thor and Steve kept their silence while Stiles’ eyes flitted everywhere. He didn’t know where they were going, because he has never been to the 13th floor. There was no floor directory in the first place because Jarvis was all they need—but the negative side was you don’t know everything about anything.

So, the 13th floor was somewhere he’s never been—surprising as he’s always liked to explore everything in anywhere he was in. But with all the supernatural bullshit that has been going on, he’s had literally no break because all he does when he’s in the Tower was move in, sleep, perform surgery, cook, eat, fly and bathe (when possible).

“We’re here.” Steve announced their floor, leading Stiles to the mysterious land he’s never ventured in.

Looking around, this floor was different from the rest. There was a clear lack of light since there were no fucking windows, for one. And two, everything was in rooms. And he could tell that each door was hard enforced steel lock doors with specifications in an StarkPad right next to it, also did he mention the extra security mile of a fingerprint and retinal scan to get in to the place?

“What is this place?” Stiles whispered, because the dark lighting (that only came from the ceiling and the floor linings) was somehow an atmosphere that warrants whispering.

“Lock-up.” Tony led them in front of the group, eyes scanning the place for any irregularities. “Anything that we find or take hold of that’s too powerful for any agencies or simply can’t be trusted with any other being—that goes here.”

Natasha tilted her head from side to side, leaning in closer to Stiles. “Including SHIELD. We’re independently organizing this facility, no one knows we have any of these things and thus the heavy security.”

Thor kept a frown in his masculine features, which brought up a whole ‘nother set of curiosity but
it was soon answered. Because they reached the end of the hall which held the biggest thickest iron safe vault that Stiles has ever seen.

“Another reason no one knows about this place,” Natasha continued her previous explanation, waiting for Tony to open the door with all its meticulous safeguards and scans, “is because it isn’t just a lock-up—“ The doors opened with steam that flew from the edges, creaking heavily as it pushed inwards, “—it’s a Quarantine.”

And then Stiles realized why everyone’s been so strict about not leaving the building, because this certainly qualified as a reason—no, as a whole life mission, if he were to judge—to stay and protect the place. He’s surprised the Avengers even left this building unaccounted for, considering how many times they flew in and out of the tower, despite all the agents and security systems in the building.

Because this?

This was a goddamn nightmare waiting to happen.

A beautiful dark-haired nightmare with a devilishly charming smirk and way of speech.

When Stiles saw him, his jaws dropped to the floor and the floor beneath it. “Oh my fucking god.”

“I would love to be your God.” The voice rang in Stiles’ ears, a wink following after. “The other part, we can work on.”

Jesus Christ.

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“Loki?!” Stiles snapped and turned around to face the Avengers, who stood right where the door opened and not anymore further in, as he was the only one who ventured inside the vault. “Seriously?! You’ve been keeping Loki here all this time?!”

Thor glared straight past Stiles, focusing his attention on his adopted brother. “We had no choice, he escaped from Asgardian prison too many times for us to take anymore chances.”

“That I understand, but seriously?!” Stiles could feel his voice raising in pitch, but softer in loudness, and the heavy stare that the other Norse god was fixing on him from his back. “In the middle of the fucking city he tried to destroy, this was the best place you could keep him?”

“Look, nobody liked the idea, especially yours truly.” Tony did a slight mocking bow in reference to himself before crossing his arms and leaning back on the wall. “But the safest option we could keep him in was right underneath our noses, so here he is.”

“I didn’t know you cared about my safety.” Loki smirked from behind his tempered glass double enforced separation barrier in the square room.

Tony squinted his eyes at him, his head bouncing slightly in an incredulous stance. “Not yours. Your diva pretentious ass could go rot in a chemical erosion for all I care—hell, I’ll help create the damn thing.”
“Okay, stop!” Stiles waved his hand around, trying to wrap his head around it. “I understand why this is a reason to stay, but you think he’s the reason why this tower’s a target, why?”

Thor sneered at his brother, coming closer to the barrier, just barely an inch from where he faced his sibling in close proximity. “Because he’s the only one who knew of secret passages in and out of Asgard, without using the Bifröst.”

“What is this next crime that you ought to accuse me of, o’ brother of mine?” Loki smiled at the thunder god, unafraid and unbothered by what was happening.

Stiles frowned. “Are you saying, he’s the perpetrator?” When no one answered him, Stiles grew incredibly confused. “How? He’s been in secret lock-up, he couldn’t have done it.”

Thor shook his head, eyes still held in an unbreakable gaze between him and his fellow god. “He’s a trickster. We’ve no idea what he could or couldn’t have done.”

“Nevermind whether he stole it or not, why use it here?” Stiles continued to argue. “If it is truly as powerful as you claim it is, then he doesn’t look like the type to take the risk of being collateral damage if it were targeted here.”

Tony shrugged, inclining his head to rest on the steel walls, facing upwards. “To escape by creating a distraction in the city or in the tower? To evoke revenge on being locked up for this long?”

Stiles bit his lips, unsure of why he was having such a hard time swallowing the idea. Yes, it made sense—yes, their hypothesis made all the sense that it needed to—but the look in Loki’s eyes brought him a degree of uncertainty and unease that he’s never felt before.

“The pretty boy’s right.” Loki sung from his cage, taking a step back from the barrier and shifting his focus to Stiles. “If I were to escape, I’d find a way that truly wouldn’t hurt me in the slightest way.”

“You’re a Frost Giant.” Thor slammed his fist on the barrier, causing a rift of what looked like sparks across the entire surface of the glass. “It won’t hurt you in any possible ways.”

Loki retreated, his back facing them, before turning around with a glint of surprise in his eyes. “Something that a Frost Giant couldn’t be hurt with, something that was in Asgard—stolen, possibly, by your choice of words—and a weapon from your repetition of ‘target’.” He snapped his fingers softly, smiling slowly as if any mirth was appropriate in the discussion (for a lack of better word), “The Casket was stolen.”

The Avengers looked amongst each other, each one holding their own silence. Except Stiles. Because Stiles didn’t care who he was against, if he’s curious, he needs to fucking talk.

“Look here, you blue-balled sneaky gorgeous of a freak—“ Pausing and blinking repetitively to make sense of what he just said (fuck his mouth, honestly, where the fuck is his filter), he decided to shake it off and continue, “—whatever the hell you’re planning, you best not involve innocent people.”

The edges of the god’s mouth perked up, delighted by the snarky attitude that could match his own, basking in the insult-compliment. “Or else what, my darling?”

Smiling sweetly, Stiles tapped the glass on the position where Loki’s nose was closest to. “I’ll play the most disturbing Barney the Dinosaur porn that I can find on a loop, while I slowly castrated your blue balls and force feed it down your throat and string you up with your oesophagus still
Tony winced, Natasha smirked, Steve face-palmed and shook his head disapprovingly, Thor nodded (but only because he didn’t understand, or at least that’s what Stiles thought it was), and Loki—the masochistic bastard—just returned his saccharine sweet smile.

And for the second time in his life, he realized his snark and sarcasm doesn’t work on any Norse god, for completely different reasons. One where the mythical being does not comprehend him, and the other (more frustratingly) where the mythical being actually finds it a pleasure.

“Looking forward to it.”

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Clint tossed the sharp electrode up in the air, watching it flip and turn before catching it back in his hand, latching onto the handle in a perfectly timed reaction. “Maybe some of us could go?”

Bruce looked up to the ceiling in exasperation, tapping on the table impatiently for the results to finalize.

“Maybe some of us could stay back while the rest separate and go to different parts of the world.” Clint mumbled on, keeping up his toss and fetch.

The good doctor simply sighed and repeated his answer for the past half an hour. “You know exactly why we can’t do that, besides even if we could, where would we go and what could we do?”

The point was made loud and clear. The Avengers all knew that this was an obvious choice, not only for protecting the world of Loki’s act of escape, but also because it was impossible. This wasn’t an enemy they could take down, or a program they could out-hack, or a disease they could reverse bio-engineer a vaccine out of. This was natural disasters, and they couldn’t stop it even if they wanted to.

“How do you think Stiles is taking it?” Clint spoke up after a while, knowing how the kid usually reacts to sensitive information like these.

Banner shrugged, eyes still waiting on the green bar to fully raise to 100%. “He’ll be fine. He won’t like it, but he knows what needs to be done.”

The bar completed with a sound to signal the success. Clint instantly stopped and placed the electrode down to grab the other panel when the documents of the analysis of the third orb came in.

Reading through, Bruce fixed his glasses, concentrating on the reports. “We got it. This one’s different from the other two. The energy wave is similar, the components too—but the strength and the mass are entirely different. But that’s not enough to prove anything—or at least, too vague to draw any conclusions.”

Clint nodded along, scrolling down further, bringing up other data. “The analyzed report we got from the gargoyle pieces also seem to have a similar energy wave—wait. They ran away when you arrived with the orb in your hands.”
Bruce took off his glasses. “Are you saying it’s a, what, counter?”

“Not sure. But they’re related. The skinwalkers, gargoyles, the Nemeton and the Orbs.” Clint slumped down in his rolling stool seat, spinning in place while groaning. “At what point does any of this actually makes sense?”

Bruce ignored the archer’s antics, choosing to further read the reports. “The readings are different, though.”

“Yeah, you said so earlier.” Clint mumbled through his hands, face completely covered in the blanket he placed on the table.

"No it's as if—" Squinting to see if he was right, Bruce doubled back and grabbed Clint’s abandoned digital panel, comparing the two. He instantly froze. Then he was off to the other side of the lab with Clint behind him, following blindly and rather lazily.

“What is it?” Clint urged on when Bruce seemed stupefied by looking at the orb inside the self-analyzing glass case that Tony built.

Bruce simply gave Clint his StarkPad, which shows some kind of wavelength, a live chart. “What is this?”

The good doctor simply nodded to the object in front of them, the orb glowing its black purple hue. Clint opened his mouth, and it hung there. “It’s that?”

“This is it, Clint.” Bruce smiled, watching the orb glow in different patterns, the darkness swarming inside it with the ever-changing light. “The difference between this orb and the others is that it’s still—“

“Active.” Moving closer after making the connection, Clint observed the small object behind the casing, looking over the data. “It’s transmitting an energy, a signal of some sort.”

In the back of their minds, even though they were fascinated by the new discovery and new questions of curiosity that bloomed from that single reveal, there was still something eating at them. A much more dangerous but compulsory question to investigate:

A signal to what?

---

Ever since they found out that the Nemeton had disappeared, Beacon Hills has been in a state of unrest. And the news wasn’t really helping either. The pack has been thoroughly divided now, it was Scott, Malia, Lydia, Kira, Isaac, Derek and Theo against Peter, Jackson, Cora and Liam.

Even without the new big bad, there were still plenty of tension to go around and even more hostility to spare. They first heard of the news that the world was going to shit at their mandatory pack meetings (a very very heavy emphasis on the term mandatory, because literally no one wanted to do it, except they have to for updates and regulations).

“Holy shit.” Cora cursed out loud, watching the live news from the corner on her iPad with Peter (since Derek was too much of a neanderthal to actually have a working television).
Peter silently agreed with her, his eyes blown wide open and a frown pulling between his brows. “It’s happening all over the world.”

Jackson hopped over the couch he was sitting on with Liam to reach Cora and Peter, finally seeing exactly what the hell the two rational Hales were going on about. “Oh my god, is this real?”

The elder Hale opted not to answer that question in order to fish out his own phone, searching the news. For some reason, Beacon Hills wasn’t affected. But Peter knew that that wasn’t a safe sign—in fact it was the exact opposite.

Searching up New York, Peter let out a sigh of relief when he found that no incident has happened in the city. He flipped his phone to Cora and Jackson, assuring them that Stiles was safe in New York.

“What are you three sneaking around for?” Lydia walked up to them, crossing her arms whilst checking her nails—a multitasking of the most useless abilities.

“We’re being educated members of the society, something that you all are not familiar with,” Cora smiled cheekily to her, immune to Lydia’s Queen Bee attitude, “It’s called watching the news.”

Rolling her eyes, Lydia snatched Cora’s iPad without much of a protest from the she-wolf. Raising her eyebrows, she scoffed. “I guess global warming has finally set in.”

“That’s it?” Jackson piped up, frowning at his past lover. “That’s all you have to say for this?”

The rest of the pack started listening in from the ex-lovers’ quarrel. Lydia sneered at him, spitting acid in each and every single one of her syllables. “What else do I have to say, Jackson?”

“Nothing, I guess you were more of a heartless bitch than I initially thought.” Shrugging, the kanima-wolf disregarded the woman’s snark for a more educated response.

Scott and Derek walked in between the two, Cora’s iPad being switched around to the dominant pair (without her consent, thank you very much), effectively stopping the two beta’s spout. Scott scoffed shortly after watching the live news on the device, handing it over to Derek. “Don’t worry about it, Lydia. This has nothing to do with us.”

Now, Peter was extremely shocked. Or maybe he shouldn’t be. Because this kind of behavior was consistent with the behavior o’ great Alpha McCall had been exhibiting so far: ignorant and self-centered.

If a possible apocalypse does not bother him, or at least slightly shake him from his spun-up reality, nothing will.

“You know, Scott.” The eldest stood up from his position leaning against the single seater couch Cora was tucked in, dusting his hands off. “Someday I hope you’ll learn to realize that not everything’s about you. That there is a greater good, and a greater purpose that you’re not involved in in any way.”

Peter didn’t stick around to hear Scott’s reply, because he was out the door and headed back to his apartment the next second. Breathing in the night breeze, Peter tilted his head upwards to the new moon. Complete darkness surrounding him on his way back.

The world may be burning on the other side of the planet, but here it was as serene and ‘peaceful’ as any other day. That made him laugh. Not because of shock, or constrained anger, or the hilariously dangerous comedic reveal of Scott and his pack’s stupidity yet again.
But due to the sheer irony.

Because what would the world be, if not one huge fucking irony.

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He awoke from his sleepless serenity. A silent ringing in his ears, a pulling force in his mind. His hands travelled in front of him, tracing the cover of the most treasured book. As his fingertips trailed the thick piece of bound papers, old with age and gifted with powerful knowledge, he set his mind to the task.

Footsteps sounded from the halls, louder and louder, until the owner finally reached him.

“It’s in New York.” The newcomer broke his silent environment. “We found it.”

Retreating his hands from the book, he adorned his infamous apparel, billowing as he walked out. “Indeed we have.”
Hello my lovely readers! Back at you with another long ass chapter (I think this is the longest chapter to date, with approximately 8,200 words). Oh, and I did say I would be updating every week and I did--I'm doing it! But, it might be even a day or two later or earlier than exactly a week so if you want to keep on track and stay updated, you can make your life easier instead of wasting your tabs by just simply clicking the subscribe button and an email notification will be sent straight to your email if there is an update~~ SO ANYWAYS!!!! I HOPE YOU ENJOY THIS ONE!!!! I love it when y'all theorize in the comment section, it is the cutest thing <3 Love y'all and thank you for reading, see you next week ;)
"Does our prisoner need—" Stiles wasn't sure if the caged prince upstairs required food, or much of anything really, so he stopped there. "Nevermind. I'll take these to Bruce and company him eat."

The Avengers opted not to reply him to dig into their food. If Stiles didn’t know any better, he’d have thought someone had been starving them—but he’s just come to terms with the fact that the Avengers all had greek statue bodies with an appetite of a hyena and an unfairly high metabolism process.

All he had was lack of pretty much everything ranging from grace and a fucking filter—and they said everybody was born equal.

So much for communism.

Balancing two plates on his arms, Stiles exited the elevator doors on floor 3, Bruce's lab. Barging in without a greeting, he placed the plate in front of the doctor who had his face stuck to a microscope.

"Any closer and I might have to operate that thing from you." Stiles took a seat at the stool surrounding the table and took a bite from his fish.

Bruce jerked back, unaware of his new companion. "Jesus, Stiles." He playfully glowered at the smile the younger boy shot him with. "I could’ve gone green on you, you know."

As expected, Stiles’ expression fell into one of alert as Bruce smiled somberly, rolling a chair to join him. Now that he’s thought about him, this is one of the rare moments when he could spend quality time with the doctor—usually it takes a mountain and a half to either pry Steve or Tony out of their personal time, and that’s only when they threaten them to see a dissection or anything as gory.

Save for Natasha, Bruce was the most rational and level-headed out of all of them. Smartest, too. And sue him, but he looks up more to Bruce than Tony—which was not as surprising but still as damaging to Tony’s ego since he has repeatedly and countlessly called him his ‘apprentice’ (for which he isn’t, period).

“Hey.” Stiles snapped from his thoughts to face the doctor calling him. “You okay?”

Scoffing, Stiles stuffed the flaky salmon into his mouth, rolling it around on his tongue. “That’s not an appropriately accurate question to ask in this stage.”

“I know you’re frustrated about—" Bruce stopped at the intense stare Stiles shot at him, daring him to list out all of his problems, so he smiled apologetically, “—everything.” Stiles mocked a salute with his fork at that save. "And I just wanted to let you know, that you’re not alone. I was in your position when I found out who had been living under our noses and none of us wants to stay here—"

“—But we have to.” Stiles finished his sentence with a smile too tight to be true. “I understand it, but it doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

Bruce frowned at that, noticing something he should’ve noticed earlier. “That’s not your biggest concern is it?” When he saw Stiles stop in his chewing, he knew he was right. “What Is it?”

Recalling back to anything that might’ve happened in the last three days, Bruce clicked. “Steve?”

“Excu—" Stiles gaped, blinking and unconsciously backing away from the man. “Wha—" He shook his head. “No—" Bruce leveled him with a pointed expression. “Ok. How the hell did you
do that?”

Bruce shrugged, swallowing another bite of potatoes. “When you’re surrounded by people who tell lies for a living, you learn a few things or two on detecting them.”

Mentally cursing out Clint and Natasha, Stiles grumbled around his straw. “They’re bad influence on you. I’m policing you from them now.”

“Are you bothered he went to your hometown without telling you?” Bruce continued to pressure him, and Stiles really didn’t know what to do—he hasn’t exactly anyone to spill all his troubles to. “Or is it the fact that he came back with something you weren’t ready for him to know.”

“Bruce.” Stiles tried to reason with him, because he really really wasn’t ready to talk about anything even remotely sounding like Bread-on Pills.

See, he can’t even say it.

Beak-Horn Kills.

Bacon Chills.

Pecan Eel.

Anyways, point made and settled. Moving on.

(Peak-O’Neals, no seriously, say that in one go, it’s the closest thing he’s got. Okay, now he’s stopping).

Lacking the energy to face Bruce’s thousand questions, Stiles gave up. “Okay, fine. I didn’t want anyone to know about my past because it isn’t exactly a pretty one.”

“Stiles.” Bruce pushed his plate aside, leaning forward as far as he can across the table. “Every single one of us has baggage from the past.”

“Mine’s different.” Stiles tried to argue, and maybe he was being selfish or inconsiderate—but his guilt and baggage were far from theirs, and he knew it. “All Steve said—that was true. And that’s not even the whole story.”

Bruce shook his head, grabbing Stiles hand because he felt that he was slipping away (and Stiles wouldn’t really argue about that). “Then tell us the whole story, because we won’t believe anyone’s word over yours.”

“I just want a fresh start, Bruce.” Stiles’ voice broke, clearing his throat afterwards. “I want to leave that behind, because if you knew—if anyone knew—you’d see me differently.”

Knowing when to give up, Bruce sat back in his seat. “And Steve?”

Busted. “What about Steve?”

Bruce rolled his eyes at him—a seriously shocking thing to be the target of because he’s usually not easily exasperated. “Do you really want me to spell it letter by letter, Stiles? Or do you still want to keep that dignity?”

Frowning in mock hurt (and maybe a slight shock because jesus, Bruce was savage). “Ok, Don Juan, lets not burn this little tiny heart of an elemental down to the ground, please and thank you.”

Inching backwards from Bruce’s heated investigative plot, Stiles redirected his gaze elsewhere.
“Steve is—“ Stiles stumbled over the words. “—Captain America.”

Blinking a few times to wait for Stiles’ continuation, Bruce nodded his head expressively. “And?”

“He’s, uh.” Biting his lips. “A great guy. Strong. Like very strong, those muscles are very very strong. How is that amount of mass even possi—” Noticing Bruce’s sly expression, Stiles literally had to bite his tongue to stop. “—he’s strong.”

Hiding his smile behind his glass of water, Bruce rolled his hands to keep him going.

“He’s a man.” Stiles added weight on each syllable as if it was a fact that nobody knew. “An honorable man.” Lingering on the last vowel, Stiles searched Bruce’s eyes in a lost cause. “With manly features and—“ He squinted his eyes, slowly nodding, “—quality?”

“Stiles.” Bruce’s tone was definite, shutting him up in one go. “You could be describing Tom Cruise, for all I know.”

“What can I say? They’re both fine men.” Stiles shrugged, knowing that he’s dug his own grave.

The good doctor knew that Stiles was evasive, but this was on a whole new level. Sighing, Bruce simply shook his head in disbelief. Bruce Banner is not a prying person, generally. But when it comes to people closest to him—that takes a dramatic turn, and he becomes sort of like a mother hen. Especially, if and only if, a problem was easily solved by simple actions that either parties involved in the trouble wasn’t willing to make.

Stiles could see Bruce’s gears working, and knowing his luck, if Bruce pushed even a millimeter more than what he did, Stiles would crack like Humpty Dumpty and his feelings will be outed like Moses parted the sea (just to be clear, Moses was Bruce and the sea was his veil and the ground was his feelings—Stiles loved metaphors and comparisons, he never said he was good at it, leave him be).

Luckily (which was almost never a possibility in his case), the monitor pinged—interrupting Bruce’s attempt at further continuing his interrogation. Stiles thanked his lucky stars (if it hasn’t burned out yet somewhere in some planet), and dashed to the monitor, assessing the alert.

“Bruce.” Stiles called him over, giving him the new data. “The Orb. It’s reacting even more.”

Frowning, Bruce tapped a button on his StarkPad, revealing the Orb sitting precariously in its casing. Inspecting closer, he wiped his glasses. “What is happening to you?”

“Have you no idea that you’ve resorted to blatantly asking the inanimate object of doom?” Stiles bit a comment from the tip of his tongue—he really has no self-restraint, forgive him.

Thankfully, Bruce was used to such tactics and instead focused at the constant alarming rise of the Orb’s signal wave. “It’s getting stronger—Stiles, its reacting, no, responding to something.”

The unsaid question was thrown up to the air: To what?

“Guys!” Clint barged into the lab, the automatic doors opening up to reveal the out-of-breath archer.

Clint only needed to point to the direction of the windows for Bruce and Stiles to run to the edge of the lab and peer outside. Stiles should have known. Really, he should’ve, because for one, he really has no fucking lucky stars—it exploded before he was even born, and two, he forgot one important thing:
New York wasn’t just the big apple and start of his new life; it was the biggest junction of supernatural kingdom.

And home to multiple packs of, yup, just his fucking luck.

Werewolves.

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“Why are all those people heading to our Tower?” Bruce planted his hands on the window, trying to get a closer look at the mass slowly approaching the tower.

Stiles didn’t stay to chat around over possibilities and theories, instead he ran straight out of the lab and into the elevators. Clint was the only one fast enough to catch the closing elevator doors, once again, out of breath. “Where are you going?”

“Get your bow.” Was the reply Stiles gave, without further explanation, and Clint knew him enough to follow his lead, letting go of the doors to let it close and sent Stiles down to the lobby.

Dashing out beyond the agents crowding to the doors, Stiles shouted at the top of his lungs. “Get back!” The agents looked towards him. “Everyone back!”

The agents filed back as he instructed, Stiles going to the front and out the doors. The moment he stepped out, it was as if the memories came rushing back in. Facing the red gleaming eyes of Alphas—yes, the ‘s’ was necessary, there were multiple alphas in front of him—and the lightning yellow and blue hues of betas and omegas, the shiver of thrill and horror went straight down his spine, into the darkest recess of his memories in Bleak Hon Frill (sorry, not sorry).

You know that phrase, ‘running from something might someday come back to bite you in the ass’, well in his situation, that’s more than just an idiom, because werewolves have very sharp teeth, and he’s hanging on to his hind just for safety.

Fuck me.

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Clint went up past the common floor and to the 12th floor, the locker and Quinjet station. Heading straight to his locker, the archer pulled his bow out and filled in his quiver with multiple kinds of arrows—not knowing what new kind of enemies they were to face.

“Clint?” Steve’s voice rang out behind him, echoing through the metal panels. The rest of the Avengers trailed in behind him. “What’s going on?”

“Get your gear.” The archer was busy strapping on his chest guard and suit.

Tony looked around, finding Bruce and Stiles absent. “Where are—“

“Bruce is in the lab, monitoring the situation.” Clint went to Natasha’s locker beside him and threw
her gun to her, who caught it with acute precision. “Stiles has gone downstairs to deal with said situation.”

Natasha strapped her gun into her holster without question, following Clint’s action.

Steve was as confused as he was first born. “Why are we suiting up?”

“I don’t know for sure, but Stiles thinks we need to.” Clint closed his cabinet of arrows, going past the rest of the Avengers still suiting up. “I’m going ahead.”

~~~

Stiles gathered his breath, stepping out into the sunlight and away from the shade of the tower. The werewolves stopped their walk in response to Stiles’ emergence. Scanning the crowd, Stiles saw one of the Alphas he was familiar with—the biggest head pack of the New York district—the Grimmwolf Pack.


Great. They weren’t responding, none of them were. What is with werewolves and their ability to brood so hard, their lips become permanently shut. Seriously. It’s a pain in the ass to deal with.

“State your purpose.” Stiles tried calling out once more, obviously to no avail.

Actually, no he did get a response in the form of a snarl and all of their fangs growling—not exactly what he wanted, but better than no response at all (barely), he guesses.

Stiles felt Clint’s presence behind him before he even spoke a word, and when Clint saw upfront the faces of the crowd, he drew his arrow in his bow on instinct. Stiles immediately brought his hands in front of Clint, blocking him.

“What is that?” The archer gritted out, handing Stiles his comms.

Putting the device on his ear, Stiles sighed. “Supernatural creatures of the night.”

Tony and Steve dropped down from above, the captain jumping off from Tony’s hold and down next to Stiles, Natasha following shortly after. Steve nearly had the urge to take his mask off to get a closer look. “Thor’s guarding our prisoner.”

Stiles nodded. “I’m glad he’s not here.”

“I am deeply offended by that, young spark.” Thor’s voice sounded from his comms.

“Sorry, princess, we don’t need your or Bruce’s destructive power this time.”

And it was true, because destructive power will cause a war with the werewolf pack of New York and Stiles would really really want to avoid that—if not for the sheer nature of exhaustion he has dealing with werewolves.

Venturing forward, slowly, Stiles held his hands up and bent his neck just slightly—enough to signal to the Alpha’s instinct that he was not an enemy. “Luke. It’s me.”
Steve frowned at the familiarity. “You know him?”

Ignoring the captain, Stiles kept his slow pace. “Can you hear me?”

It was as if the werewolf couldn’t hear him, and wolves are known for their extreme hyper-awareness, especially their hearing. Something was wrong—a staple in everything these days, it’s basically a norm now.

Stiles frowned, tilting his head even more. “Lucas?” Finally, he stood close enough to notice his eyes—the intimidating red glow of an Alpha’s eyes was one that he was familiar with, however, this one had a purplish dark hue around the electric red.

He’s seen this before.

With the McCall-Hale pack, back in the creek—the Orb.

Right. The Orb! It was responding due to the werewolves. Stiles wasn’t really sure of the connection, but if he remembered correctly, the Orb and the wolves were responding to each other.

“Bruce.” He called into his comms.

The static in his ears acted up a little before Bruce’s voice transferred. “Yes?”

“Check on the Orb.”

Without question, Bruce brought the case back up from its storage, noticing the activity within the sphere. “It’s storming—swirling, Stiles it’s getting stronger than before.”

“Bruce.” Stiles felt that nerve in his stomach unravelling as he saw the werewolves all collectively flashing their claws and sharp canines at him, the commoners and jay-walkers all stopping to look at the spectacle. “I need you to contain it.”

“What?”

“Just find something that will block out the signal waves!” Stiles monitored the public reaction, all of their phones out instead of running for their lives—why the hell has this become human nature. Stop taking videos and just fucking run. “Bruce, do it now!”

Tony and Steve were as guarded as Stiles now, having been the closest behind him and seeing the full effect of the creatures transforming.

From his peripheral vision, he could see a young couple coming closer to the back of the crowd of wolves, hands outstretched holding their phones. Those fucking idiots. And when he thought they couldn’t get any dumber, as Stiles slowly round the circumference of the wolves, the Avengers taking most of their attention as they’re assumably the ‘dominant Alpha’ figure—

Which excuse them, Stiles was not lanky, at least not anymore—he’s lean. And he’s more mature than most of them (honestly, just Clint and Tony). Why can’t he be considered as the Alpha figure, c’mon. (“I can be manly” “Pft” “Got something to say, Tony?” “You’re real cute.”)

—in the wolves’ perception, he saw a the couple turn on their flash and take a loud-sounding bright picture.

The werewolf closest to them turned around, flashing its blue beta eyes, growling at the disturbance. That’s when the rest of the werewolves snapped from their state of silence and transformed into
their furry states.

“Stiles!” Tony alerted from behind him, voice clearly shocked by fear.

Stiles simply ran towards the couple, bringing up a barrier by controlling the air particles around him, just in time as the wolf attempted to claw their heads off with a loud growl. “Run!” He shouted to the couple, the resulting shout causing a chaos throughout the streets of New York.

Tony aimed his repulsers and flew up into the air, unsure of where to fire. Clint climbed the roof of a car, bow and arrow nocked. Natasha and Steve were the only ones who stood in their positions, unmoving.

When Clint was about to shoot the Alpha closest to him, Stiles sent out a barrier holding the man down. “What the hell, Stiles?”

“Don’t aim for the heart or head!” Stiles warned the team, the expressions on their faces doubtful. Even thought Stiles knew it wouldn't kill them, he still had to take precautions. “I know, but don’t shoot to kill, they’re being controlled!”

“How do you know that?” Tony flew in front of the running civilians, blasting his repulser out to the running wolves, aiming at their limbs.

Stiles casted out a huge wave of condensed air forward, knocking the werewolves back from junction of the road on his side. “They’re werewolves.”

Steve snapped out from his trance, running to the other side of the T-junction road, opposite of Stiles. Throwing out his shield at the farthest werewolf, he kicked the one coming behind him in the chest before dropping down in front of the mass. “Werewolves? They exist?”

“Very much, yes.” Stiles swooped down to pick a child off the road, using his earth powers to make the ground under him push him up to the sky, traveling a distance until he could drop the kid down safely before doing the same back to the front lines. “And if you kill any of their members, or an Alpha, for god’s sake, they won’t stop coming for blood.”

Natasha switched her bullets to dendrotoxin bullets, shooting one straight to the Alpha in front of her. Watching the bullet take no effect, she emptied the entire magazine to no avail. “They won’t go down, Stiles!”

“Bruce!” Stiles shouted into his comms, dropping a slide kick to intervene with the Alpha trying to burst its way to the Tower. Stiles rolled with the Alpha, straddling him when they came to a stop. *Doesn’t this look familiar. No. Stop. Stiles! Focus! “Anytime soon!”*

Bruce nearly dropped the StarkPad he was holding, changing the specs of the case from inside the lab. He was already nervous from the sounds of growling and screaming over his comms, he could not afford to break anything that will hinder the progress. “I’m trying! I need to get the right blocking frequency! I think I’ve almost got it!”

“Can you get it faster!” Tony grunted with the weight of three werewolves latching onto his thrusters, dragging him down as he tries to fly. Spinning around to lose their grip on him, Tony ramped his thrusters to full, the wolves burning at the heat before successfully letting go.

Stiles cursed at himself for not bringing his mountain ash with him, having been thrown off from the Alpha and landed harshly on top of a car. This was going to get ugly if it doesn’t end soon—the constant aggression that the Avengers was pushing onto them will not result in sunshines or daisies. Someone was going to get hurt.
Well, he spoke too soon, because the minute he looked over, the police were lining up and barricading the area with their guns up and aimed at the wolves. Feeling his breath hitch at the familiar police uniforms, he stopped for a second. "Oh fuck no."

Tony grabbed Steve from his position and flew him over to the police barricade. "We’ll take care of the law enforcement. Stiles, just fix this."

Nodding absentmindedly, Stiles stumbled back to stand in front of the Tower—the wolves were attracted to the tower, probably trying to get closer to the orb. Which was probably the best compromise he can take right now—rather than having them attack the bystanders instead.

"Lucas!" Stiles grabbed the approaching Alpha, trying to make eye contact. "Please snap out of it!"

All he got was a growl in return. And something about straight up growling in his face really affected Stiles (see; Post Traumatic Stress from Werewolf Disorder), and Stiles was a man who ran on instincts and not much thought in actions—thus probably why he decided to punch the Alpha werewolf.

"Bloody hell!" Wringing his bruised knuckles because those jaws were hard as fuck, Stiles looked up to see Luke flashing his red eyes at him before he could feel the clawed hands holding him up and throwing him across the street.

"Stiles!" Steve shouted out in horror, watching the boy fly up at such speed and hit the ground with a deafening thud.

The fall brought a wave of pain through Stiles’ body, his bones ringing from the impact. Okay. Yeah. He’s done for the day. Stiles just laid there, staring up at the sky—waiting in hopes that Bruce will finish before he gets mauled to death.

But obviously, his luck wasn’t as lucky—it should not have a misleading name such as ‘luck’; no, an appropriate name would be ‘curse’. Because as soon as he blinked, there was drool dripping on the side of his shoulder, a full-out transformed werewolf on top of him. "Lucas. I don’t want to hurt you."

The ferocious growling went on, the Alpha digging his claws to Stiles’ side causing him to bite his lip from the piercing pain, although familiar to him. "Luke!"

Just as Stiles was about to unholster his gun—always equipped with silver bullets—a miracle in the form of Bruce Banner shone upon him.

"I did it!" His voice crackled in Stiles’ ear like a hymn in the heaven’s light (the piercing glare of the sun). "I think, I’m not sure."

The grip on his sides lessened in pain, the claws retreating back into its respective positions (out of Stiles’ meat, thank you). The red hard unblinking eyes were now responding to the outside world, the purple hue disappearing from his eyes.

Bursting out a short laughter, Stiles nodded rapidly, his head slumped down to the ground once more. "Yes! You did it!"

Collectively, the rest of the werewolves regained their human form, blinking into their consciousness, lost and confused. Lucas Grimmwolf blinked to the sight of one Stiles Stilinski under him, and further away, one Steve Roger was gripping the arm of a werewolf he was helping to stand a little bit too hard, and next to him, one werewolf experienced a broken wrist. It’s as full
as a circle of life will ever be. Bravo, bravo.


Stiles placed his arms against the Alpha’s chest, trying to push him away. “Let’s just get up and off the injured and fragile boy before we begin any questioning.”

Reluctantly, Luke began moving away and up from Stiles. And that’s when he noticed the red dot traveling up the wolf’s stomach to his chest.

*Sniper.*

“Get Down!” Stiles pushed and rolled the Alpha over, feeling a searing pain on his shoulder. “Fuck! Tony!”

The man didn’t have to be told what to do, flying across the direction of the bullet and taking down the sniper with his repulsor. “Kid, are you alright?”

Stiles gripped his shoulder, gasping at the red hot flashing throb from the site of injury. “I’ll live.” He bit out, looking down to the Alpha now currently under him. “Luke?”

When he didn’t respond, Stiles scanned his body and saw the bullet. *There were two shots.* The bullet was embedded in his arm, not anywhere near a location that might actually harm him—so why wasn’t he waking u—

Stiles gasped in pain, slumping down on the Alpha unexpectedly, both hands now gripping his shoulder. The throbbing intensified, something hot and sizzling traveling in his bloodstream. The shooter was a hunter. “Wolfsbane.”

Wolfsbane wasn’t poisonous to sparks, not in the least bit. Actually, if used right, it could become a beneficial herb. However, sparks have a distinctive ability to detect harmful substances in their body without being affected by it (unless you count the searing pain, then yes, aside from that). That’s probably why they were often sought out for back centuries ago, when supernatural slavery was in practice. They were often used as a food-tester or experimental subject, detecting or taking in huge amounts of destructive materials or poison until eventually their bodies give out.

A dark history that caused the near extinction of sparks, which was what made them so rare.

The next thing he knew, he was being lifted up, one hand supporting his back and the other underneath his knees, and into the warm arms of Steve Rogers, head resting on his chest. “Wha—”

“We need to get you to Banner.” The Captain inspected the bullet wound, grimacing in his handsome features.

“Take him too.” Stiles breathed through the words, subtly nodding to the unresponsive Alpha. “He’ll die if I don’t help him.”

Steve frowned at Stiles’ adamant tendency to save the werewolf who he got shot for, but agreed to the boy’s request anyways. Clint supported the fallen Alpha with his shoulder, careful of the wound, before carrying him back into the Avenger’s Tower—leaving Tony and Natasha behind to handle the clean-up with the authorities.

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“Clint.” Stiles called out to the man even though he couldn’t see him. “Can you go to my room and take a dark wooden chest at the bottom of my closet.”

Clint spared a look of confusion to Steve’s direction, but left the injured Alpha on an empty counter in Bruce’s medical lab before leaving to follow Stiles’ directions. Bruce came in just as Clint came out, rushing from his research lab to the med lab. “What—?”

“Werewolves.” Steve short-handed the answer. “Stiles got shot, the werewolf got shot. Now we need to save them both.”

Bruce frowned in confusion but learned to just go with the flow (as is always the matter with things involving the Avengers), moving to check on Stiles, only to have the boy shake his head at him and point towards the man on the counter. “Check him first, the bullet’s still inside.”

The good doctor wasted no time to prepare the scalpel and forceps. Making a move to grab the disinfectant, Bruce was unexpectedly stopped by Stiles’ voice. “You don’t need that, just get the bullet out.”

With exercised precision, Dr. Banner made an incision and used the forceps to pull the bullet out, letting it drop to the metal dish. “Now what?”

Clint barged into the lab, a large wooden oak chest in his arms. “I got it!”

Stiles made a move to reach the Alpha on the table but realized he can’t because—right, he was still in the carry of Captain America. Which, by the way, holy motherfucking bongos, Captain America is carrying him and he’s still in it. Hiding his rushing blood to his face, Stiles signaled the blonde to put him down. “Thanks.” He mumbled before rushing off to the counter.

Unlocking his chest, Stiles knew exactly which wolfsbane to take—having noticed the kind of aconite that was flowing in his blood. He spread the powder on a petri dish, conjured a flame in his palms and proceeded to burn the herb.

The Avengers watched in fascination as the flames turned various shades of blue and green before burning out. Without wasting time, Stiles breathed out. “Hold him down.”

“Hold him down?” Bruce fixed his glasses. “Stiles, he’s unconscious.”

“Oh, you’re gonna want to hold him down. Unless you want to explain why the med lab needs yet another reparation.” Stiles knew that was a low blow because the last damage cause by fighting the Onis weren’t even fully repaired yet.

Steve, Bruce and Clint held the unconscious man down while Stiles wobbled his way over to the Alpha’s side. “Sorry, buddy.”

In the instant that the burnt monkshood from the petri dish made contact with the open wound, the Alpha’s eyes snapped open, his werewolf transformation triggered into full swing, knocking the three Avengers off their balance and grip. Stiles felt the shallow scratch of a flying Alpha clawed hands across his chest in his attempt of restraining the rampaging werewolf. “Hold him!”

The Avengers immediately went back to their previous positions with horror stricken expression in their faces at a) the hideously animalistic behavior that the Alpha was presenting, exaggerated by the sprouting of hair, fangs, claws and the mysterious disappearance of eyebrows (Seriously, not even joking, where the fuck do they go? Someone please tell him before he miserably dies a death
unknowning of that cursed question’s answer that has been plaguing the bane of his existence) and b) the howling shouts of pain coming from said raging beast.

It was over soon after it started, like most terrifying experiences without much explanation. The Alpha was back in his unconscious state, body slowly healing from the effects of wolfsbane. And now, Stiles would have to face the one reality he knew was going to bite him in the ass (hah) one day; explaining this whole unnecessary package of shit.

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“So.” Tony loudly clapped as he entered the med lab, as if it was somewhat necessary to announce his presence with such a gesture. “The werewolves have gone back to their habitat, wherever that actually is. Save for a ‘beta’ called Rebecca, who adamantly refuses to leave her ‘Alpha’s’ side.”

Natasha filed into the room after him with a much more somber expression and an infinitely more enjoyable tone. “Thor’s paranoid to leave Loki’s cell in case he tries something.”

Stiles stood, leaning against the counter with his hands cradling his own waist, watching Bruce prepare another set of medical supplies to treat him. Steve grabbed the tray from Bruce, telling the doctor to keep an eye on their ‘patient’.

“Stiles.” Stark directed his sarcastically demanding voice on him. “We have a few questions—no, I, personally, have about a hundred and then some questions to ask but let’s just settle for the general ones.”

“Like how you knew how to treat a werewolf and why you have a chest full of whatever the hell that was.” Clint crossed his arms, mimicking Tony’s pose.

Oh boy. Here it goes. Why can’t he just rest and have a good night’s sleep after an exhausting day at work like normal people do?

(Because calling a day controlling one ‘werewolf rave party in the middle of New York streets induced by a hypnotizing drug called the Orb’ does not constitute as ‘normal people work load’, and the fact that his mind rationalizes the event as a ‘rave party’ is a whole separate—although not unrelated—problem of its own).

But on a side note, he does feel particularly sleepy. Or that’s just the blood loss talking.

As soon as he felt his head sway to the side, Steve caught him before he could fall completely and embarrassingly to the ground. Having worn a red hoodie, Stiles’ bloody injuries weren’t visible—which was a good thing because he really didn’t want to fuss about it, until Steve took more notice into it and found that it was damp with blood.

“Stiles!” Cap looked at his hands which were now thinly covered with blood. “Why didn’t you tell us?!”

Before he had a chance to reply, Steve placed both his hands underneath his thighs—just shy of his hind, which was a close enough fucking encounter for his heart to literally jump out his tiny man-capacity chest—and scooped him up to the counter.

Okay, stop. Hold on. Is it that easy to carry an adult man, or is it just him? Is he somehow
phenomenally light as a fucking invisible feather because he has been carried, thrown, lifted, dragged and swung around by a number of people that is far too large for that category. And that last one was even by a man whose size was similar to himself, or even smaller in height if he was being extra salty (Sorry, not sorry, Parker).

Granted, the people he’s been surrounded with are all ridiculously strong and enhanced, so—he’s not going to answer that question in regards to his own self-preservation and dignity.

He is, after all, contrary to popular belief, a fully-grown man.

Yes, a fully grown man. One that was being stripped down by Captain America. Uhuh, Stiles jumped at Steve’s hands that was holding the zipper of his red hoodie. “What are you doing.”

Leveling a frowning straight-forward disappointed look—or in other words, a normal reaction—Steve gripped the zipper even tighter. “We need to treat you, Stiles.”

“I can do it by myse—“ Stiles tried to struggle with the strong pull of Steve’s hands but let’s be real, Stiles is not even 1% as strong as Steve was, maybe 0.1% or not even then. So, Steve successfully zipped down the hoodie, revealing Stiles’ naked upper torso for the first time.

And here’s the thing. Stiles does not like being naked. No. Not even in bed. He tries to cover almost everything up. Even in bed, in which case, he utilizes a god’s gift—blankets. But being naked in public? Where he can avoid it, like beaches and swimming pools? Absolutely not. And the reason for that ranges from a lot of things such as body confidence or lack thereof, envy and an appropriate sense of embarrassment.

But probably the most important reason was why everyone started gaping at the sight of his open torso.

“Oh my god.” Natasha gasped, instinctively inching closer to him. “Stiles.”

Here, you can photoshop a spectacular six-pack abs on him or spray a fake tan all you want, but it still wouldn’t hide the ugly jarred markings all over his body.

Stiles didn’t respond to the wordless questions evident in everyone’s eyes and instead pulled the lapel of his hoodie over his body, attempting to move to the edge of the counter and off to the ground. Steve, however, stood in the way—literally, he means—by standing between the space of his legs before he could get off the counter, holding him back with his hands on his waist as an extra measure.

In other circumstances, like in any other fucking time, say a volcano eruption or another news outbreak of economic recession, Stiles would spontaneously combust—and he has a fire element so that actually is a probable possibility.

But now, all he felt was fear and maybe a tad bit of a fire burning uncomfortable in the pits of his stomach.

Steve grabbed both sides of his hoodie and rid it off Stiles’ body, taking a minute to take the sight of all of the scars that littered the boy’s body—feeling a rage grow inside him that was similar to everyone else’s: he’s just a kid.

The Avengers knew that Stiles is a legal adult, but judging by the healing over the scars and the color of the new skin, they could tell that he must’ve gotten it over his time in his adolescence.

Without saying a word, Steve simply pulled the medical tray closer and started to disinfect and
wrap all his new wounds. “The bullet went clean through.”

The mere minutes it took for Steve to treat him, with extreme precaution and a touch so gentle that even Dwayne ‘the Rock’ Johnson would blush, the Avengers spent a rare moment of silence, respecting Stiles’ privacy to not talk.

And thankfully (or not, really, he hasn’t decided), he didn’t have to.

Because someone else did.

“He was a part of a pack.” A foreign voice interrupted their silence, all the heads collectively turning to seek it. Luke pulled himself up into a sitting position. “That’s how he knew how to treat me and how he knows me.”

Tony frowned. “A werewolf pack?”

“The Hale Pack of Beacon Hills.” Luke grimaced at his wound, hand coming up to touch it. “Sorry, McCall-Hale Pack is it?”

Stiles ignored his question, choosing to find that staring at the ground was infinitely more fascinating.

“Which is how he got all those scars, too.”


Wincing apologetically, Luke dropped down from his counter, grabbing his abandoned leather jacket at the side of the table. “Sorry. But they just look so pathetically curious, I simply had to.”

Clint sneered at the Alpha, unappreciative of his sense of offensive snark. “You know, we could’ve killed you.”

“Oh, that’s a problem.” The black haired tanned werewolf smirked, unafraid of a challenge. “Isn’t it, Stiles?”

The audience turned to him, Stiles sighing at being under the interrogation spotlight, once more. “Lucas Grimmwolf is the Alpha of the New York local pack. Although there are a lot of packs in this area, and all through out the country, he’s the biggest authority figure there is—like the Alphas of Alphas. His pack represents America and is a part of the Wolf Council consisting of representative Alphas from all different regions.”

“So?” Tony tried to make the information out to be irrelevant even though he could kind of see the point.

“So,” Stiles retorted back with the attitude a fifth-grade teacher would take on to their increasingly annoying and self-righteous students (its the age development, everybody goes through it), “diplomatically speaking, if he dies—we’re looking at a supernatural war against humans. Werewolves are the most dominant force of the supernatural world—their numbers increase a lot easier than any other creatures and they have less restrictions unlike vampires or gargoyles that can only operate at nightfall.”

“You’re painting a rather heroic picture of me, Stiles.” Luke shrugged his jacket on—which, by the way, what is it with them and their leather obsession, honestly, can they be anymore generic—stuffing his hands into the pockets. “Your pack is quite a legend; defeating the Alpha pack and led by a true Alpha.”
Stiles chose not to comment on that because he does not want to correct any statement nor does he want to get into the whole ‘true alpha’ debate with particularly anyone because it’s exhausting and pointless.

“Your second is waiting downstairs.” Was the short reply (if it even constitutes as one, being so irrelevant from the topic) Stiles chose to give. “I’ll call you later to discuss what just happened at length.”

Luke nodded to the information, heading straight out the doors before stopping and turning back. “Stiles.” The spark looked up at his beckon, finding the Alpha rather timid. “Thank you.”

Not knowing how to accept the gratitude, he simply nodded. But Luke didn’t leave. “What is it?”

“I’m only telling you this because I trust you.” Grimmwolf ran a hand through his air. “The supernatural world is in chaos. The recent disasters is messing with everyone’s nature of habit. There’s also been an increase in the amount of rogue omegas.”

Even though Stiles expected for the worst since the three Nemetons were now gone, he still had the capacity to be shocked because this was troubling despite of expectancy. “I know.”

Luke didn’t look to sure about Stiles’ response but shook his head. “Oh, and whatever the hell was affecting all of us?” Now Stiles’ interest was piqued, and so was Bruce’s. “It felt familiar. We’re drawn to it, but not by a hypnotizing affect. It’s more of a magnetizing presence. It felt like—”

Stiles and Bruce looked at each other, still as puzzled by the Orb even though they were getting first hand information. Because truly, none of it makes any sense.

“—coming home.”

After they’ve all retreated into their own personal chambers and freshened up, the Avengers met back in the common floor with the exception of Thor—who still insists on staying in his brother’s cell due to paranoia. Of course, Stiles just sat in the couch of the common floor because his shoulders zapped him with pain at every movement and his whole body felt like a million tonne worth of iron, heavy and numb.

Bruce had made the case for the Orb more mobile, now being able to carry it around in his hands. He chose to place the damming object on the table in front of Stiles.

The rest of the Avengers all settled down in their respective seats all over the place, silence hanging around the room like a noose slowly tightening over their necks.

“Obviously,” Tony—as always—starts. “We have a lot to talk about.”

Steve, being unable to hold back his patience anymore, turned to his side to face Stiles on the couch. “Your friends, those who I met back in Beacon Hills.” Stiles barely managed to hold back a grimace at the wording. “Are they all werewolves?”

“Most.” He sighed, knowing that it was futile to dodge any questions with all the full power of the Avengers daunting at him.
“And they were your pack?” Natasha continued.

Nodding side to side in lack of energy, Stiles grunted out a long, “Yes.”

“Is that why you left?” Steve asked in a tone that was too soft in contrast to his previous question, the underlying continuation of that question being ‘—on a bad note’ evident to everyone in the room.

“Yes and no.” Stiles contradicted himself, moving from his slumped position against the head of the couch to balancing his uninjured arm’s elbow on his knee, leaning forward. “It’s a part of why I chose to leave to New York. But there were also circumstances leading up to my break from the pack, one that left a lot of hostility in its wake.”

Stiles stood up with much difficulty, grabbing the Orb with his fine arm, moving away from the crowd. “What do we do about this?”

The silence that came back clearly indicated that they all still had a bucketful of questions, but Stiles walked away from it, literally and symbolically.

“There’s nothing.” Bruce decided to take pity on Stiles, even though he too had his own questions to ask. “I’ve been working my head around it but it is so foreign to me that I don’t even know what I’m looking for, let alone find it.”

“Well, it wouldn’t be as easy as receiving a book of answers right at our doorsteps, so let’s go over it again tonight.” Stiles stopped in his pacing, now a distance away from the couch.

See, one thing that Stiles absolutely abhors comes in the annoying form of enigmas. And the biggest enigma currently facing him was his own damn luck. He really wasn’t sure if he had bad luck—by all the ridiculous shit that has been happening in his life—or good luck—by the mere fact that he’s still fucking alive for god knows what reason when all of those ridiculous shit has been happening in his life—but he never really could make a decision, and if he did, on most occasions, it would be closer to ‘bad’ than ‘good’.

Typical, but understandable.

So when a spark lit up in the room, a few meters in front of Stiles, his immediate thought was ‘Oh no’. Because anything, and he means anything, that happens without foresight or explanation in Stiles’ life almost always ends up in a compromising situation.

At the same time it was a ‘Oh thank god’, because now the Avengers would have to stop asking him about his past to deal with—well, whatever the hell this was.

Unsurprisingly, Oh no, it fucking was, because the spark continued, drawing out a circle in front of him, and when he looked back, oh looky here, there was another one too! If it weren't his life he’s experiencing this through, it would be a relatively beautiful sight—it looked like the hybrid of firework sprinkles and fire dancing loops.

But this was a Stilinski experience.

The circle of sparks kept turning as a vision materialized what looked like a museum. And out from the portal, came a man with—honest to God—a billowing red cape, exquisitely styled facial hair, and an accent so deep and somewhat impossibly sexy (he is aware of the inappropriateness of the situation, but a fact is a fact, he can’t deny that) that his knees was going to keel over.

“There you are.”
Stiles blinked, looking back and around himself, finding no other being near the proximity of the angle of the gaze the stranger was somehow directing at. “Uh, who are you?”

He didn’t get an answer to that, but he did get—yes, you guessed it—yet again, swept away the man walking towards him in a determined move, grabbing him across the waist and carried him through the other portal.

The circle of sparks disappeared as soon as the intruder and Stiles (although unwillingly) passed through it, and the silence returned as if nothing just happened.

None of them could move because well, for one, it happened so fast it was up and over in less than 10 seconds, and two, frankly, none of them could comprehend what the actual fuck just happened.
A Strange Encounter

Chapter Notes

Hello~ Hello~ Hello~ I know, it's a kind of late, but I'm back with an update :) I am so excited to see the plot progress, and I can't wait to update the next chapter because it is by far, my favourite chapter to date (I'm currently writing it). So! In the last chapter, I had a very interesting comment thread and have decided a new change. I'm officially announcing the need for a beta reader! Because I'm aware of the grammar mistakes, but when I started this I was busy as fuck and now I'm busy with other things--so I couldn't really beta my own chapters, and I was rushing to write them because of the update deadline pressure, thus why the mistakes were made. I'm also fully aware that I make grammar tense mistakes, but that's something that I've come to terms with because I have no idea when I'm writing this--either it's at the end of everything and I'm just retelling the events or if I'm following along the timeline as it happens. Also the point of view change makes the diction choices very hard to discern--and I've received two comments pointing the grammar mistakes, which I absolutely love you for reminding me that it is a problem. Those comments made me realize that it isn't fair for me to just let these mistakes be, because it affects the readers (you guys~) too, and I'm so sorry T^T.

To reiterate: I'm looking for a beta reader who has an English proficiency, including grammar. I honestly don't know how this works, but I guess if you're interested and you know grammar or have beta'd for other people in the past, please let me know in the comments below :)

[or do I like...apply for a beta, how do I do it, what do I do, I don't know too :::')]]]

(my wisdom teeth is growing, my mouth is in growing pains, need to go to the dentist, so I'm gonna need a little over a week to update the next one too, I'm sorry)

Oh, and I'm trying to make the elements of this story as canon as possible to the Marvel Universe, except for the apocalypse part--so yeah, can you guess which parts of this story, events or reveals, are Marvel Universe canon??

Once again, I absolutely love you guys! Love your comments the most <3 and your kudos the most <3 and you the MOST MOST <3 Hope you enjoy this one ;)

It was like walking through a door.

Just pass the threshold and voila, a different place. Stiles never really thought about the convenience of doors, but damn, they really are convenient. They can be barriers against your parents when you do less than appropriate things in your ‘personal time’, for which case a lock would prove to be very useful.

But in this case, that door he was referring to was not at all a door, instead it was a portal.

A portal.
He’s been through teleportation—a very nauseating process even though extremely convenient—but a fucking portal?

And lets not forget about the fact that he was still in a side-fireman carry from the mysterious stranger.

He was let down from the carry before he even had to say anything and then he heard the perpetrator ask, “Are you alright?”

Stiles could literally hear his patience snap, even though he didn’t have much in the first place, “Alright?” He scoffed. “Uh, I was just carried and teleported out of the safety of my home to—“

Stiles looked towards a window, pointing at it vehemently, “—London? You brought me to London?”

The man seemed unfazed by his outburst, maintaining a straight face throughout Stiles’ spout. That’s when he realized that the man had eccentrically trimmed facial hair—maybe not the best time to notice these things but he’s in panic, he overanalyzes things when he panics, it’s a coping mechanism, let him analyze.

Clearing his throat, the man spoke out once more. “My name is Dr. Strange. And I’ve brought you—“

“Wait. Hold up.” Stiles pulled his hand in front of him, palms flattened out and towards the man. “Your name is Dr. Strange?”

Frowning, the man seemed to straighten his posture. “Dr. Stephen Strange.”

See, Stiles really doesn’t know etiquette, and apparently Dr. Strange didn’t know that, so he was really not expecting Stiles to burst out laughing in the middle of this situation. But, to Stiles’ defense, the laughter was an obvious reaction.

“Oh man.” Stiles wheezed. “Wow, hah! Finally! Someone with a name more ridiculous than mine!”

Rolling his eyes, Stephen let his cloak fly out and slap Stiles on the back of his head. Stiles nearly fell smack straight to the ground on his face if not for the cloak’s indecisive decision to save him from the embarrassing scene, wrapping itself around Stiles and dragging him right to its owner.

The proximity of Dr. Strange’s face to Stiles was so uncomfortable that Stiles had to pull his neck back, uncomfortably, mumbling. “I’m sorry.”

“I’ve brought you here—“ Dr. Strange wasn’t amused by Stiles antics, continuing where he left off.

But wait, again. Hold up. “Kidnap. You didn’t bring me here. You kidnapped me.” Stiles resumed his normal neck position, staring down (although he’s aware that the man was taller than him) at him. “You do realize that’s a crime, right?”

“Brought you here.” Stephen stressed out his syllables, mimicking Stiles. “Because of the object in your hands.”

Now that shut Stiles up. He looked down on his fist, opening up to reveal the Orb still in his grasp. Looking back to Stephen, Stiles instinctively held it closer to him. “What do you want with it?”

“I need it to track something.” Dr. Strange confessed, still slightly glaring at Stiles—which was
uncalled for. Seriously, what is his problem? If anyone’s pissed, it should be him and not this unqualified criminal doctor.

Stiles stuffed the Orb into the pockets of his pants, crossing his arms despite the resistance from the cloak. “Track what?”

Stephen narrowed his eyes at Stiles, who was childish enough to glare right back at him. “It’s none of your business.”

“Oh, no.” Stiles snapped his fingers directly at Stephen’s eyes, making the man blink uncontrollably in surprise. “No, mister. You kidnapped me all the way from New York not to tell me that it’s none of my business. I’ll consider giving you this Orb and not press charges, only if you tell me everything you know about it.”

The cloak’s hold on him seemed to loosen up, and Stiles knew his bargain was working. So he pushed it—just a little bit more. “Come on, as two individuals cursed with peculiar names, we need band together and be honest with each other. Mutual support.”

Smiling cheekily at his kidnapper (which is something you should be advised not to do, parental advisory, please do not try this at home), Stiles added an extra finger poke at the man’s chest just for fun.

Stephen, in return—or the cloak, because Stiles has a weird feeling this dicky apparel was indeed sentient—let the cloak release him so suddenly that Stiles lost his balance and fell down on his back.

“Is that a yes?” Stiles called out after the retreating back of Stephen Strange.

The cloak was now hovering on its own, looking down on Stiles as if it was mocking him—and it probably was.

“A maybe?” Stiles shouted again.

The answer was: yes. And he knew that because the cloak latched on to his foot and proceeded to drag him—mind you, he was still on the floor—in an effort to follow its owner. Was he pissed off? Of course he fucking was, what kind of a question was that, he was kidnapped and now he’s basically a human mop, he’s furious.

Was he cursing at a levitating cloak in the middle of a museum (?) in London and grabbing everything in his way to maybe hinder the pull of the grab and ended up breaking a lot of things?

If the answer to that wasn’t obvious enough, then clearly you haven’t met the man.

(Yes, yes he did. And he was proud of it).

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Tony sensed that the orange spark appearing in the middle of the Avengers common floor wouldn't result in any good, thus why he activated his emergency suit, clicking on the belt he wore.

The wall next to the kitchen opened up and the Iron Man suit attached itself to Tony, piece by
piece, while the rest of the Avengers were shocked by the sudden entrance of the red-caped intruder from the portal.

As predicted, the intruder resulted in a disastrous outcome of the kidnap of one Stiles Stilinski from their very own home. The repulser on his arm just barely attached itself to Tony but it was a second too late, because the portal had already closed before the blast even went off.

"Stiles!" Steve jumped over the back of the couch, running to where Stiles was. He looked around in a diameter before turning back. "What the hell just happened?"

Natasha blinked to take in the uncannily fast execution of the kidnapping, thinking quickly to shake Bruce from his trance next to her. "Can you track them?"

"Wha-uh." Bruce shook his head, looking back at Natasha with pure confusion in his eyes. "How?"

"Check for irregularities anywhere in any spectrum!" The woman leapt from her position at the stool to the access panel near where Steve stood. "Tony!"

Tony flew the distance to her, his suit retracting from his hands, allowing him to access the panel with his code—projecting a holographic screen and keyboards. His eyes flitted from screen to screen, datas and graphs monitoring different waves of spectrum and radars filled the screen. His hands flew from key to key, his commands and inputs altering the search. "There's nothing!"

"What do you mean 'nothing'?" Natasha raged out at Tony, unable to deal with the bundle of emotions she's experiencing at the moment. "Teleportation doesn't just happen without massive amounts of energy, Tony. There must be something."

Slamming his hands on the counter, the mechanic looked back at the woman. "There are no irregularities, Tasha!" Combing through his hair, Tony huffed. "I'm not saying you're wrong—there definitely has to be an energy wave of some kind."

Natasha backed away from Tony's sudden use of her rare nickname. "What are you saying?"

"The energy wave—it's not in any of our spectrum ranges." Tony sighed, pissed off at the limits of their technology. "We can't see it, nor record it. Which means—"

"We can't track him." Steve balled his fists, closing his eyes in frustration, storming off away from the team. "Damn it!"

Bruce took off his glasses and held it in his hand precariously. He approached their captain with a calm exterior, even though he himself was a nervous wreck. "Steve." Managing to catch his attention, Bruce placed a hand on his shoulder. "Everyone's worried for him, but we need to stay calm or else we won't get anything done."

Steve looked around the room and found that they, too, were in as much distraught as he was. If Stiles was here, he would've been slapped for his reckless attitude. Huffing a small smile for that thought, Steve took a deep breath and centered himself. "Thanks, Bruce."

Banner nodded to the gratitude. "Besides, it's Stiles." Even he didn't sound as convincing as he thought he would. "He'll be fine."
Stiles’ first impression of Stephen Strange, other than ‘that dude who kidnapped me’, was ‘guy who unimpressively frowns a lot’. And to be on the receiving side of that unimpressed downward tilt of eyebrows was a really condescending thing to feel. It must be one of his abilities, other than kidnapping and making portals.

“Do you have any idea how much damage you’ve caused?” Stephen started in a reprimanding tone, a tone that literally everyone uses when dealing with one Stiles Stilinski. “There were relics in that room that has been preserved for thousands of years—one of a kind ancient relics.”

“Well, it was your choice to kidnap me. And when you kidnap me, you’re kidnapping all of me—which means all the destruction and damage, also comes your way. We’re a package deal, you should’ve thunk twice before kidnapping all of us.” Stiles stopped and contemplated the ending of his sentence—thunk was a word right? Thunk. Thunk. Yeah, why not? Sounds like a fun word (It’s not, Stiles, it’s really not, come on man, listen to me, I’m your damn conscience).

Closing his eyes in an attempt to calm himself, Stephen took consecutive gulps from his tea and folded his hands on the table, staring disapprovingly at Stiles from across the table. They had relocated to the library, equipped with tea and small snacks, an appreciated change from the previously tense and painful tone.

Stiles fished out the object in his pocket, placing it in the middle of the table, sitting back in his seat. “Tell me about the Orb.”

“I do not know much about the Orb.” Stephen stated.

Blinking, Stiles frowned. “What? You said you would—“

“But I do know of its origin.” Stephen leveled Stiles with a stare that dared him to interrupt his explanation. “It originated out of a sorcery, a dark sorcery.”

Rolling his eyes, Stiles crossed his arms. “No shit, Sherlock Holmes,” Dr. Strange raised his brows at the insult. “We know that much just by looking at the damn thing.”

“There are various types of sorcery, as there are good and bad.” Stephen ignored Stiles’ comments, moving his hands to form orange sparks in the air, a circle with intricate moving designs. “But, all sorcery is taught and recorded through books.”

“So, you’re a sorcerer?” It made sense, because Stiles has heard of the existence of sorcerers and their magical capabilities. He doesn’t quite understand the prospects of their magic, only that it does not dwell with elemental magic (only elemental sparks have full control of them).

The sorcerer did a weird smirk that Stiles was thrown off by, confused by the connotation of the smug smirk until he re-introduced himself. “I’m the Sorcerer Supreme.”

“You?” Stiles started chuckling, but it soon evolved into a nervous laughter and eventually silence because that unimpressed frown was back and the doubt was slowly fading away with it. “Oh.”

“As the Sorcerer Supreme, I am charged with the protection of the three sanctums that help protect this earth from other worldly beings attempting to subdue this planet with tenacious sorcery.” Dr. Strange gestured around him. “This is the London sanctum.”

While this was all fascinating and new, and Stiles would really love to stay and chat, his curiosity regarding to the Orb was stronger than the fascination of sorcery. “What does this have to do with
“Another part of my duty is guarding artifacts or powerful objects regarding sorcery—and the most important part of that duty, is the protection of the book of sorcery that enabled me to ascend to my position as the sorcerer supreme.”

Stiles was still confused, because he really couldn’t see the relation between a book and his Orb. But then the doors opened, and in walked a fellow he’d least expected to see here. “Wong?”

The monk he met at the museum in his early days in New York seemed as shocked to see him. “Stiles.” Wong greeted his presence while intensely glaring at Stephen. “Why is he here?”

“Figured I’d kill two birds with one stone.” Stephen shrugged, Stiles left completely out of context and still as confused as the day he was born.

Wong nearly dropped the book he was holding. “You mean you kidnapped him? Stephen!”

“Finally! Someone understands law!” Stiles pointed gratefully to Wong, eyeing Stephen with a reprimanding gaze.

Which was far too soon, apparently because Wong immediately followed up the sentence with a less than supportive addition. “We agreed it wasn’t time to do that yet.”

“The law is useless.” Stiles threw his hands in the air, slumping down in his seat and simply accepted his fate. “Is anything even a crime to you guys?”

And in Stiles Stilinski’s disappointing life manners, Stephen and Wong both ignored his sarcasm (was it though, was it really sarcastic if it was true). The sorcerer supreme motioned Wong to hand him the book. “There’s no time.”

Wong reluctantly placed the book down in front of Stiles, purposely ignoring Stephen’s outstretched hands. “This is the Book of Vishanti. It holds the lessons of the most powerful sorcery in the world—also, how Stephen learned to control the eye of Agamotto, consequently being able to control time.”

Stiles traced the cover of the book with his fingertips, speculating. “Are you saying the Orb came from a sorcery out of this book?”

“No, the Book of Vishanti contains generally well-intended sorcery.” Dr. Strange shook his head, somehow offended by that claim. “However, there is, like most things in the world, an opposite force. One that’s just as powerful as the Book of Vishanti, but holds a more sinister sorcery.”

“The Orb came from that.” Stiles slowly got on the train of thought.

Stephen confirmed Stiles’ suspicion. “It’s called the Darkhold.”

Cursing internally, Stiles sighed. There was yet another big ass problem they had to deal with on top of everything else. Well, at least there was one consolation to all of this: “So, whoever is in possession of this Darkhold, is probably the one who created this Orb, which makes him the driver to all this train of bullshit that has been happening?”

“If you’re talking about the orb’s purpose in the disappearance of the Nemetons.” Dr. Strange carefully selected his words as to avoid giving him false hope—which was kind of a nice gesture, if Stiles thought about it. “Theoretically, maybe.”
“Theoretically?” That was indeed a weird choice of words.

Stephen bit his lips, paying attention to the clock above their heads. “All you need from that book is a single spell to create that Orb. So, it is possible that the Darkhold may not even be in their possession anymore.”

What the sorcerer supreme suggested was a possibility that may very well be true, however, Stiles didn’t have much of a fucking option did he, now? Shaking his head, he threw another question at him. “You said you need this Orb to track something—I’m assuming it’s this ‘Darkhold’,” Stiles paused to receive confirmation by Stephen’s nod, “How?”

“Everything made from the Darkhold are attracted to each other—because they are one and the same, originating from a magnificently malevolent source.” Wong crossed his arms and checked the clock once more.

“Attracted, huh.” Stiles mumbled to himself, slumping back in his seat even more. So many things were running through his head, he couldn’t even begin to—wait a minute. “They’re all attracted to each other?”

Stephen took another sip of his tea. “Yes.”

“What does the Orb specifically do again?” Stiles inched closer to the edge of his seat, leaning forward to Stephen over the table.

The doctor placed his cup down, frowning in confusion from the change of the boy’s demeanor. “It was specifically made to corrupt the Nemeton.”

“That’s it?” Stiles was nearly off his chair, but he couldn’t give much less of shit because he was flabbergasted. “No other side effects?”

“No.” Stephen shook his head, eyes following Stiles’ movement.

That can’t be right can it? The Orb didn’t just affect the Nemeton, it did something to the werewolves too—and at first, Stiles thought it was a hitch or something back in Beacon Hills, but from the incident just a couple hours back, it was not an isolated incident. It was affecting all werewolves—but why?

Stiles closed his eyes, remembering Luke’s word to him: *It felt familiar. We’re drawn to it, but not by a hypnotizing affect. It’s more of a magnetizing presence. It felt like—*

“Coming home.” Stiles slowly blinked, an impending realization slowly sinking into the deepest recess of his soul. “Dr. Strange, exactly how powerful of a magic does the Darkhold contain?”

“It is immeasurable by theory. Immensely powerful, if put into terms.” The sorcerer tried to make eye contact with the young spark—but Stiles was in his own world. “Why?”

“Does it have enough power to—“ His breath hitched, not wanting to even imagine the possibility of what he would say next, “—create life?”

Wong and Dr. Strange looked at each other with alert, then to the clock, again, and back to Stiles. “No.” Stiles snapped his eyes up at Stephen with relief, but was soon to early because the doctor continued his sentence, “Not the kind of life you and I have, not normal human lives.” Stephen stared back at him. “But, the Darkhold certainly has enough power to create a sinister living force. I guess, humans call them—“
“—Monsters.” Stiles gasped, his hands gripping the edges of the table with a force too strong that it splintered the wood.

*Everything made from the Darkhold are attracted to each other.*

“Stiles.” Dr. Strange reached his hands out to stop the boy from causing anymore destruction.

*It’s more of a magnetizing presence.*

His heart was beating out of its cage, with fear and sudden panic. “Oh my fucking god.”

Feeling the ground shake, Stephen rounded the table, holding Stiles’ shaking shoulders with a firm grip. “Stiles?”

“They came from the Darkhold.”

Stephen shook Stiles to snap him out of his trance. “What?”

Stiles always knew the day Scott became a werewolf was a day that drastically changed his life. That much was a fact. But ever since that day—for some reason, he felt this sinister force all around him. Something eerie lurking underneath the surface, something that couldn’t be explained but was inexplicably there.

And even the Hales didn’t know their origin. Stiles didn’t think they knew—didn’t think anybody knew. Call it instincts, or a gut feeling—they probably didn’t want to know. Because everybody knew, that the truth would be far more unsettling than imagined.

“Werewolves.”

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“Peter!”

The oldest Hale turned to the calling of his name. “What?”

Jackson sneered in annoyance. “What do you mean ‘what’? I’ve been calling your name for the past 5 minutes!”

Peter swore he didn’t hear anything—which was weird, considering he had heightened hearing senses as a werewolf. “Sorry.”

Caught off-guard by the rare apology by the wittiest Hale, Jackson placed a hand on Peter’s shoulder in an attempt to draw any pain away to check if he was injured. “Are you okay?”

They were in the woods, training as usual. But ever since Peter stepped foot into the trees, he felt this surge of energy—the same thing that happened a while back before the Nemeton disappeared.

Shaking his head, Peter slapped himself in the face to regain his energy. “Yes. I’m fine. Question is, are you going to be fine?”

Jackson smirked at the tone of challenge in Peter’s voice. “Oh, bring it, old man.”
If he could use a word to describe how he was feeling, Stiles would definitely put the word ‘catatonic’ to a good use. He felt like Hulk was raging on inside his skull—trapped and enlarged. It was a pounding fucking headache and it was painfully numb. He’s aware it doesn’t make sense—but at this point, nothing fucking does, does it?

“Stiles.” Stephen tried again, for the past five minutes, to grab Stiles’ attention. “Stiles. I know you’re—“

“I’m what?” Stiles snapped at him. “I don’t even know what I’m feeling right now, but you do? Oh please, tell me, what the fuck am I feeling because I don’t have a fucking clue.”

The sorcerer supreme sighed, looking to Wong for some assistance, only to get reminded of their schedule by pointing at the time. “Stiles. Please. Get a hold of yourself, we don’t have much time.”

As much as he was fuming to spontaneously combust into absolute nothingness by the help of his fire prowess, his curiosity won out. “Much time for what?”

There was a loud echoing ringing, like a chapel’s bell tolling down the hallways and corridors to where they were. Stiles watched as Wong and Stephen share a serious look. Wong immediately grabbed the Book of Vishanti before placing it in a chain by the retractable ‘bookshelf’ display, locking it in place. “Stiles, stand up.”

Not knowing what was going on, Stiles stood in confusion, legs wobbly and unsure. “Why?”

“Or else,” Stephen threw his cloak in the air, the fabric clinging itself onto his shoulder, “Your soul might be a little disoriented when it gets out.”

Wait, what?

Stiles could only stare at the approaching sorcerer in shock as the older man threw out his hand and flat-palm punched him in his chest, not only knocking all the air from his lungs—

—but apparently he, himself, too.

Sharply taking his breath, Stiles looked around and lost his breath, yet again, from screaming. Because a) he was fucking floating off the ground without the use of his powers and b) he could see his own fucking body dropping to the chair like a limp vegetable.

“Hollyyyyy shit.” He waved his arms by his side, to his front and loop-de-loop round his back. “I’m dead!”

Stiles looked up at Stephen and saw that he, too, was in an aerial state of grey matter. “What the fuck? You killed me and then died, too?!” Stephen just rolled his eyes, which considerably pissed him off even more, if he were not already extremely irked and con-fucking-fused. “Did I sign a partnered double suicide that I wasn’t aware of?”

“Relax. You’re not dead.” Stephen attempted to unblock his ears from the loud speaker that is Stiles Stilinski, shaking his finger in his ear lobes. “Yet.”

“I heard that!” Stiles’ pointer finger flew out right in front of the sorcerer’s face, which was
grabbed and pulled towards his direction.

Pulling the boy along by his fingers, Stephen stopped in the open area of the hall. “You’re in the corporeal world, and that is your soul in its corporeal form.”

The sorcerer supreme held his hands up and moved them in a circle, a portal opening up before them. “After you.” He gestured toward Stiles.

See, call it Stockholm Syndrome, but despite the extremely rude and arrogant behavior of this charming suave man, Stiles oddly did not detect any ill intentions from him—and he was the advocate for suspecting ill intentions, blame that on the anxiety and paranoia.

Thus, Stiles followed his directions and went across the portal, crossing the ‘door’ like experience once more, before finally stepping down on grass. A forest, he figured. Looking back, he saw Stephen follow him through the portal before it disappeared into thin air. Well, at the very least he wasn’t getting abandoned in god knows where in his corporeal fucking form.

Happy thoughts, Stiles, happy thoughts.

“Where is this place?” Stiles looked around his surroundings, following the sorcerer in front of him. Even though he could tell that he was walking on grass, he couldn’t feel the sharp tickle of nature on his toes. If he didn’t know any better, he would’ve thought he was high from wild mushrooms or accidentally inhaling one of his many bottled species and concoctions—but he didn’t, this was real and it was fucking ethereal.

Dr. Strange didn’t even turn to face Stiles when he replied with a, “Somewhere you’re very familiar with.”

“Okay, what are we doing in this place that I’m ‘very familiar with’,” Stiles kicked a fallen stump, knowing that it wouldn’t hurt him as his feet passed straight through.

“You’ll know soon enough.” The sorcerer kept walking on.

Stiles knew a lost cause when he saw one, therefore he maintained his silence for the rest of their ‘trip’. But, of course, knowing him, he didn’t. He just wanted to test that sentence out loud (in his mind) to see the possibility, but really who was he kidding. “You know, what makes you so strange.”

“Excuse me?” Stephen finally turned his head, albeit on accident, because what the hell was that question.

Stiles did a victory lap in his head. “Is Strange a family name?”

Narrowing his eyes at him, the sorcerer crossed his arms. “No, no its not.”

“Then why? I find it extremely hard to believe that your parents would name you for comedic relief or simply be harsh enough to take one look at your new born naked ass covered in unidentifiable womb goo and went ‘oh, that is strange’.”

At this point, Stephen contemplated, really really seriously, the consequence of turning the elemental spark into a fucking turtle, but chose logically (?) not to. “Those were my parents decision; no way of verifying as they are now dead.”

“Oh. My condolences.” Stiles bit his lips, coughing his throat from the sudden air of awkward silence.
Stephen Strange let slip a small smirk of victory, knowing well what the mention of his late parents would do to a conversation he really didn’t want to have.

Then again, he really hasn’t met Stiles has he?

“—But! You know,” Stiles continued on his word vomit with a high pitched tone slinking down into a , coincidentally the sound of his nonexistent shame sliding down the trash Shute because huh, who needs that, right? “In a world where everyone’s trying to be unique and standout from ‘normalcy’, it’s a pretty undeserving compliment that you have that embedded in your name—just saying, although it does make for a hilarious potential of a superhero name.”

Stiles could almost feel, in his heart, the depth of the sigh that Dr. Strange didn’t let out. He wasn’t dumb, okay? Stiles was relatively aware of how dickish he was acting, after all, he’s watched over dicks for the most parts of his life (in more ways than one, if you know what I’m saying, wink wink). Cough-but-really-why-hide-it-louder cough, Scott McCall.

But, hey. When happy thoughts don’t work to reduce your panic or fear, laugh the hell out of it. It’s a damn effective tactic, just look at his life as proof—granted, it’s a shitty constantly endangered and morally ambiguous life, but he’s still alive isn’t he? (Well, at least he’s pretty sure he’s alive, unless Stephen lied to him about this corporeal bullshit then, welp, there goes his life advice).

Thankfully for Stephen, he didn’t have to answer or put up with any more of Stiles’ ridiculous questions because he had arrived at his destination. Stepping away from Stiles, the man cleared up the elemental’s line of sight, watching him slowly gape at what he was seeing.

“That’s—“ Stiles pointed in front of him, eyes switching between the sight and the sorcerer. “How?”

Stephen shook his head. “There’s no time to explain.”

“What? Time for what?” He was losing his mind, and rightly so, because everything that happened so far was too much for him to process, and that was on top of processing everything else that happened yesterday and the day before that—it was just too much. “Why did you bring me here?”

Dr. Strange didn’t have to answer, because the answer was right in front of them, and Stiles knew it too. He took a deep breath, even though he knew it wouldn’t do jack shit to calm him down. He changed his question. “What do you need me to do?”

“What you have to.”

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Steve nearly threw his StarkPad to the ground if not for Natasha, who caught his arm just before he was able to do it. The Cap wasn’t even apologetic for almost hitting the woman in the face, and he had a reason for it, just as everyone did. “He has been gone for 6 hours!”

It was nearing 1 a.m. in the morning and none of them had made any progress in tracking Stiles or the mysterious stranger who took him away. This made for a very taxing and vexing 6 hours of no sleep, appetite or peace—and that was on top of the sleepless days and tireless situations they had to face.
Thor gripped his hammer in his hands, swiping it from the ground. “We are aware of that fact. Now, be of more use and help.”

Steve glared at the god, moving forward to confront him until Natasha had to pull him back with a firm grip on both his shoulders. The woman tightened her grip harshly. “Stop throwing a tantrum, you’re causing a distraction.”

Everybody was hanging on to a thread of sanity, including Bruce and Natasha—one had a foreboding green tinge on him after a certain archer snapped at him for not finding any clues, and the other had thrown a knife at a certain billionaire who sniped at her and held a certain god in a chokehold for a moment too long when said god wanted to behead his brother, as he suspected that the ‘damn mongrel’ must be behind Stiles’ disappearance.

“Distraction?” Clint scoffed, eyes fixed on the holographic monitor in front of him. “We haven’t made any progress to distract us from.”

“Bruce and Tony has been cooped up in Tony’s lab for hours.” Natasha snapped at the archer, who in return gave her a raise of his eyebrow. “They’ll find something.”

Steve broke off the woman’s hold, storming to the kitchen sink. Dousing his face in water, he shook his head and let the excess drop in its downfall. Sighing, he slammed both of his hands on the counter. “When?”

Natasha kept silent on the question, because she truly didn’t know the answer.

Thor threw his hammer up in the air before grabbing it in a stride, heading to the elevator. “That’s it. I’ll tear off my brother’s head until he tells me where Stiles is.”

The god almost reached the button before an arrow attached to a wire rope flew at him and opened up to a metal clamp, catching his hand. On the other side, Clint held the wire rope on one hand and his bow at the other.

“What is this, man of birds?” Thor glared at him.

Clint jerked on the wire harshly, knocking Thor off guard and away from the elevator. “Don’t recklessly cause more trouble than we can deal with.”

As soon as a spark flew off Thor’s fingertips, Natasha armed herself with her guns, pointing them at the god of thunder and the archer respectively. Steve kicked his Shield, which was laid against the wall, up into the air and caught it with his hands, bracing himself.

Basically, everyone was on the verge of going on a violent spree, on each other. And that scenario would only end badly, despite who won.

Thus why it was a relief when the circle of sparks appeared in the same place it took Stiles 6 hours ago, and out from it emerged the proverbial water that doused the fire.

“Stiles!” Steve ran to him, arms encircling Stiles’ waist and shoulders in a desperate hug. “Thank god, you’re back! We’ve been worried sick!”

Thor, Clint and Natasha crowded the boy as fast as Steve did, all checking to see whether he was injured, passing him around to be patted and embraced to ease the worry in their chest. But Stiles was unresponsive.

“Stiles?” Steve called out to him, cupping his chin to force the boy to look at him. The captain was
shocked to see that he had a film of sadness in his eyes and a clenched jaw of resolve.

But before he could ask what it meant, and before that nightmare was over, another one occurred. A red alert popped up on Clint’s StarkPad, the archer immediately checking what it was about.

“What is it?” Natasha nudged him, eyes still trained on Stiles.

Clint hesitated, looking at Stiles and his worrisome condition, but he couldn’t ignore the new development. “Uh. I-I set an algorithm with Tony’s help to warn us of high activities of lightning or thunder in weather conditions all over the world—”

“—as a precaution for the Casket, yes, we know.” The woman urged him on, the panic in her stomach not letting up even though Stiles was safely back in their arms. “What happened?”

“I just got data that recorded abnormally high activities of thunderstorms and powerful lightning.” Clint tapped on his StarkPad to verify the reading he was receiving.

“Where?” Natasha, having lost her patience, gripped Clint’s hand that was holding the StarkPad and pulled it so that she could see it too.

The screen showed a map of the world, with red dots blinking, increasing in number and data scrolling steadily fast on the sidebar.

“Everywhere.”
Gravely sorry for the suppeeeer late update guys I'm so sorry I've been so busy. So here's the deal: I was busy planning for my trip, and I'm going to be in Japan for the next week and a half so it's gonna be a little while until the next update which will be two weeks from now. IM SO SORRRRRYYYY!!! I know I promised to update once a week but so many things are happening :( SO! Please enjoy this chapter, let me know what you think by leaving me a comment. I love you guys so much!! Thanks for supporting this story and HAHAHA guys 100,000 words!!!! And still not in the post-apocalypse tag--we are in for a long run :')

LOVE LOVE LOVE U GUYS! see u next time. (I'm also still looking for a beta so if you're interested, message me in the comments ;))

Tony stole the StarkPad from both Natasha’s and Clint’s hands and enlarged the data as a holographic screen. The red blinking dots marking almost every city of different countries in every continent. “Thor, how is this possible?”

“It’s—“ The god came closer to the screen, hands hovering over the intangible screen. “It’s not.”

Checking the data for any misreadings, Tony clicked his tongue in annoyance. “There’s nothing wrong with the data, so somehow it fucking is possible, how?”

Steve tightened his arms around Stiles’ shoulder, somehow attempting to shield him from more bad news. But Stiles stood strong in his place. Natasha spared the two a glance before pitching a question of her own. “Thor, is it possible to direct the Casket of Ancient Winters to multiple targets.”

Thor’s eyebrows gave into gravity’s pull, frowning at the woman. “No! It’s never been done befo —“

“In theory!” The assassin snapped at the thunder god, making him rethink his words and what he was about to say. “Can it happen in theory?”

The Avengers held their breath for Thor’s answer, the god himself looking to be deep in thought. He raised his head to meet the inquiring eyes of the band of heroes, shifting his gaze elsewhere in regret. “Yes.”

Tony cursed. “So, all of these countries could be in danger of the casket?”

Bruce turned away from the crowd, hands fisted in his side. “And we just spent—“ Growling underneath his breath, he stomped further away before glaring harshly back at the crowd, “—useless time guarding our prisoner when we could’ve been helping—“

“That’s enough!” Steve reprimanded the good doctor, feeling Stiles jolt in his arms due to the increased tension. “What matters is what we’re going to do now.”

“Cap’s right.” Tony sighed, giving up on trying to run a diagnostic on the program for the fifth
time. “If all these cities are gonna be hit, we need a counter-measure.”

“How? There are hundreds of cities and only seven of us!” Clint threw his hands up, stating the obvious fact.

Thor shook his head. “No.” Catching everybody’s attention, Thor placed both hands on his hips, nodding to himself. “If they were to cast out the Casket’s power to multiple targets, despite how incredulous it sounds, there is a limit.”

“How many?” Natasha stood from her lean against the sofa.

“I do not know.” Sighing, the god slumped in the couch beside Tony, weary from all the stress. “This is all theoretical, I have no idea how this works.”

The room fell silent with a panicked grab for ideas ransacking in their own heads. Steve felt the boy in his arms move, his shoulders bopping up and down once and a big audible heave of breath came out.

“There’s someone who does.” Stiles spoke up for the first time since he got back, his eyes dimmer than they remembered, his smirk not as mischievous and snarky as usual. “Isn’t there?”

Without waiting for approval, he shook out of Steve’s arms and into the elevators, the doors closing before any of the Avengers could follow. Stiles closed his eyes as he embraced the isolation in the moving metal box, opening it when the doors opened to the floor he wanted to go to.

Letting his feet take him to where he wants to go, Stiles entered the combination and scan before he arrived at the foot of the glass, his intended guest meeting him just across of where he stood. “Well, well, well, if it isn’t the young spark.”

Stiles simply met Loki’s gaze with an unchanging one, turning back to grab a chair and place it right in front of the glass, sitting down. “I’m here for information.”

Raising his brows, Loki crossed his arms. “What makes you think I know the answer to whatever question you’re thinking of asking me?”

“Because even though you’re not the perpetrator, it’s an idea you’ve probably thought of or would’ve executed first if not for the current criminal on the loose.” Stiles crossed his own arms to match the god’s.

Smirking, Loki tapped his foot playfully on the ground, a rhythm forming. “Even if I do, what makes you think I’d give it for free?”

“I don’t.” Stiles replied as fast as the question ended. “I’m trading it.”

“What could you possibly have that I want?” Loki tested the boy, expecting freedom or an upgraded prison in return.

Stiles blinked innocently at the man, his answer on the tip of his tongue.

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Steve rushed out of the elevator with the rest of the Avengers following behind him, opening the
doors to the vault as fast as possible. The moment the doors to Loki’s ward opened, they didn’t
know what to expect. Maybe Stiles’ burst of powers, who knows, they wouldn’t blame him if he
did. But they were certainly not expecting laughter, genuine laughter, from Loki, the god of
mischief, himself.

“Stiles!” Tony ran to Stiles, standing protectively in front of him before getting pulled backwards
and to the side by Stiles.

Thor followed Tony, sandwiching Stiles between them even though he was safely seated in his
metal chair. “What happened?”

Loki clapped rhythmically, stopping only to wipe the hint of tears in his eyes from his mirth.
“Alright, darling, I accept the trade on your terms.”

“Trade?” Steve piped up from behind Stiles, hands protectively on the head of the chair.

Stiles smiled, satisfied that he won. “The Casket of Ancient Winters. Can it be directed at multiple
targets?”

Loki tapped his fingers on his arms. “Well, that’s a rather intrigui—“

“Multiple targets, yes or no?”

Disappointed at the rejection of his playful remarks, Loki decided to simply give into the demand.
“Yes.”

The Avengers all collectively frowned at the confirmation of their suspicion.

“How many different targets?” Stiles leaned forward in his seat.

“It depends, there are variables that factor into this—“

Stiles glared at the god, unsure if he was simply trying to waste time. “Maximum target. What’s
the limit?”

Loki wasn’t a fan of being cut off from his speeches, but he wasn’t quite ready to piss of a spark.
“In my guess, 20. Maybe 25, if you push it.”

Stiles looked back, eyes catching Tony’s. Tony nodded to his unvoiced suggestion. “We need to
filter out possible targets.”

Loki tilted his head to the side. “Or, you could just wait until a sudden spark in lightning or thunder
intensity or activity—out of the ordinary or normal levels of volts, ridiculously strong ones.”

Bruce was careful not to stare at the god for too long, holding a slight hatred and fear for their
prisoner. “How does it work?”

“Energy transmission.” Loki sat back on his bed with his elbows on his knees. “The Casket of
Ancient Winters is, in its very core, a massive uncontrollable energy. If you want to split that
power to hit multiple targets, you would need an energy transmission mechanism and some kind of
interconnected portal that stretches far enough to your targets.”

Thor glared at his step brother. “And how exactly would you know that?”

“Unlike you, brother, I don’t spend my time fawning over astrophysicists—I, for one, kept on
learning.” Loki snapped back, pissed at the unappreciative tone that they took after he gave them what they wanted. He took a breath before turning towards Stiles. “The process of it is extremely hard to procure—forget finding the mechanism, making those portals would require—“

“Let me guess, extremely immense power.” Stiles let his head hang, relying on his bones to support his head because he’s just fucking had it. “Of course.”

Standing up, Stiles ignored the curious eyes on him and only stopped to turn back when he was right at the door. “Thanks, Loki.”

Surprised at the gratitude, Loki bowed his head in return.

Tony was the first to follow Stiles out, Clint and Natasha right behind him. Bruce stood there for a few seconds, closing his eyes to de-stress (if it worked, which most likely didn’t) before joining them. Steve kept looking back and forth, choosing to stop in the middle of the door. “Wait. What trade?”

Thor gave his brother one last dirty look before pushing the Captain out of Loki’s cage, making sure to lock the door, and then lock it again—just to be sure.

(If he pushed on of the metal cabinets in front of the vault door, well, that’s just a coincidence of furniture displacement).

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Stiles slammed the door to the bathroom, causing a loud echo through the ceramic tiles. He bent his head, hands prepped on the sink, fingers barely gripping on to the slippery edge. A testament to his own grip on his feelings.

Sighing loudly, he held his breath, willing his heart to calm down, but all it did was made the booming sound of his heart thumping even more defined and deafening—filling his ears and head completely.

Closing his eyes to the overwhelming noise, he tried to focus.

“Stiles?” A knock interrupted his rapid breathing, a familiarly soothing voice dripping with worry.

Stiles inhaled sharply at the sudden rapped wood knocking, turning on the tap, a flow of rushing water drowning his panicked breaths and voice tremor. “Yeah?”

Steve hesitantly held his knuckles above the surface of the door, unsure of what to do. “Everything alright?”

Cupping his hands with the water, Stiles drenched himself in the face, rubbing vicariously up and down the bridge of his nose. “Yeah, ’sgood.”

Stiles shook the excess water off, drying his hands on his jeans before opening the door to face Steve. The moment Cap saw the complicated swirl of emotions behind his eyes, he knew something was up. But Stiles forced a smile and passed him to the living room, slumping down on the couch.
Tony was never one for formalities, and in the face of an impending disaster—he really has no qualms to tiptoe over the broken glass that is clearly Stiles’ mental state. “What the hell was that back there?”

The silence that answered Tony didn’t faze him, even though it put everyone else on their edge. Knowing Tony, though, obviously he didn’t back down. “Stiles.”

Once again, Stiles ignored the interrogative question, choosing to stand up from his slouch and head towards the elevator because—*give him a god damn fucking break, will you?*

Safe to say, he was in a really distressingly precarious mood—barely keeping himself together after what happened with Dr. Strange—so, needless to say, when Tony forcefully grabbed his elbow to hold him back, Stiles reacted.

*Hard.*

He pulled the hidden gun tucked into his pants out in a blink, pointing it directly at Tony’s face. The billionaire was shocked frozen, his eyes unblinking and wide with fear.

The rest of the Avengers stood in their places, unmoving. Stiles glared at Tony with a fervor he didn’t expect to ever exude to the man. His hands were trembling slightly, but his eyes were unwaveringly steady.

“S-Stiles.” Tony mumbled, stuttering, his hands slowly coming up in a surrendering position. “What are you doing?”

Stiles laughed—which was probably not the best reaction he should’ve shown, now they would absolutely think he was bat shit crazy (if they haven’t already)—simply because he didn’t know what else to do. “I’m doing my damned best.”

The Avengers were caught off-guard with the sudden crack in Stiles’ voice—the shell of nonchalance and eerie composure breaking in an audible vocal snap. There was something they didn’t knew—a context they haven't been brought into.

“But no matter what I do, things are still—” Stiles fumbled with his words, his breaths getting quicker and heavier, “—going to shit.” The grip on his gun loosened, the heavy weigh tipping downwards enough for Tony to place his hand over it. “I don’t know what else to do.”

Tony successfully withdrew the gun from his hands, handing it over to Natasha who was slowly approaching behind him. “What happened, Stiles?”

Stiles hid his face in the palm of his hands, trying to recollect himself. *They deserve to know.* This fight wasn’t his own. Taking a deep breath, Stiles blinked a few times before he lifted his head to face them.

They *need* to know.

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“That is—“ Bruce took his glasses off—a habit, if no one’s noticed by now—massaging his temples in an effort to process the information, “—a lot to take in.”
Tony shook his head, bracing his elbows on his knees, leaning even further forward to where Stiles sat opposite of him. “So, the orbs we’ve been trying to break down came from the Darkhold, a ‘bible’ of the dark magic—no comments, please, trying to wrap my brain around this, I need analogies—and the reason werewolves are attracted to it is because the first werewolf was created from a spell in the Darkhold.”

Waiting for Stiles to nod, Tony took another sip of his whiskey—because lets be serious, he couldn’t possibly take this down without alcohol to soothe the path (Stiles has been doing this wrong the entire time, the answer to his mentality was right there: alcohol). “And the red-caped pedophile took you because he was searching for the Orb to find the Darkhold.”

Steve saw the hesitation in Stiles’ answer to Tony, calling out on it. “That’s not all, is it?”

Stiles didn’t know if he wanted to throw Tony’s glass at him or be grateful for bringing it up. Both options didn’t seem to please him, so he simply took Tony’s glass and downed what little alcohol was left. From his peripheral vision, he could see Steve and Tony’s shocked expressions but he couldn’t care less.

“That wasn’t the only reason he took me.”

Clint frowned in the vagueness presented in his answer. “What else did he need you for?”

There was a silence that followed the end of Clint’s question, leading everyone to perch on the very edge of whatever surface they were sitting on, waiting. Stiles hated silence. Nothing good ever comes out of it.

Stiles met their inquiring gaze with a serene expression that the members couldn’t really decipher. “What I needed to.”

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“What do you need me to do?”

*Stephen looked into his eyes, clear sincerity in his own. “What you have to.”*

*In the face of such honesty, Stiles couldn’t snap another comeback. He forced himself to walk towards the familiar tree stump. “How is the Nemeton here?”*

*“Stiles, there’s no time—“*

*“You will make time.” Stiles harshly glared at the sorcerer supreme. “How?”*

*Dr. Strange narrowed his eyes at the young spark but decided it’d be best to follow his demands. “This Nemeton didn’t cease to exist like you thought it did—it disappeared, yes, but only from the tangible world. We are in the corporeal world where things are much more profoundly seen. In your words, this might be the ‘spiritual realm’, I guess.”*

*“Why is the Nemeton in this ‘spiritual realm’.” Stiles crossed his arms, and yes, he was aware that he was being quite rude but give him a fucking break, he’s been in a mental stupor trying to figure this whole shit out.*
“This Nemeton differs from the others. You must’ve known that somehow, seeing that Beacon Hills was the only place that did not suffer great consequences like Japan and London did when their Nemetons died.” Stephen sat back into an invisible chair, which Stiles found as fascinating as it was confusing.

Stiles rounded the Nemeton, the rough feeling of aged bark a strange comfort for him. “The Nemetons are dead?”

“Yes. But not this one.” Stephen pointed at the magical stump. “This Nemeton had far greater protection than the others did. Why do you think?”

Stiles frowned. “I don’t know, if I did I wouldn’t be in this mess now would I?”

Stephen returned his frown with an unamused stare. “Think.”

He hated enigmatic people, you know the ones that always speak in codes and compelled you to be all philosophical in trying to decipher their answers. He already had a Deaton to last a lifetime, that sneaky son of a bitch.

“I—“ Stiles started to rant but he paused. No fucking way. His mouth hung open, the last syllable hanging in his lips. “The greatest protection of all—a life.”

Stephen smiled at his conclusion. “This Nemeton had so many sacrifices made to it that it had more power and protection than necessary—and that was what saved it, consequentially preventing the world to fall into an immediate apocalypse the moment all three Nemetons died.”

Paige and Jennifer Blake (or Julia Baccari, the horrifying alter ego) died on the roots of the Nemeton. Allison, Scott and Himself, all ‘died’ for the Nemeton to find their parents. On top of that, Stiles purified the Nemeton by killing the Nogitsune, and himself in the process. “This Nemeton is the only thing preventing the entire scale of an apocalypse reigning down on humanity—is what you’re saying.”

“Yes.” The sorcerer supreme let his smile fall, taking on a more serious expression. “But it won’t last long.”

Stiles stopped in his trek. “What does that mean?”

“In terms of speaking, this nemeton is currently doing three times the workload that it can withstand.” Stephen sighed, standing back up. “Even with the additional protection and power from the sacrifices made so far, it’s on its last legs.”

Sacrifices. Right.

“Wait a second—“ Stiles held his hands up. “This doesn’t make any sense. Sacrifices, especially life sacrifices, are the most powerful magic existing in this world—even more than the Orb’s dark sorcery. There were five sacrifices made to this Nemeton; how the hell did this Orb even manage to poison it?”

When Stephen hesitated to answer his question, Stiles knew he was on to something. “Stephen. What happened.”

“Stiles, you need to underst—“

Stiles forced a surge of air down the sorcerer’s throat, his eyes glowing a sinister grey, his hand outstretched in front of him. “Don’t tell me what I need to understand. Tell me what I want to
When Stephen let out a choked sound, hands gripping around his throat, Stiles deactivated his magic, letting oxygen back in his lungs. The sorcerer supreme doubled down, hands on his knees, heaving. “You—are far more dangerous than you look.”

Stiles hasn’t really decided whether that was an advantage or disadvantage but he’s far antsy to care. “What happened?”

“The energy from those sacrifices were ‘used up’ for a lack of better word—” Stephen coughed through his words, clearing his throat to regain his stability, “—when your previous pack included the Nemeton in a controversial dark magic.”

Of course. Of course it would be Scott and his hormonal wild sorority. Taking a hard swallow down his throat, Stiles prepped himself for the worst. “What did they do?”

Stiles could see the doctor hesitate to answer him, but he flashed his grey eyes at the man and he complied. “A resurrection spell.”

Jesus fuuuuuucccckk. “Oh my fu—” Stiles bit the rest of his remarks by literally forcefully biting on his tongue, willing himself not to lose control, “Necromancy?!?”

Stephen nodded stiffly.

“Bloody hell.” Stiles cursed, turning around with his head raised up to the sky, asking relentlessly why-the-fuck-does-he-have-to-deal-with-this, “Necromancy is one of the darkest form of sorcery, also one of the hardest. How the hell were they able to learn it, let alone attempt it?”

“I don’t know all the details. However, I do know that it failed.” Stephen shrugged, crossing his arms. “The reason why it nearly depleted the energy of the sacrifices is because the intended target of resurrection was also coincidentally a sacrifice.”

A sacrifice? Other than Paige and Julia, no one else died on the Nemeton—except, “Allison.”

Stiles honestly didn’t know he could be in this level of raging flabbergastedness. Fuck English, he deserves at least a few inventions of his own words after all the fucking shit that he’s been through and will probably go through even more.

“Scott fucking McCall.” Stiles wanted to hysterically laugh the fuck out loud, jesus christ. “What a fuckload of fuckery that man has the capability of causing.”

“Now that you know, and now that we’ve wasted enough time,” Stephen checked his pocket watch, staring at Stiles with intent in his eyes, “It’s time to proceed with your part in this matter.”

Here it is. Here comes the part he knew in his gut he wasn’t going to like. Sighing, Stiles placed both his hands on his hips. “What do you need me to do?”

Stephen assessed his stance and expression, adjusting to it in an immaculately careful way as if he was disarming a bomb. “You can save it. Save this town and the world.”

Stiles blurted out a heave of laughter, and to be honest, he wasn’t really sure why. “Nothing’s ever that simple.”

“No.” Stephen took a step closer to him. “You’re right. It’s not a fixed solution. What you’re going to do is temporary—strengthens the Nemeton for at least another decade.”
“You’re deliberately postponing it—just tell me what the hell am I doing?” Stiles snapped at him, edgy and on his last nerve because he has an astronomically bad feeling about this.

The sorcerer supreme stared at him wordlessly for what felt like forever, before eventually breathing out slowly. “The sacred bond.”

If it was at all biologically possible, Stiles would’ve sworn that his eyes would have fallen down to the ground due to the utter ridiculousness of that demand. And this time, he did laugh.

Stephen wasn’t finding the amusement in Stiles’ nervous laughter, and soon neither did he. “No.” Stiles shook his head, lips stillquirkily smiling in a disturbed manner. “No.”

The sorcerer supreme looked to the ground before staring back at him with a helpless expression—as if he was the one who was burdened by something, which hell no—if anyone was going to make that exasperated look, it should be him. “Stiles. Please just calm down—“

“Don’t you fucking tell me to calm down after asking me to do—“ Stiles exhaled a long weary breath, unable to even comprehend what doing it would result in, “—Stephen, I can’t.

Not backing down, Stephen held his ground. “You have to.”

“Why?” Stiles threw his hands up, eyes a little too wide and a little too glossy. “Why the hell should I make the biggest sacrifice to fix a problem that wasn’t even of my making?”

Dr. Strange could not answer his question—and so he went on.

“Why the hell am I suppose to be the one sacrificing everything when they—“ Stiles lashed his hand out to the side, pointing to the general direction of the city, “—let this happen, no, made it happen. When they know nothing of sacrifice, living obliviously in their bubble of ego and self-centered power and desire.”

The silence he was met with didn’t really help either.

“I’m not going to save them.” Stiles shook his head repetitively, convincing Stephen—although he was probably trying to convince himself even more, “Not again, not this time.”

The sorcerer blinked once before reigniing the words that would set the decision in this vain debate. “Then we’ll just watch the end of the world unfold.”

“That’s not fair and you know it.” Stiles snapped at the man, harsh and gnarly. It’s probably because he knew the annoying sorcerer was right, despite everything.

“Stiles, things are rarely fair in the world. That is exactly why people like us need to fight for the collective purpose, despite what’s fair or not, because we know it’s right.”

For the first time since Stiles raised his voice, he looked—and he really looked, deep—into the sorcerer’s eyes and saw more than just sincerity; it was hope, anguish, empathy and passion. After a sight like that, Stiles knew he was losing, fast.

He breathed out in jagged heaves, “Why does it have to be me?”

Stephen blinked. “Only an elemental spark can perform the rites—“

“There has to be at least another spark—“

“—But it became your fate ever since you gave your life to this tree.” Dr. Strange cut him off
before he could argue, and it was probably for the best.

“You know what this will do to me.” Stiles felt his vision blur, moisturizing, a heavy weight in his eyes. “How could you ask me to do this?”

At the very least, Dr. Strange had the decency to look apologetic—even though they both knew it wasn’t his fault. Their conversation, a very mild way to put it, ended with that heavy question—an unanswered one.

As for what happened next, the sight was sworn to stay between the two exceptionally minded magic users. And if anyone asked Stephen Strange about it, he would say one word, exactly one—no more, no less—because that, in true honesty, was probably the most he could allow himself to say after he prompted a young boy’s sorrow:

Poignant.

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“Well, long story short, we won’t be having an apocalypse anytime soon. The supernatural and natural disasters will keep rolling in—just in a slower rate and not all over the world at once like before.” Just as Stiles expected, the Avengers didn’t know what to say. Honestly, he was relieved that they hadn’t as many questions as he thought they would—but then again, maybe they were just being considerate of his emotional well-being.

“Stiles, I’m so—“ Clint stopped himself before he said another word, deciding to change the topic he was breaching on, “What exactly is a sacred bond?”

Inhaling, Stiles took a moment to think. “It’s complicated. But, basically it’s a trade. It means I paid a price to get something in return. It’s sacred because it enables anything—literally anything in the world—to be traded with the price you’ve paid.”

“Anything? No matter how insane or impossible?” Natasha frowned, fascinated yet disturbed by the idea.

“Anything. Fame, fortune, love, even another life or protection from death.” Stiles linked his fingers together, resting it on his knees, the circle Steve’s hand was drawing on his back a soothing presence. “It’s incredibly rare—forbidden, almost.”

Tony simply couldn’t see the logic behind that. “Why?”

Stiles smiled at the billionaire’s question, because he predicted Tony would be the one to ask ‘why’. “It was too high a price.”

Steve’s hand stopped its motion, leaning forward to assess the emotion behind Stiles’ eyes. “What was the price you paid?”

There was a pattern somewhere, Stiles guessed. It was the same train of thought when Stephen kidnapped him—he still doesn’t know if it was bad or good luck. But the alarm sounded off.

Bruce slowly went up from his chair and grabbed the nearest StarkPad, still reeling back from yet another information overload. He shook his head from the daze, looking down on the pad to check
“Stiles?” Steve lowered his voice, pushing him to answer his question.

Tony got up from his seat to check on Bruce, placing a hand on his shoulder—which turned out to be the wrong move, because the good doctor jumped out of his skin and nearly dropped the StarkPad if it weren’t for Natasha’s ridiculously good reflexes.

The woman assassin checked the pad for herself, immediately jumping out of her seat, alarmed. “We need to go.”

“What’s wrong?” Steve shot his head up, attentive as always.

Natasha handed the tablet over to Tony. “The Casket, it’s opening up—20 locations all over the world.”

“Make that 22.” Tony scrolled through the data, frowning even more. “No, 26.”

Bruce checked the data along with the mechanic. “That’s impossible, Loki said 25 would be pushing it.”

“Well, yeah? Now it’s 31.” Tony pushed the tablet to Bruce, letting him panic over it. “Loki doesn’t know shit.”

Steve bit his lips before standing up in his authoritative pose. “Alright. Nat, call all available branches of SHIELD to dispatch their agents to the locations, they may be underground and ‘non-existent’ but this is a code black situation—get them there.”

Cap looked around the living room, straightening his back. “Everyone else gear up, we leave in ten.”

As the Avengers all stood up and made their way to the elevator, Stiles bunched his pants in his fist, eyes flitting around the room. “I’m not going.”

Slowly, they all turned to face their youngest companion still sitting down on the couch. Tony jerked his head back in confusion. “You are going.”

Stiles sighed, looking back at Tony’s bewildered expression. “I’m not. I can’t go.”

Natasha placed her hand on Tony’s wrist, holding him back, speaking up for him instead. “Why won’t you?”

“It’s not that I won’t—it’s that I can’t.” Stiles stressed his syllables, standing up in frustration. He didn’t know why he was projecting it onto the Avengers, but there really wasn’t anyone else he can take his frustration on was there?

“What—“ Clint started but was restrained by Steve holding his hand right in front of his face, telling him to back down.

Steve blinked a few times, trying to figure out what was wrong. There was only one factor that they didn’t know that could possibly affect the boy who would normally go running into the battleground.

“The price.” He looked up in confirmation. Steve made the short walk back to Stiles’ side, his hand holding Stiles’ elbow in a supportive gesture. “What price did you pay?”
Instinctively, Stiles’ hand reached up to cover Steve’s, eyes slowly meeting his.

“What did you give up?” Steve urged on.

His eyes, smiling sadly, told it all before he even had to say it. “My spark.”

Steve’s heart fell. And so did the Avenger’s. But most of all, Stiles’ fell a long time ago, but today—he buried it a little deeper.

“I don’t have my powers.”
Pandora's Box

Chapter Notes

THE RESPONSE FOR THE LAST CHAPTER HAS BEEN ABSOLUTELY AMAZING GUYS OMG I LOVE U SO MUCH!!!!!! I'm not one to obsess over numbers of kudos or comments, so this magnitude of love that has been showering this fic is so fucking huge to me that i can't even comprehend it because i dont usually pay attention to it, i feel like a fucking baby swimming in gold bars! Do I make sense, god, I hope I do. BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY! I'm so sorry it took me this long to update--this chapter took a very long time to write even though it's not the longest chapter. I just wasn't sure of how to write it, and the research was really complicated so even though this fic will be canon with MCU and Teen Wolf database and logic, it might not be as scientifically accurate (sorry lol). Please keep supporting this fic because it is literally my baby and omg im so in love with it and all my readers im so in love with every aspect of this journey!!!!! SO MUCH LOVE FOR EVERYONE SEE U IN THE NEXT CHAPTER~~~

This is totally un-betaed by the way. Oh, and I still need a beta so anyone who's willing and experienced or has a proficiency in English pls contact me in the comments!!!

No one knew exactly how to react to the subtle bit of information Stiles just blurted out. Because Stiles was all about subtlety if anyone hasn’t noticed.

"I can't go." Stiles shook his head, not giving the members any time to comprehend or even process what he just told them. "I'll be more of a hindrance than help, go."

Steve stood there watching the chirpy sarcastic man crumble, he watched him at his most vulnerable moment he's ever known. And it was such a rare sight that the Avengers, who dealt with gods, extraterrestrial creatures and a flying Sokovia, couldn't do a thing.

"Stiles," Tony stepped forward, feeling responsible as he was the one who pushed the most. "I am so sor-"

"Don't." Stiles bit hard at his inner cheeks. "Don't say anything just—" Breathing out he stared at the billionaire, "—just go."

The rest of the team motionlessly stood there, unsure of what to do or say—or even if they should go at all. But could you blame them? This was an unprecedented situation that no one saw coming—not even Stiles himself.

Stiles knew he was being unfair, but he really needed some time to himself and the world needs the Avengers. "There are 34 countries on the verge of destruction and you're standing here doing absolutely nothing.” He sighed. “Go.”

Clint was about to retaliate but Steve held him back. Finding the courage to stabilize his voice, Steve tightened his grip on the archer. “Stiles, you could still come with us.”
“I’ll maintain the base. I’ll run center from here, someone needs to do it.” Stiles shook his head to Steve’s offer. “Now go, before it’s too late go!”

At Stiles’ sudden shout, the Avengers nearly stumbled over their own footing to depart from the living room. Once they were in the elevator on their way to the Quinjet, Stiles collapsed down to his knees. His lungs grew heavy and his head bending to the will of gravity.

“Fuck.”

~~~

Tony took the wheel of the Quinjet, taking off once everyone’s settled in the aircraft. He threw the communication’s earpiece to every member of the team before turning the dial on the Quinjet’s panel to activate it.

“Stiles?” He spoke into his piece, turning the dial even more to adjust the frequency. “Stiles can you read me?”

Tony waited for his response, positively certain that he’s got the right frequency.

“Yes, calling from Avenger’s Tower, I read.”

Steve activated the hologram table in the center of the Quinjet seating area. “Stiles, tell us the situation.”

“Uh.” Stiles pulled another screen down from Tony’s array of glass moveable screens in his lab, opening up the map. “I count 36 possible targets, all scattered across the globe.”

“Shit.” Clint cursed at the number, opening his case to prep his gear. “How is this even possible, Loki said—”

Thor grimaced at the name. “Are we really trusting Loki now?”

“Not the point.” Snapping at the two bickering adults, Stiles kept himself busy by alternating his focus on the multiple screens he pulled out. “All the available SHIELD personnel has called in for instructions. I’ve already deployed the agents in pairs to each location.”

Bruce synced his StarkPad with the map Stiles was monitoring, along with the positions of each SHIELD agent. “Then, where are we going?”

“We’re splitting up.” Natasha leaned over the tablet Bruce was holding, checking on it. “So out of 36, we need to prioritize exactly 6 locations. Question is, which ones?”

“We don’t even know where it’s going to hit or even how many countries.” Bruce ruffled his hair in frustration, “It could easily be more than 6.”

Thor braced both his arms on his waist, his hammer hanging from his wrist. “Even then, I’m not sure of what use we’ll be. The Casket of Ancient Winters is of great power. Unimaginably strong. Once it is unleashed from its casket, there is no known way of stopping it.”

“Our priority is saving lives.” Steve reiterated, hands balled up in a fist. “We can still do that much even if we don’t stop the attack.”
Something about that mission line settled uncomfortably in Tony’s gut, but he shook it off to focus. “6 out of 36 countries. This better have a damn good reason of selection.” Huffing out a loud breath, he started the process. “Any common links between these countries?”

Stiles massaged his temples, eyes hurting from all the blinking dots in the screen showing the map and agent’s positions. “None. I’ve checked through all of them with algorithms—population size, locations, historical background, economical worth, even fucking lakes and geographical tectonic plates—they’re completely at random.”

“What if it is at random?” Clint threw the idea up, hoping to make some sense into this nonsensical progression.

“Impossible.” Tony waved it off. “Whoever they are, they’ve stolen the weapon from Asgard. Do you seriously think that kind of enemy would pick their targets at random?”

“There’s something we’re not seeing.” Stiles concurred with Tony.

“Fine. Let’s do this.” Steve clapped his hands to wake the members up from their stupor of frustration. “Our priority is to save lives. We’ll filter out these six locations with population size and significance.”

“And exactly what kind of ‘significance’ should you judge them upon?” Bruce, the ever so ethical doctor, tested him.

Steve leveled the judgmental look Bruce was giving him with his own stable gaze. “Anything of importance that absolutely cannot be destroyed. Places, people, monuments, labs, hospitals, research facilities, nuclear facilities, anything and everything that needs to be protected for the future.”

Bruce glared at Steve. “So other countries with no particular significance, we’re just leaving them to be protected by what, our prayers?”

“All 36 target locations have two Agents protecting it. Be rational, Bruce.” The captain furrowed his brows back at the doctor.

“And what if we’re wrong?” The skin on the base of the doctor’s neck turned a sickly tint of green, pulsing.

Steve held his ground, unfaltering in his position even though Tony was turning on his pilot seat in fear of what might happen, Natasha holding the tranquilizer behind her back. “Then give me a better idea.”

Banner stood there, eyebrows drawn low on his face and the veins on his arms popping out. The atmosphere in the Quinjet was suffocating at best, even Thor had a strong grip on his hammer.

“Bruce.” Tony called out to the heavily breathing doctor, catching his attention, softening the gaze in his eyes to calm the doctor down.

Snapping from his rage, Bruce excused himself from the ‘meeting’—for a lack of better word—and settled at the weapons storage area, sitting down on the floor with his back against the wall.

“I’ve narrowed it down to 6 locations per Cap’s instructions.” Stiles cleared his throat, hoping to shield the awkward tension with a warning of imminent danger. “I’ll send the coordinates to the Quinjet. Tony take Clint with you, Thor take Bruce and Nat and Steve can take the Quinjet to their separate destination.”
The Avengers had nothing left to say, following the instructions the boy sent them. For better or for worse, the decision has been made and although none of them were neither fine nor comfortable with it, they simply had no better option.

~~~

Derek Hale sat in the living room of his couch, watching the nonexistent interaction between the two divided members of the ‘pack’ he was supposedly in. He heaved out a loud breath, knowing that it wouldn’t be answered with a voice of curiosity and worry for his emotional being.

Surfing through the channels in his TV, he stopped on a particularly alarming news channel.

Cora stopped from her trek behind him, a plate of sandwich in her hands. “Wait, Derek stop!”

She jumped over the back of the couch, stealing the remote out of his hands. The older Hale was about to bite her ears off, but he stopped when he heard the sound on the TV come back on from its muted state.

News about the striking state of the world filtered in like the bolts of lightning wrecking it—fast and shocking. Cora held her hands to her mouth, “Oh my god. Peter!”

Derek frowned at the panicked state of his sister, not quite understanding the need for such harried antics even though the news was indeed unsettling.

Peter ran down the stairs at the beckoning of his favourite family member, groggy skipping the steps. “Cora, I’m a werewolf, you don’t need to shout to call me.”

Ignoring the man’s remarks, she simply pointed at the news on the screen, looking back at his alerted expression with furrowed brows and a cold sweat rushing down her back. “Call him. Peter.”

Nodding absentmindedly, eyes still on the screen of unbelievable news, Peter fished his phone out and pressed the speed dial. “Come on, pick up.”

Cora was about to leave before she felt the grip of Derek’s hand on her wrist, pulling her back. Derek glared at her when she tried to break way. “Who are you calling?”

Glaring right back at him, Cora used her strength to pull herself from Derek’s grip. “That’s none of your damn business.”

“He’s not answering!” Peter nearly threw his phone at the wall after the call disconnected, yet again. He grabbed his jacket and keys before he was out the door, running with all his might.

Derek stood there in confusion, watching Cora snatch her purse from the sofa before making it for the door. He held her back, again. “Who is he? Where the hell are you going?”

Flashing her eyes at him, Cora snarled. “Back the hell off, Derek.”

The way she reacted to his touch was as if he was some sort of disease, and that—more than her curses—hurt him deeper. “Cora!” Confused and irritated, Derek flashes his own eyes at her. “Why the hell can’t I know? We’re family.”
His words rang in her ears. Something uncannily funny about it—depressing about it. “Are we?”

Her words struck him. Something undeniably true about it—regretful about it.

Before he could answer her, she was out the door and gone from his sight. Derek wasn’t sure if it was the way she left or the way she said it that made him speechless. Maybe both.

But what bothered him most was neither that nor the other. It was that he couldn’t answer her right away. The words: of course.

Instead the response on the tip of his tongue was more questionable but undoubtedly more accurate:

Aren’t we?

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Stiles took the ear piece out and threw it at the counter, breathing out heavily. He placed both his hands on the table and kept his eyes alternating between the multiple screens in front of him. The map, the Agents, the electricity levels, weather reports and live news update. His eyes were straining, itching him to close his eyes and take a fucking break but the world isn’t taking a fucking break now is it—wake up you slimy weak ball of nerves.

He looked up at the clock to take note of the time. Figuring it was way past the stiles-thinking-blackhole o’clock, he left the lab, taking a StarkPad synced to all the screens so that he could keep track of everything. Before he left, with much consideration, he decided against taking an earpiece with him.

Because he wasn’t sure what he’d do if he heard any one of the Avenger’s voice right then.

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Loki tapped a rhythm on his stomach with his fingers, humming softly to the soft buzzing sound of the machines working. He has always wondered how much energy was being used to keep up his cage security, but judging by the barely audible buzzing—Tony’s figured a way to make it self-sufficient.

The doors to his cage opened, a heavy dull noise of the push of the metal doors. The god of mischief sprang up from his lying position at the hard bed he was provided with, anticipating his guest.

“To what do I owe this spectacular pleasure?” Loki smirked.

Stiles played along with him. “As promised, our date.”

Laughing with mirth, Loki shook his head. “You call that worthy of a date?”

Acting offended, Stiles hugged the pizza boxes close to his chest. “I’ll have you know this is high
quality pizza from Tony’s favourite restaurant. It has truffle oil, high-grade meat and everything.”

The boy moved to the delivery mechanism on his side of the room, placing one of the pizza box in the container built into the wall before closing it—waiting for the button on the side to turn green. Once he pressed it, the container on Loki’s cage opened and the pizza box made its appearance.

Loki bowed his head mockingly, taking the pizza box out before the container closed. “Thank you, good sire.”

Stiles didn’t even bother to drag a chair, he just plopped down on the floor. Setting the pizza in front of him, he started to dig in.

Loki shrugged and followed the boy’s antics and sat on the floor along with him. “I’m glad you kept up your end of the trade, but I didn’t expect it to be this soon.”

“Well, I did say that I’d trade the information for my company—I didn’t specify when and therefore shall be completely up to my terms of whether I actually want to see you or not.” Stiles mumbled around his pizza, shoving it down his throat like a starved bear—stress eating is a thing, and it is his thing, if anyone in the world deserves to stress eat, it is definitely him.

“So you wanted to see me?” Loki teased the boy, munching on his own slice with much more etiquette than his ‘date’ had.

“Don’t twist my words, Slytherin.” Stiles narrowed his eyes at the god, pleased that he actually got the reference judging by the eye roll he got in return. “Besides, do you gods even need to eat?”

“Let’s just say we eat from our own conviction instead of necessity.” Loki swallowed his slice whole, dusting his fingers off on the napkin that came with the box. “Correct me if I’m wrong, but I sense your manner of appetite as a human trend called stress eating.”

Stiles’ cheeks were popping out of its jaw sockets, moving, chewing. He kept on shoving another slice down his throat, raising an eyebrow, "So?"

The god of mischief took the rapt reply as a sign to wave over the topic—and rightly so. No one, absolutely no one, should ever learn to experience the wrath of a stressed Stiles deprived from his stress food.

Even though he decided to avoid the topic of his stress-eating, Loki—the ever so curious sly being—still couldn't let go of the one thing that kept bothering him ever since the boy stepped into his cell.

"You're significantly dimmer now, darling." The god tip-toed over his wording, assessing the boy's reaction. "May I ask what happened?"

There was a period of time, minutes, that followed the end of Loki's question—one in which Stiles simply stared at the man without moving an inch, putting the god on edge. However, to Loki's surprise, he eventually answered.

"Well, makes sense, since I lost my spark." Stiles twisted the crust of his pizza slice in his hands, waving it around like a pointer stick. "Not technically lost, it was sacrificed. But hey, what’s the fucking difference am I right?"

Loki was a douchebag. Lets just all respectively agree with that statement because he really really was one. Stiles expected a snarky reply or at least some sort of retort about his idiotic actions or the sogginess of the pizza—just literally anything.
Except, he didn’t.

“A spark is not something that can be casually given away nor lost, darling.” Loki carded a finger through his hair, tucking it onto one shoulder, tilting his head with the wide expanse of his neck exposed.

Stiles saw the small smirk Loki hid behind the carding of his hair, weirdly irked by the implication that the god knew more about his spark than he did himself. “Wait—what does that mean?”

Loki contemplated his answer, popping a pepperoni from his pizza into his mouth. “Stiles.” The boy looked up at the god, with mozzarella stretching from his lips to the baked treat in his hands. “You are so much more without your spark, do you know that?”

Taken aback, Stiles nearly dropped the food he was holding to haphazardly rub his ears because that couldn’t possible be what the god that was once Avenger’s enemy (debatably still is) just said. “Yeah, definitely. So much more useless.”

Surprisingly, Loki didn’t bother to retaliate further because he knew the stubborn seed in Stiles would not yield to his words. The only difference was that Loki knew the certain bound of events that would take place despite Stiles’ hopeless demeanor. And if he wanted to keep that to himself a little longer, well, who could blame him.

He is, after all, the god of mischief.

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Natasha observed the quiet state their Captain had fallen into—unresponsive, almost. Well, then again, all of them were dead silent. Clint and Tony had already left the Quinjet, Tony having to drop Clint off at his location before flying to his own.

The assassin made her way over to their statue of a captain, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. “Hey.”

Steve looked up, Natasha’s comforting yet reassuring smile towering over him.

“He’s gonna be fine.” Firmly stating her beliefs, she kneeled down in front of the uncharacteristically sullen man.

Thor and Bruce stopped their own preparation to listen in to their conversation, their curiosity getting the better of them, their feelings getting ahead of them.

Steve huffed a small chuckle, pathetic and void of joy. “How would you know that?”

“Because I trust him.” Her reply was as swift as the question itself. Her eyes showed no hesitation and neither did her voice.

There was something about Natasha’s simple yet courageous answer that woke Steve and the rest of the Avengers up. The reminder that the youngest member of their team was far stronger than they initially thought, with or without his powers.

Steve laughed at her answer, a brief and relieved laughter. Smiling, he decided to trust her, and in
him too.

That Stiles would be fine.

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“Loki, you okay man?” Stiles slurped on his soft drink, the bubbly and rough noise echoing in the small chamber.

Loki blinked at the wall before turning to Stiles. “Why the Casket?”

“If it were me—” Loki stopped his sentence to spare Stiles a blank unimpressed stare at the younger’s look of playful accusation, “If I were to steal something from that vault that would cause the most destruction with the least amount of effort, it would be the Eternal Flame.”

Stiles chewed on his straw, following Loki’s suspicion. “What about the Tesseract? Wouldn’t that be more effectively destructive?”

“The Tesseract obviously holds more power, but it would need more technological devices and delivery mechanism along with rare elements to control the power.” Loki narrowed his eyes in speculation. “Basically the same amount of effort that would be needed to split the Casket and direct the energy into multiple targets, so why not take the Tesseract if the amount of effort to use it was approximately the same?”

“Maybe he, she, they, it, whoever—whatever the fuck is doing this,” Stiles flapped his hands around in the air to express his—whatever the fuck this is—, “messed up? Or didn’t know? Maybe?”

Loki intensified the unimpressed glare he kept on Stiles, making the boy squirm in his seat because even through an impregnable glass and technologically-enforced barrier, Loki was still one hell of a threat. “They were able to break into the most secure vault in all of Asgard, undetected. Do you really think they’re the kind to make mistakes?”

Lying flat down on the floor, Stiles let out a gargled scream of hopelessness. “So they took the Casket because it had to be the Casket. Why?”

“Why, indeed.” Loki hummed along with the question, shrugging to himself while scarfing down another slice.

Stiles rolled his eyes at Loki’s nonchalant attitude. The whole world was at a fucking stake of collapsing, how the fuck can he not care? He was trapped in the world that was about to fall into a chaotic state of destruction—wait, no. No.

“Why destruction?” Stiles stopped his restless movements on the floor, looking straight up at the ceiling. Loki threw his crust on the pizza box, dusting his hands off to pay attention to the boy, “We directly assumed it was destruction.”

Loki nodded. “Because it always results in one or another form of destruction.”

“Yes.” Stiles sat up as if he’d been struck by lightning, eyes wide and staring off into the distance, thinking. “But what if—what if destruction, or complete annihilation, wasn’t the intention?”
Processing the possibilities, Loki slurred his words, playing the scenario out in his head. “The Eternal flame would guarantee absolute destruction—everything would’ve been destroyed, it’s uncontrollable.” Stiles nodded ardently to his speculations, urging him to go on. “The Tesseract would’ve been to unpredictable, it could result in opening a portal to another dimension or cause the whole world to self-implode.”

“It had to be the Casket.” Stiles was sure of it now, he could feel the answer forming in his mind. “Why, what makes it different. Think.”

“The Casket’s powers—it’s of Jotunheim’s fiery winter itself, a thousand killing winters. Lightning, thunderstorms, the capability of freezing anything and everything in its paths.” Loki listed off, remembering the study he did on the weapon. “Specific targets. What does this have to do with it, why specify the countries that will be hit?”

Stiles grumbled to himself, sighing. “I don’t know.”

“Was there anything specific about the targets?” Loki pushed on.

“I don’t know, the targets were at random.” The boy repeated the conclusion of their earlier decision. There were nothing connecting the targets together—his algorithm suggested it.

“There has to be something, Stiles.” The god stood up from his slump, nearing the barrier of his cage. “The enemy is just smart enough to conceal it.”

“What?” Stiles nearly shouted, even though he knew Loki wasn’t at any fault. “What am I not seeing?”

“If there’s too many variables, limit it.” Loki made sure his voice was stable, calm, because Stiles was just barely hanging on. The poor boy hadn’t any time to process the loss of his powers—he needed to be calm to think. “Process of elimination.”

Stiles closed his eyes, drowning every throb, every noise, in his head. Breathing out, he nodded. “Okay.” He reached the StarkPad beside him. “Okay, elimination.”

“I don’t think our enemy wants absolute annihilation, so filter out anything that will immediately cause absolute destruction.” Loki advised him, crossing his arms.

“So nuclear power-plants and military bases are out of the question.” Stiles filtered the options, narrowing down the 40—yes, the numbers increased while he wasn’t looking—down to 36 possible targets.

“The only ability that differentiates the casket from other weapons in Odin’s Vault is its freezing capabilities.” Loki theorized, seeing that Stiles agreed with him too. “I have an inkling that’s a big factor of inclusion—so filter anything that will still work even if it’s frozen or will have no devastating immediate impact if it is.”

Stiles clicked his tongue. “Um, research labs, containment facilities, water sources—that narrows it down to 30.”

“I don’t think this is about money. Or anything within the development of economics or any political agenda, so filter that out too.” Stiles wanted to argue with Loki’s reason, but he figured that it was logical after all.

Besides, what use would money be in a world without order?
“21.” Stiles huffed an unbelievable laughter. “It’s down to 21.”

Loki bit his lips, sitting back down on his bed. “That’s still too many to evacuate. Is there nothing else?”

“Without knowing the exact motives, we can’t just assume anything else.” The anxiety was coming back to him in waves of more anxiety, because trouble always brings company doesn’t it. “And that’s discounting the fact that we’re not exactly 100 percent sure on our elimination process.”

“It’s useless to have that kind of mindset.” The god shifted his hair from one shoulder to another, leaning back on his hands. “If you don’t know their motives, then figure it out.”

Stiles didn’t know if he wanted to punch the guy or make him choke on his food, because fucking hell, he makes everything sound so fucking simple to the point where it’s irritating. If he knew their motives, he wouldn’t be in this fucking turmoil in the first place.

“If it’s not destruction, what else could it be?” Controlling his voice, he asked the all-knowing sly ass norse god. “Tell me, o’ Loki, the intellect.”

The god simply rolled his eyes at Stiles’ antics, well aware of the mental stress that was severely affecting the boy’s mood. “There’s many types of destruction, Stiles. Physical ones are not the most damaging.”

“Funny, coming from the man who nearly destroyed all of New York.” Stiles knew it was a low move, but he’s out of retorts okay, plus the guy’s their fucking prisoner for god’s sake—he can take an insult or two for nearly killing Coulson if he’s going act all omnipotent.

Closing his eyes, Loki willed himself to the calmest state of his mind. Trying again, he slowly slurred his words so that Stiles would snap from his childish tantrum. “I don’t know the answer, Stiles. You need to think.”

There was something ugly bubbling in the pits of his stomach. Something raging underneath his skin. Stiles knew what it was. “Stop telling me to think, what the fuck do you think I’ve been doing?”

Unwilling to budge, Loki didn’t bat an eyelash and went on. “You’re angry. You’re dictating your answers with your emotions.” He sighed. “You’ll never find the answer that way.”

Clenching his fists, Stiles stood to match the god’s standing height. “Why do you keep assuming that. I don’t know. I don’t have a fucking clue what they want.”

“That’s why you need to think, Stiles.” Loki gritted the words out of his teeth, patiently.

_Fucking hell._ “I can’t!”

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Steve detached the parachute bag from his body, running straight to the scene. He was forced to abandon the Quinjet due to the overwhelming amount of turbulence from the thunderstorm.
“Everybody take shelter!” He shouted to the civilians running amok in the city he landed in, all in a panic from the loud thunder and the continuous lightning. “Get out of the streets!”

The Captain activated his comms in his ears, tapping it twice to clear out the static. “Can anyone read me?”

Tony was the first to answer, “Finally. What took you so long?”

Clint chimed in, “We’re in a real pinch here, Cap!”

Steve could tell why everybody was so restless just by looking around his surrounding. The temperature was dropping impossibly fast, colder and colder by the second to the point where even he felt chilly.

Watching his breaths travel up into the sky in huffs of white smoke, Steve took note of the sky. Captain Rogers had seen a lot in his glory days of war, through harsh weather and conditions. But this?

This was on a scale where he didn’t even think was possible. The sky lit up as if it was electrocuted, flashing on and off. Clouds tumbling and hugging each other, the rain furiously shooting through. The thunder was banging and loud, echoing as if it was an orchestra.

He watched in horror and shock. Yet, ironically, it was also a magnificent sight.

What a cruelly beautiful thing nature was.

“Stiles!” Steve shouted into his comms, head still tilted up. “Did you find a way to stop it?”

The reply he expected never came.

“Stiles hasn’t been online for a while now.” Natasha was the one who replied him, her voice sounding worriedly panicked and out of breath. Steve could almost hear her teeth chatter from the cold. “We tried to send a distress call, but it didn’t work.”

*Stiles.* “Call his phone. Do it now!”

“We tried!” Tony made pissed of grunt from his end of the line, the blasts of his repulser audible from Steve’s earpiece. “The call fell through, we can’t reach him!”

There was an abrupt deep shout before static flooded each one of their earpieces, Thor having absorbed a particularly nasty bolt of lightning with his comms still on. Dropping to the ground on one knee, the god shook his head to regain his composure, “What is he doing?”

Steve threw his shield to prevent a woman getting struck by lightning, his shield acting as a conductor. Running to retrieve his weapon, he ushered the woman away from danger. “Give him time, he’ll figure this out.”

There was no doubt in anyones mind that Stiles would eventually find the answer. Absolutely none. Still, even though the Avengers were confident about that, they were unavoidably anxious.

Stiles will find an answer, yes.

But time was not on their side.
"If you can’t think, then run it through an algorithm to find something that ties these countries together.” Loki wanted to bang his fists on the glass wall separating them but he knew it would result in an electric shock that would paralyze him for an hour. He knows this, because he tried.

Stiles felt a vein pop in his head. Jesus, he didn’t know how Thor dealt with him all these years. This god was a fucking jackass.

"Don’t you think I’ve tried that? Now that I’ve lost my spark do you think I’ve lost my intelligence as well?” The words snapped out of his mouth like a shark out of water—jarringly loud.

Swallowing the lump in his throat urging him to scream at the boy, Loki took a deep breath before answering in an eerily constrained voice. "Check again. You haven’t even checked the search program ever since you entered this room."

Stiles nearly threw his StarkPad at him, but he settled for harshly shaking it out of sheer respect for the technology built inside it. "I’ve been searching with you this whole time!"

"Not that, you mewling quim." Stiles blinked atrociously at the insult, but Loki went on, "The algorithm!"

“I—“ The words got stuck in his throat, because what Loki said was true. Stiles took a pause, checking the StarkPad for the algorithm program only to find that it wasn’t there. “Th-there’s supposed to be a notification to tell me when it finds a match.”

Loki was resisting the urge to roll his eyes. “Is there, really?”

“There is.” Stiles stressed his syllables, fishing out his phone to show it to the smug god. “See, it’s —“ His phone remained a black screen despite his numerous attempts to unlock it, “—not working.”

Turning his phone around, the screen finally lit up only to remind him that his phone was out of battery. Bloody fucking hell. Stiles wanted to scream. “For fuck’s sake, useless piece of shit, it’s out of pow—“

Wait.

Stiles blinked.

Loki frowned at his sudden pause.

Wait a fucking second.

“Power.” Stiles finished his word, saying it in a whole new light of connotation.

Seeing no particular wonder to the word, Loki’s brows furrowed even more in confusion, “What?”

“That’s why it had to be the Casket, that’s the only thing that will guarantee absolute impairment.” Stiles looked up to the perplexed god with an unbelievable expression on his face, because holy mother fucking balls, “That’s it! You’re a fucking genius, Loki, you sneaky lil bitch!”

Before Loki could even ask Stiles to elaborate, the boy was gone—out and into the elevator. Standing there, baffled, the god gaped. “What did he just call me?”
The moment Stiles reached the counter in Tony’s lab, he dived into a stool and went kamikaze on the touchscreen keyboard. Pulling up maps and classified data, he matched the countries location through the filter.

He worked in silence, the only deafening sound was his fingernails hitting the counter of the virtual keyboard. His eyes were straining to follow the stream of numbers and coordinates.

Once he found the data that supported his thesis, Stiles shoved his earpiece in, not even bothering with formalities and jumped straight into it. “It’s power grids!”

Tony shrieked at ringing deafness in his ears from Stiles’ volume. “Christ, Stiles! Where the hell were you?”

“It’s the power grids, Tony!” Stiles ignored the man’s question in favor of revealing information. “That’s their motive, they’re targeting our power grids!”

Clint stopped in his running, puzzled. “Power grids?”

“Yes. I’m matching up the possible locations with a list of countries that I’ve narrowed down to 21.” Stiles huffed in a thrill of excitement after finally getting something right, fucking hell, that took a damn while.

Steve bit his urge to ask the boy how he was doing, but he knew his priorities. “Why power grids?”

“The only reason our enemy took the Casket instead of all the other weaponry in Odin’s vault was because of its specific combination of abilities.” Stiles kept his eyes on the screen, hands clicking to keep his brain running. “In order to destroy—and I mean completely destroy—a power grid, they need to fry the circuit. And to do that, one needs to overload the circuit with too much power that it basically fries out. The Casket is capable of doing that especially with its incredibly strong lightning, along with freezing the actual facility—there won’t be a way to fix it. It’ll be impossible.”

Tony held a stationary position in the air, thinking. “Stiles. Our world runs on these power grids, it’s how each country, each city, gets electricity.” He blinked rapidly, a creeping fear crawling up the back of his spine. “If that’s destroyed—“

“That doesn’t matter!” Natasha snapped at them, helpless in her situation because she didn’t have a target she could physically hit. “Stiles, where are the targets?”

Licking his lips in a nervous habit, he cleared throat. “I—Power grids are everywhere, it’s similar to a spiderweb. But there are main power grids that intersects with all the others running through their respective country. If anything, that will be their target.”

“Where exactly are they, Stiles?” Thor boomed from his line, throwing another bolt of lightning of his own to counter the nature’s.

Please, gods if you’re listening, any gods of any religion, please. Stiles bit his lips, waiting for the algorithm to match the results. And it finally did.
It did.

But.

The gasp was audible to the Avengers from their earpiece. They knew exactly who it came from too.

“Stiles?” Clint was afraid to ask, but he did anyways.

No. The boy stared at the final map with the possible locations and the blinking red dots of the rapidly increasing activity of lightning which confirms the target of the Casket. “No.” Stiles shook his head. “No. No!”

Steve felt his own heart drop at the devastated sound of his voice. “Stiles, what’s wrong?”

“It’s—“ His breaths escaped him in a flurry of unwanted heaves, painful and shocking—like the reality he was faced with. “Steve, you’re—“

In hindsights, he should’ve known.

“What is it, Stiles!” Steve raised his voice, a rare occurrence but an appropriate one.

Bad things come in a series. And theirs—well, theirs were just starting.

“Wrong.” Stiles bit his words out, the bundle of nerves back in his throat. “You—you’re in the wrong location.”

Tony sighed, regret drowning his lungs. “Who?”

The map was a disaster of misplaced agent’s locations and blinking red targets of the Casket. They were wrong. “All of you.”

Stiles was dreading their reaction, but unfortunately—or fortunately—he didn’t get to hear it.

Because the screen recording the lightning, thunder and temperature levels in each country just lit up like a Christmas tree and the next thing he knew, it turned off.

The lighting in the room turned off as soon as the screens did.

And so did the comms.

And the rest of the world.

That is, the whole world plunged in darkness.

Because the Casket had been opened.
They were wrong.

There was no warning—no sudden declaration nor any last flash of light. One moment Stiles was staring furiously at the mess of locations in the map displayed on the screen, terrifyingly whispering to his comms, and the next he was stuck in the middle (left, right, back, front—there wasn’t really a way to tell because he couldn’t fucking see a damn thing) of pitch black darkness.

“Steve?” He called out into the dark, tapping on the device in his ears. “Tony?”

Walking towards what he thinks is forwards, his hands reached out to grab any counter that he can work with. Finding the familiar surface of a touch-screen underneath his finger tips, he tried to reboot the system, or just turn it on—but it didn’t work.

“Can anyone read me?” Stiles’ voice was starting to tremble in desperation. “Fuck.”

Stiles tried to think positively, like hey, who knows, maybe this was just a random blackout? But lets be honest, he was as positive as Eeyore was enthusiastic—which is not at fucking all true.

Someone fucking find him a set of stairs he could fling his body down on, because the Casket had been fucking opened.

Since wishes don’t come true, Stiles settled for the next best thing which was slamming his head onto the counter, repeatedly.

Just once. Just once. He would have liked to be right about something and be early enough to stop whatever the fuck he had been right about. Every single time. It was just not enough.

Suddenly, a light filtered in his vision with a voice trailing behind him.
“Stiles?”

Stiles looked up, wincing because hell, that is one blinding ass of a light source. But he recognized that voice. “Loki?”

The god dimmed down the brightness of the ball of energy that was emitting light, setting it to float on its own as he went to set Stiles upright from his slump at the counter—a flattering position, mind you, it highlights the gracious curves of his fabulous ass.

Stiles was too tired and mentally flabbergasted that he couldn’t get anything out of his mouth, but thankfully, Loki took one look at Stiles’ constipated face and took the liberty of answering without question.

“The security system to my prison died.” Loki shrugged. “I figured it was the Casket.”

For a moment, Stiles remembered about the team’s suspicion of Loki being involved in this whole ploy—because hey, here he was, free and unharmed. But before he could go any further spiraling into that theory, Loki slapped him in the back of his head.

“I got out and came here because I was worried, be grateful you mutt.”

Scoffing at the weird expression of concern, Stiles allowed him a show of trust of his own with a tired smile. “I will be if you stop insulting me.”

Loki figured it was the best response he was going to get, so he moved on quickly and directed the light towards the unresponsive systems of the human technology. “Mind giving me a run-down on what’s happening before you dramatically rushed out of my cell?”

Stiles sighed. “The team—SHIELD and the Avengers—we deployed them into locations that we thought was possible targets which was chosen by ‘importance’ or some bullshit excuse like that.” Technically, he knew he was being petty as he was also involved in the agreement of that reasoning, but he was beyond…well, he can’t even find the word to describe what he was feeling, because there’s no word in the dictionary to describe how one is supposed to feel when they’ve literally failed to save the world from a nordic god weapon even if they’ve figured everything out but was just too fucking late—jesus, god help him and the English dictionary. “We were wrong, obviously.”

Loki frowned.

“Our power grids were hit—that’s why there’s a blackout, that’s why there’s no communications and that’s why everything is not fucking working.”

Loki finally dawned on the conclusion Stiles was pulling. “The power grid locations and SHIELD agents positions were different. They weren’t in the right location, so they couldn’t stop it.”

“Ding ding ding!” Stiles flamboyantly waved his hands as if he was ringing a bell. “We’ve got a winner!”

Softening the glow of his ball of light, Loki masked the concern in his voice as indifference. “Even if you lucked out and sent them to the right location, or if you’ve figured it out early enough to redirect their location—I still don’t think you’d be able to stop it.” Still, something about the boy urges the god to give him some comfort, and it is the most peculiar thing. “The Casket is unstoppable.”

Hopping onto the counter with much difficulty, Stiles rolled his eyes in the dark, barely visible by
The way the light was bouncing off him. “Is that supposed to make me feel better?”

Loki should’ve known the boy’s instincts would break through his facade. Finding no point in denying, he raised his eyebrow in challenge. “Well, did it?”

The small smile Stiles gave in return was enough for him to dispel the peculiarity.

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“Stiles!” Steve shouted into his comms only to get no response. “Stiles! Can you read me?”

Taking his comms out in frustration, he shoved it into his suit pockets before he ran to pick up his shield. The thunderstorm and lightning died down as the rest of the country did. All the light swooped out from under him.

Steve craned his neck towards the skies to see the cloud still looming over them, no signs of sunlight passing though. Stiles’ words rang through his mind like a clean bell: Power grids.

There was a slither of light passing through the turmoil of clouds so he wasn’t completely submerged in total darkness, but the light just made his surrounding an eerie greyscale of deserted streets and tall reflective buildings.

“Stay inside!” Steve shouted to the civilians that were threatening to spill out of the safety of buildings due to the sudden loss of light and power.

Thinking things through in his head, Steve surveyed the place he was in. If the Casket had been opened like he feared, that means the threat was over. The only thing wrong with his conclusion was that there was a bigger threat just around the corner, but Steve knew that.

He’ll deal with it when it comes. But now, now they need to handle the consequences of failing.

Steve breathed a huge breath of air but it felt as if it did absolutely nothing to his lungs—as if he was still drowning in the burden of leadership. His shoulder was the broadest out of all the Avengers, but that didn’t make it easier to carry the weight on it.

Strapping his shield onto his back, Steve ran to a motorcycle he spotted parked on the side of the street. Thankfully, the key was still attached to it which slightly eases the guilt of stealing because he didn’t have to hardwire the engine. Stealing and taking a conveniently available object that coincidentally happened to be there are two very different things.

Steve blinked at the logic he reached and sighed. Stiles was rubbing off on him. Closing his eyes in an attempt to repent, Steve revved the engine and drove off to where he last saw Natasha.

Of course, with his eyes open—Stiles hasn’t rubbed off on him nearly enough to change him completely. Yet.

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“So, what are you doing?” Loki crossed his arms at the boy who was smiling too wide for it to be at all genuine. “Stop moping and acting all pathetic and do something to fix this.”

“Fix it?” Stiles scoffed, mocking the god’s intelligence. “There’s no way to fix it. Loki. They’ve completely destroyed our power grids—no more electricity. Bye-bye innovation. Welcome back to the Dark Age.”

Well, Stone Age—but since it’s dark, literally and metaphorically, and will continue to be dark for the rest of who knows however the fuck long, thus it’s Dark Age. If anyone would like to disagree—fight him.

“Stiles.” The god took a step closer to the emotional mortal, hands out to try and calm him down. “When I brought wrath down on New York, even I thought that there wasn’t a way to stop that. I thought my plan was perfect. But the Avengers proved me wrong.”

Sighing, the younger shook his head. “This is different.”

“You don’t know that—“

Stiles snapped. “But I do!” He blinked to catch Loki’s stunned expression and felt the slightest pang of guilt run through him—it wasn’t the god’s fault but he was lashing out at him. “There’s no way around this! No Deus Ex Machina to save the day no matter how badly we want it. We can’t fix this, Loki, even Tony knows that.”

Loki stayed silent. He didn’t really understand how technology works in the human world since he’s lived with technology far beyond their years for all of his life. He didn’t understand how something so old-fashioned in his eyes could not be easily repaired. But then again, what was ‘old-fashioned’ to him was most probably humanity’s ‘greatest invention’. “How bad is it?”

Caught off guard with his sudden change of tone, Stiles slid off the counter so he was half leaning against it, bracing himself on the edge with his hands next to him. “On a scale from breaking a mirror to instant death, I’d say it’s ‘monumentally fucked’. Other than the 18 main power grid countries that are absolutely wrecked, we’ve got no power whatsoever; that means no computers, no internet, no light, no technology, no phones, no communications—literally everything doesn’t work.”

Loki hummed, running the numbers in his head. “Well, that’s not all bad. At least other countries are safe, no immediate harm or destruction done.”

“You don’t get it, even if other countries are not damaged by the Casket itself, the repercussions of losing power is all the destruction you’ll need.” At Loki’s perplexed expression, Stiles continued. “For instance, without electricity, traffic lights won’t work, that means traffic accidents. All those injured from traffic accidents will need medical attention but, without electricity, almost all hospital equipments won’t work such as life support machines, surgical equipments and lights, brain imaging technologies, heat generators, water pressure and more. And that’s just from the top of my brain, I can’t even begin imagine about what will happen to everything else.”

The devastation was starting to make sense in Loki’s mind—comparing it to what might happen if Asgard lost its core, the power to everything. Words won’t even begin to describe the horrors. “Okay.” He breathed out, nodding his head to try and help Stiles. “Okay, so despite everything, doing nothing is still the worst option.”

The point made no sense whatsoever in Stiles’ logic, the confused twitch of his brow back on his face.
Loki straightened his posture. “What can you do now?”

“Wea—What do you mean?” Leaning forward to hear him better, Stiles frowned even more. “There’s literally nothing to do.”

“There must be something. There was a time when your ancestors lived without electricity, Stiles, and they didn’t go extinct.”

Stiles paused in his moping. He hated to say it but Loki was right. And wow, what wonders did that do to his pride. The god of mischief, deceit and destruction was more hopeful than he was. God, he really needs one of those self-help books, this has passed ridiculous to just downright sad.

Without warning, Stiles pushed himself off the edge (again, both literally and metaphorically) and proceeded to the elevator before he realized—right, no electricity. As if he was making a point, he gestured widely at the useless metal trapdoor to Loki, who rolled his eyes at him—which, yeah he kinda deserved it.

“Where are you going?” Loki called out after him, following the boy towards the emergency staircase which he was scaling down three steps at a time—he was practically flying.

“Morse Code.”

Loki tread after him to the 4th floor, looking at the plate before going out the doors to a wide space of what looked like a lab. “This is no time to be filled with remorse, Stiles.”

“Wea—No. Not remorse. Morse Code.” Stiles unlocked the glass doors to the lab with his thumb print, rushing into the corner of the lab where all the materials are stored in a messy organization of shelves.

“Morse Code?” Loki trailed behind Stiles while looking around, his questions growing in numbers without getting answered. “Where are we? What is all this?”

“Junk.” Stiles cut the explanation short in order to grab Loki by his wrist and shove him forward, bringing the ball of light that hovered around the god to shed light on the shelves before he started rummaging around said junk.

Loki looked at Stiles with shock in reaction to how comfortable the boy was with grabbing the god who was—until about an hour ago—a prisoner in his captive. “Why would you keep Junk?”

“Ask Tony. This is his lab.” Stiles off-handedly replied to the man as he turned and grabbed Loki to rearrange his hands to form a cradle by his chest before unceremoniously dropping pieces of said junk into his carry.

Loki was too shunned to complain, simply opening his mouth once before shutting it and settled for looking at the junk in his arms as if it personally offended him.

Stiles chucked the last piece of material he needed into Loki’s arms before herding him to the nearest counter.

“Am I your personified grocery bag?” Loki chided the boy despite following his instructions to dump the junk on the counter. “What are you going to do with all this anyway?”

Wheeling a stool over, Stiles immediately made himself busy with his hands. “I’m going to communicate with our team.”
Loki looked at the boy with doubt straightening his look. “With a coil of copper and wooden plank boards?”

“With a Telegraph and Morse Code.” Stiles murmured under his breath, quickly assembling the machine with Loki’s shaky lighting. He pulled the god closer by the hems of his neck in an attempt to bring the light closer. “This is one of the earliest forms of communication with no use of electricity—well not the ones we plug in anyways.”

“And this collective junk put together can be used to communicate?” The tone in Loki’s voice was dubious, mocking at best.

Stiles glared at the man. “If you’re not going to be helpful, go do something. But leave your light.”

Deciding it was best to leave the boy to work, Loki strolled around the lab—Tony Stark’s lab, he reminded himself. A lot of machines or new plans for the IronMan suit was littered around the room with no organization—no security. Loki looked over his shoulder to confirm Stiles’ fixed position at the counter before reaching out to tinker with Tony’s work.

“Don’t touch anything.” Was the voice that reprimanded him.

Glaring at the boy who still had his back towards him (how he managed to know Loki’s action was a mystery to both of them) and rolled his eyes, grumbling. “Fine.”

Stiles could feel the presence of the god looming over his shoulder again as he plugged the headphones in, finishing the set-up. “There.”

“This is your great plan?” Loki waved his hands disappointedly at the sad-looking telegraph.

“Well I’m sorry, ye mighty lord, we humans can’t teleport or send messages telepathically, we have to make do with whatever shitty circumstances we get.” Stiles shot the man a sharp look before putting on the headphones and adjusting the frequency.

Loki waited patiently for Stiles to lock on to the right frequency and watched him tap onto a device repeatedly. “Wait, there’s no mic or receiver, how are you supposed to communicate?”

Stiles continued to tap his message out in rapid precision. “We use Morse Code to send messages. It’s a code with dots and dashes that makes up the alphabet and punctuation, I’m tapping out the message through this transmitter.”

“How does one know whether it’s a dash or a dot?”

“One dot is one tap, one dash is three taps.” Keeping his left hand on the transmitter, his right hand wrote the message he was tapping out on a piece of paper. “The simples one would be SOS. Dot dot dot, dash dash dash, dot dot dot. Three dots for S and three dashes for O. Do you get it now?”

Loki hummed in response.

Seriously, do they not teach this in God School, human technology 101? Do Gods even have school? If they live forever, how do they get the knowledge anyways? Stiles craned his head to look at Loki with a curious glance, blinking his eyes innocently.

“Whatever you’re going to ask—don’t.” Loki shut him down before he could even start, feeling rightfully exasperated at the expression Stiles was showing on his smug face. “I’m pretty sure the answer would be either one of ‘no’, ‘obviously not’ or ‘no, you blubbery moron’.”
Stiles couldn’t really argue with his cruel words because yes, admittedly, those were cruel but true words. But hey, he stood by his unvoiced question. Education is important, kids, stay in school.

“Wait.” Loki paused Stiles in his finger’s track. “How will they get this message?”

Stiles frowned.

“I get that they must have their own radio or some form of receiver, but how will they know to get one or even know you’d be sending them a message?”

That was a good point—a point that Stiles avoided to think about.

“They’ll know.” He settled on his answer, blatantly ignoring his nerves crawling on his spine. “They have to.”

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As soon as Stiles broke the news, Tony immediately flew to where he last saw Clint on his monitor, a few miles off of where he dropped him. He fully intends to grab the archer and fly them to the nearest power grid to their location but everything went pitch black in a matter of seconds.

One minute he was swerving through high rise buildings and the next he was crashing straight into one from the sudden blindness.

“Shit.” He cursed as he went down on a free-fall, his suit systems were offline and not rebooting. “Jarvis!”

Tony flipped midair onto his front, facing the rapidly approaching ground. He boosted his thrusters multiple time, one fail after the other coming up on his monitors. “Come on!”

With one final push, his systems activated and his thrusters burst him up to the sky, barely avoiding the messy impact onto the concrete street. His sight lit up with the assist of Jarvis, redirecting his thrusters to Clint’s location.

“Jarvis, give me an update.” Tony commanded inside his mask, an inkling of what he had hoped was not the answer echoing in his head. “What just happened?”

“I’ve lost contact with the Tower, sir. As a matter of fact, I’ve lost my access to almost every portal of the internet and system.”

Tony cursed to himself, knowing that his comms wasn’t on so he didn’t have to worry about a certain captain’s repercussions (not that he really minded in the first place). “How is everyone?”

“Last time I checked, they were all fine. No one was in a location where the Casket was opened.”

The screen in his mask was an array of different monitors that were all unresponsive. “Jarvis, what are the chances that this is a simple—“

“It’s the Casket, sir.”

Tony rolled his eyes in exasperation. “Would you at least give me the scarce few seconds left to keep my hopes up?”
The billionaire was starting to fear the inescapable repercussions that would undoubtedly devastate them even further into panic and utter chaos, but he couldn’t afford to think of that right now. If the Casket has struck, he has to assume that everything had immediately stopped working.

In the event of an international disaster, communication is key. Well, in any event, communication is key, but in this case particularly—it is the master key. Having said that, he has no doubt in his mind that Stiles would have thought of it too.

And in the world without internet, as the children would find a ‘myth’, the only communication that works over long distances is radio. Since electromagnetic waves, or radio waves in specification, does not need electricity to function, it is the only tool that will benefit them in this situation.

Tony was sure that Stiles would, if he hadn't already, caught on to it. Steve would too, since back in his original days, radios were his form of communication. Thor, on the other hand.

After a brief silence to himself, Tony shook his head. Thor would be fine, he would travel to seek out Bruce as he himself was seeking out Clint. Everyone knew that regrouping was the second most important key in an event of disaster.

“Tony!”

He heard his name shouted out from the familiar raspy voice of the archer. The man of iron immediately swooped down and landed next to the man. Unfortunately, the countries that they were in were on the side of the world that did not get natural light from the sun at their current time. The pitch black darkness was lessened by Tony’s arc reactor but the light was only bright enough to illuminate the short circumference surrounding them.

“Are you okay?” Tony greeted the archer, looking around the area with the light from his hand that he redirected. “Any casualties.”

Clint bit his lips. “I’m fine. But—“ Waiting for Tony to look back to him, he continued. “Some civilians were harmed, some injured and some dead.”

Tony gave the man a minute to get his composure back—and maybe he was also giving himself some time to adjust, because both knew that they really couldn’t do anything to stop lightning in its tracks. But now was not the time to adjust.

“Clint, we need to make a radio.” Tony announced before mumbling to himself. “A crystal radio would work just fine.”

“Already ahead of you.” The archer nodded in the direction of a DIY store across the street. “I’ve scoured the materials, it’s all there.”

Both Avengers made their way to the store and assembled the radio with speed only a mechanic would have. Clint did his part by adjusting the frequency manually to the Avengers line. It was one of their safe-guards; a safe line of communication, a specific frequency to talk amongst themselves if the need were to ever arise.

As soon as Clint found the frequency, the static noise that was rumbling from the speakers was immediately changed with a clean transmission of loud and jarring staccato monotone notes. Clint abruptly stopped and scrambled to find a pen and paper.

“Stiles.” Tony smiled to himself, proving that his inkling about the boy was right. He impatiently waited for Clint to decipher the message. “What is he saying?”
Clint’s pen stopped once he realized the message was on a loop and he had written it down twice. Taking the paper off the table, he read it out loud. “This is Stiles. Casket open. Tower lost power. Come back asap.”


The AI’s voice came loud and clear from the speaker in Tony’s suit. “It explains why I can’t contact the Tower, sir.”

“Wait, isn’t the Tower running on self-sustaining energy source that you’re experimenting on?” Clint imitated Tony’s perplexed expression.

“Supposedly, yes.” Tony’s system would not have been effected, it’s not connected to the power grids.

There were a million questions running in his mind but Tony shoved them aside, there would be a time to address his suspicions. “Clint, can you transmit back to Stiles?”

The archer took a look around the dimly bitted room before nodding. “I see some things that would work as a transmitter with a few modifications. Yes.”

“Jarvis, are the rest of the Avengers getting this transmission?” Tony asked out of instincts before he remembered that even Jarvis couldn’t connect with the members. “Right, um. Bruce will definitely get this transmission, he’ll be fine as long as Thor manages to find him and bring him back to the Tower. That leaves Steve and Natasha.”

“If it helps, sir, Captain Rogers had discarded the Quinjet and has no means of transportation for either him nor Natasha.”

Clint cursed and Tony grumbled. “No, Jarvis, that really doesn’t help.”

The archer was just about done with attaching the transmitter, looking up from his seated position on the table. “Tony, do you know their positions?”

“Yes, well at least where they were the last time I checked.”

Clint nodded to himself before revising his plan. “Okay, here’s what we’ll do. Tony, you’ll go pick Natasha and Steve up. I’ll interrupt Stiles loop with your message and a new one for Bruce and Thor once they’re locked into the frequency. Since I’m the closest to the Tower, I’ll ride my way back and regroup with Stiles.”

Tony was anxious to leave Clint on his own but decided that it was for the best course of action they could take.

“Jarvis. Map a route to Natasha.” Tony slid his mask back on, his thrusters levitating him off the ground. He took one last look at Clint before nodding at the man and flying away.

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Stiles kept Loki entertained (or really it was the other way around, but he didn’t really want to admit that he needed entertainment from a god of such peculiarly morbid talent to distract him from
feeling equally morbid himself) while he waited. He didn’t particularly know what he was waiting for, but he waited regardless.

“What about sandwiches?” Loki hummed from his position at Tony’s favourite swiveling executive chair that he kept in the lab. Stiles figured that the billionaire wouldn’t mind lending it, seeing that Loki had been quite helpful in various ways and he didn’t want to get into another long debate about reprimanding Loki not to touch or use things that weren’t his.

Stiles raised his eyebrows, unbothered by the randomness of the question. “What about sandwiches?”

“I’ve never really understood the origin of that name, truly. They aren’t made from sand nor witches. At least, not to my knowledge.”

“One thing I’ve learned in my exhausting life is to never question the origin of names, my friend.” The younger sat precariously on the edge of the lab counter Loki was swiveling around. “I’ve been stuck with one I can’t decipher, it’s a curse.”

Loki scoffed. “Your name? Stiles? I have to admit it is rather odd but not enough to be a curse isn’t it?”

Stiles gave him a deadpanned stare while simultaneously grabbing a paper, writing something swiftly on it before handing it to the god.

“What’s this?” Loki squinted at the single long writing on it. “A slavic, maybe Gaelic, spell?”

Stiles fought an eye-roll. “That’s my name.”

Loki took one look at the word—if it even classified as one, Loki wasn’t a master at mortal languages but he’s pretty sure that the last few consonants in the alphabet aren’t meant to be used in the same severely debauched word as it would result in... well, a severely debauched word.

Loki rolled his tongue against the roof of mouth before settling on a simple, “My condolences.”

Stiles could barely get a shrug in there as a reply before he was interrupted by a new tapping jarring noise from the radio he had on speaker. The noise jolted him out of his seat, nearly sending him falling to the ground if it weren’t for Loki’s quick reflexes to catch him by the waist.

Sparing a small token of gratitude at the god, Stiles grabbed the paper back from Loki, flipping it to a blank side before taking note of the new transmission coming in. “I told you they’d get it.”

“What does it say?” The god didn’t even bother hiding his curiosity.

Stiles worked in silence before he reached the end of the message and caught the loop. Taking a few moments to make sense of it, he read it out loud: “This is Tony and Clint. Stiles, check the boiler and electrical room. The Tower should be running. Coming back now. To everyone else, regroup at Tower. Casket open.”

With a mutual look of understanding aimed towards one another, the two made their way to the staircase to do exactly as the message said. Stiles made a move to grab the firehose from the wall when Loki stopped him.

“What in the world are you doing?”

Stiles blinked at him. “The electrical room is all the way down in the sub levels of the basement.
4th sub-level, I think? That’s at least an 80 floor climb down—there’s no way in hell I’m doing all that cardio.”

Loki gave him a deadpan. “So you were planning to jump down in hopes that the hose will be strong enough to hold you?”

“What else am I supposed to do?” The boy threw the hose down as if it burned his hands—because now that he thinks about it, yeah, even if the hose manages to hold his weight, there’s no guaranteeing what the whiplash of that hold will feel like.

The god gave one exasperated sigh as if dealing with Stiles was the most burdensome thing he had ever experienced (to which Stiles fully denies), before moving into action. By that he means bending down, scooping Stiles up into his arms, unceremoniously putting him into a princess hold—what is with all these Stiles-carry that everyone keeps putting him in without his consent, he is a grown man with little but still existing pride, put him down damn it—before lifting up into the air and flying above the staircase railing and straight in the middle of the deep hollow space trapped in the square-winding stairs.

Before he could even complain, Loki—that smug ass bastard—freefalled down the height with Stiles loosely in his arms. The sudden surrender to gravity had him clinging onto the god’s neck for some fucking grasp of safety because jesus he swore he almost flew out of the way too loose grip Loki had on his waist and behind his knees. It was as if Loki wanted him to fly out—but then again, it’s Loki so that’s probably what he wanted.

There was an abrupt stop to the wind rushing in his ears and he slowly peeked through his closed lids to find that they were now in a stationary position. Loki gave him an all-knowing smirk. “See, no cardio and no pain.”

“And 10 years shaved off my life I’m not getting back.” Stiles sneered at the god before demanding to be put down, gently, on the safe escape of the holy ground.

Without the key, Stiles mentioned a small apology to the door before kicking it open. He was met with a long metallic hallway that split into different directions. The door to the electric room was right at his side.

“So, what did Stark mean when he said that ‘the Tower should be running’?” Loki trailed his finger on the different towering mechanical cabinet-looking thing on the walls.

The machinery should have been blinking different patterns of red, blue, green shades, illuminating their faces at the contrarily dark room—but they were all dead off power. Stiles squinted his eyes to read the labels on the machines in the darkness. “That’s why we’re here aren’t we? To check the —”

Stiles stopped in his tracks, his eyes landing on something unfamiliar in the machinery. “Wait a second.” He moved closer to one of the generators, his hand poking the sleek black rectangular device unsymmetrically attached to it. “What the hell is this?”

Loki stood closer to inspect the object as Stiles struggled to detach the object from the machinery. “It appears to be magnetically stuck.”

“I can see that, thank you.” Stiles huffed a breath of air in an attempt to rearrange his annoyingly disturbing tuff of hair that’s hanging by his face, his hands giving up on battling the device.

His hand raised palm-flat on the device, intending to force it to move using his—Stiles blinked. He
retracted his hand, looking at it as if it was something he had never seen before. Right, because he forgot. He can’t.

“Loki.” He struggled out. “Can you help me—help me take this please.” Loki pinned a concerned look at him, but Stiles was just focused on his hand. “I can’t do it, I don’t have—“ powers.

Loki was considerate enough to cut him short by ripping the device from the machine with force, a static of electricity buzzing between them from the detachment. “It’s alright, I’ve got it.”

Stiles cleared his throat, shaking his hands before reaching out to grab the device. “Thank you. Well, um.” He flipped the object in his grasp, inspecting it as he unlatched one of the panels, revealing the inside of the rectangular metal. “Wait, this is an EMP device.”

“A what?”

“EMP.” Stiles checked the wirings and components to be sure. “Electromagnetic Pulse—it basically shorts out our power or electronic devices along with signals, it disrupts everything.”

“So, all this might just be because of that?” With such small words, Loki addressed the catastrophe that they were living in.

But see, Stiles would gladly eat those small words for breakfast, lunch and dinner if it makes them any more true than it is undeniably false. “No. This device is only capable of a short, maybe medium, pulse and that is not enough to effect the whole world. The Casket was definitely opened. But this?”

Loki caught the device recklessly thrown to him.

“This was planted here on our generator to disrupt the Tower personally.” Stiles frowned at the implication of what he just said, filing it in the back of his mind to talk to Tony about in a later time. “That’s why the Tower was affected.”

Stiles pried open the generator casing in the wall, finally setting eyes on the intricate yet beautiful technology inside it. “Oh, wow.” He touched the structure, the marvelous innovation brimming with untapped energy, the light a familiar hue he’s always stared at in battles. “So that’s what Tony meant.”

“He built an arc reactor for the Tower.” Stiles turned to the god who was peeking over his shoulder. “It runs on a completely different power grid, all on its own—a self sufficient energy source.”

Loki smirked, somehow having expected this new leaf to turn. “Does that entail what I think it does?”

Stiles returned the smile with a smug one of his own, his hands working to fix the disturbance that affected the reactor. With one last new wiring in place, Stiles closed the casing to the reactor and pushed the emergency start-up button on the side.

“I think it does.”

The sound of the clicking button was followed with the sudden flood of light, nearly blinding his eyesight. The machines cried back to live with a loud whirring sound and a flash of the blinking colorful lights he had been expecting to see when he came into the room.

They had power.
“Let there be light.”

“Loki.” Stiles tried to hide his smile of joy in vain. “You’re a god, but still not that God.”

“We’ll see about that.” Was the vague comment he got back.

And he did not want to ruin the joy of fixing one problem in the midst of myriads of them with just one suspiciously ridiculous remark—thus, Stiles swallowed his snark and simply smiled.

If that’s not progress, nothing is.

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Stiles waited patiently in the now well-lit room of the common floor, where there was a balcony that the Avengers—well at least those who could fly (including Banner, which in his case he leaps)—liked to use as their landing station. Loki was by his side, sporting himself a martini that Stiles made him out of gratitude and boredom, but mostly boredom.

There was silence one moment and then there was a heavy loud crack that sounded from the balcony. Stiles and Loki whipped their heads to the site of crash to be met with the sight of one bamboozled thunder god and shell-shocked scientist.

Unable to read the tension, or rather the cause of tension, Stiles ran and opened the sliding windows to the balcony. “Thor! Bruce! Thank god you’re back.”

Stiles placed his hand on Thor’s bulging arm muscle which damn, is a hell of a lot more glisteningly sweaty from his perspiration. He advantageously learned two things in that moment other than Thor’s ridiculously solid muscle mass. One, Gods do, in fact, sweat. And two, never let Loki out of his cage.

For obvious reasons, after all he’s the god of mischief, but also for the fact that it flips Thor’s switch like none other. And not exactly the good kind.

“Loki.” He murmured in barely contained rage and accusation.

Shit fuck. Stiles’ grip on Thor’s arm tightened in an effort to stop him—the fact that his hand couldn’t even cover the entire circumference of those muscles were just a passing thought in the back of his mind; it is, no one can prove him wrong, if it makes an appearance in his dreams then well, that’s just a coincidence. “Thor, calm down.”

Instinctively, the god threw Stiles behind him, shielding him from his brother. “Get back, Stiles. Are you alright? Did he do anything to you?”

Loki figured it’d be best to just back down and raise his hands in surrender. Stiles could feel his eyebrow raise indignantly; see, he may have lost his powers but he’s not a fucking damsel in distress who needs protection, thank you very much.

“No, Thor.” He shook off the grip the god had on him and stood in between the two brothers. “Loki’s fine. He helped me.”

Thor did not look convinced, but no one could blame him after all he went through in Asgard
because of him. “In exchange for what? His freedom?”

Loki ignored the reoccurring feeling of his brother’s distrust in him, masking it under a smirk. “I helped out of the goodness of my heart, if you can believe that.”

“Is the smirk really necessary? I mean, you’re not exactly helping here.” Stiles rounded on his back and reprimanded the god. These omnipotent beings and their smug sense of ego—would it kill them to show some sense of decency and honesty, jesus.

Thor brandished his hammer in his hands, his gaze heated and focused at his brother. Just when Stiles thought it couldn’t get worse, he heard a small huff of growling behind him. As he slowly turned, he was met with the sight of Bruce leaning on the glass wall, breathing heavily, a green tinge flowing in his veins.

Oh no. No. This is not happening. After all he went through, all the stress screaming at him, and finally getting the fucking power back on—he is not going to have a Hulk rampaging around the Tower.

Stiles didn’t know what to do. In the back of his mind, he thought of ways to end this tension but all those scenarios would require the use of his now dead spark, so yeah—no fucking use whatsoever. His heart is not breaking, yours is.

Being human, sparkles—fuck, sparkless. Jesus, he needs some sleep, he can feel his brain cells dying—and completely maxed out on his sensibility and consideration, Stiles cursed underneath his breath and did one thing he never thought he’d end up doing ever.

The boy sighed heavily before turning on his feet, lunging one hand towards the god of mischief’s raised hand and tugged on him, hard. Hard enough to throw the god of his balance and drag him over to Stiles, proceeding to very gracefully (with a mess of limbs) wrap his arms around Loki’s neck and pull him down into a rough, rather awkward, but very endearing—at least, it was supposed to be, until Loki started choking in his tight grasp—embrace.

Nobody knew what to say because who was he kidding, in their perspective he was hugging a villain, no correction: their worst enemy, which was still unsurprisingly an understatement.

Stiles, of course, didn’t know what was so gobsmackingly shocking about it; Loki did, after all, helped him. A hug or two shouldn’t be that harmful can it?

He blames it on his lack of sleep, brain-to-limb filter, spark, brain, well—he blames it on his everything. Because of his general lack of basically everything required to be a decent human being, he didn’t know shit about what he’d just done.

To make things worse, the one person that should not have been included in witnessing the scenario had popped up. They were all too caught up in processing what Stiles just did to realize that they had more company. Company in the form of Tony Stark, Natasha Romanov and one Steve Rogers.

“Stiles.”

He turned around and saw him: a very extremely shocked and horror-stricken Steve fucking Rogers.

Tony was the first to recover, looking at the two sides before gulping down a suspiciously high-voiced, “Oh boy.”
Steve was a soldier. That was his reason of excuse when he reacted on his ‘soldier’ instinct as he threw his shield to the god that was currently in Stiles’ hold. The burning emotion he felt in the pit of his guts had absolutely nothing to do with it.

It didn’t.

Stiles reacted on instincts too, turning Loki a full 180 degrees so that he would be in the line of the shield’s attack. However, as soon as he turned, the god grounded his feet and flipped them right back to their original position just in time for the shield to knock the air out of his lungs.

The shock in everyone’s eyes were loud and clear even though it was an action void of sound. Steve’s face fell in a hardened grimace, a tad bit laced with regret and shame.

“Loki!” Stiles gasped out of him as he struggled to hold up the god’s weight. He angled his head towards Steve and frowned at the man.

Tony was on the edge of his toes wondering what the right thing was to do, but he had his repulser charging discreetly, though he wasn’t really sure who to aim it at. Steve was rightfully reconsidering his actions as seen by his frozen stature under Stiles’ heated gaze, patiently and anxiously waiting for the repercussions of what he did. Bruce, well, Bruce was just hiding in the corner behind the kitchen behind one strongly standing Natasha—which was a ridiculous sight to behold, but a rational one indeed.

But what they were expecting—which was a meltdown from Stiles and a one-sided screaming match on his behalf—didn’t happen. Instead, he holstered Loki unto his shoulder and proceeded to walk him to the elevator.

The doors of the metal mechanism shut with an echo louder than all of them thought it ever had. It was especially, unbearably, loud and final for a certain captain.

“Where are you taking me?” Loki murmured in a breathless voice as they came out of the elevator on a hallway with two opposing doors.

Stiles shifted the god’s weight on his side to unlock the door before opening it and dragging the god inside to the living room. “My flat.”

In true Loki fashion, he smirked. “What, no wine and dine?” He was tilting his head side to side as if he was considering something very seriously. “Luckily for you, I rather like a straightforward approach.”

In return, in true Stiles fashion, he dumped the god of mischief on his couch with no regards to his injury. It might’ve be mean, since he did take a full-frontal hit from Captain America’s shield in
his place, but hey—actually, nah, it’s Loki. It’s well deserved treatment.

Stiles wasted no time to fish out his medical supplies that he kept in his living room to treat the god that was groaning in pain on his couch. He jumped over the back of his couch and proceeded to strip the being from his garments, revealing his back.

“Very straightforward.” Loki quipped.

Since he was facing Loki’s back, Stiles just rolled his eyes at the remark, continuing his ministrations of putting salve on the rapidly bruising skin.

“You are aware that gods heal on a level different from humans right, we don’t really need all this mundane treatment you call medicine.”

Stiles was not fazed by the rather obvious statement, grabbing a roll of bandage. “Yeah, well, you just took a blow from Captain fucking America so this injury is like no other, my fella. Plus, this is magically enhanced medicine that I personally made—trust me, it’ll help.”

Apparently, something he said must’ve had much more effect than he thought because the god kept silent after that, letting the boy finish his treatment. Once Stiles was done with wrapping the bandages around Loki’s mid-riff, the god spoke in a tone he’s never heard before.


The boy’s hands stopped, the excess bandage hanging on his finger. “I could ask you the same thing.” He stuffed the cloth aside. “You could’ve dodged his shield, but you took the blow.”

Loki craned his neck around to face him. “Could I?”

The expression on the god’s face was one that Stiles couldn’t decipher—so perfectly void of any tell-tale emotions, a perfect poker face. “I can’t figure you out at all.” Sighing, Stiles leaned against the couch and flopped into a comfortable position. “On one hand you might’ve just done it to fool everyone that you’re on their side, and on the other you could just be doing it out of the sheer ‘goodness of your heart’.”

Huffing out a small laugh, Loki slotted himself into the couch, sinking further into the soft pillow. “Most people think I don’t have that.”

“See, I’m still open to suggestions, but I’m leaning towards the second explanation, yes.” Stiles hummed, staring up against the ceiling.

Loki shared a small smile to himself.

“If it does end up being the first one though, you truly will be the most cunning being I’ve never dreamed to exist, Loki.”

And that, to the both of them, was one hell of a compliment.

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The Avengers waited around their conference room, members swiveling in their chair uncomfortably. Clint took note of Steve’s rigid pose on his chair, arms bent at the elbow from the
impending storm coming their way in the form of one lean snarky boy.

Stiles barged in through the double doors with no words to his entrance, he just straight up walked the short distance and didn’t even bother to sit down before he threw a black box device on the table.

“I found this in our electrical room.”

Tony, being Tony, was the first to grab at the object, inspecting it in his hands. “An EMP device?” Stiles addressed him with a strict nod. “How is that in—?”

“I’ve got no fucking clue.” The boy cut him short, the tension in the air hanging still. “But, I’m guessing that’s why our signal got cut and powered down even though we’re in a self-sustaining building, why my phone was affected and shut down for no valid reason, why—basically, why this whole thing went to shit even when we’ve figured everything out.”

There was a tsunami of regret that washed over each and every one of the Avengers, but Stiles felt the burden of inaction far more than the others did.

“The day the Triskelion was attacked.” Clint piped up from his seat. “My best bet is that they planted it then.”

Tony chuckled in response, shocking everyone. “Here we go again.

“You’ve got something to say, Tony?” Clint challenged him in a mocking way. To be fair, everyone was emotional, tired and devastated. They were still in the process of understanding just what the fuck had happened and now they were faced with this same problem again and again.

“Yes, as a matter of fact. Thank you for asking, you gentle-archer-man.” The billionaire swiveled in his chair. “Who the hell are we fighting? What the hell are we fighting?”

Natasha looked as if she was about ready to rip Tony’s tongue out his throat but Bruce held her hand in a steady grasp.

“They—whatever, whoever they are—have been planning this for far longer than we can think. Things that might not be related in any way might just be a step in their plan. I feel like we’re missing something big. As if we’re just playing a pre-determined game with a set of constantly changing rules.”

Clint clicked his tongue and stared Tony down to get his attention. “Are you just going to complain or are you going to give us an answer?”

The frown that was slowly etched on Tony’s face was enough for Bruce to reach out a hand to the man as well, trying to hold his emotions down with his weak grip.

Before anymore damage could be done, Stiles exhaled even louder than he did before. “Tony, please.” He turned his head to the archer. “Clint.”

The exasperated expression on his face was enough to shut the two bickering men up. Bruce cleared his throat in an attempt to refocus their discussion. “It’s no use trying to think of what could’ve been or useless ‘if’s and ‘whatnot’s, now we have to think of what comes after.”

“I don’t know.” Natasha contributed with a slump on her seat. “One thing’s for sure though, it’s
nothing good.”

Stiles pushed away from the seat he was leaning on, letting the wheels of the chair collide against the table leg. “This failure. Our failure. The repercussions will affect everyone, everywhere.”

Steve was one move away from pulling the boy to stay as he saw him inching away from the table. But he didn’t feel like he had the courage, nor right to do so. And so they all watched as he left the room with a question that would wreck their days to come.

“What do we do to make up for that?”

~~~

Stiles threw his phone at the wall out of frustration. Yes, electricity was back in the tower and yes his phone had power again, but obviously the connection was still down because everywhere else in the fucking world is still dead as his gameboy.

He had meant to call Chase to receive an update about the supernatural world and all its mischief—and also update him on his contribution to its temporary stop. Speaking of which, where the fuck did Chase go? Even before the attack happened, he had been unreachable for days.

And there goes his anxiety.

_Fuck._

*What if something had happened to him?*

*What if he had found something out?*

*What if their enemy knew he had found something?*

*What if—*

There was a series of knocks on his door that disrupted his spiral of darkness. Stiles snapped his head up from the edge of his seat on his couch. He collected his thoughts together and took a deep breath.

Stiles didn’t know what he was expecting on the other side of that door, maybe Clint or Tony because they’re the type to rant whenever these shitty situations happen. He was not expecting, however, the appearance of Steve Rogers at his door.

There was a mutual guilt that struck the both of them as they laid their eyes on each other once the door opened. Steve, for obvious reasons, and Stiles, for acting harshly towards the man.

Before Stiles could react to his appearance other than the slack gapping mouth he was sporting, Steve rushed in and collected the boy in his arms.

The enveloping warmth of Steve’s arm was a familiar comfort that he had rarely felt throughout the entirety of his time in SHIELD. It was something he didn’t know he needed in that moment, but little did he knew, he _desperately_ needed it.

They were stood there in the darkness for a time that both of them thought was too short. Stiles
didn’t bother turning the lights on in his room—he felt like he somewhat didn’t deserve it. It was an evening—half a day has passed since the world turned dark—the clouds loomed and casted a shadow over Stiles’ towering windows.

“I’ve wanted to do that since I saw you.” Steve whispered near his ears, his head slowly pulling back from the hug. “I’m so sorry, Stiles. I lost control, I was full of emotions and when I saw Loki—I didn’t know what to do and next thing I know you were glaring at me and I—“

“Can we just—“ Stiles gripped Steve on his shoulder harder to make him stop, an exhausted expression painted on his features, “—take a break from all this?”

The silence prompted Stiles to elaborate. “Can we stop living in this disaster and just be us, whatever ‘we’ are?” He held onto the taller man’s shoulder even more tightly, almost in fear of losing his grip. “Just for a moment.”

Steve’s nod was brief and short, but his words were even softer. “Anything you want.”

“What I want more than anything is to rest.” Stiles laughed with his head slowly leaning on Steve’s shoulder in place of his hand, softly adding. “Tired.”

The boy was about to drowse off to sleep and Steve, being the gentleman and the swooning prince charming he was, picked Stiles up by the back of his knees and a hand around his back. Stiles was in Steve’s arms without a single word of protest—because no, unbelievable as it may sound, his snark and pride does have off-days and needs to be charged in order to function.

Steve sat down on the plush couch Stiles had in his living room, sinking down and bringing the boy in his arms down with him. The man rearranged a blanket to cover them and propped his legs on the coffee table in front of them.

Stiles snuggled further into Steve’s shoulders, sitting sideways on Captain America’s lap. His hands were still snaked around Cap’s shoulder and he made no move to move them whatsoever. Call it drowsiness or call it lack of self-control, whatever it was, Stiles didn’t care.

In the midst of all this shit-storm, Steve was the cornerstone of home that stayed stable and present near his presence. And he needed a home, especially in that moment.

“Something Loki said struck me.”

Steve blinked from his attempt at a light slumber, peacefully stroking the boy’s back. He hummed in response.

Stiles kept his eyes closed, somehow scared to open them. “He said even if we were lucky enough that our predicted location happened to be a location for a power grid, we wouldn’t have been able to stop it.”

The Captain knew better than to criticize Loki in this situation, because as annoying and as self-righteous and confident the god may be and as optimistic as Captain America stands for, Steve knew the god had a point. They would be useless against it. Thus he hummed again, waiting for Stiles to make his point across.

“And for a second, I thought about that possibility—about one of you being there in a country where the casket was opened.” Stiles burrowed his head into the crook of Steve’s neck, his voice getting waveringly softer. “About you being there.”

Steve craned his head to face Stiles when he moved. “And?”
“And—“ Stiles tilted his head to meet the man’s gaze he felt on him, his eyes clear with worry and affection. “And I was so relieved that you weren’t.”

“Why?” The Cap whispered into the dark silence, his eyes enraptured by Stiles’ honest honey orbs.

“Because I know you. I know all of you.” They were close, Stiles noted. So close he could hear Steve’s heartbeat lulling him into a peaceful state of mind, a safe place. “You would’ve tried to stop it even though you knew you couldn’t. Even if it costs you your life.”

Steve felt the fear that Stiles felt, and he painfully smiled in an attempt of assuring him—something. Because he knew he couldn’t assure Stiles that he’d never do that. “Well, that’s what we have to do.”

The answer was one that Stiles expected, yes, but still it brought a weird mixed feelings of acceptance and sorrow, yet peacefully if that makes sense.

“I know.”

Oh, he knows.
HELLOOOOOO. HI. BONJOUR. KONNICHIWA. ANNYEONGHASAEYO. HOLA. ALOHA. For some reason, I almost always start this introduction with an apology (says a lot about my writing, doesn’t it lollll) but sorry for being predictable but I’m going to start this of with an apology this time as well by saying IM SORRY FOR BEING SO LATE. THERE’S A REASON I SWEAR. My uni has been throwing so many things in my face and I’m drowning in weird sleeping schedules, ridiculous philosophy essays and just a mountain of things. Anyways, above all that, this chapter is the biggest reason why I’m late. This chapter will be quite different from the rest, and you’ll see why later on. Writing this chapter has been the most difficult feat, because it took me a lot of research (the most I’ve done so far in this fic, not kidding, legit I have pdf downloads on the materials) and a lot of thinking. It was also hard due to the topic this chapter revolves around, I should warn you this might not be what you’re expecting at all. I don’t know if I would call this my favourite chapter because that would be weird to say, nor would I say I loved writing it—but I feel as if this is an integral part of the story and atmosphere I’m trying to build so, I have no regrets~

Oh and I have decided to leave this entire work unbeta’ed. I figured that I should focus on finishing chapters and fixing the plot lines as well as plot holes and then beta the whole work once it's done. I have no idea why but the minute I finish a chapter, I have to upload it immediately. It's a thing, okay, and I have it--obsession, maybe? I don't know. So I hope that's okay!!!!!

Once again, thank you for the lovely comments and thank you for your patience. I can promise you for sure that I will NEVER abandon this fic so, don't worry, no matter how long I will STILL update. Thank you for the love and support I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH~~~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Carl!” Stiles called over his shoulder, his eyes focusing on the hook needle he was piercing through bloodied skin. “Bandage here, please!” He tied the skin-safe thread with a determined look and faced the teenager scrunching her face in pain. “You’re fine now.”

The girl winced through her smile of gratitude, hands hovering above the suture on her upper thigh. “Thank you.”

“No problem.” Stiles chucked the hook, pliers and disinfectant back into the tray. “So, Carl is going to be here soon to help you wrap this up so it doesn’t get infected, he’s also going to run you through the procedure of how to treat it, please listen carefully so he does not need to repeat it twice—it has happened more than we’d expected and he’s a bit of an impatient bastard.”

A hand his the back of his head, nearly sending him crashing to the floor from his crouch. “I can literally hear you talking shit about me from across the room, Stiles. Go ahead, you’re needed elsewhere.”

“I’ll leave her to you then.” The young man picked his tray up and ran from one of the rooms in
the corridors to the lobby, where he was met with a pleasant surprise. “Clint!”

The archer turned from his perch at the reception table, smiling a wide grin for the sight of the boy. “Hey

“I thought you weren't supposed to be back yet!” Stiles pulled back from the casual hug, instinctively checking the man for any injuries.

Clint rolled his eyes, knowing exactly what Stiles was doing. “Yeah, we decided to return early, and no, I’m not injured. Nothing happened.” He looked around the bustling space of the Avengers Tower lobby. “So, how’s it going here?”

Stiles smile dropped slightly, just enough to notice. “It’s what can be expected.”

It has been a whole 8 months since the world turned dark. A long, painfully long, 8 months of people transcending into chaos and panic. The first month was the hardest. Everyone was on immediate alert, everyone suffering from what the Casket did to them—and the power grid site countries, they were the picture perfect devastation incarnate. Either the whole country was obliterated—frozen, destroyed and barren of life—or worse, escaped complete destruction by the brink of luck and were suffering even more. The Casket released an infinity winter along with reoccurring thunderstorms, this meant that the countries struck by the Casket was now a barred dead zone. No one could go in or out of those countries.

They were all trying to do the best they can—help as much as they can. But that first month, they didn’t. They couldn’t. Without electricity, there was no connection—without connection, the Avengers were in the blind of everything happening. They tried to blindly search for trouble or disasters or just anyone in need of help, flying through random countries with the help of Thor and Ironman. But that didn’t result in much, or even if it did by chance, they were too late in most cases.

Basically it was the worst month in recent history. Each nation, each country, each being—they did not know exactly how horrible the repercussions were worldwide because they were focusing on their own pain, on their own disasters. It was just recently when they set up a communication system with morse code and radio signals that they learned just how horrifying it was.

The day the Avengers learned, through weeks of compiling data from each country—at least the ones they could reach and make contact with—, they couldn’t function for days. How could anyone; when they just learned that their failure cost the whole world population to drop from 7.7 to just a mere 3.6 billion.

3.6 billion. With the assumption that the countries they could not reach and the countries that were destroyed by the Casket were dead or reduced by at least half in population. 3.6 billion people—men, women, children—dead.

3.6 billion dreams, laughter, memories, unreached potential, and joy stolen in a blink of time.

The number had stuck in their heads like the echo of a gunshot.

3.6 billion.

“Did you find anything that can help?” Stiles shook himself from his trance, turning to Clint who was still overseeing the lobby.

Clint faced him for a slight second just to give him a shameful shake of his head. “We weren’t expecting to find any, given the circumstances of our expedition.” He placed his hand on Stiles’
shoulders. “I’m sorry.”

“No, don’t be.” Stiles shook Clint’s hand off in a joking manner to lighten up the mood, bumping the man on his shoulder. “We’ll make do.”

That was a blank statement and both of them knew it.

A few days after the Avengers regrouped in the Tower, Stiles grew sick and tired of moping in his own misery and the collective depressing moo that the Avengers had pooled up into. Tony and Thor were gone most days, carrying Steve or Natasha along with them in their world-wide ‘look-out’ duty—but as established, that didn’t exactly work out. And whilst they were trying out that strategy, Stiles and Bruce tried to make repercussions.

It struck him when he finally took a step outside. He was cooped up for a whole day in that Tower and he hadn’t seen the damage in real time. When he saw just how many people were on the streets —crying, sleeping, hurting. His first thought was ‘what happened to their homes’, and his second thought was what sent him rushing back to the tower.

“Hospital!” He barged into Bruce’s lab.

The doctor nearly threw his tablet in the air, he was in the middle of doing performance reports on every equipment he had. The Avengers Tower retained power, thus makes their machines worth a lot more as the last functioning technology on earth.

Stiles smiled at the memory briefly before going behind the reception desk and picking up a black clipboard from Amy, the receptionist on duty. He sighed at the number of pages attached to the clipboard, flipping back the papers until he reached a page with unhighlighted names.

They had a system now, after a month into the plan. Plan would be a very loose word to phrase the catastrophic unassembled mess that was the idea to establish a pop-up hospital in the Avengers Tower. There was an influx of patients, materials, machines and equipments that had to be sorted out in the first week of opening—or what the Avengers would like to call the ‘Blur of February’. They had visited every hospital within the tristate area to rope them into cooperating with their new idea, and they all had consented, well at least the ones that were still open consented. There were hospitals that have been abandoned due to the lack of electricity. Tony made the decision to uproot all supplies from the abandoned hospitals and had them moved into the Tower where it could be of more use.

All in all, they had acquired all the equipments and materials needed to run a hospital. They were set to go, and they had recruited doctors as well. That’s probably when Stiles realized that there were still hope left in the people—the fact that there were doctors willing to move across the state to help run a hospital, to help save people even in he middle of all this destruction and catastrophe.

Then, they threw out the word that there was a functioning hospital running in the Avengers Tower. Yes, threw out, as in Tony’s iron legion flew across America, Canada, Mexico and South America whilst blasting the announcement out loud. Clint and Natasha also set up a looped message in almost all the radio frequencies so anyone that had a radio could get the information. They put out an open invitation to doctors and hospitals to move out and help in the Tower as well, bringing whatever equipment or salvageable materials they could get with them.

“How many has been added?” Stiles asked Amy, he picked up the red clipboard whilst tucking the black one under his arm, checking the list for unhighlighted names.

Amy sipped on her coffee, rubbing her eyes to stay focused, typing on her keyboard to check the
updated catalog. “Fifteen to green, three to yellow, six to red and two to black. Just in the last hour.”

Bruce came up with the color scheme of priority. They grouped incoming patients through these colors, putting their name on the respective colored clipboard. Green was for patients with minor injuries, like scratches or bleeding and basically things that could be resolved in the matter of seconds or under 10 minutes. Yellow are for those who had more serious injuries such as dislocated bones that needed popping back or open injuries that needed stitches, things that could be fixed in 10 to 30 minutes. Red is for severe injuries such as broken bones, profuse bleeding or blood loss, or head injuries, or injuries that would most likely lead to the patients being hospitalized. Black is for death-inducing injuries such as organ injuries, organ failures or internal injuries. All patients will have to queue for color screening in the entrance with a simple brief three-five word diagnosis, and the information would be forwarded to the reception desk and they would add the names to the clipboards. All working personnel would have to check in with the desk once they finished with a patient and wanted to go help another, highlighting the next patient on the list to indicate that they were taken care of.

The Green patients were usually handled by volunteers and those who only have minimal knowledge of first aid. The Yellow patients are handled by certified agents and those with background in medical knowledge such as university students. The Red patients are under the hospital interns, nurses, and those with advanced knowledge and experience in medicine. The Black categorized patients were strictly handled by doctors, only those who have a degree in medicine or positions in hospitals.

Stiles stole Amy’s coffee and gulped it down in one go, the woman didn't even complain because she knew how much he needed it. For god’s sake, the man hasn't slept in days—he needs all the fucking adrenal and coffee he can get his hands on. He placed the red clipboard down in place of a yellow clipboard, then placed that one down to grab a highlighter, the black clipboard now back in his hand.

“Get some of the people on the Yellow duty to transfer to Red, only those who’re advanced. Take Luke, Darcy, Kevin and two others.” There was a total of seven unhighlighted patients on the blackboard, Stiles proceeded to highlight two names off the list as he simultaneously checks the StarkPad he has on his fanny-pack (yes, he has a fanny-pack, it’s very helpful and convenient especially as he keeps moving around rampantly) to see the availability and progress of surgery rooms and surgeons. “Page Dr. Forrins to Surgery Room no. 3, he’s just finished with his last surgery. Also, call Dr. Jenkins to room 5, his break time’s almost over.”

“Kara! Liam!” He waved over the nurses in charge of looking after the black-assigned patients until they were within hearing distance. “One of you take the patient with a punctured liver to room 3, and the other with the collapsed lung to room 5.”

The nurses rushed with the patients on the gurneys to the elevators. Amy immediately set out to his order, her pager in one hand and a landline handset on her other, calling different people in rapid speed and accuracy. She was amazing as a receptionist, seeing that she had to handle calling or paging the doctors, calling the preparation team to get the surgery room ready with necessary machines, and updating the data on the lists and her PC at the same time. Amy reminded him of Lydia, her skills were impeccable.

Blinking out of his thoughts, he checked the StarkPad for availability of doctors and surgery rooms, along with progress reports on surgeries and stock updates. His shift was almost over before he has to call Dr. Romsarkov to take his spot at the hectic lobby. Looking at the clock, and then at the crowd of patients occupying the busy space, Stiles sighed.
“Amy.” He called behind this shoulder. “Cross the patient with internal bleeding off the Black list and prep surgery room no.1 for abdominal surgery, call me as soon as it’s ready.”

The hospital has been running for the most part of 6 months, going on 7 months. Technically they opened the hospital almost immediately after they had come up with the idea, but it took quite a while before there was enough staff and equipment for it to be fully operational. In the first month, Stiles was an assistant surgeon—spending all his hours, day and night, in the theatre helping doctors do their surgery. When he was not in the operating room, he was helping run the hospital and managing it. When he was not doing that, he was learning and studying medicine, as much as he can, as fast as he can. And soon enough, on the third month, he started to do surgeries on his own, being the lead surgeon. Juggling the full doctor status and the technical CEO of the hospital was, well, a lot—to underestimate it.

“Stiles!”

He ran to the intern who called him, Jourdain, who was manning one of the five positions in the colour screening. As soon as he got there, he saw a man hanging between the shoulders of two women—his family, he supposes—unconscious.

“What’s wrong?” He prompted.

“The patient is drowsy, pupil dilation around 1 mm, unresponsive. I think he’s in a stupor.” Jourdain had been an intern at the ER department in Mt Sinai Hospital for a year and a half, one of the best in New York.

Stiles gestured for the women to lay him down on a gurney. He fished his compact flashlight from his fanny-pack (see, convenient) and checked the eyes of the man. It was like Jourdain said. He frowned. “Take a CT scan, now.”

Jourdain wheeled the man to one of the two CT rooms, conveniently placed in the lobby per Stiles’ request. Whilst waiting for the scan, Stiles led the two women to sit down in the waiting area, handing them two cups of hot chocolate before running off when his name was hollered by Amy.

“Yes?”

Amy smiled in pity. “The room’s ready for you.”

“Thank you, you’re amazing.” He ran off again, at this point his track of movement was one similar to a pinball machine, and he was the pitiful ball rolling in every which way in ridiculous speed. He tapped a nurse in the Black section, telling her to transport the patient to the surgery room. “Tell them to prep the patient for surgery, I’ll be there in a minute.”

Making a last round of the stations, Stiles called Dr. Romsarkov up for his shift. He signed off on the StarkPad—a necessity every personnel needs to do so everyone knows where everyone is and what they are doing if anyone needs to know—and signed on for a surgery status.

Stiles was just about to get into the elevator before Jourdain held him back. “Whoa, give a guy a warning the next time you want to get his attention, or you’ll end up with a lawsuit for sexual harassment sooner or later.”

Jourdain rolled his eyes at him, a sight he often sees, and gave him a CT scan. “Here’s the result.”

The instant he saw the scan, his expression went from stressed to gutter. “That’s a intracerebral hemorrhage, and it’s near the brain stem.” He passed the scan back after closing the folder, looking at the man with a pointed expression. “You know what it is, you know what to do. So, why are you
The sullen face he got as a response made Stiles feel like a dick—which, yeah he admitted he was, it comes with all the traumatic shit he’s been through, although it’s certainly no justification for the behavior—but this was something that they all shared the same sentiment to.

“Look, Jourdain.” He placed his hands on the young man, hoping to convey as much empathy as he could. “We have more inpatients than outgoing ones, and that number increases everyday. I get your feeling, I really do. But you’re going to have to come to terms with it, one way or another. So label them White, explain the options to their next of kin and move along with the next patient, okay?”

Without a look back, Stiles went in and slammed the elevator button close repeatedly. Waiting for the number to reach the surgery floor on the 7th, he leaned his head against the wall. The White clipboard. See, one thing—if anything—about being in a post-apocalyptic world, is that everything becomes a matter of choice and survival. Whites are the color codes assigned to patients with guaranteed death, meaning those with injuries that are life-threatening and requires time consuming surgery, and even then would not have much chances of survival post-surgery. The White labelled patients are basically left for dead, and their next of kin is given an option whether they would want to take the patient home and live out the rest of their numbered days in pain or if they would like to administer euthanasia, to die painlessly in the hospital.

The system is ridiculous and bat shit fucking crazy. There was a whole debate about the system when it was still in its construction stages, in which there was lots of shouting, accusing, violence and crying that left Bruce, Stiles and Tony refusing to talk to one another for the better part of a week. But there had really been no choice. There aren’t enough beds for patients, and even less doctors to treat everyone—they need to prioritize in order to achieve a high success rate for those who actually can make it. Hospitals are a rare fucking commodity—and they are the most advanced hospital branch that they know of, unless of course somewhere in China they finally broke out their secret energy programme and are now plotting their dominance of the world then, yeah, they are the leading authority on medicine.

Before he had more time to dwell on the spiraling subject, the elevator doors opened. He was immediately greeted by the house officer on the floor—Lauren, holding a StarkPad and an array of nurses at her back holding his surgery gown. “The patient has ruptured arteries, and we suspect internal damage to his intestines, but we’re not sure where exactly.”

Stiles grumbled at the same time the nurses slipped his gown on, hands tying the lapels behind his back. “Why does it have to be that hellish shit-show of a maze?” Flaying his hands out for the nurses to adjust his cuffs, he muttered. “Can’t it be something easy like, I don’t know, the stomach?”

Lauren ignored his remarks in favor of pushing her glasses up the bridge of her nose, continuing to brief him until they were in front of the surgery room. “We’ve administered the anesthesia and he’s completely under, also we prepared two pints of his blood type for back up.”

He finished washing his hands, holding it up for the nurses to put his gloves on. “That’ll do, thanks Lauren. Oh, and once a room is vacant, call down to reception and let Amy send another black-list patient up with any doctor we have at hand.”

The doors to the surgical room, which was previously a lab, opened to reveal the surgical staff awaiting his orders. “Let’s get this started.”
Tony shut the panel back, letting his hands stay on the latch for far longer than necessary. He took one last read at the screen next to it—monitoring the data of the machinery inside the panel. He gave it some modifications before he left the room.

Sighing, he locked the door behind him and went to the elevator. “Jarvis, take me to where Stiles is, please.”

“He’s currently roaming the patients ward, sir. As we speak, he’s arriving in the 21st floor.” The ICU ward, Tony thought to himself. “I’ll set the floor for you, sir.”

The elevator started moving, and it was a long climb up from the sub level basements. It gave him quite the breather, and god knows he needed it. He looked at his own blurry reflection on the metal elevator walls—he looks horrible. The wrinkles on his face were much more evident, not due to age but due to the pull of stress. The laugh lines on the side of his cheeks were starting to fade away. And his eyes, his eyes just looked as dull and as lifeless as he felt.

Tony Stark was no longer the man he knew.

Who thought eight months could change someone so much? And the worst thing about that statement was that it applied to every single member of the Avengers.

The sudden bright fluorescent lights of the ICU ward blinded his sight as the elevator doors opened. He had to take a few blinks to adjust to the new brightness before he got off. The set-up of this building is drastically different from before. Now the Avengers tower was repurposed as a hospital, taking the first 40 floors of the building as its domain. There were 78 floors of the Tower, excluding the top 15 specially for the Avengers and sub level basements, and thus the remaining 38 floors were repurposed as other things, such as storage for things that absolutely need electricity for safety purposes, but mostly research and development labs and control center for the world wide disaster.

He greeted the house officer on the floor, a resident doctor at one of the hospitals in Canada, who moved to New York after hearing the need for doctors. “Claude, do you know where Stiles is?”

The brunette smiled a sympathetic smile and gestured towards the hallway with the rooms of the most endangered or unstable patients, then abruptly left when one of the red lights turned on on another corridor. Each room for the ICU ward has a red light outside their door and a sound alert to page the doctors and nurse as fast as possible—because in this ward, even a few seconds could make the biggest difference.

Tony walked past the rows of rooms with beeping sounds of machines. Each machinery noise like a ticking time bomb, and a hammer that pounded in his ethical compass.

He knocked on the glass door of the room Stiles was in before sliding it open and entering. Each room had two patients, and they each had their red light on their side of the door ledge, but Stiles stood in the middle, holding both charts of the patients in his hands.

“How’s it going here?” Tony stood next to the unmov ing man.

Stiles spared Tony a welcoming smile, but not quite as bright. “All of you should get another catch-phrase to throw around here, that one’s getting old.”
“It’s today, isn’t it?”

He inclined his head towards the billionaire and nodded promptly as he flipped the charts closed and took his mini StarkPad out of his fanny pack. Tony winced at the act, knowing that he was partly to blame for this day, and the other days like these.

When Stiles claimed that this hospital system was bat shit fucking crazy, he wasn’t kidding. And everyone agreed. The hospital was a great idea—a necessary idea. But it was one that came at a great cost, and a lot of pain.

*Why the fuck is that the only option?*

*It’s not by choice, Stiles. We have no other option. Yes, the Arc Reactor for the Tower should last a decade or more, but I did not design it to withstand major electricity consumption machines running simultaneously like chemotherapy or life-support machines.*

*He’s right, Stiles. If we keep exhausting it like that, I’d say it won’t last 5 years, maybe not even 3 years with the amount of patients that keep flooding in. And I know all there is to know about energy research.*

*But—but you said you were searching for an alternative energy source. You said you would find a solution by the next few years!*

*Yes, but it doesn’t mean I’ll succeed. We can’t just assume that there will be a new energy source in 3 years, because we don’t know that. If we do fail, and the reactor is exhausted by then, then what do we do?*

*Listen to Bruce, Stiles. And even if we can spare the electricity for that, it would be way better to repurpose it towards Nuclear Reactors experiments in order to attempt to create a sustainable stable energy.*

*So, what, Tony? Are you saying saving lives isn’t important enough to use up electricity?*

*We’re not saving any lives with those machines, Stiles! They’re called life-support machines, we’re comforting a dead person!*

*Tony—*

*No, Bruce. He needs to hear this! Nothing good will come out of postponing someone’s death. We need to be rational, not emotional.*

*So we’re deciding who lives and dies now? As if the White List wasn’t enough? We started this to prevent more death, not cause it. And definitely not to play God.*

*It’s not our decision if they were already dying in the first place, Stiles.*

A knock interrupted his reminiscing, Tony shaking his head to get rid of the horrid memory. Stiles just watched him with pained eyes, knowing exactly what he thought of—because it was exactly the same thing he was remembering.

Their eyes reflected each others—the emotions whirling, a sad mixture of guilt, regret, confidence and apology. And then both of their eyes flitted to the newcomer, it was Claude.

“I have my list of names.” He sullenly announced, looking at Stiles expectantly. “You?”
“Yeah, me too.” Stiles strained a small smile before handing his charts over, simultaneously accepting the charts that Claude gave him. Both of them flipped through the charts, reading the information and data carefully. “Who is the other auditor?”

Claude flipped through the chart as he answered him. “Dr. Choi, and yours?”

“Dr. Padma.” Stiles sighed, hoping to find a mistake or hope in the data that they overlooked, but since it’s Dr. Choi, that’s impossible—the guy’s a fucking neurosurgeon, you don’t get anymore meticulous than that. “Okay, do you have the papers?”

“In the nurse station.” With that, the crowd moved out of the room and to the station, standing by one of the counters whilst waiting for Hilda—the nurse in charge of the floor ward—to give them their papers.

Stiles and Claude signed off the papers, Dr. Choi and Padma’s signature already on the two paper respectively. Tony watched them as they exchange paper and sign that one as well. Once everything was done, they gave the papers back to Hilda. Claude sighed, “Hilda, could you please contact human services and ask them to start the preparations? I’ll go and debrief the families—”

“No.” Stiles interrupted him, tucking his pen and equipment back into his fanny pack. “I’ll do it.”

“Stiles, are you sure—“ Tony stepped in his way, but Stiles shook his head and chose to walk around him instead.

When Stiles heard the footsteps of Tony following behind him, he stopped and turned his head to the side, not quite looking at him. “You don’t need to see this.”

“If you have to, then I do too.” Tony’s voice was small but strong.

Stiles’ shoulders somehow slumped in relief, betraying his statement to shield Tony from this process. Tony knew that he wasn't really involved in the actual human interaction service of the hospital, he was just in charge of management and development at best—a vice-director, if you could say.

They stopped at the end of the hallway, facing the double doors to the conference room repurposed as a waiting room for the families of the patients in the ICU ward.

Stiles steeled his nerves before pushing through the doors, stealing the attention of every head in the room. “The families of Mr. Jamesons, Mr. Rodney, Mr. Clarrot, Ms. Denise and Ms. Horowitz, could I please have a word with all of you in private?”

A crowd of almost 15 people followed him to the adjoining room, some of them quite marveled by the appearance of Tony Stark. Stiles closed the door behind him.

“First and foremost, I have to offer my apologies. I’m afraid the recuperation period is over and the results are not improving.” Some of them had their hands to their faces, holding back the gasp and the implication of what he was saying. “As stated in our terms of the patient’s admittance to our Intense Care Unit, we will be following with protocol. To those with patients on life support, you have until the end of the day to say your goodbyes, and our human services department will be in contact with you to proceed on with any ceremonies you’d like to hold in addition to the Memorial Wall remembrance. To the patients without life support, they will be be moved to the interim ward where they will keep them comfortable until their time comes. My condolences.”

Tony was startled when Stiles bowed a proper 90 degree, his head facing the ground, in front of the families. He looked up and saw why—maybe it was due to the sheer act of being polite and
sincere, yes, but maybe it was also to avoid looking at the faces of the people whose lives you just completely destroyed by taking away their loved ones.

That was when Tony realized just how heavy and burdensome this job could take from someone. It’s a job with the worst combination of everything. So much so that he could only watch with his lips sealed, of what was probably the common reaction to Stiles’ announcement.

A woman reached out to his shoulders, shaking him. “Y-you can’t do that. He was—he was fine. He just had a tiny relapse yesterday, but please—please just give him a few more days to improve. I beg you, please. He’s my husband, I can’t—“

A young teenage girl went to her knees to try and lock eyes with him. “You said you took her tumor out. You said the surgery was successful—it was fine. If the disease is gone then why does she have to die? My mom is alive, so why?!“

Instead of breaking down and panicking from the rapid grab of hands, Stiles stood there like a cornerstone. He stood still in his foothold, unmoving. With his arms on the shoulder of both women

“I’m gravely sorry that it has come to this and I sincerely do wish to do more. But I beg you to understand our situation, and our shortcomings. I know it’s not fair and it’s not easy to understand, but this is truly the best we can do with our hands tied behind our backs.”

Their respective families dragged the two females back with them, apologizing in clenched teeth because they too would like to do the exact same thing the women just did—cry, kneel, beg and blame.

The Recuperation Trial—the ICU is run by this particular contract. Anyone who was admitted into the ICU will begin their stay there for a total of 3 days, and within those three days if they show improvement, their stay is prolonged to a week, and on and on until they are stable enough to be put into normal care. However, if they do not show improvement within three days of admittance, the hospital will have the right to take them off the ICU and move them into the interim ward. And if they were on life-support, then the moment they take them off the ICU, the patient will die.

The inspection of whether the patient made enough progress or not to proceed with the stay is done by the house officers in charge of the ward—some days Claude and some days Elizabeth—and the decision needs to be approved by two other auditors, and signed in the ‘discharge’ papers. Stiles was always one of them. Because he was involved in the making of the contract, along with Tony, Bruce and two senior doctors, he felt the responsibility of seeing the consequences of what he did full frontal.

It’s a devilishly cruel but necessary contract. The reason why this is so is due to the energy problem and the limited placement in ICU. There are three floors devoted to the ICU, two of them are general intensive care units including divisions of Pediatric Intensive Care Unit taking care of children and teenagers, Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit dealing with patients with heart defects, and so much more. And one floor is devoted to NICU, the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, taking care of babies who are prematurely born or born with complications.

The Recuperation Trial does not apply to the NICU, for good reason.

But in exchange, the assured care of babies means a less assured care of adults and the like. Energy that can be spared for constant life-support machines are all dedicated to the babies in the NICU ward, leaving little or none to spare for the regular ICU wards.
In the event of a global disaster, there are duties that people need to uphold. One of them is the continuation of survival for their kind, in other words, the prevention of extinction. Continuing to reproduce, and making sure the baby survives, is a part of that duty.

But if they were to be completely honest, they just did not want to apply the Recuperation Trial to the NICU. Because that’s a line where no one should cross. That’s a line where you lose your humanity. Just the thought of it was enough to make Bruce Banner hurl his stomach out in the conference room.

As they were walking back to the elevator, Tony stopped. “For those not on life support, they get moved to the interim ward. So does that mean they’ll be fine, since they’re still taken care of?”

Stiles walked on forwards. “Do you know that I have a new nurse, every day, asking for a transfer to another ward. No one can stand it there in the interim ward.” He pressed the buttons to the elevator. “Because it’s a patients ward, where we’re not allowed to save them. We’re not allowed to buy them time, we’re just there to make them comfortable.”

Tony winced unknowingly. It’s a knee-jerk reaction to react in disgust when dealt with the interim ward, he would soon learn later on.

Sighing, Stiles’ fingers start to shake before he balled them up in a fist. “If they have a relapse, or a hemorrhagic shock, or even a seizure—all we can do is give them anaesthetics or wait it out.” He turned to look at Tony, who walked the short distance to face Stiles. “All we can do is watch them die. All we can do is put them to sleep, so they won’t be in pain.”

Basically, the interim ward was something resembling the physical form of a false hope. A scam, Tony thought. He was only involved in the beginning process of the Recuperation Trial Act, since he was there to consult on the part involving electricity usage. He didn’t know any of this in full detail. Now that he did, he wished he didn’t. The guilt was eating at him. Probably the same way it was eating at Stiles.

He closed his eyes, forcefully and painfully, and then he opened them to find Stiles looking at him with lifeless and pitiful eyes. Tony reached out his hands in an attempt to touch his shoulders and comfort him, but Stiles avoided it by a swift side step as he escaped into the elevator.

Tony could only watch in shocked hurt, his hand still stuck in mid-air, fingers curling into his palm. Then, the elevator doors closed.

Leaving him in the cold, beeping, periodically red-light flashing, hallway of the serene Intensive Care Unit ward.

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Stiles shut the door of his flat with much more force than necessary. Grabbing his chest, he felt as if he couldn’t breathe, like something was pulling at his heart and tugging. He supported himself with his hand on his knee, leaning against the door. With one last heave, he switched on the lights and stared at his flat.

It was a shipwreck.

Books, littered everywhere, open and closed. Stacked in an order and in different places. Papers in
bundles and file folders all over the tables, floor and shelves. There was an order to this chaos, and it was in stations. Different parts of the living rooms were for different parts of research—one for the hospital, one for the energy problem, another for magic, and so on.

But the biggest mystery was still left.

Pulling the curtains away from his floor-to-ceiling wall of windows, Stiles sighed. His research on the collection of mishaps that has been happening has been put to a halt. Because there were no more clues since the supernatural disasters stopped due to his sacrifice with Dr. Stephen Strange, and because Chase was still not in contact.

8 months, and all he’s heard from Chase was a simple sticky note message on his refrigerator door with the words ‘I’m fine’. It was his handwriting, and his initials. The man had the means to teleport and it was inconspicuous, just like Chase Byrnes himself.

Being in his room suffocated him. Looking at his window full of scribbles, circles, words and arrows, suffocated him. Taking in the mess of the station with papers and books suffocated him. Everything was just so suffocating.

He turned on his spot and went right back out of his room, into the elevator and right up to the roof. The instant he stepped onto the open air, he ran straight to the edge of the railings. Looking at the sky, grim and empty even though it was a blue clear sky, he took in the sunshine. Taking a deep breath, he gripped the railings and arched his back, opened his mouth and—nothing. Absolutely nothing.

The scream wouldn’t escape his throat. He just couldn’t make a sound.

Clearing his throat, he tried again.

Gripping the metal hard, taking a step up the ledge and pulling himself back in preparation of leaning forward to let his scream out, he gaped and—still nothing.

Stiles let his arms take in all of his weight as he slumped his head backwards, so much so that he was parallel to the sky. The clouds looked so thin and sparse, stretched across the whole sky, but all he could see was that it was taut. As if the sky was pulling at the clouds like cotton balls, ripping it apart, only tethered together by white thin strings. Exhausted and spread thin.

Oh, like he was.

Without his permission, he felt something stream down the side of his eyes, following the gravity and going in his ear lobes. His breath hitched in his throat but he still couldn't scream. It’s as if he was drowning in absolutely fucking nothing.

Maybe he should just give in to the gravity as well. His hands were slipping from the hold of the metal, the sweat making it harder to grip. And so he let go, and he closed his eyes.

It was a short drop to the ground, but still enough for him to get a bump in the head, at the very least.

But he didn’t feel the cold floor of the roof. Instead he didn't fall much at all. There was something warm, firm and steady, pressed against his back. Arms circling his front, as he was pushed to the railing, and turned with swift movements. Now Stiles’ back was against the railing, caged in by thick arms also on the railing. Trailing the arms up into the owner’s face, Stiles couldn’t held back his gasp.
“The first thing I come back to is this?” Steve smiled, and even with tired eyes, he still looks as charming. “You’re always so full of surprises.”

Without warning, he broke down in stifles of cries. Tears flowing without stop down his cheeks. He was back. Steve was back. Stiles hands were immediately on his face, trailing it as if he needed to confirm he was really here.

As if it was an illusion.

“You promised me you were going to be fine.” The calming sea blue that was his eyes seemed to sparkle, probably with moisture, as he chuckled. “This is exactly why I said I should’ve stayed.”

The tears were blocking his words, incoherent sniffles and vocally wrecked sounds were all that he was making as he shook his head in repeat, vehemently, as if saying, no, I’m not fine. Not at all. Not one bit.

Stiles reached his arms out on both sides of Steve’s head, and instantly Steve pulled him closer by the waist, hugging him with no holds barred. Stiles wrapped his arms tightly behind Steve’s back,

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“Thanks.” Stiles whispered into the cup of his hot chocolate when Steve handed it to him. They had moved to Steve's apartment as he offered to make him a hot drink. For god knows what reason, the man had the talent to make the world’s best hot chocolate—as if being Steve Rogers wasn’t damn unfair enough, he had to be even more lovable and irresistible.

That’s probably the only thing that’s kept constant in this whole wake of drastic changes and horrible disasters.

Well, that and Tony’s flamboyancy.

Steve picked his duffel bag up from his couch to make space for himself, before sitting down right next to Stiles, body facing the boy. The duffel bag was still packed.

“When did you get back?” Stiles motioned towards the bag.

“Just now.” Steve smiled at him. “I met Tony in the common floor while I was searching for you, and he was sulking. He told me about what happened today.” He had this look, an expression that was eerily similar to one of scolding a child. “You two need to fix whatever it is you’re going through.”

“Well, there was a lot that happened in the four months you were gone.” Well, Stiles knew that was a bit of a dick move because he could see the immediate guilt in Steve’s face, but it was true. A lot has happened since Steve was chosen to travel around the world with a group of SHIELD agents to assess the situation.

When Steve kept his silence, Stiles sighed. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean it that way. It’s not your fault that the crime rates have been skyrocketing everywhere around the world.”

Even though the supernatural and natural disasters stopped affecting the world, for the past 8 months human disasters have been happening. Reports about the rise of rebellion, anarchy or a
terrorist takeover in government has been exploding all around the world. And obviously, the right choice to handle this was to send Captain America all around the world—to convince, charm and punch people out of their stupidity and evil doings.

Stiles doesn’t even know if he was being mildly sarcastic about it or not, because hey, it’s just true. If they sent Tony, the problem would’ve escalated, knowing his ego and unconventional way of fixing problems. Natasha and Clint would have just done it in a clandestine way, which will just solve things for a moment before another problem arises. Thor doesn’t know human conflict, especially one involving politics and terrorism. And Bruce.

Well, they wanted to fix the problem. Not to make it disappear in a pile of ruble.

Thus—Steve.

Steve nodded, scooting closer to Stiles until their knees touch. He reached forward and took one of his hands, holding it between his own. “Look, Stiles. I can’t imagine how hard it has been for you. But everyone’s going through it, alongside you. Maybe they don’t feel the exact burden, or the exact pain, or the exact responsibilities—but they feel their own, and it is always a similar kind.”

“But everything’s just so—“ Stiles looked down to his lap, brows furrowing and teeth gritting against each other. “—it’s so hard. He doesn’t know to the horrible extent of how excruciatingly hard it can get.”

He waited to catch Stiles’ gaze before moving forward. “You can’t compare and measure those things. Everyone is hurting in some way, and to each and their own, their pain is just as painful as yours—not justifiably but emotionally, because everyone’s standard of pain is different. And Tony is one of those people.”

“I know, I know that, but—“ Stiles closed his eyes only to open it by the sudden comforting tight grip on his hand.

“We need each other, we can’t go through this alone.” Steve smiled in sympathy. “I don’t know what happened but don’t push each other away.”

Feeling a sudden shift in the air, as if it was lighter, Stiles took a deep breath. He returned the man’s smile after a long silence. “I’ll talk to him. First thing tomorrow, I promise.”

This overwhelming ease just came over him. Steve being back was so much more than he imagined it would be like. Even though there had been no exchange of words of what exactly determines their ‘relationship’, they were fine just being without a label. They were comfortable.

Just his presence is enough to calm him down, even amidst all the darkness. It’s enough to ensure him that he’s not alone, and that even though everything’s not going to be okay—he will get through it.

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Into the woods, running, branches crackling, panting. The day light was becoming scarce and they knew they had less and less time of stopping it. They were lucky enough to have found out about the plan, but it would be of no significance if they couldn’t stop it.
Soon, they reached the clearing. A familiar spot, a memorable spot that changes each and every
time.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?!” He shouted, his raspy aged voice growling with
anger.

What he got in return was equal aggression. “You can’t stop me, not when it comes to this.”

The small group were detained quite shortly after, and all they could do was watch. Watch what
they knew was both terrible decision and a terrible act. The least they could hope for was that it
won’t have any drastically negative repercussions.

But if there’s one thing they all should’ve learned through their extensive history, it’s that there’s
always always a worse outcome.

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Stiles was almost done with his night shift manning the floor in the lobby when he felt the exact
same tug in his chest come back. It got so suffocating and so weirdly painful that he excused
himself to the bathroom.

Stumbling into the sink, he was halfway bent to the faucet, turning it on blindly and immediately
splashing ice cold water in his face. Because nothing else is a better remedy for heartburns (well,
that’s his best guess) than a quintessence of a bitch slap in water form. Get it together.

Once it stopped, Stiles turned the tap off. His hands were supporting him, gripping the edge of the
sink counter as he leaned forwards with his head bent downwards, eyes closed.

But the sound of flowing water kept on going.

What the hell?

He opened his eyes to look at the faucet which was definitely turned off.

Wincing in confusion, he had to ponder for another minute before he realized—oh right, there’s
another sink other than the one he’s quite disturbingly spent a lot of time staring at. He’s had a
very very exponentially long day full of medical emergencies and surgeries and emotional
breakdowns, which was basically the essence of a typical Tuesday for him.

The new normal, ha! What a joke.

Stiles turned his head to the side to see that the sink next to him, indeed, had a running faucet. He
tilted his head even higher up to see that a man was there. But he wasn’t doing anything, he wasn’t
washing his hands, or cleaning something, or fixing his make-up (it’s the twenty first century, all
he has to say about it is yassssssss—please excuse him, he’s very much brain-dead right now).

“Hey.” Stiles called out to the man in the bathroom, standing still, unmoving, staring at the sink as
the water kept going. “Are you alright?”

When the man didn’t answer, Stiles shut the tap off because excuse him, no matter how sick he
might be, there is still no excuse to waste water especially in a situation like this. He looked up to
the mirror, and saw the reflection of the man.

His eyes were murky. As in, very murky. As in, milky white and weirdly cloudy, murky. As in, the miserable mistake of accidentally mixing milk and water in the same glass, murky—point is, it was hella murky.

And his skin was pale with a rather greenish-purple hue underneath it. It was a weird discoloration, as if his entire body was covered in week old bruises.

And maybe it was because the whole situation was weird and his brain has an over-active imagination and a sprinkle of over-reacting tendencies, but the bathroom was suspiciously cold. It could also may well probably be due to the ice cold water he just splashed in his face repeatedly so that everything felt cold, but eh, it was still cold.

“Sir?”

No response.

Stiles stood up straight this time, head looking towards the door. There’s something definitely wrong with this guy. Maybe a disease. Oh shit. If it was a disease, it has to be contained quickly. Stiles snapped from his undignified state of brain and got to action.

But something about this whole situation felt more disturbing and uneasy, more than the dangers of a disease could make him feel like.

“Sir, wait here, I’ll get more help.” Stiles hurriedly turned and headed for the door in hopes of bringing another doctor in to help him diagnose whatever this is.

But he didn’t make it.

Because suddenly a hand grabbed him by the wrist and pulled him back. Stiles had the slightest moment of déjà vu in his head, the bitter and electric taste of trouble just hinting at the back of his tongue.

Slowly, he turned.

And yup.

People should credit him more for his incredibly succinct instincts for detecting bad shit, because hell yeah he was right.

Hello darkness, my old friend.

Chapter End Notes

So, to make it clear, yes there's a time skip. Yes, I'm cruel for writing this chapter. And yes, I've left Steve and Stiles' situation a bit unclear and unexplained because yes, I am that cruel. Also yes, that one scene completely without name or context because oOooOoOh mystery, waddup. Oh and yes--that is indeed a cliff hanger, because I am certainly, if not anything, very cruel.

Let me know your response by leaving a comment ;)
(first end note bc I felt like I owe something for being supper latteee and also, to apologize yet again because IM SORRRRYYY)
Stiles was a man of instincts. Hard, inborn, and polished through experience and countless traumatic events, strict instincts. Sometimes it could get in the way, that paranoid and over-excessive instincts of his, but other times it can prove to be very helpful.

Well, at that exact moment he didn't know if it was actually a good thing but it was helpful for himself to get out of the grip. If his instincts were wrong though, then that would mean he just side-kicked a gravely ill patient in his side and made a move to punch him in the solar plexus.

Training sessions with Steve for the last year has been extremely helpful despite his constant protest of having magic and adamantly staying in the sidelines—as usual, circumstances fucked him over sideways and now not only did he not have his magic, he was also very much decidedly not in the sidelines. For the first time, he was ever so grateful for the entirety of the Avenger’s meddling and over-protective personalities. Not that he would ever admit that straight to their faces.

But the doubt of his actions faded away as soon as he got up close and personal to the patient as he bent over to punch him—those eyes weren’t just freakishly white, it was supernaturally wrong. And the moment the man grabbed his wrist, he felt an overwhelmingly dark and numbing feeling spread from the point of contact. Cold and barren.

The punch sent the patient backwards, colliding against the bathroom walls. Stiles scrambled from his shock and ran out as fast as he can, slamming back against the door once he was out with force and blocking it close.

The sudden bang of the door was loud enough to garner the attention of a few nurses and patients near him, but it was sort of drowned out by the pained groans, hurried talking and various noises of metal clanging and wheels whirling.

Jourdain who was attending to a patient near him immediately went over once he noticed Stiles’ position at the door, calling another nurse to take care of the patient.

“Hey.” He ran closer to him, and for some reason he seemed a lot taller than Stiles even though they were somewhat of the same height with Jourdain just a little bit taller than him. “Are you
Jourdain was reaching his hands out as if Stiles needed help to stand and that was when he realized how he was at that moment—he was barely standing, so much as leaning against the door with his knees bent and hands plastered against the wall. He was sweating bullets, breaking out in cold sweat, and his eyes were wide and he was panting with hitched breath.

He felt cold. So cold. His skin was breaking out in goosebumps and a permanent shiver ran down his spine. There was a feeling biting at his bones, a familiar stomach-dropping feeling—fear.

“Keys.” He gasped out, holding on to Jourdain’s arm sleeves. “Get me the keys to this door.”

The man was obviously confused and honestly considering whether Stiles had finally broken down for good, but the fear and panic in his eyes were too real for it to be emotional stress. As if to reassure him that Stiles was sane, something started banging at the door that Stiles was pressing his back against.

“Hurry!” Stiles rasped worriedly, his feet scrambling to place a strong foothold to push his weight back against the door.

Without a second more to waste, Jourdain ran to the reception desk and grabbed the keys to the bathroom in a sprint. When he came back, the banging were starting to get louder and more desperate and if he were to be honest, it was starting to scare him.

“Give the key to me and call for the Avengers!” Stiles shouted, turning his head, he could see Amy rushing to the area from the commotion.

Without missing a beat, Amy assessed the situation. “What’s going on?”

“Put the building on lock-down, Amy.” Stiles grasped for the key before sending Jourdain away. “Don’t let anybody leave and don’t let anybody come in.”

“What?” The receptionist frowned in confusion and Stiles’ erratic behavior was causing her anxiety—it’s a weird effect that he has on everyone, his emotion’s influence. “Wait—Stiles, why —”

“Just do it!!” The desperation in Stiles’ voice was enough for her to run back to the reception desk and activate the lockdown protocol. Immediately, a loud alarm sounded and the red turning lights were flashing next to the entrance.

Amy’s voice rang through the speakers as she spoke to the mic. “Everybody please remain calm—we have detected an emergency and are now initiating lock-down. I ask for all personnel to help clear the entrance and prevent anyone from coming in or out. The shutters will be closing. I repeat —”

As Amy went on with her announcement, people were starting to panic despite her words. The crowd started to shuffle inwards and the nurses had to physically block patients from coming into the hospital without inspection. It was a mess trying to clear the path but by the time the metal shutters dropped, everyone steered clear.

Stiles fumbled when an especially harsh bang rumbled through the door and nearly sent him tumbling forwards, but he held steady and he turned on his front, pushing with the side of his body whilst his arm tried to get the key to fit in the door.

The banging just kept on coming and with each one it got stronger and louder. One particularly
 strong one caught Stiles off-guard and knocked him away from the door, crashing onto the floor and a nearby trolley full of medical supplies.

He was drenched with anti-septic and disinfectant, with metal tweezers, pantries, sewing kits and other apparels scattered around him in a loud clanging parade. The door banged against the wall in force of the opening and the patient stumbled forwards in slow ragged moves.

Stiles shouted behind him when he heard footsteps going near him. “Stop! Stay back! Get everyone back!”

The nurses immediately followed his order and escorted the curious patients who kept trying to see what happened back while Stiles was clambering backwards in accordance to the man’s step forwards.

“Sir!” He tried uselessly, hands grasping for anything resembling a weapon around him—a pair of industrial scissors was his best option—, “Please calm down.”

There was no response—not that he was expecting one, anyways. But the patient (a very understated way of calling him) kept lunging forwards to Stiles, and the actual patients that were being herded back by the nurses were starting to get freaked out by the situation.

One thing any situation doesn't need is panic, or worse more panic. Panic never makes anything better. Except at the disco, then yes, they do make everything a million times better.

So without hesitation, Stiles gripped the scissors in one hand and threw himself at the patient, knocking him down and straddling him. He plunged the scissor directly into the liver, which will cause the patient to bleed heavily because he knew he definitely nicked a large artery.

But he didn’t.

There was no blood or even any macrophage fluid (you know, the stuff that helps you heal wounds), nothing was coming out of the wound even when Stiles retracted the scissors. There was no spray of any liquid, nothing at all.

And through the limited experience yet extensive knowledge Stiles has on the medical field, what just happened is absolutely and biologically impossible. Stiles is almost certain that he knows exactly what this patient (again, a huge understatement) is, but he just didn’t want to admit it.

Because seriously, he reaaaaaaaaallly doesn’t want to. This was the one thing that he didn’t want to admit the existence of because hell, it’s just too much to handle.

He’s purposely avoided reading any material about the creature that he just positively although reluctantly identified—and now that is becoming seemingly a bad principle to uphold. You would’ve thought that he, of all people, would be the most well versed in the things he hated because of this little friend called paranoia and a shit luck, but nope. He’s well versed in all the other things he hates but this one particularly is a big ass neon-glowing no-no even to his google-fu and research kink.

Still, he should probably do something, as the creature is currently trying to fight back. Thinking about what to do, he just started stabbing the creature randomly at different organs, yet still nothing.

“Where the fuck is Jourdain with the backup?!” He shouted randomly at anyone, hoping they would get the message and send more backup to fetch for the man who was getting backup.
What a sentence, am I right?

Jesus, he needs sleep.

Amy, thank god, got the message and ran off to search for Jourdain. Stiles had just enough time to shout her a thank you before the creature he was straddling sprung forward and flipped their position.

Now with him on the floor, a few feet away, and the creature scrambling up on his legs to his waist, Stiles screamed a little. Maybe a little high-pitched and un-manly but hey, save him the criticism, he was scared and out of options.

On top of that, he felt the strange pull in his chest again. Not the fucking time. But the pain kept blooming and his breaths shortened drastically. And also the fact that the creature was now on top of him and was very much drooling at him—which, ugh, he really does not need to get infected or bathed in weird substances, he does that everyday in surgeries—does not really help his thinking.

Thus he decided to repeatedly stab the incoming patient in the heart with loud yells and manly screaming (Despite having literally hundreds of witnesses, he adamantly will state that it was a manly screaming—it’s a topic covered before, he will stand by it, thank you).

See, at times like these, he really doesn’t know what his luck wants to do with him. Well, he’s not going to be ungrateful and choose to not want to be saved but still—pick a damn side, let him live in peace or die in panic, you damned bipolar luck, you.

Because the patient creature stopped moving and flopped down lifelessly straight on top of him.

Tony flew in with his suit half attached to his body, the rest of them extending piece by piece, molding to his shape. His repulser was out and charged aiming it towards Stiles’ direction. “Stiles! We’re here!”

The rest of the Avengers filtered in behind him, all of them confidently spouting different versions of ‘Where’s the danger?’ , ‘Fall back!’ and ’It’s fine now!’ despite being comically late. The nerve on these guys, Jesus Christ.

Steve passed through the group to reach Stiles who was still trapped underneath the body. “Stiles, are you okay?” His voice was panicked as he shoved the dead body weight on top of Stiles and gathered the boy into his arms.

“My heroes.” Stiles murmured sarcastically, but he didn't move away from the embrace.

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“What in the fuck just happened?” Stiles screamed at the entire room. They were preoccupying the cleaning storage room, the furthest away place from the lobby that was still in the first floor.

“We were hoping to ask you, seeing that you’re the one who saw and experienced the whole thing.” Clint looked around, although you could see his eyes consistently looking back at the same spot.

“Exactly! Hope you enjoyed your long ass relaxing bath, seeing that you took about—oh, I don’t
know—a million years to get down here!” Even the cleaning products couldn’t hold a candle to the levels of toxicity Stiles’ words carried.

The room fell in short apologies and a lot of wincing.

“Is that what I think it is?” Tony inclined his head at the disfigured limp body, having never really been that good in wallowing in guilt.

“A zom—“

“No!” Stiles interrupted Natasha. “Don’t even say it, just keep it as a thought in your brains, thank you.”

Bruce frowned at his behavior, not in anger but in confusion. “But it is, isn’t it?”

“Hey. It could just be a potent virus.” Stiles argued strongly, even though he knew his point was weak.

“Well, unless you can come up with another viable explanation as to humans that can’t die despite being repeatedly stabbed everywhere else except the heart—” Tony pointedly stuck his finger out, waving it like a teacher’s stick, “—we’ll stick with the undead.”

“Isn’t it supposed to be the head? A headshot, I mean, to kill them.” Clint waved a finger, being the closest one to the corpse.

“Hm, I don’t know Clint, I just took a blind guess and picked the heart to puncture because I don’t think my surgical scissors will be enough to pierce through the thick, stone hard skull now would it, Mr. I-have-no-super-strength-archer?” Stiles snarked even though he was one word away from just screaming his brains out.

Tony, a man with no qualms for subtlety, pushed on. “How do you not know? You know everything there is about monsters that people don’t even know about and you skipped over a classic fan-favourite? Really?”

Stiles directed his eyes at the older man, his eyelids popping back so hard that you could nearly see the veins of his inner stress. “Wha—Is he serious?” He looked around the room before going back to Tony. “Well, I’m sorry Mr. Genius Philanthropist last time I checked, I’m still human and not a walking supernatural wikipedia at your beck and will.”

“Boys!” Natasha slammed the door with her hand, snapping them all out of their bickering. “Can we just focus on what’s happening, we’ve got civilians out there who might possibly be in danger.”

Tony bit his lip to stop the instinctual clap-back that was at the tip of his tongue. He didn’t even know why he said all that, his brain knew that things with Stiles isn’t currently sprouting sunshines and rainbows.

“How did this happen?” Steve tried to take control of the situation by establishing a clear line of mission, hoping to keep everything strictly professional and away from all the emotional spiraling.

Everyone looked to Stiles, receiving an exhausted shrug from him. “Look, I don’t know, okay? I was in the bathroom and he was next to me. I noticed he was acting weird and I thought he was a patient so I went to grab help, next thing I know the man was trying to grab me like I was the last piece of cake in a five year old’s birthday party.”

“Let’s take into the possibility that he really is a zom—“
“Don’t—“ Stiles flung himself into his sentence, leaving a very startled Steve hanging on to his words “—you dare, Steve!”

Feeling like he just swallowed his tongue, Steve cleared his throat to fish his gustatory organ back to his mouth. “Something else. Let’s take into the possibility that he’s something else. How does one come about becoming a—uh, something else?”

“From the extensive knowledge of films and novels, you get bitten by another brain horny zombie—”

“People! Please! How hard is it to just avoid one fucking word that starts with an alphabet that’s rarely ever used anyways!” Stiles threw his hands up in the air with an exasperated jaw drop. “For a bunch of incredibly intelligent people, this result is just embarrassing.”

Tony looks like he wants to strangle the boy for interrupting them repetitively, but hey, it’s their fault for not following instructions. What right did he have to give them instructions, you ask? Well, rewind about a million ages ago, his position with the avengers was as a manager and a liaison to SHIELD, which technically means he’s their boss. So, despite denying all the responsibilities that will befall unto him with claiming that title, he will still try and use it to his justification and advantage.

What? He never said he was a good person. Stiles Stilinski will always be—true to his word—a cunning sly bastard.

Natasha, being the ever so mature and out-of-their-league companion, ignored their childish ministrations and checked the body. Clint shrieked when the woman manhandled the body of something that could possibly come back to life and turn her to their side without a care in the world. The archer watched with extreme caution, flinching at the slightest movement from the jostling Natasha was causing to the body, turning him side to side.

“There’s no sign of a bite mark anywhere.” The assassin grabbed the man’s head and started combing through his hair to see if there was any damage in the head and neck area.

“Wait, how does a,” Tony paused for dramatic effect while inclining his hand towards Stiles, “something begin to exist anyways?”

Clint shrugged, wincing his eyes in deep thought. “Doesn’t it always start as a ‘potent virus’?”

At the logical explanation, Stiles blinked repeatedly at the use of his own words against him. And just like that, the man had destroyed his one line of defense reasoning. He had half a mind to just snarl at the archer, but being childish could wait.

Figuring that he should probably get over the quaking of his bones at the impending fear of his worst nightmare being realized, Stiles heaved a huge sigh and crouched next to Natasha. “Is there an injection or puncture wound perhaps?”

The woman shook her head as her fingers roamed the man’s pale discolored skin for any bumps or signs of indentation of any kind. “No, nothing. This guy doesn’t have an open wound or any sign of assault done to him.”

Stiles swallowed the rest of his very rational fear (Natasha just doesn't comprehend the concept of rational fear and thinks all fear is simply irrational) and initiated contact with the limp body, silently praying to all the gods that it wouldn’t come back alive. He held the corpse’s (?) hopefully) arm, turning it around and pressing at the crook of the elbow. Frowning, he proceeded to rip the
corpse’s shirt apart with a scalpel in his hands—he picked up all the sharp objects he could find before entering the room, since he aims to be a man prepared for anything—and did a full unintrusive diagnosis.

“She’s right.” Stiles sighed, growing even more unsettled and confused. “This guy is definitely dead. But judging by the discoloration on his skin, his organs stopped working long before I found him in the bathroom. If he really was infected by a virus, regardless of what he becomes, his organs have to be working in some state of functionality for the virus to travel through the body.”

“Unless this virus speeds up the deterioration of organ and body matter?” Bruce offers in assistance, although he himself wasn’t too sure what help his suggestion would do.

Tony interrupts their train of thought by a jarringly shocking intake of breath. “Oh, that is bad.”

Clint bit the bullet and asked, “What?”

“If there’s no puncture wound, then the virus or supernatural deadly-transforming toxin must’ve been delivered some other way.” Tony bit his lips, his eyes flicking every other way, thinking, panicking. “Maybe through digesting food or water, or worse, it could be—“

“Airborne.” Stiles finished Tony’s revelation with a gasp.

There was a knock interrupting their newfound clarification, Jourdain popping his head in after Natasha opened the door for him. “Here’s what you asked for Dr. Banner.”

Bruce took the StarkPad from him, nodding a small token of gratitude to the nurse before the door closed again. “I tested for his identity, figured it was the best way to start.”

“Can we focus here, please?” Clint waved his hands around the group, not so silently panicking in the recent development of their discussion. “An airborne virus? That could mean everyone’s affected!”

Stiles pinched the bridge of his nose as he closed his eyes, frustrated. “I mean, I thought it could be a virus that’s why I told Amy to lock the hospital grounds down. So at least if it is a virus, it’d be contained.”

“Yeah, contained with us in it!” The archer was now on the verge of shouting, which no one can blame him for. See, the man has been through a lot after joining SHIELD and he’ll be damned if the thing that finally kills him, out of all the ridiculous shit he’s been through, was a damn virus.

Despite knowing the stress that led Clint to say those words, Stiles couldn’t help but feel somehow attacked. “What did you expect me to do? Let the virus spread out and kill the rest of the population that we’ve already fucking reduced by half!!”

The whole room flinched at Stiles’ sudden raise in volume. He closed in on himself, hunched shoulders with instant regret of what he just said. They don’t need a reminder of what happened, especially because it’s the one main thought they wake up and fall asleep to every single passing day and night.

“Hold on. That—that’s weird.” Bruce mumbled to himself, his fingers scrolling through the data in the StarkPad.

Tony nodded in anticipation, grateful for anything that can move past the disruption in the air, his hands rolling to signal the doctor to continue on with his rambling. “Well, don’t leave us hanging here, Doc. What you got?”
“Uh, I’m not sure what I’m reading or if it’s true, um.” Bruce scrolled back up and started to analyze the data again to make sure he was right. “According to this, you were right. He did die.”

Stiles rolled his eyes. “Of course I’m right—“

“But he died 5 months ago.”

At that, everyone took a double take at the information.

“Five months ago?” Stiles repeated with a furrowed brow.

“Wait—that’s, that’s impossible.” Tony shook his head with a fervor. “I may not have a PhD in biology or virology but that’s scientifically impossible. So it’s not a virus?”

Bruce opened and closed his mouth like a gaping goldfish for a while before he settled on his words. “No, it’s not anything. Someone who was dead for that long can’t become anything. It’s just not possible in terms of virus delivery or transformation of any kind.”

“He’s right.” Stiles murmured underneath his breath, biting the fingernail of his thumb. “Even death limits the supernatural realm of possibility.”

Just like a struck of lightning, Stiles let his mouth gape. Something about his own sentence was bothering him, as if the answer was screaming at him, hidden in the unassuming words. It’s as if his brain wasn’t fast enough to comprehend what his consciousness is telling him—which isn’t a surprise at all, because Stiles does believe in that theory and it explains a whole lot of shit.

Also it doesn’t hurt that it provides a conveniently laid out excuse for all of his slow-realizations and late research conclusions. See: his incompetence.

“Well, whatever this is, it apparently destroys all known logic in death so where do we go from there?” Clint threw the idea up in the air, waiting for someone to rebound on it. “Anyone got a smart idea, feel free to speak up.”

The fact that two of the most ingenious people along with three of the most competent agents in an intelligence agency—plus one hot mess—came up with zilch was concerning, to say the least.

If the reality is anything like what they were thinking of, however, well then. The world is, to put it mildly, fucked.

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Tony and Bruce cooped themselves up in the lab to dissect the corpse all the while praying that it would stay dead, hoping to find answers of some sort. Steve, Natasha and Clint stayed put in the lobby just in case anything else happens. What was he saying ‘in case’ for, he knows something was going to happen just not when.

If there’s still one constant thing in his life, as he’s reminded recently, is that things always goes to shit.

Fuck Deaton and his ‘regression to the mean’ bullshit. He won’t deny it has some merit of truth in it, but still fuck that cryptic bastard.
He has a running hypothesis on the idea that Deaton somehow planned everything including Peter’s rouge adventures and Scott getting bitten, and is just letting all this happen for shits and giggles, but he hasn’t gotten any evidence to back that up so for now it’ll stay on the back burner of his mind.

Stiles ordered all of the hospital personnel who’s not on shift or duty at the current hour to stay put in the lobby and check on everyone, especially for common signs of a virus like high fever or any symptoms that matches the corpse like skin discoloration or murky eyes, whilst simultaneously resuming order in the business. You can never be too safe by checking everything.

An hour passed by with nothing else out of the ordinary happening. It was an excruciatingly tiresome hour. All the Avengers were on guard, jumping at the sound of clattering scissors or scalpels against metal trays, and god forbid someone actually drops another medical tray—Tony had his repulser out and nearly blew one poor trembling nurse’s head off the first time.

The hospital ran as usual, going through the list of patients that were already inside the Tower before it was quarantined. They had reduced the names on all their colored list by half with the added attention and reduced crowd.

The only downside of it was that the commotion outside the Tower was getting worse. People were banging on their doors for entry, shouting and begging. It was horrible, but Stiles didn’t know what else to do. At least not until this whole situation was identified and controlled.

The Avenger’s guards were dropping once the hour passed, being more at ease. Stiles was utterly confused as the rest of them were—usually things like these would escalate well before an hour was over, maybe in the next few minutes of the incident. But nothing seemed to be happening.

Steve was making preparations to lift the quarantine with Tony on the other side of his walkie-talkie (Tony insisted on each of the avengers having the classic radio equipment at them at all times, but Stiles opted out because literally didn’t have any space left in his fanny pack and he can’t carry it everywhere what with changing into and out of surgery gowns every hour), unable to let the patients outside the Tower be denied of their right to medical attention. He was always the soft-hearted one of the Avengers.

Now Stiles was on his way to the Avengers’ section of the tower, stopping at a floor that became his most recent place of recluse. As soon as the vault doors open, the prisoner inside instantly knew who it was.

“Welcome back, darling. How was your day at work today?”

Stiles rolled his eyes in fond exasperation at the words that greeted him, it’s a routine by now and he’s given up on denying the fact that he always has a response ready. “It was just absolutely fanta-fucking-tastic.”

“Fantastic isn’t a word, sweetheart.” Loki smirked.

Stiles slumped his back against the glass barrier locking the god in his side of the room, his head inclined to the side so he could sort of see Loki in his peripheral vision. “Doesn’t matter because turns out, logic doesn’t exist in death so why should it exist in words, am I right o’ lord almighty?”

Loki picked up on the hint of desperation and utter exhaustion from the boy—not that he wasn’t exuding all of that before, but now it was more intense. He sat and leaned against the barrier from his side, a few inches to the right of where the boy was leaning against so they could see each other face to face when they turned their heads.
“I’m guessing this is not from the daily ministrations of the hospital you’re running?”

Huffing, Stiles chuckled. “No, no, as if the hospital wasn’t enough to cause me enormous stress that could crush my body like a pringle ten times over, no, that bitch just had to put some more because apparently I’m not going through my fair share of troubles yet.”

“Which bitch?” Loki was quite appalled by the word, for some reason not liking the crass tone of the insult. He may be the god of mischief but at least he has class and was refined in his colorful language of insults.

“Reality, that bitch.”

Loki tapped the glass between them, forcing Stiles to focus back on his face instead of staring of into the distance. “As much as I love having you here, I’m pretty sure you wouldn’t head off in a state of emergency to visit a prisoner. You’re here for information.”

Sometimes, Stiles hates how intuitive Loki can be. He hates having to use Loki like this, especially after spending a lot of time with him. The god has been a great help in solving the Casket’s target location, and even though it didn’t work out as they hoped it would, Stiles was never one to forget to pay his gratitudes. He kept coming back even after he paid his fair due of appreciation and spent almost all of his free time with the god, which is basically all hours that was left after 14-16 hour shifts in the hospital and the 2 hours devoted to research everyday.

Stiles was never one to sleep, especially after getting possessed the last time he succumbed to it. But now, it’s as if he was constantly running on adrenaline, never taking a break. None of them sleep much, the rest of the Avengers were either too busy with helping around the hospital, patrolling the world or researching on alternative ways to enhance life situations globally.

There’s no rest for the weary or the wicked, my ass. The wicked get plenty of sleep, thank you very much, and the weary can just pop a damn sleeping pill for all he cares. They, on the other hand, have no such luxury.

Whoever wrote that quote should’ve just written down the truth: There’s no rest for those who fail.

“We’ve got an undead walking around. Either with a virus or with something, I just don’t know what it is. But I do know that it’s impossible.” Stiles wreaked a hand through his hair, pulling at it as if he was physically pulling a solution to this shit out of the top of his head. “Death is just a boundary in all things, even in the supernaturally weird and fucked up unexplained shit. It has to be.”

Loki blinked. “Are you serious?”

Chuckling, Stiles lolled his head around to exaggerate his point. “Right? It’s so fucked up and I thought I’ve seen everything there is to see about all things weird and fucked up.” He hummed a bit. “You know, I blame your brother for this. Thor kept insisting there was the existence of zombies ever since the Skinwalkers incident and trying to prove me wrong—see what happens when you meddle with taboos, they almost always end up as a jinx and bite you back in the ass, hard.”

“No. Well, yes, my brother is a compact body of all muscles with only a single brain cell.” Loki strayed off from his point before pedaling back. “But that’s not what I was referring to.”

Stiles frowned.
“Reanimation of dead corpses?” Loki hinted at his words.

Rolling his eyes, Stiles grumbled. “Yeah, and?”

Loki gave him a deadpanned stare that literally screams at how disappointed the god was at the boy. The god loved to drag out the revelation of a simple answer, it low-key made Stiles want to strangle him.

Ha! Low-key, Loki. *Jesus, Stiles, not the time for jokes.*

“It’s not a virus nor is it a supernatural creature.” Loki continued at his game—although, in his defense, he was trying to help Stiles figure out the answer on his own but can everybody just give him a fucking break; there’s no ‘I’ in deesaster, it’s supposed be handled *together* with everyone coming up with answers *collectively*.

Yes, he realized, in hindsight, he might’ve tweaked the word a little but his point still stands.

“It’s magic.”

Stiles had to blink the information into his brain slowly. Magic? It’s true that he didn’t consider it a possibility because it’s so out of their range of abilities. Sorcerers, Druids—although they technically use runes imbued with magic, it’s still magic all the same, Witches, Fae and so many other types of magic users with different skill sets and none of them match the criteria.

No. He’s missing one.

Loki helps his speed of thought. “You’re dealing with especially dark magic.”

The word slips past his lips, dragging it down into a small gasp.

“Necromancers.”

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*Holy Shit.*

Stiles stood abruptly. “Hang on.” His hands outstretched in front of him, like he was physically pushing the idea away. “Hang on a fucking minute.” He doesn’t say this often because he doesn’t want to sound like a fucking five year old learning the new and wonderful world of snark dictionary, but he is so damn close to losing his flipping marbles.

“Forget being a Necromancer, *necromancy* itself is the hardest magic to control, period. It’s nearly impossible to pull of a successful link to communicate with the dead but actually resurrecting someone back to life? Especially someone who’s been dead for five months?”

Stiles didn’t know how the magic specifically works but from what he’s heard and read, if a resurrection spell wasn’t done immediately in the window of a week within the time of death, then the soul will eventually leave the premises and one would need to psychically search the spatial realm for it before dragging it back.

“That’s *impossible*.” He concluded.
Loki clicked his tongue, the disappointed look back in his eyes and Stiles was not having it. “I didn’t say anything about resurrection, I said reanimation.” The distinction made the boy swallow his remarks. “I predict the corpse wasn’t saying or doing much when you encountered it, other than pursuing violence. If it was a resurrection, I’d believe the corpse would have human personality and movement.”

“Let’s say you’re right. Necromancers still don’t exist. Because the magic is so forbidden and hard, there are only maybe a handful of them that were able to fully practice it, and even then they were wiped out by hunters ages ago.”

Sighing, Loki stepped away from the glass barrier and opt to sit on his bed. “There are a lot of things you don’t know, sweet boy, but are you really going to risk the safety of millions just based on your inability to believe in the supposedly ‘impossible’ things?”

The statement made Stiles bite his tongue in irony. After going through what he went through in all his life, he really should’ve known better than to doubt the possibility of impossible things. Taking a deep breath to calm himself, he tried to think with a clear perspective.

“Okay, okay. I can do this.” Heaving out the air in his lungs, Stiles realized he had all the pieces in his head, the only thing left to do was to make sense of the bigger picture. “If we’re dealing with a Necromancer, then there’s a reason behind why he or she would come here. They didn’t resurrect anyone so it’s not something personal.” Then it clicked. “Reanimation means this was a premeditated attack.”

The god of mischief nodded along to his thought process, giving his fair input. “You said nothing happened since the past hour. This might mean they’re waiting for something.”

There was something about Necromancy that he specifically remembered—a skill set trait that he thought was a bit inconvenient to deal with. “No. No that doesn’t seem right. It makes no sense to wait if they’ve got the means to reanimate more bodies—“

Right. Bodies.

Loki’s head snapped up the same time his did. “Where did you say the corpse was buried in the first place?”

“I didn’t.” Stiles slowly took his Stark-pad out of his fanny pack, opening the file that Bruce shared to him. “It says that there was no one to claim the body and with cases like these where the family is not with them to make a decision on what to do with the body, we keep them in a cold storage just in case someone ends up looking for them. Oh my god.”

His memory, although extensive and has the ability to retain information like a sponge, was a damn slow bitch to work with. Suddenly, he remembered the trait he was trying so hard to recall. “Magic is fair, even dark magic. There has to be limitations so that one could not be all-powerful. All necromancers have a handicap—their magic only works within a certain reach of set distance.”

“Where is the cold storage, Stiles?” Loki urged him to react, fast.

“East wing of sub-level 1.” Cursing the return of his shit luck, Stiles made a break for the doors. “They’re inside.”
Despite learning from experience that jamming the button of elevator doors are not scientifically proven to speed up the distance per minute in which the device descends on, it still doesn’t stop him from jamming the B1 button like a madman at a rave party—because Stiles Stilinski was redundant like that.

Once the doors opened, he slipped out of the space and ran towards the cold storage unit. Since the Tower wasn’t exactly equipped with built-in mortuary cold chambers, they had to make do with regulating temperatures at a massive cold storage unit that was previously used to store chemicals and other sensitive materials.

The bodies were laid out as best as they can, in metal sliding racks without doors that Tony whipped up last minute. Stiles ran through the aisle between the racks on each wall, checking to see if all the bodies were accounted for with the exception of their rabid friend getting dissected in Bruce’s lab.

Weirdly, they’re all there. See, he never really understood the origins or choice of word for the phrase ‘never look a gift horse in the mouth’, but he got the meaning of it and he was quite happy to follow through with the philosophy almost half of the time. But his anxiety and paranoia won’t let him get away from having doubts—or sleep, really, or just anything healthy for his wellbeing, or any happiness for goodness’ sake, he is sub-consciously destroying himself.

Doesn’t change the fact that it the situation was highly confusing and suspicious. The distance limit should put the necromancer inside the building, given that the corpse was already inside in the first place. The lockdown should still put the necromancer inside the building.

Unless they slipped out before the lockdown protocol was initiated.

But that would make even less sense, because all the corpses were inside the building. Their magic only works with the dead and not the living thus, a necromancer without a corpse is absolutely useless.

If he was the necromancer, he would stay inside where it’s more beneficial. There’s no advantage of being outside the Tower. Regardless of what his aim was, he’d still need to stay close to where the bodies are—

“Buried.” Stiles finished his thought out loud.

Oh, christ, he was a fucking idiot! The necromancer initiated the lock down on purpose by reanimating a corpse from inside, knowing that virus contamination would be the first priority. The lockdown was to keep them inside. To buy time, because reanimating the dead would obviously take time.

Okay. Stiles breathed out, trying to calm himself down. There’s an upside to all this, which is the simple solution to all their problems. As long as they keep the building on lockdown, all their problems would be avoided.

Well, technically, that solution heavily relies on the fact that the necromancer’s aim was targeted at them and not to the general population of the big apple. And that hopefully, the necromancer will get the fucking clue and fuck off already because they can’t exactly keep the Tower on lockdown for the rest of eternity—there were patients and lives they were risking just by shutting the doors an hour ago.
Wait a fucking minute. Patients. Steve and Tony. They thought the threat was eliminated.

They’re going to disengage the Lockdown Protocol.

Effectively destroying their one chance at safety.

“Shit!”

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“Raise them up!” Steve shouted over his shoulders, giving the orders to life the shutters that locked them inside the building.

Amy followed his instruction and deactivated the lockdown protocol with the password. As soon as her fingers stopped typing, the shutters slowly retracted back upwards. They were met with a few cheers from the patients that have been waiting outside, who were still blocked by the glass wall and shut doors.

Natasha gathered all security to open the bolted doors and stand guard by the entrance and outside, just in case something else happens and they would need to initiate another lockdown.

Being one of the lead authority on the ground and an extensive helper in the hospital rounds, Clint manned the floor. “Alright, Kara, Liam and Jourdain, take a few interns and volunteers to go outside with a few security details to scan for patients who need immediate attention and get the rest in line for the colour screenings.”

The three experienced residents called for the help they need while they scoured for medical supplies and handed a first aid kit bag over to a couple of the security guards and was off.

Steve felt like he could finally breathe. He looked around and saw Natasha and Clint drop their shoulders down just an inch in relief, although they were still busy as a bee running around and getting the whole place in order.

Having travelled a lot, he didn’t get to stick around and see their new hospital initiative flourish. He didn’t understand how it worked or how hectic every single minute would be—once the ministrations started again, there was never a single moment of silence. Everyone’s bustling, patient’s are complaining and groaning about their pain and families are worryedly shouting for help and attention—so much stress from the noise alone and the pressure of not only handling and calming, but also saving these people with limited equipment and an unfairly fair system of priority over their shoulders is a burden he could not even begin to imagine.

Or withstand.

Steve always knew that Stiles was one hell of a gem—special beyond belief. From the moment he met him, even though he didn’t know what happened in his past, Steve knew Stiles learned the same thing they did, through similar hardships and experiences. It was so amazing to see how extremely adept Stiles can be, how strong he got and how capable he handled all the horrors that befall on him. Amazing, yes, but extremely sad to watch.

After the Casket, Steve had seen many sides of Stiles that he hasn’t gotten to see before. The wall that Stiles built around his emotions had started to crumble, yet at the same time it had begun to
reinforce itself to be stronger. Everyone in the Avengers saw the cracks in his wall, but Steve was the only one who had seen what was beyond the gap.

Vulnerable, miserable, suffering and terrified. Every time he saw those emotions behind Stiles’ brown honey orbs, he could feel his own heart aching.

_He’s safe now._ His consciousness tries to reassure him that the boy was safe, now that Steve was back in the Tower. And after the seeing Stiles break down on the roof, Steve was adamant on not leaving the boy’s side. To hell with emergencies—Tony and Thor can handle it for a few months.

“Don’t open the gates!”

Stiles’ voice penetrated the room. His volume was deafening given that he was still inside the elevator waiting for the doors to open when he shouted, even above all of the panic going on in the area.

“Keep them locked!” The boy bolted out of the elevators once it was fully open, running to the doors when he suddenly stopped and saw that it was too late. “Oh, god. No.”

Steve made the small walk back to reach the boy and place a comforting hand on his shoulder. “Stiles, what is it?”

“What did you do? I told you not to!” Stiles whispered in a small trembling voice before turning to Steve with a harsh look on his face. “I put the message on loop on our stupid walkie-talkie!”

“What? What’s wrong?” Clint peaked up at the disturbance, leaving Amy to process through the rush of information being passed on from the front.

Stiles pushed through the two Avengers stood in front of him, fear building up inside of him, ready to explode—or implode, whichever one comes first. “Move.” He pushed through the scattered people fussing over their family member’s or friend’s health. “Move!”

He reached outside and saw Natasha directing guards to maintain peace and calm through all the pile-up of patients. “Natasha! You need to get all these people inside now!”

Natasha was used to weird and erratic behavior, enough to discern when the behavior is unfounded and when it’s completely necessary. She found that Stiles’ weird and erratic behavior was always necessary and foreboding, thus why she didn’t bother asking question and followed his suggestion.

“All personnel escort the patients inside as fast as you can! Keep them to a side so they can be sorted later! I need 5 men to stay outside with me, form a perimeter around the entrance!” Natasha shouted her orders, watching her subordinates jump into her order.

Stiles stood there, almost 20 feet from the entrance of the Tower, watching for any suspicious activities. _Was he wrong? Did he get it wrong?_ It would be nice if he was wrong. But he can’t be. This was the only explanation that made sense.

Steve came up next to him, silently. He was letting Stiles do his own processing, Steve knew his persistent bombarding of questioning would not speed up the boy’s process, if not hindering him even more.

They’ve waited for something to happen for a time far shorter than what it felt like. Steve was starting to relax but Stiles grew even more anxious as time passed. The captain placed a hand on
Stiles’ shoulder, forcing him to look back at him.

Steve shook his head in a slow elaborate movement, as if to mildly imply that Stiles’ anxiety was getting out of hand—as if he was too paranoid.

If he wasn’t so confused he would’ve snapped back like a bear trap. He survived his shit-show circus of a coming of age period by maintaining an extremely healthy and necessary form of extreme paranoia.

Otherwise he would’ve been a chewed up monster food stain straight on the ground in a ditch somewhere a long, long time ago.

Just as Stiles was about to give in to Steve’s assessment of his mental paranoia getting the best of him, there was that bitter electric taste at the back of his tongue again. The stomach-dropping stone raining in his guts. The bone-tingling shiver down his spine.

The utter sense of complete horror racing his bloodstream.

His eyes were pulled into the distance, focusing on a blur that stretched out the entire horizon of the road. Softly calling out his name, Stiles squinted his eyes to get a clearer vision. “Steve.”

Steve looked at him with conviction before sighing, grabbing the smaller man with both his hands on his shoulder and proceeded to turn him and herd him back to the Tower. The man thought Stiles shouldn’t be wasting time outside and instead be focusing on his medical responsibilities needed inside the hospital.

But, Stiles knew his instincts was never wrong. Not once has it ever caused him—well, he needs to pick this word very carefully because it always causes him trouble, pain and chaos despite being right, but that was due to the circumstance of what his instincts was always right about.

So, without much of a thought in his mind (he was running on instincts at this point, screw niceties), he elbowed Steve in his mid-riff which okay didn’t technically cause much pain, if not at all, but it caught the captain off guard and letting his grip on Stiles’ shoulder loose which allowed the boy to escape from the herding and running straight towards the road for a better view.

He ran and ran and he ignored Steve’s scream for his name. He ran and as he ran, he could see the blurry line across the horizon come clearer, as if he was manually focusing a point on his camera. He ran and ran, and then he stopped once he got close enough.

And then he took a step backwards. And then another. And then he straight up ran backwards.

Because the line wasn’t a line at all. The blurry line dispersed into singular figures, and more figures behind the first row, and more and more and he couldn’t even take in the whole scene and process because the line wasn’t a line—it was a horde.

A horde of the undead, headed straight on a one-way lane to the hospital.

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“Shut the doors!” Stiles screamed at the top of his lungs. “Shut the doors now!”
He was running at full speed, barreled straight past Steve but the older man caught him by the waist and closed the momentum by spinning him around and trapping the younger boy in his arms. Stiles felt like he was experiencing a full-body whiplash, on top of being slammed against a brick wall. He was pressed up against Steve’s chest and he was breathing so heavily, because his lungs are rattling inside his ribcage from the sudden catch and stop.

If this was done under less tense circumstances and way less speed of impact force, Stiles would be majorly turned on right now. He kinda was, to be honest. But he’s not going to say anything because he was still experiencing shock and his heart was throbbing off his chest.

“Wha?!” Stiles gasped.

Steve tightened his hold. “Calm down. You can’t rush orders like that, Stiles. Tell us what’s happening.”

Wanting so bad to just snap at the older man and bite his ass seven ways to Sundays (the angry kind, not the kinky kind—he’s not into biting and yes he knows how extremely ironic that is, given his past), Stiles had to swallow his emotions up because he knew Steve was just trying to control the situation.

“There’s an army of the undead that is closing distance on us fast. They’re not zombies, no—they’re corpses controlled by death magic called Necromancy which only works on the dead, not those alive. We need to get these people inside and barricaded, if not they could die, and worse, become reanimated.” Stiles sped up the pace of his answer, trying to hurry because they really don’t have time for this.

Steve, bless him, managed to retract his eyeball back into his socket, recovering from the shock, and nodded firmly. In a loud commanding voice, the captain made his move. “I want all the Avengers to assemble here outside the building, and ten guards backing us up. Everyone else back in the Tower and take shelter until I say so!”

“The man turned his head to where he was called, following Stiles’ line of sight to the road. The horde was close. Extremely close. From what they witnessed and what Stiles’ experienced, the undead were freakishly strong and nimble.

Speed is a factor they did not account into their calculations, however, because as soon as Steve turned his back on the horde to focus on the retreat, he heard a screeching shriek from the end of the road.

He was only able to see a blur of movement when he turned, and he thought it was too late but then he heard a gunshot that knocked the incoming threat a few feet away from where they stood.

Stiles’ hands were trembling from when he instinctively took his modified gun out and shot at the first sign of the sound. “Booster bullets—brute force impact on contact.”

Before any of them can recover from the shock, the horde was all the more closer, with a couple of extremely fast bodies surging forward. Steve grabbed his shield from its harness on his back and knocked the next two rabid undead trying to get to them. “Everybody move! NOW!”

The undead keep coming at them one by one, Stiles guessed that the speed and capabilities of each reanimated corpse depends on the original state of the bodies when they died—which explains why some are faster than others.
He unloaded another round of bullets at the bodies coming at them, trying to buy the nurses and soldiers time to escort all the patients inside.

But it’s still only a matter of minutes, no maybe seconds, until the entire first line of the horde arrives.

His gun was running out of bullets and he’s used almost all of his magazines. Steve was also not having much success in killing them because his weapon was a shield, all round edges and not something protrusive.

He’s always found faults within Steve’s shield, I mean, come on. It’s basically just a round indestructible barrier that does protect and shield very well, but it isn’t really effective in causing deathly injuries.

Then again, it’s cool and original and its a compulsory item that screams Captain America, so, he can’t really complain. Plus, Steve doesn’t really like to kill unless he has to. Usually he just knocks people straight out of their consciousness, so a shield fits him well.

Unless you count his move in which he jams his shield with extreme force to sever or lacerate.

But his point still stands.

A shield does not bode well in trying to kill a reanimated corpse when the only known way (at least by recent experience) to do so is through a shot in the heart.

They could see the horde of the undead rushing to get to their Tower from their standpoint, and they couldn’t see the end of the mass. Stiles fell back behind Steve and took a second to turn around to check the progress of their retreat—which was not so progressive at all.

“Natasha! Clint!” He shouted so that the two could possibly hear him, but amidst all the chaos there was no chance in hell his voice carried over.

He could see through the glass walls that the lobby was jam packed with patients and there was chaos of people pushing each other to get into the building faster. Imagine if the crowds in Black Friday, Christmas and New Year’s end’s sale was combined altogether in an average-sized Starbucks joint—that was what he was looking at.

Stiles was violently jostled from his thoughts when Steve stumbled back and knocked him down, along with the full body weight of one Steve Rogers weighing him down.

“Ow, fuck!” Stiles felt his elbow grate against the harsh gravel road, from the flow of the warm blood running down his arms he can tell that the skin was definitely scraped off.

But that wasn’t what was occupying his attention, no. His undivided attention was at the two undead bodies being fended off by Steve’s outstretched shield, their arms trying their best to grab at them.

Steve grunted as another two bodies piled up on the two already pushing their weight against his shield. There was an entanglement of the most undead and rotting foursome on his prestigious shield and he was just not having it.

“Steve!” Stiles shouted underneath him as the weight forced the bigger man to crunch his full weight on the boy—which, excuse you, he’s 147 pounds of pale skin and fragile bones, he’s not meant to withstand bench pressing a muscled super-soldier.
Out of the side of his eye, he saw the horde becoming discerningly clearer and closer, and he thought this might be it. Death by being pulverized under a horde of the undead.

He would be lying if he said that he hasn’t thought of that before.

The fact that it was *actually* happening was another problem, though. God, his life was an actual living *nightmare*.

He started to slowly surrender to the crushing weight of five bodies—yeah, one more managed to topple over them, did he not mention that?—and a super-soldier with his back pressed hard on his chest, the man settled between his legs.

As he closed his eyes, he heard the loud noise of a repulser going off and suddenly the weight was off of him.

“Get a room, you two.” Tony’s voice joked at them, setting himself down from his flight with Bruce in a carry in his arms.

“Steve! Stiles! Are you two okay?” Bruce donned his motherhenning skill like a glove and instantly caught on the blood that was streaming out of Stiles’ disaster of an elbow. “Your arm!”

There was gravel embedded in the raw meat since his elbow skin was just gone stuck in the road, and he thinks, no, *definitely* knows that it’s going to be infected if not treated properly. But then Steve gave him an absolutely shattered look of guilt and boy if did that not dissipate the pain he felt from the wound, nothing will. Stiles shrugged it off. “I’m fine.”

Tony was fending off the horde with his tiny missiles, flying around here and there to try and hold the line. “Yeah, well nothing about this is fine! Bruce, we need the big guy!”

“Stiles, fall back and guard the Tower with Clint.” Steve slightly nudged the boy behind him as dusted off his shield. “Send Natasha here, now.”

There was no room for arguments in the way he phrased it, and Stiles knew what his directive was. The captain was trying to get him to safety since he can’t fight. Well, yes, he can fight, he’s trained in both combat and weaponry, but he was at the bottom of the rung when it comes to strength amongst them.

Stiles nodded, gritting his teeth as he did so. He turned his head away from the scene and ran back. He ignored the familiar roar signaling the reappearance of his green comrade, opting to scream Natasha’s name once he got close enough to the Tower. “Nat!”

The agent swiftly turned her head and once she did, she took in the view. Natasha looked taken aback for just one second before schooling in her work face and ran to meet the boy. “Is that a—?”

“Not zombies. Dark magic. Army of the dead. Blockade, help.” In heaves of breaths, Stiles tried his best to explain the situation but before he could finish, the woman was running to the scene, leaving him behind. “Aim for the heart!”

He found Liam and Jourdain outside the Tower, trying to calm the patients and families that are rushing into the building which caused a chaotic hold-up. “They won’t listen! The entrance is blocked because people keep pushing through, Stiles, there are people getting injured and I think I saw someone with a pretty bad open wound across his stomach stuck in the middle.”

Assessing the situation, Stiles reached for his glock and slid a magazine of bullets in. He knew what it looked like, especially when Jourdain’s eyes went wide, but it wasn’t what he was thinking.
He raised his arms before anyone could say anything and fired three shots.

The crowd stopped moving and went silent from the shock, some crouching on the ground due to fear. Now that everything was quiet, it felt like he could breathe a little easier. And think a little clearer because, hah, admittedly that wasn’t the best way to deal with the situation but it was the fastest option.

“I’m sorry for the shock but I need everyone to listen to me very carefully.” Stiles declared his orders, projecting his voice as loudly as he can without out-right screaming because he’s not a bloody dictator for fuck’s sake, despite what he just did. “Yes, there is a threat—“ again, a huge understatement, “—but it is being handled by the Avengers. I need you to follow the instructions of all hospital and security personnel, they are here to keep you safe and to protect you. Please file into the Tower calmly. We won’t let anything happen to you and there is enough space for everyone.”

Ignoring the background clashes, explosion, roars and shrieking happening literally 30? 40? feet behind him, Stiles focused on monitoring the retreat, constantly shouting orders and instructions to make space inside the Tower.

“Kara!” He beckoned the girl, holding down on her shoulders once she’s within reach. “I need you to go in there and instruct Amy to put the building back on lockdown once I give the order. I’m appointing you and Jourdain to be in charge once it’s effective. You keep the shutters locked, and do so until I say otherwise. Promise me.”

Kara was one of the first recruits they had. She was a young woman, in her mid-twenties. She was at the end of her med school and was already accepted into a residency training at one of the most prestigious hospitals in DC. A brilliant, beautiful and passionate woman who had the capacity of tenderness and sympathy more than anyone he knew.

If he was straight, he would’ve had the biggest crush on her. Then again, even if he was straight, he would still be distracted as hell. How could he not be? Steve Rogers could turn him gay with only his dashing smile and gentlemanly manners, any day.

“Stiles!” Clint shouted his name, squeezing past the entrance of the Tower to reach him outside. “What is going o-oh-woah.” He took a minute to blink the chaos happening behind him. “Okay. That’s new. What the hell is that?”

“Necromancy. Army of the undead, no, not zombies.” Stiles sighed. “They can’t turn you with a bite, but once you’re dead, you’re a pawn to their dark magic.”

Clint raised his eyebrows as he slowly blinked, not even trying to pretend he understood the logic behind that. “How did you know? That the threat was outside and not in?”

“A Necromancers’ magic only works within a certain radius where he or she becomes the center of. Which is why I thought they were inside because we had dead bodies in our cold storage, but then again, if I were a necromancer I would value quantity over quality, especially if I was alone.” Massaging his temples, he tried to block out the noise behind him. “There’s a grave we established, just at the end of the road before the intersection. A large plot of land with hundreds, maybe thousands of bodies buried.”

“Oh god.” Clint ran his hand down his face, slapping himself awake from any of the fatigue. “Okay. How do we stop it?”

“We find the Necromancer, that’s how. Kill them and their magic stops.”
“Seems simple enough?” The archer offered, but he knew that the Necromancer would be hidden somewhere behind their army.

Clint gripped the string of his bow stretched across his chest, trailing it to the bottom where it connects to the body of his weapon slung across his back. “Can you identify them?”

Stiles looked away from the scene to face the man, scrunching his eyebrows to think. “Well, uh. Yeah, Necromancers have identifying traits. Dark magic comes with a price, they pay with their soul. There’s a, uh, a mark that appears every single time they use it—think of their bodies as canvases, once the whole area is painted black, they’re done. Well, no, technically they die and then they’re pulled into Hell as a slave to the Demon King or the Devil or whatever the fuck he’s called.”

Clint stayed silent for a minute or two, staring at the small war happening right in front of him—specifically a giant Hulk that is rampaging through the horde and drowning in a sea of the undead. Stiles stood with his back towards the music, mindlessly observing the Tower and Clint in his peripheral vision. One second he was silently watching and the next thing he knew, his vision was obstructed by a bow with an arrow aimed straight at him.

“Wha—” He blinked before raising his gun as an instinct, pointed directly at Clint.

Before he could utter another word however, the bow inched to his right and an arrow flew straight past him. It was so close to the point where he could hear the stream-lined projectile’s wind jetting by his ear.

He turned around in a whip of his neck, seeing the arrow stuck in the head of an undead that was a foot behind him.

Which is not supposed to be possible.

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“What.” Stiles blubbered out of his most ingeniously. “How did that get there?!”

Clint took a huge gasp of breath, looking up from the undead he just shot. “It was on the ground.”

“On the ground, you mean—“

“Came back to life, yes!” Clint shouted as another one writhed on the ground behind Stiles, hands disappearing over his shoulder for an arrow and notching it into his bow before letting it fly straight to it’s head. “Like that!”

In an instant, before the first undead body Clint shot could reanimate again, Stiles slammed himself down on it and straddled the damn thing. He checked the body, and indeed, there was a clean gunshot wound through the supposedly dead body.

He looked up to the archer and saw that the man was wearing the same expression he was. As if the world was trying to help his statement, the bodies of the undead that the Avengers ‘killed’ started to slither and wake from their ‘dead’ positions on the ground.

Which excuse you, did not help him at all. Despite all his ramblings about wanting to be ahead of
all mysteries and being right all the time, he would really appreciate it if he wasn’t right about the worst theories he could possibly come up with because that would be a bitch to deal with.

His vanity can take being wrong for a few times, just, please. For fuck’s sake.

As if that wasn’t enough, since the Avengers’ main objective was to theoretically ‘clear the herd’, they left a blazing trail of bodies behind them as they advance towards the horde and away from the Tower. Which simply meant that the Avengers were far away and now they have a whole army’s worth of thirty, forty undead men and women right in front of their doorsteps.

“Clint, uh.”

The man nodded as he notched two arrows at once in his bow. “Go!”

Stiles made the short run to the glass walls, banging on it. “Guards outside now!” He shouted at the top of his lungs, urging all the patients to get inside—which thankfully, was almost over. “Kara! Lockdown! Now!”

Feeling a subtle movement behind his back, he rounded on himself and kicked outwards, finding it impact harshly with the discolored fleshed of an undead. Reaching for his gun, he shot the thing in its head.

The guards were filtering out now, but only about five or six made it out just as the last patients finally filed into the building. “Amy! Do it now!”

They can’t wait for all the guards to get out without risking some undead slipping into the Tower, or worse, the Necromancer. Stiles took another step backwards as the shutters rained down to the ground.

He immediately rejoined Clint at his side, gun at his ready. “Have you found a way to kill them yet?”

“No.” Clint let three explosive arrows rip out of his bows at different angles, letting the bodies catch in flame. “Was hoping you’d do that since you’re the one with superior supernatural knowledge!”

Dodging a particularly nasty lunge from a corpse incoming from his right, Stiles tucked and rolled away from Clint and shot his gun as steady as he could. “Well, I’m not well-versed in Necromancy since I never thought I’d indulge in such dark practices, sorry for not being evil enough for you!”

This could go on forever, he thought morbidly in his mind. They needed a solution, and fast.

“Stiles behind you!”

Clint’s voice snapped him out of his thoughts, his sub-conscious knowing that he wouldn’t be able to block the attack and instinctively threw his hands in front of him, calling forth his connection to the earth and willing it to surge into a wall—

Shit.

Stiles only had the split second to blink back into reality, hearing in the background, a blurred shout of his name before he felt a hard kick stabbing into his liver. Christ, he forgot how strong they were.

And fuck, this one was hella strong with a much better coordination of movements.
Yes, he was in extreme pain and yes, he is articulating words in his brain about completely unnecessary and untimely remarks and observations. But what else is his overactive brain supposed to do when his body was literally thrown into the air due to the force and angle of that kick.

Stiles closed his eyes as he braced for the impact against the hard concrete ground but it never came. He felt metallic arms catching him instead.

“We leave you for one second and this happens. Jesus, kid.”

Rolling his eyes at Tony, he slung one arm across the back of the man’s shoulder and used his other hand to fire his gun at the mob of the undead starting to awaken. Again.

“It’s not my fault shit keeps hitting the fan in an exponentially ridiculous rate!”

Tony opted to let his tiny projectile missiles fly out of his shoulders instead of serving a snarky commentary to the boy, who is still in his carry.

At this point, Stiles was too exhausted to complain about the many times he has been put into a carry hold of different variations. Actually, he was grateful for it because he didn’t think he could stand judging by the constant stabbing of pain that he felt in his sternum after that kick.

Steve ran back towards them, leaving their tank-equivalent of a teammate to handle the front lines. “Stiles! We’re not going to last, we need to end this!”

He felt his eye twitch in annoyance because a) yes he was aware that they need a solution and that things aren’t exactly sunshine and rainbows over here and b) when are people going to realize that constantly shouting at him was not going to make a solution magically appear in his head.

“There’s nothing we can do about the undead puppets—we need to kill the Necromancer.” Stiles struggled to grab his extra magazine in his back pocket, what with the position he was in. “I’ll leave guarding the Tower to you. Tony, fly higher, I need you to scan the crowd.”

The man followed his instructions and flew away from the Tower and towards the end of the horde. All Stiles could see was just heads and more heads scrambling over one another and running towards the Tower. The fact that it was past midnight and well into its way to bloody dark o’clock is not helping either.

“I can’t see shit but use your night-vision to scan for a person with dark marks, or tattoos.”

Tony stayed silent for a second, allowing Friday to scan the crowd for him. “Nothing. I can’t find them.” He did a double check, clicking his tongue as he did so. “Isn’t there any other way we could find them?”

“Why yes, I supposed light magic users can detect dark magic users but oh shocker! Guess what? I’m not a light magic user, actually I’m not any kind of magic user at all because I fucking threw it away so that shitty situations like these wouldn’t have happened in the first place but somehow. Ha. Somehow, we keep finding ourselves waist-deep in shit.”

Heaving, Stiles bit his tongue from saying anything else. But can you blame him? Tony certainly couldn’t. Because being a continuous victim in the brunt of all this shit-storm doesn’t leave you much time or capability of being a happy go lucky sweetheart.

“Stiles, I—“
“No.” The guilt that came after his outburst drowned his speech. Stiles shook his head. “No, don’t say anything. Look, I’m sorry. It’s not the right time, I know. But this is the only way to find them, at least the only way we’re able to do.”

Tony nodded his head solemnly, knowing to avoid a topic when he hears one. “Maybe we’re searching in the wrong place?”

“A Necromancer has to be close to the corpse, it’s their handicap. Their magic only works in a certain distance. But I guess the more powerful they are, the further it reaches.”

“A radius distance?” Tony scrunched his eyebrows even though Stiles couldn’t see it due to his mask.

Stiles shrugged, not understanding the specific focus the man has taken. “Yeah? I think so, why does it matter?”

Without saying a word, Tony flew back towards the Tower and before Stiles could protest, he stopped in the middle—right where there was a clear line between Hulk and Natasha fending off the front line of the horde that stretched towards the end of the road, and Steve and Clint fighting off the mob of the undead in front of the Tower.

“Think about it. The bodies that we thought we killed weren’t reanimated immediately. That meant when this whole thing first started, they must be within the horde. They purposefully left the corpses dead on the ground to split them from the group and when they thought it was enough, they reanimated them again. Considering all that, the Necromancer must be in a position where their magic reaches both sides of the fight.”

Stiles’ widened his eyes in recognition. “The center.”

Tony affirmed his conclusion with a nod before scanning their current area. “At least, I thought so. But I can’t find them.”

No, Tony’s deduction was right. It made perfect sense. The only answer left was that they were hiding.

“The phone-booth.” Stiles whispered, as if he was scared the Necromancer could hear him and try to escape. “Tony, the phone-booth.”

Spotting where it was, the elder man immediately descended to the location, deploying his projectile missiles at the target. The phone-booth exploded at the impact, the smoke and dust lingering at its wake.

But the horde didn’t stop. The smoke dissipated as Tony stepped foot on the ground, letting Stiles lean against his side.

A figure appeared in the smoke, a hooded cloaked man by the looks of his stature. Stiles had to ignore his instincts to snark at the back of his mind, because the man was such a fucking cliche he might as well have brought a scythe with him to complete the textbook look.

However, despite his urge, there was something about the man that instantly shot him down. All of a sudden, the air was suffocating and cold. The hairs stood up on the back of his neck and Stiles knew Tony could feel it too if the tightening grip on Stiles’ waist was any indication.

The man only got to move an inch before he had Stiles’ gun and Tony’s repulser pointed at him. “Don’t move.”
Stiles could see the smirk he was hiding underneath he cloak. “Make them stop or we’ll shoot.”

Their response was in the form of a cackle, disorientated and unsettling. Before Tony could use a more violent way to evoke a more eligible response from him, he spoke.

“Foolish, foolish mortals. You think you’re so smart, but why is it that you’re only able to focus on what’s in front of you.”

At that, Tony’s mask retracted from his face, the man sporting a very warranted pissed off expression. “Look, tall, dark and broody, I’m sure you’ve got a whole speech ready but I can’t find it in myself to care for it, so why don’t you stop controlling your army before I blow a hole through your skull.”

Instead of abiding the warning, the cloaked man continued to laugh at them. This was of course, standard behavior 101 for mentally unstable villains. But that wasn’t all that there was to it.

Something was wrong. The Necromancer was way too confident, even after being caught. ‘Focus on what’s in front?’, what did he mean by that?

“Oh, dear. You can try to atone for your sins as long as you want to, and lie to yourself that it’ll be enough. But even the darkest soul like me can tell that you will never find forgiveness.”

Tony took a sharp intake of air and Stiles would too, but his throat was dry and stuck and absolutely useless. They couldn’t respond, but the scenery around them stopped. The army of the undead behind them stopped screeching and the noise of the chaos dimmed down. The shouts of the soldier and the Avengers were drifting off in confusion as the bodies fell lifelessly back to the ground.

“They were right, you really are too preoccupied with righteousness.” The Necromancer’s saccharinely sweet and raspy lulling voice brought their heads and attention back to him. “That’s why, you’ll always fail.”

“Why are you here? What do you want?” Stiles tried to scream at the sick bastard but all that came out was a croak in his throat and a wavering voice.

In the back of his mind, his subconscious was trying to fit the pieces together. To look behind, instead of what was in front of him. In front. The army was what was in front of them. Behind, what was behind that?

Focused on what was in front of him?

A distraction?

“Answer him.” Tony demanded from his stance, the repulser in his hand charging up for a blast.

Distraction. But what was the distraction? Keeping them locked in the Tower long enough for the Necromancer to reanimate an army of the undead was the distraction. Right? Stiles blinked. No. No, that was his assumption. He couldn’t think more of it because the army came and then—

Wait a second. The army. Was that the distraction? Something that large-scale was a distraction?


Distract them from what? Nothing else could possibly be happening. Except if you count the re-
reanimation of what they thought the killed—

Wait a second.

“And what is that?” Tony provoked the man.

If nothing could kill the undead, then why did that patient—Holy shit. The patient.

“And what is that?” Stiles gasped out loud, catching Tony’s attention next to him.

The Necromancer pulled back his hood to reveal his face. It was no one they knew or recognized, but the sight of it—the sight of a face that was completely covered in swirling darkness, including his eyes that had pitch black scleras and stark white irises, was absolutely horrifying.

“To suffer, in the dark.” The man smiled, his teeth yellow and darkened at the gums. “I’m here to snuff out your hope, your light.”

“Tony, the patient.” Stiles forced himself to look away from the horror, tugging at Tony’s arm to do the same. “The first one, the one in your lab, he’s not dead.”

Tony blinked out of his shock, his head snapping towards Stiles. “No, that can’t be. Bruce dissected him, and the distance from here to the Tower is—“

“Within range. Tony, the end of the horde is far too long compared with the smaller mob. We are at the center, yes, but the center includes the full length of the Tower in the radius.” Stiles sped through his reasoning, eyes flicking here and there trying to think. “If they can’t be killed in an explosion by your missiles do you really think Bruce’s clean and precise incisions would?”

Stiles instantly knew he was right on the dot when the man smiled. But that didn’t reassure him at all. It meant he was still losing.

“Tony! Go!” At Stiles’ shout, the man flew in a blink of the eye, straight to the Tower.

“You’re clever.” The man drawled out the vowels, licking the edge of his teeth as he smiled wider while he watched Tony fly off. “But I’m afraid you’re too late.”

Frowning intensely, his brain was racing a mile a minute. Which was why he probably realized another anomaly.

“You said they.” Stiles hardened his gaze at the man. “You said ‘they were right’, earlier.”

At that, Stiles saw the Necromancer twitch his eye ever so slightly. That was good. It meant he wasn’t supposed to say that. He slipped up.

“You’re not working alone.” Stiles retraced his steps and analyzed the full picture. “No, no. You’re working for someone. Anyone who uses dark magic uses it for selfish gains, lust of power. An attack this big of a scale needs a large amount of dark magic and you’re on your deathbed judging by your dark state.”

“Are you fetching for a compliment of your intelligence?” The Necromancer tried to evade the topic but Stiles knew better.

“Someone put you up to this. Who are they?” He demanded, gripping his gun tighter and moving his finger to the trigger. “Tell me.”

The man clicked his tongue multiple times, as if he was criticizing him, acting as if he still has the
upper hand. “Oh, Stiles, dear. You still haven’t learned the basic lesson in which I’m trying to tell you. You’re too focused on what’s in front.” His eyes flickered to a spot behind Stiles’ shoulder. “You need to watch your back.”

Stiles turned around in a heartbeat to find an undead corpse grabbing his legs and jerking him down to the ground. He grunted in pain as his head collided with the gravel, hands gripping his gun tighter and aiming it at the head of the corpse. He must’ve shot multiple times until the undead screeched in annoyance (maybe, cause he thinks they don’t feel pain since well, yeah, they’re dead), just enough for Stiles to break free from the hold, scrambling backwards until he got up.

“What the fuck, man?” He whipped his head around to try and berate the Necromancer only to find him gone.

Shit. He has no time for this—if the man could be trusted, then something was about to happen. Thinking back to the words of the Necromancer, to figure out his goal. He stopped on one particular phrase that rung a bell in his mind.

He said his aim was to ‘snuff out your hope, your light’, to make them suffer. In the dark. But they were already in the dark, the whole damn world was in the fucking dark.

Except.

“Holy crap!” Stiles abruptly turned his head towards the Tower, making a move to run towards it and warn someone, anyone. The patient in the Tower was left behind for a reason, played dead for a reason. That one had the linchpin, the directive of this whole damn ruse. Everything else was a distraction so that he could buy enough time for the man—or corpse—on the inside to do his job.

Before he was able to run however, he felt something grab his shoulder, a dark aura surrounding him, drowning him. He couldn’t move, couldn’t turn his head to face his attacker, or even speak.

“It’s too late.” The familiar voice of the Necromancer slithered behind him, his tongue licking a long strip over the back of his ear, moaning as he did so. “Mmm, the taste of fear.”

If Stiles could puke, he would. But right now his internal organs and mental state was a mess beyond fixing and he couldn’t do anything.

First there was a sound, something like an energy pulsating through something. And then there was silence. Then floor by floor, the Tower in front of him started to black out. Snuffing out their light.

Stiles breathed out in a pained gasp, all his energy to fight just disappeared out of his body. He could feel the Necromancer turn him around with the help of his magic, even though Stiles didn’t move an inch.

He faced the darkness head on, staring into the black eyes of the demon—because that’s what he was, he was a fucking demon. He wanted to rip his eyes out, and beat the organs out of him. Stiles’ face contorted with tears and anger and all he could tell himself was: calm down.

This isn’t over. He can still win. There’s still one piece left in the game, and that was whoever sent the Necromancer. Stiles will be his life that whoever that was, was behind this whole damn thing.

The mastermind. The big bad. The villain.

Taking a deep breath through his nose, Stiles stilled his gaze.
“Who sent you.”

The Necromancer smiled as his hands crept up to Stiles’ neck, fingernails trailing his thrumming veins. “Ah, now why would you ever think I’d actually give a truthful answer to that?” He tightened the hold he had on his neck, making Stiles choke for air. “I’m free, now. There are no strings on me—“

Stiles coughed as the hold on his neck loosened, and the speech the man was giving suddenly stop with a cough of his own. Frowning, Stiles looked down and that’s when he saw it—blood, dripping out of the man’s stomach, a gaping wound that had a—

_Fucking hell._

—hand with claws punctured right through it.

Stiles felt his knees give out as he fell to the ground, hands cradling his neck while his eyes was trained upwards, watching the Necromancer fall lifelessly in front of him. The moment the body hit the ground, it bursts into ashes and dark particles, a smoky burnt scent lingering in the air.

He didn’t know if it was the exhaustion talking, or maybe just him going bat shit crazy, but he could’ve sworn as the ash flew past him, surround him, he heard a whisper: _“There are no strings on me.”_

Now that the body was out of the way, he could see the attacker. The sun was coming up behind him, breaking dusk into dawn. Stiles was in the man’s shade, eyes still focused on him, mouth slightly gapping open.

_No fucking way._

He could recognize that 5 o’clock shadow, trimmed facial hair and brooding shoulders anywhere. After all, he could see it in his dreams every now and then, a lingering attachment—a hopeless painful memory still drilled in the back of his eyelids. One thing he didn’t recognize though, was the bloody red eyes shining in the dark.

“Derek.”
Honestly, guys. Hahaha, you must have trust issues by now because my ‘soon’ never really gives you what it entails huh HAHAHA. I have no idea why I’m like this. I have no excuse other than the fact that this chapter has got me feeling all kinds of emotions and all kinds of confusion in writing it. So many ways it can be executed, so many ways it can be portrayed and just the possibility seemed endless so I kept on pausing, re-reading, and re-fixing, re-organizing bits and re-editing the flow of the chapter and what to include or not. And the research, the fucking research, a LOT of research went into this, I didn’t jump into this knowing medical procedures, anesthesia doses, supernatural creatures, Marvel stuff, the entirety of this AU, I had to learn that strenuously or build it from the ground up. Thus why it took like about two months getting you this chapter :) But by far, this is my absolute FAVOURITE chapter, and that is due to a lot of reasons. It just, embodies all the factors that I absolutely love about this fic (in a writer/creator’s perspective)—the fragile nature of humanity, the stress of a post-apocalyptic world, the damage and assessment after a disaster, the bumbling jumbling mess of emotional strain, the vulnerability of love, and just ugh, all of it. I loved writing it, I loved the progression of the plot in it, and I just love the sequence of events that is in this chapter (andalsoDerek!!!!!).

ALSO!!!! It has been brought to my attention that this is progressing a bit slower than everybody thought, for the romance and that the punishment against Scott and Pack haven’t been executed yet. First and foremost I am sorry, really sorry that some of you feel that way. But this is a Slow Burn, and extremely long Slowwwwwww Burn(for both the plot and romance) and more than that it is about morals (if you want more explanation on this, read the end note. if not then ignore it~). I have to stress that I’m not even remotely done with this story, that means things are still going to happen in the future that will explain more and progress the situation—all the tags are going to be met upon. Sorry if you felt lied to or mislead by this extremely Slow Burn, but it will all happen in time and you’re going to know why it took me so long to get there.

Without further ado, please enjoy this late, and long, long installment of the story (I know y’all told me the longer the chapters are the better, but I’m pretty sure you’re not expecting this 25,000 slab of words so HA! Careful what you ask for hahahaha sorry). Also, sorry if it feels rather rushed for some parts? Cause well, I just didn’t know what else to do with it and in my perspective, the rush of that part was as informative of that scene as is of the whole fic; literally no time to breathe—is what I’m trying to convey LOL.

I love seeing all your comments and I hope this chapter will not fail you!!! LOVE YOU SO MUCH THANKYOU SO MUCH FOR WAITING!!! SEE YOU IN THE NEXT CHAPTER and oh god, I'm so looking forward to your reaction and comments on this ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There were no words.
Literally. There were no words to describe how shocked he was. No, shock was the fucking understatement of the century. Overwhelmed is not even a heavy enough word to describe it. Is there a verb form for comatose because that’s what he would use—but he figured literature and English experts didn’t expect people to want to feel comatose because what kind of a fucktard of a masochist would want that? Well here is one, one Stiles Stilinski, who is in very dire need of the word and is disappointed by your efforts. Thank you for nothing, you horny fuckers. Seriously, what is with all the orgies in the ‘golden’ literature, get a life please.

One that’s as shitty as his, because they don’t deserve to be happy for leaving him without a word for his emotions right now.

For what felt like the longest time, neither of them spoke a word to each other. They could hear the faint chaos behind them, in the Tower—probably from what Stiles feared had happened. Neither of them dared to break eye contact with each other, none of them making a move to step forward. Not that Stiles could anyways, because he thinks he got a concussion from his head bashing into the ledge in the road full force and the grip that undead had on his ankles was so strong that he definitely feels a bruise there. Also, maybe a displaced muscle because it was hurting more than it should.

That was on top of all the other injuries he had in the past hour—which, bloody hell, only an hour back into the life of avoiding supernatural disasters by an inch of a breath and he was already in a crap-load of pain. Christ sake’s, he needs a morphine drip.

Stiles must’ve been more emotionally expressive than he thought he was, because Derek noticed his pain with the flash of his red eyes, which also hold the fuck up. When the hell did Derek, broody eyebrows ‘I’m not trained to be an Alpha’ Hale become an Alpha. Again?

No, more importantly, how? Who did he kill—

“You’re hurt.”

The voice that he came to be so familiar with shook him out of his thoughts.

Stiles didn’t know what to say, but could you blame him? There’s too much shit happening and he hasn’t even processed a single bit of it. It’s so typical for the werewolf to find him in a vulnerable situation. Instead, as if trying to prove to Derek that he wasn’t the same weak old Stiles that he used to be, he stood up with all the strength he could muster.

Which was a shit idea, but his ego was too big for his own good (Stiles blamed it all on Tony—that man is rubbing off on Stiles way too much for his own comfort). So not only did he cause immense amount of pain on his abdomen and ankle, the blood rush to his head from the sudden movement intensified his concussion by a thousand causing him to stumble and stagger pronouncedly.

Before he could fall to the ground for the gazillionth time that day and get yet another injury, Derek was at his side. His hands were at his waist, his position putting Stiles’ hand was around his shoulder, carrying all of his weight.

The instant he felt his touch, it was as if a dam of memories just flooded his vision. Their eyes captivated by one another, like a prison. They were trapped. Stiles was trapped, again. Derek’s touch felt like it was burning him. All that Stiles forced himself to forget and lock in a box buried deep within his heart was now bubbling up to the surface with one touch.

It was too much.
It was overwhelmingly intense.

Stiles tried to violently push himself away from Derek’s hold but the man had fucking supernatural strength, so obviously his odds were stacked against him. “Let me go.”

The man paid no attention to Stiles’ order, instead did the exact opposite and strengthened his hold on the boy. “It’s this or I’ll carry you.”

That definitely shut him up for good. He’ll take mild touching over being in complete surrender to Derek. They headed for the tower in a slow but steady pace due to Stiles’ injuries and that was when he was reminded of what he was going in to find.

In the wake of another disaster. And if it’s anything like Stiles imagined from the top of it’s head, it was going to be condemning.

God’s help them.

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It was somehow worse than Stiles would’ve imagined and at the same time better than what he’d expected. It was a strange balance that shouldn’t have existed but then again, with Stiles’ track record, his life is full of impossible things so really, he shouldn’t be surprised at the existence of a paradox.

The Tower was a disaster, he could tell because the quarantine had been lifted (probably Tony’s order) and the noise of panic was drafting out like smoke out a burning building. People were panicking about the eerily similar situation that has landed them in this dark hellhole in the first place, having triggered memories and panic attacks across the room. The hospital staff were all struggling to get behind the power outage and calming people down, to no avail obviously.

Stiles nodded past the guards who let them in the Tower, taking in the scene of chaos inside the building. Patients were dropping everywhere, some in fear and some in the loss of hope for getting better or cured. Nurses were whispering to each other in panic while the older, more experienced nurse or doctors tried to get the situation in order.

Derek led Stiles by his waist to a free spot at the seating area, his hands moving to place him down. “Wait here, I’ll go get help.” Stiles kept his grip on his arm but before he could say anything, the wolf was already shouting. “Can we get someone here please!”

Without thinking, the boy grabbed Derek’s neck with his free hand and pulled it so that the wolf was facing him. What he didn’t calculate into the plan was that the man’s face was now so close to his that their noses were nearly touching, as he held the man by the back of his neck. “Listen to me, because I’m not gonna warn you twice.” He stared into Derek’s eyes as intently as he could, trying to get his point across. “You do not speak unless I refer to you, and you do not act unless I specifically ask you to.”

He could tell the Alpha was about to retaliate but Stiles held his grip tighter. “Let me remind you that you have no authority here. And assuming that you didn’t know I was here, you’re here because you need something from this area and I’m willing to bet it has something to do with this hospital. So, if you want to get what it is you came here for, you follow my rules. And that is if I grant it at all, because right now I have about a million and one questions including the curious and
possibly morbid state of your eyes. Do you understand.”

Derek licked his lips in hesitation.

“Do you understand?”

The Alpha nodded strictly, shocked at the abrasive and dictator-like behavior Stiles was exhibiting. To say that he was taken aback was an understatement.

Stiles let his grip on Derek go and proceeded to push him away. Given that his pain was too extreme for him to handle and his rush of adrenaline is starting to wear off faster than a drop from a 360 degrees rollercoaster freak ride, he fell into Derek’s support once more.

Christ, one minute the man’s here and he’s back to old habits.

Stiles grumbled, reluctantly letting the man support him whilst he hobbled off to find Amy—she’d probably be the one with most information regarding the situation. Except, it was still only started to break into dusk outside and the power was fucking out—basically, it was pitch black outside and on the inside. At the very least, they could barely navigate their way thanks to the protocol all hospital and security staff received, which was turning on any light source they have including the ones attached to their uniforms.

How in the hell is the hospital supposed to function without light if he can’t even find his fucking way to the reception desk of the hospital lobby floor he sees every single day?

Calm down, Stiles. His inner voice tried to remind him that panic would make the situation worse, but he couldn’t help feeling scared of the prospects.

“Stiles!” The familiar voice of a billionaire screamed through the room, a streak of light brighter than the others swiping across the area. Turning, searching. “Stiles, are you here!”

Feeling a bubbling relief, Stiles shouted back. “Here! Tony!”

The billionaire could pinpoint his location pretty easily and soon enough, the man was gathering Stiles up in his embrace. “Oh, thank god.” Tony sighed into the nape of his neck. “I was running on instincts so I forgot the fact that I left you alone with a necrophilic psycho when you can’t fend for yourself.”

Stiles can’t even argue with that. Because it was true. He couldn’t fight even if he wanted to at that moment. He was way too weak.

“It’s okay, there were way too many important matters to deal with anyways.” Stiles pulled back from the hug, patting the older man’s shoulder. “What happened?”

Tony ran a hand through his hair, stopping to fist his hand in his brunette locks. “We’re too late. I found the corpse while he was destroying the arc reactor for the Tower. I stopped him before he could fully destroy it but— he took a deep breath, “—Stiles. It doesn’t look good, the damage, it’s —”

“Please, tell me you can fix it.” Stiles begged the man, the news adding weight to his shoulder and to the throbbing pain that was starting to dull around the edges and lull him to the sweet release of just letting go.

Thankfully, the man managed to unknowingly stronghold Stiles back to reality by grabbing his shoulders in a reassuring manner. “I’ll try. I managed to salvage some components that run the
back-up generator, so I’ll get that running as soon as possible. But, I won’t know if I’ll be able to fix it until I run a full diagnosis.”

“Go.” Stiles ushered him away, nodding when Tony’s eyes did a look-over of the boy’s body and instantly glazed over with concern. “You know me, I’ll be fine. Let me handle things here, just focus on getting the power back on.” With one last hug, Stiles surged forward and whispered to the man’s ears. “Don’t let him be right.”

Tony instantly caught on to the thing Stiles was referring to, and he answered in the form of a strict and hopeful gaze. *They were going to fix it. They have to.*

In the middle of all the chaos, Stiles almost forgot that Derek was standing right beside him. The moment Tony flew away, Derek manhandled Stiles so that the Alpha could face him. Before the boy could even complain about the way the man handled him, Derek exploded.

“What the hell was that?”

Stiles frowned in confusion.

“Stiles, that was Tony Stark. How the hell do you know Tony Stark.” He backtracked to the previous scene. “No, how the hell are you close to Ironman?”

Without answering the barrage of questions, Stiles simply deadpanned Derek with the most judgmental glare he could muster. “I don’t remember asking you to speak.”

There was a low growl budding in the back of Derek’s throat—one so loud and frustrated that Stiles could feel it through the reverberation of his bones through the man’s grip on his arms. But Derek, no, *werewolves* in general do not scare him. Hasn’t for a very long time now.

For the second time in a short period, Stiles was thankful for the very very clingy nature of the Avengers, because not a minute after Tony left, Natasha and Clint came barreling down into his side, grabbing him away from Derek who they mistook for as a threat.

Actually, maybe they had a point there. After all, he certainly wasn’t a friend.

“Stiles, are you okay!?” Clint patted him down, obviously getting his answer when Stiles barely avoided fainting from the loss of the support of one Alpha werewolf. “Jesus, you’re banged up. You look like shit.”

Breathing a huff of air out the top of his lips, Stiles rolled his eyes. “Why thank you for that wonderful compliment. What wonders did that do to my self-confidence.”

Natasha had her gun towards Derek when the man’s eyes flashed red from suddenly having Stiles ripped away from his arms. “Make another step and you’re dead.”

Sighing, Stiles begged for answers of exactly why he had to deal with this. Since when did he have to do the protecting for Derek?

“It’s okay, Nat. He’s—*not a threat? not dangerous? An ally?* None of them quite speak the truth since none of them were actually the truth, so he just settled on the next best thing which was ambiguity, “—nothing.”

The look on Derek’s face when the word slipped his mouth, the blatant disregard of importance or
even just acknowledgement. It hurt him. Stiles could tell by his eyes.

He used to be able to tell anything and everything from just looking at Derek’s eyes. Memorized the perfect shade of it. Knew with his heart what each blink or flicker of his eyes meant. He used to fall straight into the pools of his irises.

But now, all he saw was betrayal.

And something raged inside his heart—just the sheer notion of ‘how dare he feel that way’. As if he was the one who was the victim—

**No. Stop.** Take a deep breath, Stiles Stilinski, and get your shit together. Now was not the place and definitely not the time for this.

It was starting to feel like no time was ever the time for him to deal with his emotions.

Natasha knew there was something more that Stiles wasn’t telling her, but she was used to it. There is always more to the case, in any aspect of her life and his. Always. “Look, there’s too many questions and not a lot of time to go through the first hundred let alone the next thousands that come crashing after it.” The assassin hid her weapon away, focusing on the immediate problem at hand. “Steve is taking care of the situation outside. Where’s Tony?”

“Trying to get our power back.” Stiles leaned further into Clint’s hold, finding that the adrenaline was starting to wear down and he can’t handle the pain much longer.

“What happened to that anyways?” Clint interjected with a flabbergasted tilt in his voice.

Shaking his head, the boy closed his eyes for a moment, trying to process everything that just happened. Filtering. “Necromancer. The army was a distraction. The first body, that patient I fought, he was the plan all along. So we would leave the body unattended so he could go into our power system and destroy the reactor. Honestly, I’m still so—“

Frustrated? Angry? Defeated? Check, check and hell to the fucking check it to the yeah—you thought he’d be used to being defeated but hell this one hit him hard. But most of all, he was confused.

Not just because of the necromancy, as if that wasn’t enough to flip someone’s brain over, but it was just the fact that all this happened that confused him. It was just not possible.

“Stiles. Hey, Stiles!” Clint snapped the boy out of his train of thought, the boy looking at him with an expecting look. “What is it?”

Biting his lips, the boy smiled passively. “No, it’s—“

“If you say nothing, I swear to god, kid.” The archer warned him with a look.

Stiles sighed. “I’m just thinking. How did this happen? Why did this happen? There’s something that the Necromancer said to me that just raised all kinds of red flags—we don’t know anything. There’s something bigger, something more important at play here that we’re completely missing.”

He didn’t even know why he was hesitant to mention anything about the fact that the Necromancer attack even happened, which was supposedly impossible. He knows that in his core that this was not possible. Forget the fact that he didn’t even knew Necromancers were even still around, there’s a reason why Necromancy was so rare and that was not due to the sheer difficulty and risk of the art of the magic itself.
All necromancers are bounded. It’s just the way it is—their magic is constrained by a lot of other powers in place. That’s why even though back then when Necromancers were still quite a common rarity, there had been no big disasters of an army of undead corpses traipsing around through town such as what happened today.

It’s all wrong. Something’s horribly wrong—to state the obvious.

Also, the painful tugging of his heart was not a good sign, nor of any help at all.

Stiles crumbled to his knees from the pain, his hands fisting on the fabric on top of his heart. *His pain sure has the best timing.* Derek was instantly at his side, despite the constant reminder of his warning for him not to do anything out of line.

“Stiles, you’re hurt. You need to lie down and heal.” Derek goaded him, his hand rubbing calming strokes on his arm like it was an instinct.

Because it was. A long time ago—or at least that’s what it felt like. A lifetime ago.

There was something so melancholic about it, so familiarly comfortable about it. And nowadays, he was in desperate need for comfort. For something familiar. Something safe. He leaned into the touch, also on instinct. Because it was.

But then a pained scream snapped him out of his reverie. Then all the other noises came to life. Patients groaning, nurses constantly calling for more medicine and materials, doctors barking out orders of transfers and needs.

And he was reminded of everything.

The pain of his past. Derek. His responsibilities. The current mess. The hospital.

*Oh god, the hospital.* Fuck.

He instantly gathered all the strength left he could muster and stood upright, ignoring the shooting signals of pain going through his brain synapses. Stiles could tell he was alarming everyone, but he couldn’t care.

“Nat. Clint. There’s no power. The hospital—I gotta—” The boy stumbled through his words, flashbacks of the horrible blur of February going through his mind.

The two agents seemed to understand completely what he meant, leaving Derek in the dark. Natasha eyed Derek warily before she clasped both her hands on both sides of Stiles’ cheeks, lightly slapping him out of his budding panic attack. “Stiles. We got it. We’ll take care of everything here, you do what you need to.”

Stiles took a deep breath, breathing in Natasha’s directions and instilling the purpose in his mind. One thing to focus on, just one. It’s better than the jumble of mess that’s going on.

“We’ll be fine.” Clint reassured him. “Tony will find a way to fix this. We’ll find a way to fix this. And you’ll find a way to pull through while we do so. You always have.”

He wanted to believe those words more than anything. So he did. He tried, at least. To the best of his abilities, he slipped on a strong and calm appearance as he made a move to walk towards the reception desk. Derek followed along with him like a lost puppy, supporting him if he stumbled or tripped.
The person he wanted to find was thankfully there where he needed her to be.

“Amy!”

The woman turned her head with such speed that Stiles could hear something in her neck snap, a muscle or bone creak maybe. Her eyes were wild with panic and her breath hitched. The moment she saw him it was as if all the negativity around her lifted. “Oh, fucking hell.”

She lunged into him, half hugging him and half scrambling to hold him. The woman was a mess, her voice breaking into small sobs, controlled and at the same time desperate.

“Stiles. What’s happening, I—“ She wepted into his shoulder, and if that wasn’t heartbreaking enough her backstory will take it up a notch. See, Amy was a special case. She was well on her way to becoming a doctor, did her years and was starting her hospital training—but she couldn’t handle the burden of handling someone’s life. She was too fragile for that overbearing crushing weight of saving it, or being unable to do so. So she settled for being a nurse, and when the Dark surged, she stepped up into the role of head nurse and receptionist. “I’ve been getting panicked SOS messages through the radio frequency, I don’t know what to do—Stiles. What do we do?”

Derek stood on the sidelines, watching Stiles calm the woman down. Stiles ignored the man who clearly wanted to ask questions but he focused on the problem at hand. “Calm down. Hey, we’re going to get through this, okay?” He waited for the woman to respond in the form of a nod. “Can you call a staff meeting for me please. Now.”

Amy nodded vigorously, wiping her tears and moving past Stiles and towards the general direction of the busy rush of people. She took her whistle out and blew hard. Every medical personnel has a whistle to signal emergency meeting or gathering—only to be used in desperate times.

Stiles pulled Derek aside and to the corner. The wolf thought that he was finally going to get some answers, but all Stiles did was warn him again. “The rules still apply. I would’ve sent you away by now, but unfortunately, I need you to do something for me.”

Before the Hale can figure out what that meant, a crowd of at least 30 people with scrubs and hospital lab coats on gathered around Stiles in a neat circle.

“All right, is everyone here? It doesn’t matter, if anyone missed this, just relay my words to them.” Stiles clapped and rubbed his hands together. “I’m going to make this short because hell knows this ain’t the time for a meeting but we need order. From now on, we are going to be practical and rational, even more so than usual. Lock your emotions in a box and move on. I know you have complaints about how we do things here but I know that deep inside you know we are doing what we have to—not what we want. So, save who you can, not who you want to. We are back in the blur of February, but worse. Back then we had power, but no order and no supplies. Now we have order and supplies, but no power and more panic and way more influx of patients.

“I know you’re stressed. I am too. We’re overworked and—well, we’re not underpaid because we have to be paid something to be underpaid, and we’re not being paid at all. But you all knew that when you joined. You knew this was going to be hard, and I’m sorry to say that this will be the hardest day you will have to face. I’m going to be honest with you, we don’t know how this is going to play out so this might be the first of many a’ harder days. I hope you bear with me and know that the decisions that will be made from this point on forwards, I will have no joy in making.”

Stiles could see that his speech had a devastating effect to the miserable and exhausted looking hospital staff, but after a second’s worth of contemplation, all of them looked at him with a new
resolve—a stronger one. They had unshed and shed tears in their eyes, bullets of sweat dropping from their forehead and blood, along with other fluids on their uniforms from handling all those patients in a short amount of time.

He felt an overwhelmingly proud feeling blooming in the pit of his stomach, warm and fluttering. *They were going to be fine.*

“Amy. Report update please.”

Amy settled herself and got her clipboard out before flipping through the charts that she speedily wrote over the past hour to keep organization without her data streaming computer and network. They were smart to keep a physical copy of everything along with digital tracking.

“So far we’ve had a casualty of 21 from the riot—some due to lack of time and some due to the increased aggression and trauma to the wound. I haven’t checked in with the ICU but I’m pretty sure it’s a mess up there, I’ve been meaning to but there’s just so much to do and I—“ Stiles only needed to give her a look before she took a deep breath and started over. “Sorry. Facts only. Right. The only department without any trouble is the NICU, everything else has lost power. All doctors have been redirected to their area of specialty and all surgeries has been put on hold except for the ones that were already in progress from before the incident happened.”

*Right. Shit, the surgeries.* Stiles ran a hand down his face, this was going to be excruciatingly painful, he could feel the migraine coming. The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit was probably the most important part of their hospital and thus they dedicated a small arc reactor—like the ones Tony built for his suit and the iron legion—to power up that floor as a back-up just in case anything like this shit happens. Thank fuck for small mercies. Because babies, man.

*Babies.*

If anything happened to them—holy shit, he could not even begin to fathom the utter pain and sense of raw depression—just thinking about it makes him cry.

*Snap out of it.*

“Okay.” Stiles clapped his hands to get everyone’s full attention. “We’ll stick to the system. From now on, all those on the Black list will be treated as those on the White list.” Stiles could already hear the start of a protest coming from the staff but he was quick to explain. “I know. I know you’re angry but you have to understand. We have no power here, all surgeries are on hold. Even a simple surgery procedure needs lighting and anesthetic machines, so unless you want to do your surgeries outside in broad daylight with your patients wide awake and screaming bloody murder, I suggest you swallow that lump in your throat and move on or else you are all welcomed to start wheeling the beds and drugs down a couple flights of stairs.”

“CT scans won’t be working so anything you conclude as a brain injury, more than a concussion, will be deemed as a White list patient. Also, you do not need the permission of other senior staffs to use common painkiller drugs and injections—just remember to give it to those who desperately need it. We are in short supply.” He continued on, listing all the things he could think of while keeping aware of the time. “The fridges that contain all our blood and medicine are built to retain the temperature up to 3 hours after discharge to an electrical outlet, so do not hesitate to use that blood to replenish others. If in three hours we don’t get any solution to our power problem, gather all universal donors and all others that are willing to donate their blood for immediate use.”

His words were spitting out like wildfire. His brain kept thinking: what else? What else. *Come one, fucking think, Stiles.* “Since moving patients would be difficult with no elevators on hand, you are
hereby allowed to perform simple field surgery—anything easy enough with only the help of local anesthetic that can be injected. Someone please set up a corner for that, no civilians wants to see a surgery so please be cautious.”

“I’ll come back with more updates on how to navigate this difficult,” The word seemed like a lie, because it will be hell, “situation. All my orders are effective immediately, and will be until further notice. But most of all, trust your instincts and your gut. If you’re unsure, ask someone you trust. We do not have time for doubt or sympathy. We need to pull through. Maintain calm and compose yourself. I know you’re scared but these people are scared and hurt. And as the foremost figure of authority and help, you have to have the strength to reassure them that they will be okay. They’ve come a long way for your help—so help them.”

The hospital staff closed their eyes and gathered closer, they didn't have to say anything but they all knew the other was praying for everything to be fine, for strength, for courage. They collectively took a deep breath and felt that energy settle in their core.

“Okay.” Stiles smiled, hoping to reassure them. “Now go be a hero and save some lives.”

When he saw the determined and surrendering look of each of his hospital staff members, as they disperse and run back to their station and continue as if this was work as per usual—he felt immensely grateful for them, and also overbearing guilt for what he’s making them do.

They didn’t deserve this. None of them did. But if he started thinking like that, then that train of thought would drive him straight down a rabbit hole that will end in him chucked into the pits of depression. Because there was never any answer to his questions.

And he needed to accept that.

With a strong tether to his heart and to his anchor, he blinked back his fears and swallow the lump in his throat. He focused on something more present and binding—the clusterfuck that was about to happen if he didn’t stop it.

“Derek.”

The wolf was startled at being addressed so publicly and voluntarily.

“Drain my pain.”

Derek stood there like he was hit by a bus, caught like a deer in the headlights—unmoving and shocked.

“Well?” Stiles snapped his fingers in front of the man, waking him up from his trance. “Today, Derek.”

“Stiles, wait a minute, I—“ The wolf finally got his sense back together and tried to explain something but Stiles just didn’t want to hear it.

Probably because he already knows what it is, that being the reason why the Hale was there in the first place. Even though he technically did use it as a bargaining chip to keep the Alpha in line, he still was adamantly sure he would reject whatever the fuck it is Derek was here for. Plus, he doesn’t want anything to do with Derek, especially not with his problems because he has a special sixth sense for all things relating supernatural and this one just screams Beacon Hills.

So that’s a big giant fucking no from Stiles.
“Make yourself useful or get out.”

Derek swallowed his remark and took Stiles’ hands, and black lines started traveling from Stiles’ veins to Derek’s arms. The Alpha groaned in pain as the boy let out a breath in relief.

He felt rejuvenated, but Stiles knew it was just a temporary high. Before this gets way too familiar, he needs to get to work so he doesn’t need a second dose of that drug.

It really doesn’t help that the workload he’s got is the size of the Himalayas mountain and a sprinkle of nasty consequences if he were to fail to attend to it.

The fact that he was trying to fix all this with a concussion amongst all his other injuries, muted by a very temporary supernatural pain reliever, was concerning at best.

Suicidal, at worst.

Stupid? Always.

But hey, it’s nothing different from their plans so far so what could possibly go even more wrong?

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See, the problem with running the only hospital in the middle of a post-apocalyptic world where there is no electricity, is that they’re running the only hospital in the middle of a post-apocalyptic world where there is no electricity. Even before the loss of power in a modern world, running a hospital was already a burdensome and rigorously tiring job—ask any doctor, nurse or director. When they started, limited electricity always casts a shadow over their ethical morals and their responsibilities.

Now that they lost their only source of power, a billion problems crashed through the roof—Stiles doesn't even know where to start. He’s feeling a migraine on top of his concussion but for now he’s got pain drain juicing out of him from Derek’s arm so he’s fine.

At least, he will force himself to be fine until he can properly rest. Which at this rate, is give or take in about 20 years.

Needless to say, his sleeping schedule is a mess. Nonexistent, if you will.

As he barged through the staircase doors to the ICU ward, Stiles was instantly bombarded by a thousand different noises and finally followed by the constant shout of his name.

“Stiles! Oh, thank god.” Lauren, the unfortunate nurse on the clock in charge for the ICU ward, cried out his name in relief, rushing towards him with charts in her hands and a radio in her belt with a transmitter attached to her wrist—they built a compact morse code transmitter in the form of a button clicker attached to a radio for a form of simpler communication, a pager of sorts. Two nurses followed behind her.

Stiles stopped her before she could crash into him, taking the charts from her hands before it could fall. “Hey, calm down. Breathe, then update me.”

He made himself busy by flipping through the charts, but in all honesty his brain was just too
focused on the constant shouting from the ICU rooms, on all of the rooms. Emergencies everywhere.

“Everything is falling apart—Stiles we can’t do anything, almost half the patients here are on life support and that’s obviously not working due to the power loss.” Lauren grabbed the chart from underneath the pile. “The surgeries in the NSICU ward failed—both of them. There’s two cardiovascular surgery going on, it seems that Dr. Achmed will be fine handling his patient but Dr. Rotherson is freaking out, rightly so. There’s three general surgeries going on, and one of them is a laparoscopy by Dr. Chen so that one will be interesting. There’s a cyst removal by Dr. Joy and she was almost done before the power outage so she’s going to be fine, and the other one is by Dr. Van Hodder, a bullet wound surgery—a victim of a robbery crime, bullet perforated the smaller intestine, so that one is definitely fucked.”

God fucking damn it. Stiles thought for a second that if he closed his eyes hard enough will all this just go away. Seriously. If this was all just a dream he would legit love to wake up now. Doesn’t matter how much of it was a dream—if he woke up the day before he went to Scott’s house asking to look for a dead body which just screams ‘whatta fokin’ idiot’, he wouldn’t be pissed.

“Okay.” Grunting, Stiles set himself to work. “For the patients on life support, the machines should have a back-up battery in case of power loss—it should be automatic but if it’s not, there’s a button switch behind the back panel on the left side of each machine, please find it and activate it. Before that, prioritize which patients will do fine without the life support—like patients who need ventilation, switch the intubation into manual balloon pumps and keep a nurse on it to keep pumping.”

One of the nurses nodded at his instruction and went on to follow his orders, going to each room to notify the other staff.

“First priority is to keep the anesthetics working, we don’t want to give anyone trauma and incomprehensible pain by having them wake up in the middle of their own surgery.” Stiles raced through his head, taking out his walkie talkie. “Contact each surgery room and their anesthesiologist—sort which one needs the most attention and dire need for help. If the anesthesia will last throughout the whole surgery without further application or monitoring, then I won’t bother with it.”

Lauren dismissed the other nurse to do exactly that.

“I’m going into Dr. Rotherson’s surgery, so be ready with everything I ask for when I get back.” Stiles handed the chart boards back to the woman before shouting for one of the other nurses. “Someone get me a gown please!”

The head nurse had only a second to calm herself down with Stiles’ patting her back before she was called off somewhere else. Stiles directed a command through the walkie-talkie, hoping the man he was reaching heard his message and did as he asked.

From the corner of his eye, Stiles noticed Derek nearly jumping out of the way of a nurse who was running around with a tray full of syringes of various kinds of drugs. A part of him was happy that the wolf was suffering, but then the better part of him pitied him.

Darn his moral conscience. He should’ve killed the bastard in the crib, now he’s gotta deal with this goody-two shoes instead of being perfectly fine with his morally ambiguous self. He blames this on Steve. Steve was rubbing off on him—and unlike the situation with Tony, it’s not that Stiles views it as a bad influence, he’d just like it to be in a more physical and literal way.
Look, he was a young man. A healthy—in all the appropriate and bare minimum kind— young man. He’s got needs and a fucking high libido that he’s been pointedly ignoring, without consent, due to the constant shit storm he’s had to deal with.

Unlike most creatures that he’s encountered with, supernatural or not, he for one does not get excited by the thrums of stress and life and death situations.

As thrilling as that might be the first time around, due to the adrenaline and what not, Stiles has been through countless of those circumstances that he’s grown rather immune to the rush and therefore is grateful he hasn’t developed a kink for it.

Honest to god, he was setting himself up to fail but look at that, he managed to avoid it. Twas a pleasant surprise, and that is not something he gets often in his disarray of disastrous events he calls his life.

Ugh, the gates of insanity was staring him straight in the eyes and all he could think about is what he wouldn’t give to have that hunk of all American Brooklyn solid mass of justice and righteousness on top of him—

“Stiles!”

Blinking out of his dangerous thoughts, Stiles was faced with one concerned looking Derek. Right, Derek. He almost forgot.

“What the hell was all that?” The wolf glared at him—and Stiles was really not seeing how he deserved the glare.

But then again, he’s always found that he would be on the receiving side of any Hale patented full-on eyebrow glare in any set of circumstances. Good to know that some things never change.

Stiles feigned ignorance. “What?”

“All this!” Derek gestured to all of him—which, ugh, rude, the man was insinuating something problematic with the whole of him, which was true but give the man a break, please. “How are you related to all of this? Why is everyone looking to you for directions? Who—“

Before Derek could finish his questions—thank fuck because Stiles really didn’t want to explain anything especially if he didn’t warrant it—a nurse came running from one of the patient’s rooms.

“Stiles! We need you for an emergency!” Lauren grabbed him without a second to her thought and dragged him running back to the room she barged out from, Derek trailing behind her unsurely.

Stiles wanted to complain about everyone treating him like a human rag doll, but it was also partially his fault for being so damn easy to pull around. Damn his deteriorating self-preservation skills.

But he stopped complaining when he saw the state of the patient, a woman in her early thirties—shortness of breath, coughing, no, choking.

“What’s wrong with her?” Stiles shook the nurse’s hand of him, grabbed the pen light he had on the lapels of his jacket and checked her eyes, judging the dilation of the pupil. “She’s awake, conscious but barely.”

Lauren grabbed the chart hung on the end of the bed, turned on her headlight strapped to her forehead and reading the patient’s data. “She had a CABG surgery just 7 hours ago.”
“What? Cabbage?” Derek, being the unaware dumbo that he is, disturbed their flow of diagnosis.

Stiles busied by grabbing his stethoscope from his fanny pack and checked her chest. “No. CABG—Coronary Artery Bypass Graft Surgery, which is exactly why we call it CABG to prevent the waste of time saying the full name in case of an emergency like this which you are also wasting time by asking stupid questions.”

The frown between his eyes grew as the woman started heaving louder and started to painfully whine. *Shit.* “Miss? Hey, I need you to stay with me okay.”

Derek moved forward and grabbed the patient’s hand, and before Stiles could figure out what the fuck this Stupidwolf was doing, he saw the black lines from his fingertips and nearly shouted his head off. “DERek, stop!”

The Alpha retracted his hand in a snap when Stiles’ hand came slapping down on it. Feeling offended, Derek could barely contain his growl. “She’s in pain.”

“Yeah! And she needs to be in pain in order for me to properly diagnose where the hell the pain is coming from to stop it properly!” Stiles didn’t even try to control the bark in his tongue, because this was life and death and not some sympathy game that he was playing. “Lauren, check her pulse!”

Stiles grabbed the scissor in his fanny pack and started to cut down across the garment of the woman, stripping her from the chest upwards. He could hear the off-guard squawk from a certain werewolf but he ignored it in favor of roaming the woman’s chest with his stethoscope. “Were there any complications in the surgery?”

“He’s in pain.” Lauren recalled from the top of her head, one of her hand on the patient’s wrist, checking her pulse as she focused on the hand with her watch on. “135 bpm, Stiles, I’m reading hypertension. Do you want me to check her blood pressure?”

He opted to focus on moving his stethoscope down to the side of her body, checking the lungs instead of the heart because he has a very bad inkling of what this might be.

“Stiles!” Lauren urged him for an answer.

He got his answer when he pressed his hand against the side of her body and she nearly jumped up in pain from her bed. “It’s pneumothorax.”

The nurse blinked before shaking her head. “Pneumothorax? Are—are you sure, last we checked she has nothing wrong or any trauma to her lungs.”

“Yes, and worse, it’s tension pneumothorax.” He took his stethoscope off and let it hang on his neck. “It can occur in postoperative thoracic surgeries. Someone get me a chest tube kit and a local anesthetic, now! Lauren, keep track of her pulse!”

“Why?” A small squeak of a question floated through the tense atmosphere, coming from Greg, the nurse that joined them just under six months ago. He was a curious little thing, adorable and very persistent.

Stiles spared him a tired and stressed smile. “Tension pneumothorax has all the making of a pneumothorax—collapsed lung, when the air escapes the lung from a form of trauma and fills the chest cavity, the uh, pleural space, thus building pressure. Tension pneumothorax is when that pressure affects all the other organs—like putting pressure on the heart, which is all kinds of dangerous. So it needs to be instantly dealt with or else it will inevitably lead to a cardiac arrest.”
He huffed, inclining his own head away to shout outwards. “Which is why I need that tube and anesthetic, five minutes ago!”

His sudden shout made the woman jolt, which he should probably be more careful about. Making soft shushing noises, he placed his hand on the woman’s forehead, pushing her hair backwards and calming her. Touch is very important, since emotions are felt by the brain and nerves—just the calming and warm touch of someone else could bring great comfort in times of dire pain and stress.

“You’ve been so strong, but I’m going to need you to hold on okay, sweetheart?” He was aware that the woman was older than him, but he found that endearing names often help patients. “You’re doing great. The pain will soon be over, I promise.”

Derek watched on the sidelines as Stiles calmed the woman down without taking away her pain. The boy was multitasking between caring for her and keeping track of her condition.

Another nurse, Carla, barged into the room with a tray in her hands and a hurried breath on her lips. “Here! Everything sterilized and ready!”

Without having to tell her, Carla gave him a pair of surgical gloves and took an antiseptic swatch to clean the woman’s side to prep her. Stiles slipped the gloves on without much trouble and picked up the scalpel on the tray whilst Carla administered the local anesthetic into the skin, numbing the area.

“Just wait a bit longer.” Stiles calmly spoke as he counted the ribs on her bare side until he reached the 12th, paying attention to the mid-axillary line and other identifying landmarks. “You won’t feel a thing, sweetheart.”

Carefully, he started to make an incision along his finger being extra careful to avoid the many artery, vein and nerve that run underside the rib—injuring those would result in a bloodbath so hecc—making sure there’s enough space for the tube and his finger.

“Stiles, what are you—” Derek spoke alarmed before his voice rained in complete shock over what Stiles was doing. “What the hell, Stiles?!”

Stiles turned around with a glare the intensity of a ferocious Alpha that even Derek felt a little fear run down his spine, hashing out at him. “Shut up! You’re scaring her!”

The wolf got the clue and snapped his mouth shut. Stiles continued his ministrations, grabbing the tube with a Kelly clamp and inserted the tube with direction of his finger, careful not to advance too far, and just enough into the pleural space. Once he saw the elevation of discomfort from the woman’s expression, he carefully pulled his finger, then his clamp out, holding the tube in place from the outside. Quickly suturing the tube in place, and taping it down, Stiles heaved a breath.

“You’re gonna be fine, love.” He scurried for his stethoscope and checked the area again, finding that immediate danger has been relieved. From the corner of his eyes, he saw another nurse waiting anxiously outside the door with his surgical gown. Right, the surgery, actually scratch that, multiple surgeries in danger. Christ, he needs a break. “Lauren. Can you please handle everything here—I trust you to keep things calm until a doctor is free to help around. This patient is fine, but if things gets worse, ask a doctor to do a needle thoracostomy.”

As soon as she nodded, Stiles headed towards the nurse by the door. Derek followed him around like a lost puppy with a million of questions racing through his eyes and furrowed brows but Stiles could literally not give any less shit because he’s got none in the first place.
If it wasn’t for his pain drain juice, Stiles wouldn’t drag Derek along anywhere. He’s not obligated to answer any of his questions and he sure as hell sticking to that philosophy at this point of time.

“Where are you going?” The eyebrow incarnated as a human blubbered out.

Stiles simply ignored him, opting to follow the nurse that was stripping his jacket as he walked down the stairs, simultaneously explaining Dr. Rotherson’s surgery procedure and where he stopped when the power went out. “What are you going to do?” The nurse asked as she stopped in front of the surgery ward.

“I’ve got a plan. Thanks Maya.”

The nurse went away once they reached the General Surgical Ward on the 7th floor, handing the gown to Stiles before running off. Stiles turned towards Derek and settled on pointing to the chair. “Sit.”

Yes, his inner childish self could not refrain from making a dog joke, it’s in his nature, people, everyone should expect this from him. Plus, Derek’s indignant glare was all the more fun added to the action.

“Don’t go anywhere and just wait.”

Derek looked like he wanted to complain, but he seemed to understand the boundaries he’s pushing if he did. So he settled on asking instead, “So, you’re a doctor?”

With the expert roll of his eyes, Stiles pushed the clear doors to the surgery ward, letting it close behind him, leaving a confused Derek behind him.

He was so not getting paid nearly anywhere well enough for this. Actually, he wasn’t being paid at all. So hardy har-har, look who’s laughing now?

Stiles realized later in the surgery what the answer to that question was and boy did he want to cry, laugh and scream at the same time but he opted not to because his tears would fall straight into the open organs of the patients and he really didn’t want to be sued for malpractice or infection because oh, right, hah! HE HAD NO FUCKING MONEY.

He was now officially a stereotype—a broke ass university student.

Wait, no. He wasn’t a student, well because the University is not technically operating anymore due to obvious circumstances, his student status was automatically revoked.

So, now he was just broke.

And astronomically overworked.

(sobs intensely on the inside)

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Bruce found himself kneeling in the middle of death. Literally, he was surrounded by piles and piles of rotting corpses. He looked at his hands and thought of the only explanation that came to mind—he was hulking it out again.
Before he could reduce into more panic and shake tremendously, Natasha was beside him, hands on his shoulder. “Hey, big guy.”

He looked up at her, all cunning smile with a dash of confident smirk on her face. There wasn’t a scratch on her either, which makes him a lot more grounded. Seeing his loved ones safe always helped him after the green high.

Again, literally. Because as the Hulk, he was looking at the scenery from a high point.

His eyes caught unto the glint on Natasha’s neck—the pendant that Stiles gave her, somewhat dimly glowing. He did say it would protect her, maybe that’s why she was squeaky clean without injuries.

“Bruce.”

His name, called out softly, woke him up from his trance.

“Right. Uh, thanks, I—“ He looked around him and then it settled—the fact that no one else was around. “What happened? Where’s everyone? Are they—“

“Calm down.” The agent helped the doctor up to his feet, hand still clasping his elbow to support him. “They’re all fine. Well, not all fine and before you regress into panicking out of your skin again, I should clarify that our members are fine, it’s everything else that’s not.”

Bruce frowned and was about to ask what she meant by that, but all he got was a finger pointed at the direction of the Tower which he followed and— “Oh my god.”

“Yeah.” Nat huffed in a weird mix of emotion, a little bit of sadness, a little bit of utter exhaustion, and definitely a lot of dark humor. “That happened. Tony’s trying to figure everything out with the power while Stiles is dealing with—“

“The hospital!” Bruce snapped, his legs making a break for the Tower.

Natasha rolled her eyes as she ran to catch up with the good doctor—she was always cleaning up after them boys. Swear to god, if it weren’t for the Red Room’s cold and cool demeanor (such an understatement, wow) that was instilled in her, she would’ve quit a long time ago quoting reason of personal health particularly one avoiding going insane if she were to spend even one more minute with these group of—

Breathing calmly, the seasoned professional calmed herself, refraining from stressing herself even more by thinking of any string of adjectives and nouns that would perfectly describe what her teammates were.

She has one actually: men.

But hey, she knows better than to spark a gender war so, she’s going to keep that comment to herself.

Natasha caught up with the doctor inside the building, thankful for the light that was starting to break over the horizon so she wouldn’t be completely blind in the Tower what with all the darkness.

Thankfully, Bruce’s building panic was soon impeded by Tony crashing into him, holding the doctor tight so that they wouldn’t violently ricochet off each other into the crowds of more panic around them. “Hey, Brucie, how’s life?”
“Are you being serious right now, Tony?” Bruce’s voice nearly doubled in pitch, confused between being relieved the man was safe or angry at his disposition. “What the hell happened?”

Tony looked around the anarchy that was his Tower’s lobby makeshift hospital and turned back to the increasingly anxious Bruce Banner, doctorate in many fields and a raging angry green monster badass.

Which doesn’t really make for a safe equation now does it?

“Life’s fine, you know who’s not fine? You.” Tony reassuringly patted circles down his back as he subtly pushed him out of the Tower and outside. “Let’s just take a breath here.”

Bruce knew what Tony was not-so-subtly dong and he looked like he was going to pop a vein—a human one, but he wouldn’t mind popping a green one because right now his emotional bar is off the chart. “I’m not going to rage out!”

“Sweetums, your shouting says otherwise.” The billionaire winced in his honesty.

The doctor was about to strangle the man. “Not if you start talking and tell me what the hell is going on!”

Feeling like the conversation wasn’t going anywhere, Natasha place each of her hands on both men’s chest and pushed them apart to stand between them. “Plug your testosterones and put on your big boy pants. I have a nasty feeling that we’re not in the clear yet.”

Squawking out indignantly, Tony pointed an accusing finger at her. “Since when do you get supernatural premonitions?”

If she could roll her eyes to the very back of her head and just stare at the inside of her skull, she would. Anything would beat staring into this dumb exasperating pile of mess, let alone deal with it.

Thankfully, she was saved from having to answer the stupid question by Clint. At least, who she thought was him. Because currently, the archer was covered in a myriad of substances that were all different shades of disgusting with even more questionable solid substances sliding all over different parts of his body.

She really didn’t want to ask.

But hey, this was her job so.

“‘The hell happened to you?”

Her long-time partner in crime and best friend just stared at her soullessly, as if he was done with the constant amount of shit hitting the fan and to be honest, who could blame him?

Especially if he was covered in rotting obliterated pieces of body organs just sliding of his arms to his finger tips before dropping to the ground in an exaggerated manner.

“I just spent about an hour and a half trying to shovel my way through pyramids of months and years old corpses that just came back to life off the streets so we could actually see the ground and walk on steady land. Then spent the better half of another 30 minutes trying to transport those bodies back into their rightful graves—may their souls rest in peace—and is now seriously considering whether we should just pave the graves over with concrete and then nail some metal work on the ground so that those mother fucking bitches don’t get a chance to decide on their next walk down the streets whenever a sociopathic Necromancer tries to find some new friends.”
For the first time, Bruce felt what everyone else feels when dealing with him in his stressed mode, although the consequences of his circumstance was far more overbearing. He took a step back from Clint just in case he spontaneously explodes—he’s seen weirder things at this point he wouldn’t even be surprised.

“So I think I speak for everyone when I say—what the hell are we going to do?!” Clint blinked his eyes wide, his hands massaging his temples but just ended up rubbing more of the gooey substance running down the side of his face in his skin. “Honestly, this is starting to get a little old, getting fucked over at every turn.”

“I think I also speak for everyone—especially those in there—” Tony pointed towards the hospital lobby in disarray, “when I say that we all need to calm down.”

“Calm down?” Clint waved his hands around and splattered coagulated blood all over them. “I’m covered in substances I didn’t even know existed in the human body and I’m pretty sure whatever is in my underwear is definitely not rocks or pebbles unless they suddenly have teeth-like ridges on them. I don’t think I’m ever going to feel clean again unless I bathe in a tub of alcohol and burn my skin off until I grow a new one.”

Tony threw both his hands in front of him. “Okay, I get it, Legolas, just stop moving around and take a few steps back and please, for the love of god, keep your bodily substances to yourself. This is cashmere.”

Natasha acted fast when she hugged Clint from behind to restrain him from killing Tony, which she would’ve been more than happy to let happen if the circumstance didn’t scream for the immediate need of all of their health to be in tip-top shape so they could be of some actual use.

“I swear, every time, you guys are like rabid dogs going at each other. And I’m an expert at rabid dogs.”

They all redirected their attention to the newcomer, one that they were very relieved to see. Bruce was the first one hogging his attention, his hands wrapped so tightly around the boy, that he couldn’t barely breathe.

“The hospital—Oh god, Stiles, how—how bad is it?” Was the first thing he said after he let go of the boy.

Stiles gave him a small smile. “It’s, well, we’re doing our best. We’ve manage to pull through all the surgeries, although there were six table deaths out of the fourteen going on. I could only help about three operations in that amount of time. I called Tony to send the iron legion to each surgery rooms as a battery source—thank you for responding so fast to that.” He gave Tony a look of appreciation which the man brushed off with a smile. “The life-support equipments are now running on emergency battery, and we’re trying to do as much as possible by hand like ambu bags for ventilation, resuscitation and intubation, we’ve got a nurse vital monitoring each patient and well, everything else is just a disaster. That’s all I know on my end.”

“I’m so sorry, Stiles. I should’ve been there—“

Before Bruce could say any more, Stiles gripped the man’s hand in his and returned his pained look. “We did all we could, you were somewhere else where you were much more needed.”

Bruce just swallowed that sentiment with a lump in his throat.

“Tony? Please tell me you have some sort of good news?” Stiles begged the man.
The proud genius could only give him a heavy sigh before he admitted defeat. “Like I said, the arc reactor for the Tower is damaged beyond repair but I did manage to do a diagnosis on the back up generator—a prototype I’ve been tinkering with—and I think it could be fixed since I’ve salvaged all working parts for it.” Tony could see the sight of relief in everybody’s shoulder, which makes it much more of a punch in the gut because he wasn’t exactly finished. “But, uh, since it’s just a prototype, we can’t use anything heavy on electricity-consuming. The most it can do that will last quite a while is just giving power back to the lights, the elevators, the data network system and maybe a couple of low-wattage equipments like the fridges and water pressure. That means—”

“No life-support, no scanning equipment or technologies, no surgical equipments which means no surgeries. That’s, well, that’s—“ Stiles tried to find the words to say but just couldn’t.

“Unfortunately, that’s not all. I’m not even sure how long this prototype would survive, if we conserve it maybe we could last about what—2 months?” Tony squared his shoulders, trying to make the best out of a terrible situation.

Stiles’ face fell, everyone’s did, but due to the sheer youth of his features, it was a lot more evident and heart breaking in his. “2 months? Tony, it barely even does anything to help us and it won’t even last 2 months? That’s—that’s not good enough!”

Tony snapped.

“What the hell do you want me to do?!“ His voice was straining, half with heartbreak and half with anger. “I hadn’t the time to work on the prototype because if you hadn’t noticed I was trying to find an energy source for the entire world! And I didn’t think I had to work on it because we had a fully functional arc reactor and you said we were finally out of the woods—“

“I said it wouldn’t happen as often as it did, not that it was finally over!” Stiles could barely hold his own voice from a level noise of angry to catatonic explosion. “What happened to all your paranoia of always wanting a back-up?!“

Bruce was now holding Tony’s hand to signal for the man to just back off but Tony just shook his hand off violently by throwing it up. “So what this is my fault?”

“Stop!” Natasha grabbed Stiles back by the collar while Clint and Bruce simultaneously held Tony’s shoulder to ground him. “People are dying just a few feet away from us and you’re seriously trying to equivocate over words to establish blame?” She glared at the two of the smartest people she knew. “Both of you are better than this, so snap out of it!”

Bruce took his glasses off, fiddling with it. “Let’s just try and get all our facts in order.”

“Oh, I know, that one’s easy. We got attacked by a Necromancer that raised an army of the dead that we had to fight tooth and nail against which then I had to clean up, but that was in truth a distraction for the inside corpse to destroy the arc reactor. So that’s what and how it happened. Why it happened, on the other hand, I’ve got no fucking clue.” Clint smiled sarcastically, his voice dripping with it.

Stiles chewed on his lips before giving up and voicing out his curiosity. “I just don’t get it!”

“How do you expect me to do that!?” Natasha grabbed Stiles back by the collar while Clint and Bruce simultaneously held Tony’s shoulder to ground him. “People are dying just a few feet away from us and you’re seriously trying to equivocate over words to establish blame?” She glared at the two of the smartest people she knew. “Both of you are better than this, so snap out of it!”

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“Don’t get what?” Bruce enlightened his outrage.

“This! This isn’t supposed to be possible.” Stiles rubbed his eyes in pain. “It’s just not! The fact that it just happened means something is terribly wrong and it doesn’t bode any of us well. Or the
world for that matter of fact, because somehow in a hilariously ironic turn of events those two are somehow connected.”

Natasha shook her head. “It doesn’t matter why it happened, we need to deal with what we know and what we can do.”

“How can it not matter?” Stiles looked at her as if she grew to heads. “Nat, that’s what we’ve been trying to figure out since day 1!”

“No, Stiles.” She calmly stared at him without any judgement. “That’s what you’re doing. I can’t speak for all of us but I’m just doing what has to be done because that’s where my duty lies. I’m not going to let the mystery frustrate me from doing what I can do to help.”

Her words was like a splash of cold water that slapped him out of his sleep. He hated to admit it but her words had some truth to it. Stiles begrudgingly nodded his head at her request to focus on much more immediate things.

“So what’s our plan? Does everyone know what they’re doing?” Natasha tried to wrap up the impromptu meeting.

Stiles was about to swiftly reply when Derek ran past him and howled so loud Stiles was sure he startled some patients all the way inside the Tower.

“Wha—Derek! What the hell?! Don’t know if you noticed but it’s a bit late for that! Howling at the moon kind of loses its effect when there’s no moon to howl at!” Stiles backtracked and closed his eyes to signal his brain giving up. “You know what, suit yourself, go howl at the sun and break the stereotype, you do you McBroody Brows.”

The rest of the Avengers looked very confused and just whiplashed, rightly so might he add.

“Werewolf.” Stiles supplied for them as if it answered all their questions. “Okay yeah, ignoring that, I’m going to go on a limp here and say all I’ll be doing is trying to somehow manage the chaotic mess that is our hospital.”

Tony sternly crossed his arm and pointed at the newcomer. “Wait—no, we can’t ignore that, who the hell is he, anyways?”

Stiles was afraid this was going to happen which was why he had specific instructions for Derek to stay in the building but who was he kidding, he could only blame himself for trusting Derek to follow his orders.

“He’s no one, ignore him.” Stiles tried to wave the problem off physically by waving his hands to his side but Tony was relentless as he was stubborn.

“Werewolf—if he’s a werewolf then was he part of your pack?” Tony’s eyes went a little wider. “Is he from Beacon Hills?”

Damn Tony, you and your fucking ingenious brain can you just shut up for a second. Stiles sighed internally and was getting himself ready for the barrage of lectures he was going to get.

But before any of them could say anything, another bomb dropped on them—the bomb of Steve Rogers.

You might be wondering where the hell Steve has been in all this mayhem, Stiles sure was. But as much as he was curious about the man’s whereabouts, Stiles was also relieved that he had
managed to avoid bumping into him. Since Steve was the only one who had contact with the people from his past and what with that man’s protectiveness and his tendency to take it overboard.

By some luck the reason why Steve was not attached to the hip to Stiles was because he was the only one equipped to take the mantle of leadership with the guards in coordinating a new security protocol in each floor.

Running around and giving orders doesn’t really coinc ide with finding Stiles so he had to bottle up his urges and do his work first.

Now that that was done, Steve ran through the crowds of people, murmuring soft apologies to the people he bumped and careful not to injure those who were already injured. Captain America, being uncharacteristically uncalm and fidgety? Why, one might ask?

Well, simple really—the source of almost all his worries these past few months: Stiles. For the entirety of his life, Steve knew many men and women, especially with his profession he knew a lot of men and women with spectacular qualities and skills. None have quite surprised him like Stiles before.

Which was weird because it was not due to his powers nor his personality, although that in itself is amazing. It was due to the sheer stroke of bad luck that this man had the capability of having, and his particular quirk of being a human magnet for disasters and injuries.

This was discounting whatever happened in Stiles’ past before he met them. Steve only knew snippets of Stiles’ past from his memorable trip back to the boy’s hometown, and he could already tell Stiles’s streak of bad luck started way before he joined the world of SHIELD.

The boy was barely an adult and he’s been through what most adult will never scratch the surface of.

So Steve feels that given all the facts, he’s allowed to be a little protective over Stiles. Especially not after the other night. Which he also needs to get the boy to sit down and talk in detail over—if he’s learned anything, it’s that emotions are supposed to be shared and not pent up.

As the leading authority in shoveling his emotions down (second only to Tony, if he were to be honest), Steve doesn’t want Stiles to feel as if he has to do this alone. To be the only one who has to be strong. Even when he’s being pulled apart by the seams.

Thus probably explains why the minute he saw one of the ghosts of Stiles’ past in New York, in front of the Tower, right beside Stiles—well, it wasn’t pretty.

It doesn’t help that Stiles luck was shit. Remember that pain of his? That heart-tugging breath-taking gut-punching pain he can’t put his hands on about what’s causing it? The one with really shitty timing.

Well here it comes again and this time, it came so suddenly and without warning that his body just buckles in it and he nearly fell to the ground if it wasn’t for Derek, once-again, grabbing him into a hold that prevented him from folding in.

His supernaturally sensitive attributes are very helpful but also very fucking unnecessary at times. Like, what was this? The third, what, fourth time? Was he and Derek’s arms like opposite poles in a magnet? Is his body the moth to Derek’s flaming arms? Is there a center pull of gravity in the man’s arm? Honestly, what is going on?
Of course, Steve had to walk into that very moment because why wouldn’t he?

*What in the literal hell is the world trying to do to him?*

Tony saw the whole thing pass by in slow motion—Steve running, Derek (he noted from Stiles’ previous outage) growling and flashing his, wow yes, red eyes, Stiles looking as if he was accepting his impending death, Steve throwing his fist out, Derek dodging in time to grab the Captain’s fist consequentially jerking Stiles along with his movements, Stiles again look as if he was dying, Steve glaring and shot another punch that nearly missed Stiles’ face, Derek getting angry at the misguided attack and going on the offense with Stiles’s waist trapped in his other hand, and at this point Stiles just looked all the more happy to die which was the point where Tony figured that he should probably stop this before the boy actually ends up dead.

Stiles Stilinski, the boy who died a ragdoll.

What a legacy.

Natasha had the same idea as he did as he raised his compact glove repulser the same time she raised her gun—each pointed at different heads. The woman had hers on Derek’s, to which he growled at and earn her eyebrow tilt in return. “Between my bullet and your claws, I think I like my chances better.”

Steve looked as if he won and proceeded to grab Stiles’ hand and pull him out of the wolf’s grip into his own arms.

The assassin directed her judgmental gaze at the Captain. “And you, don’t think you’re off the hook for that, you almost sucker punched our Stiles.” She shook her head. “And that’s a one hit knockout considering your strength and his—well, him.”

“If my head wasn’t spinning like a middle aged drunk man on a tea cup ride, it would come up with a rebuttal to that but—thanks.” Stiles supported his drooping head with his equally exhausted arm.

To his defense, Steve appeared to have realized his careless actions and had a horrid look on his face as he proceeded to pamper Stiles with his worry.

Derek, on the other hand, looked like a flaming open fire ready to explode the second someone even looks at him the wrong way. Well, that’s how Derek looked like all the time—it’s his default setting, could you blame him?

Why, yes, actually you can. But he’s a Hale, half of it is hereditary.

“Uh, someone mind explaining the sudden mauling or are we supposed to ‘ignore’ that too?” Clint piped up to the group, irked by all the tension and brawls that has been consecutively happening for all of ten minutes.

Instead of answering his question, Steve raised one of his own to a more specific target. “What the hell are you doing here?”

The glare shooting from Derek’s eyes intensified with a hint of a growl in his throat as he hashed out, “None of your business.”

“I warned you to stay away from him.” The Captain wouldn’t back down from the pissing contest, which Stiles is just completely over at this point.
Although one thing did stick out from said contest, one that Stiles has been pointedly avoiding to ask.

“Wait, Cap, you know this guy?” Clint backtracked, his eyebrow raising up to his hairline.

*What exactly is Derek doing here?* He’s been quiet the entire time—well mostly because Stiles threatened him to shut his muzzle, but come on, who was he kidding? This was Derek ‘I’ll rip out your throat with my teeth’ Hale, he was never one to shy away from a threat or follow through with an order he certainly didn’t like.

Steve instinctively closed his arms around Stiles a little bit tighter. “Kind of hard to forget a man who called Stiles a monster.”

Plus, Derek has just been following him around without purposing his agenda, and that’s assuming he even had one. Stiles entertained the idea of Derek just casually stumbling into New York and finding a building surrounded by a herd of the undead and just happened to feel in the mood to help out a life or two—but even his concussed sleep-deprived brain knew there was no chance in hell that was ever the case.

Tony got aboard the hostile train as he aimed his hand repulser to the intruder. “Alright, Lord Farquaad, give me one good reason I shouldn’t just blow your head off right this second.”

But Derek hadn’t even done anything remotely insinuating that he has an agenda. Stiles frowned. Wait, that’s not entirely true.

“You howled.” Stiles spoke up, breaking through the tension with his calm yet confused voice. “Why did you howl? Why are you even here in the first place, you didn’t know I was here.” He felt Steve’s arm around him loosen, taking the chance to step forward. “Wolves howl to communicate or to signal their location. Which one were you doing?”

Derek gave him a stoic face in reply.

“Really, Derek? Nothing?” Stiles scoffed at the man’s perpetual silence, his voice taking more of an irritated lilt. “Well too bad because after a few years with you I’m fluent in eyebrow language and yours is telling me that you’re doing both. And now you’re just telling me to fuck off, which excuse you rude.”

Before Derek was given the chance to answer, Stiles’ brain decided to make an unannounced visit.

“And hold on a second.” He swiftly turned around to face Tony with an incredulous expression on his face, “did you just seriously use a Shrek reference?”

Tony just have him an absolutely exasperated look, hands reminding him of the situation that they’re in.

“Right, not the point. The point is that this isn’t just a coincidence. Unless you suddenly have the urge to gawk at Lady Liberty and her flaming torch of freedom, you’re here for the hospital. But you don’t need one, you’re a werewolf.” Slowly, he was piecing together the puzzle, some of which he already had the pieces of but just ignored due to the previously pressing circumstances.

Judging by Derek’s expressive eyes, Stiles knows he was right.

“So, you’re not here for yourself.” He scoffed. “You’re howling for them aren’t you? To tell them your location.”
The only one who could follow their conversation fully was Steve, having witnessed first-hand the type of hostility and tension that revolves around Beacon Hills and all things related.

Stiles couldn’t explain the sudden tug in his heart, that familiar gnarly pain building up again. “Why?”

At his side, Steve could feel the boy tense up and he responded with re-securing his arm around the boy. Stiles was grateful for that action, because he didn’t know if he could even stand up on his own.

When the wolf kept his vow of silence, Stiles glared at him sternly, “Derek Hale, I swear to god, if you don’t tell me I’m going to—”

“Because they’re coming.”

Derek blinked slowly, letting his words sink in before straightening up his posture, staring into Stiles’ wide eyes with his own calm ones.

“The pack is coming, here.”

Stiles couldn’t breathe, let alone formulate a response. So many questions were racing through his head, too many emotions thundering in his heart and way too few curses on the tip of his tongue.

But before any of that could filter and boil down, Steve, the sweet sweet guy that he is, picked Stiles up into a carry and sped the hell into the Tower and out of the battlefield.

Having been left in the dust and keeping quiet the whole time, Bruce finally put his spectacles back on, swallowing audibly loud. The attention was on him now, and he could tell by their faces that everyone was looking at him for an explanation of what just happened. As if he knew what goes in the chaos that is Stiles’ brain and the discombobulation that is Steve’s actions when it comes to Stiles.

But Bruce, for the love of him, just wanted to get some rest and a happy little pill to help him through the next few—he could already tell was going to be very stressful—hours.

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Steve wouldn’t let go of Stiles even though he was thrashing around in protest—and Stiles was one hell of a thrasher, man, can that boy trash. He is a wild beast who snarls and scratches and bites (especially in bed). But he wasn’t about to out himself so for now he settled with just thrashing around, uncoordinated limbs helping in his disarray of movements.

“Steve!” Stiles tried hitting the man on his shoulders. “Put me down!”

By now, Stiles have gotten sadly used to the fact that he could get swept away by any one of the members of the Avengers and he had made his peace with it. He just hopes he won’t have to be in that situation with Hulk or Natasha—because being carried by them would be embarrassing and dangerous (the dangerous one being Natasha’s scenario).

But this one was not only uncalled for—but also raises a lot of questions.
After a bumpy ride in Steve’s arms what with the man vigorously climbing up 8 flights of stairs to a nearly empty Neurosurgical Ward floor consisting of surgery theatres and observatory rooms, the super-soldier finally put him down on a bed after closing the door to a patient observation room.

“What the fuck, Steve?!” Stiles had to close his eyes, letting his brain settle down in his concussed head after all the turbulence.

Steve paced around the room, nearly knocking some of the life-support machines over with his excessive arm movements to exaggerate his point. “I’m not letting you anywhere near them, or Beacon Hills. They’re disrespectful savages and they don’t deserve you.”

Seeing Steve act so spastic and loud with his arms and gestures was unsettling, mostly because it was his job to be that way and not Steve’s. “Okay, Martin Luther King, calm down. I don’t need you to defend my honour.”

“Well, too bad.” Steve stopped his pacing and put a strong foothold on the ground. “You don’t get a say in this, you’re not helping or meeting them.”

Thankfully, Stiles’ eye lids were strong enough from the constant eye rolling that it managed to keep his eyes from popping out of his sockets in reaction to Steve’s outburst. “Wha-?! You’re seriously putting me under house arrest?”

“Stiles.” Steve stressed his name like he was an incessant teenager going through his emo phase. “You’re hurt—you can barely walk, and Tony, christ what was he thinking leaving you alone—“

“Woah woah, wait a damn second.” Stiles raised his finger along with the count. “One, Tony left me to save the Tower’s arc reactor which I also told him to, and two) I can take bloody good care of myself.”

Scoffing, Steve shrugged in a manner that was almost cocky. “Well you’re doing such a good job at that aren’t you?”

Stiles almost felt disgusted by this side of Steve that he’s never seen before.

Struggling to keep his voice in a level tone even if it was threatening to break into a million whimpers, Stiles blinked back his hurt. “Just because I lost my Spark doesn’t mean I can’t defend myself. I’m not a weak damsel in distress so don’t you fucking degrade me like I’m a useless trophywife and lock me up.”

“Then stop getting hurt!” The super-soldier shouted at him, shocking the poor boy in his seat.

This was ridiculous, Steve was being ridiculous but Stiles was never one to back down from a screaming match. And the pounding in his head along with the tugging in his chest sure as hell won’t stop him.

“Steve that’s what we do!! Getting hurt is the job description—it’s not an occupational hazard.” He could feel the blood rushing in his head from his screaming. “We take risks everyday! And I accepted that you can die at almost any given time of any fucking day, because you told me you would still take the risk anyway. Why can’t you do the same for me?!”

“Because you’re breaking apart!”

Stiles had been kicked, head injured, thrown around and actually got punched in the gut, but nothing compared to how it felt when Steve threw those words in his face.
And he wasn’t done.

“Stiles, you’re barely hanging on by a thread. And you never stop. One disaster after the other, one solution after the other, one surgery after another—Stiles you never stop to just take a breath.” The Captain let his tense shoulder down, as if symbolizing that he too needed a breather. He mellowed out his voice, trying desperately to connect to something inside the boy’s heavily guarded emotions. “I know you don’t want to talk about your past but I can guess from their behavior and yours that Beacon Hills is your Achilles’ Heel.”

For a few seconds, the only sound loud enough to be considered of importance was Steve’s heavy breathing. It was the most he’s shouted in a long time, out of the circumstance of battle or distress.

“Fuck you, Steve.” Stiles seethed with as much venom as he could gather into his tongue, pushing off the bed and limping towards the door to leave.

At the very least, Steve was indeed taken aback by the sudden flip of volatility, making him question that maybe he was indeed going too far. But then the image of Derek holding Stiles and the instant change in the atmosphere once the two of them made contact—like a spark in the air or the sudden extinguishing of oxygen—that image was enough for Steve to feel justified in his words.

“Derek Hale.”

Stiles stopped in his trek. Steve knew he hit a raw, open nerve.

“Were you and him—?” The man couldn’t even bring himself to finish the question, although the intent was properly delivered.

Stiles’ shoulder tensed, still having his back towards Steve. “We were nothing.”

“I see the way you look at him, Stiles. Something that complicated is never just ‘nothing’.” There was something so gut wrenchingly haunting about his admission, Steve felt like something was breaking. Maybe it was their trust or their bond, or maybe it was their potential—to be something more.

Captain Steven Rogers knew the string he was about to pull, the string that would unravel a skeleton in the closet. He knew the damage he could cause, the ideas he could put in Stiles’ head, the doubt and the wavering heart he would bring into the young man’s consciousness.

But he had to know.

So he pulled the string.

“Are you still in love with him?”

There was an even more daunting silence that followed the end of his sentence, unrivaled by the one that came before it.

Stiles walked out without even bothering to give a reply to the question that will come to haunt the two of them, more than the other would know.

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Sunlight streaming, scattering rays down the slopes of his back, moles dotting constellations across the hill of his spine. Rough, calloused fingers slowly tracing the lines. Sheets scattered around them like a warm aura of protective bliss, an after glow. Soft murmurs accentuated by tilted lisps and the drag of wet lips on dry skin—whispers and promises of forever and always. The delicate and unbearably intimate confessions of trusts, mouthed at shivering shoulder blades, repeated by the barely audible verbal declaration that could only be heard with his heightened sense of hearing.

“Hey, Sourwolf.”

“What, Stiles?”

Rough scratches trailing down, disturbing the tattoo in its path, red marks disappearing almost instantly. Hot breaths, trying to catch one another, chasing the ecstasy hanging on the tip of their lips. Hands trailing blazes of fire and desire—the raw unmuted feeling of want—the complete abandonment of permission, just pure taking. They’ve saved each other’s life too many times for there not to be a complete trust between the two of them. Hushed, rushed, the blinding passion for the present, for the here and now, for the guarantee of something to hold on to. Blushed, flushed, his throat open for the taking, licking the thrumming thump thump of his lifeline on his neck arteries.

“Do you trust me?”

A beat of silence.

“With my life.”

Laughter, stretched cheeks, muscles almost in pain from the constant strain. The rare feeling of absolute comfort, tucked in a firm hold of two muscled arms cradling him, lying on a plush sofa. Burning body furnace right behind him and a warm toasty blanket cocooning them—as if desperate to trap the domesticity that the both of them rarely ever experienced, in between all the death and despair, the terror and the constant goosebumps. Wafting smell of coffee and a warm home-cooked breakfast, eggs and bacon, on ceramic plates painted blue like the sky, while the sky stretched blue like the ocean. TV news caster playing in the background, something to ground them to reality, to keep them here instead of there in their bubble of paradise—disconnected, safe.

“Don’t let me go.”

“I won’t.”

Why? Because the world is unsafe. And danger is always lurking in the corner, and they—they can’t afford to be distracted.

“Promise?”

“Stiles!”

The shout of his name brought him back to reality with a jolt. Instantly, the panic settled into his stomach, having carved out a comfortable space to rest since years ago. He looked at his watch—an hour and a half’s worth of sleep. That’s good. That’s plenty.

He felt the sudden punch of pain settle in his gut again—guess that’s the limit of the pain drain high. Stiles grunted as he tried to sit up, hands coming up to his abdomen to find bandages wrapped
“Sorry to wake you—I treated your injuries as best as I can.” Bruce placed a hand at the small of his back, helping him sit up.

Stiles tried to remember how he ended up in one of the break rooms, lying down on the cots provided for nurses and doctors to rest in between shifts. He grunted as he tried sitting up straighter, his head protesting like a parade.

“Careful. You’ve got a concussion.” The good doctor sighed, raking his fingers through his hair in stress. “Along with a bruised rib or two if the discoloration on your diaphragm is any indication, a swollen and strained ankle that I’ve taped tightly, along with a severely scraped elbow. Honestly, Stiles, are you ever without an injury?”

God, don’t ask him, he’s been trying to figure out the answer and reason to that question for almost the entirety of his life and he’s still got zilch. Stiles settled for a sheepish smile instead of the long rant he’s got building in his brain. “How are things?”

Bruce, in turn, dragged a rolling chair to sit across him. “Bad. We’ve lost a few—no, more than a few, a lot of patients. The back-up batteries on the life-support machines and surgery equipments are starting to exhaust itself. The White List is on an all time high. Steve is helping Tony repair the reactor, but that’s not looking to be promising at all.”

At the mention of his name, Stiles winced. And Bruce, ever the monitoring mother hen, caught his minuscule reaction.

“Look, Stiles.” Bruce started, leaning forward on his elbows. “I don’t know what happened between you two but—“

“Are you seriously going to do this when I literally have no way to escape given my injuries and you physically blocking me?” All Stiles got was a judging stare, to which he prematurely rolled his eyes to. “Dick move.”

“Stiles, Steve is miserable.” The good doctor tried his hand at a more gentle tone. “And when Cap’s miserable, his mood affects the balance of the team’s. And what with your feud with Tony —“

“Really? That too? You of all people should understand that feud since you were also a part of it until, wait, ha! Right, you backed out of it completely, stating anger management issues!”

The room fell on heavy silence. Both regretting their choice of words, both managing to take a harsh blow at one another.

“That’s not fair.” Bruce whispered.

Stiles gave him a miserable, sympathetic smile. “Yeah, well neither is this. Nothing is, actually.” Laughing maniacally, Stiles tried his best to keep whatever control he has as strong as he could.

But, hey, he never said he was any good at it.

“You know, I keep telling myself that once this is over I’ll finally focus on myself, to prioritize and really take care of myself. I’ll finally try and make sense of everything that happened, to process it, to figure out what the hell my emotions are supposed to do with it—to mourn and cry and just be angry. To vent.” Blinking, he shook his head in disbelief. “But, when exactly will that be? When will this be over? Because every time we get over a problem, something else comes up around it.
and it’s right back to square one. Out of the fire and straight into the inferno—it’s lucky we’ve avoided slipping into Hell what with our luck.”

Bruce couldn’t say a word because they both know his words ring true.

“And at some point, I realized that this was never going to end, at least not in our lifetime.” Stiles ruffled his hair in frustration. “So what the hell am I supposed to do?”

It was a question that required an answer no one has—it was the opposite of rhetoric, much much more desperate.

“I gave up everything that I had to put an end to this—to make all this stop. It took a literal part of me—the part I feel most connected to—to secure ourself at least a fleeting guarantee of peace. And look what happened! Nothing’s changed!” Stiles had to look upwards to catch the tears threatening to fall, because once one of them fell, the waterworks will just keep flowing. “So what the hell more do I have to do?!?”

Bruce opened his mouth to try and somehow comfort the boy but he had nothing, so he simply sat next to him.

“I’m trying. I’m trying my best, every day, but people keep relying on me and it’s just so hard.” Taking a deep breath to settle his nerves, Stiles reached deep inside himself and tried his damn hardest to lock everything back into his specially reserved box. “I can barely function as is, I don’t need emotional baggage from the two of the most emotionally constipated people I know.”

Taking pity on the devastated and guilty expression the good doctor had, Stiles decided his emotions had rant rampant enough for today. “So just please, leave my feelings the fuck alone.”

“Hey.” Clint knocked on the open door, leaning against the door-sill. “Sorry if I’m interrupting anything but we need either one of you, the nurses and doctors are lost on instructions.”

Taking the gifthorse and ignoring his mouth, Stiles jumped at the chance to escape the emotional interrogation. “I’ll go. You need some rest, we’ll take shifts after I set up a roster and rotation system.”

Placing a hand on Bruce’s shoulder, he gave him a smile to ensure the man that their quarrel did not dent their friendship. With that, he left with Clint’s hands around his waist, supporting him so that he could walk faster and up the stairs with his injured feet.

The climb down the flights of stairs to the lobby was a fairly silent one, given that Stiles has zero doubts Clint was listening on them the entire time—or at least more than half of it. This was extremely out of his character because Clint was a man who seems absolutely distant at a first glance, but in truth is a very persistent nosy man to the people closest to him.

Well, maybe this was Clint’s way of comforting him—to not pry into his open wounds, even though he doesn’t mean it in a bad way.

Or maybe, he was mistaken and Clint was just processing through the load of information to get his questions straight.

He was sure of that last possibility the minute Clint opened his mouth with a sympathetic glint and a curious tilt of his mouth. Christ. Before he could say anything, Stiles held a single hand up.

“Don’t—“ He raised his voice, making the man jolt out of his skin, “—even think about it.”
“Hey, Cap, hold that pipe a little higher.” Tony instructed from his position, bent under the pipe, trying to get a few wires connected to the panel behind it.

Steve cleared his throat and lifted the pipe in his arms higher. Tony suspiciously side-eyed the man, but decided to leave it alone. He probably knew the problem bothering their Captain—it’s always concerning the same thing, or perhaps he should say boy.

“That should do it.” The mechanic made an approving sound as he closed the panel and ducked out of the small space, pulling the lever on the back-up generator expecting light to flood back in the room. But it didn’t. “That’s—no, that was supposed to do it.”

The genius turned around, narrowing his eyes at the destroyed Arc Reactor behind Steve. “You can let go of that now.” Passing the man, he tried to wrench the broken reactor out from the machinery but found it stuck. “Cap, can you lend me a hand with this?”

Tony continued struggle on his own, never finding the back up he asked for. “Cap?” Throwing his head to the side, he saw the man still carrying the pipe up to his chin with a far-off look in his eyes. “Cap!”

That was the moment the super soldier chose to snap back into reality, his hold of the pipe slipping out of his slack hands and hitting the unassuming mechanic who was trying to stand up from crouching to pull the parts of the reactor that was stuck.

“Son of a—” Tony held his newly injured shoulder while biting the expletive in his tongue.

Steve, the sweet being that he is, immediately flipped his switch to guilty care-smothering mode. “God, I’m so sorry, Tony. Are you okay?”

The man placed his hand on Tony’s elbow, trying to help, but was batted off violently.

“No, Steve, I’m not given that you just nearly gave me brain damage via pipe bludgeoning!” Tony raked his fingers through his hair. Honestly, he could’ve done the repairs by himself and his iron legions as muscle power, but he figured he’d give Steve something to occupy his mind from thinking about his own problems and thus how they’re here.

Looking at Steve’s heartbroken expression, Tony decided to try a foreign approach that he’s seen so much from Bruce—being sympathetic.

“Look, I’m not going to ask what happened between you and Stiles—that much I can guess by looking at our new furry guest brooding and scaring everyone in the lobby, adding that to you handling Stiles like an Amazon next-day delivery package.” Tony sighed, placing his hand on the man’s broad shoulder. “I can only imagine what levels of hell Stiles shouted at you for that.”

Seeing that he hit a strong nerve with Steve’s face, Tony started patting the man awkwardly, given that this was the first time he coddled Steve. Could you blame him though? Steve was never the type to need coddling. But ever since Stiles came along and spiced up their already spicy life, they’ve all seen new sides of Steve they never had before.

Tony’s boiled it down to two conclusions: It’s either Stiles has magically opened the dam to
Steve’s reservoir of emotions or he knocked a few screws loose in the part of Steve’s brain that deals with processing emotions from the constant injuries from all the constant danger they seem to be dragged into since they met the boy.

“But, Steve, you’re going to be fine. You two are going to be fine.”

“How do you know that?” Tony could feel the shoulder muscle tense underneath his patting palm as Steve replied, “Tony, I said a lot of things out of—out of anger and spite, and my head just, I couldn’t think and I shouted at him—God, Tony. I shouted at him.”

Captain America sagged down against the wall, dragging Tony’s hand along with him. The billionaire crouched down in front of him, letting the man stir in his emotions. This, for Tony, was a huge deal because remember, the man’s deadly allergic to emotions, whether it be his own or others.

“I’m sure your words came from a good intentioned place.” Tony tried his hand at calming him down, shifting in his crouch.

Steve chuckled to himself. “I wish it was—but no it wasn’t, not all of it at least. The worst part is, I knew where those ugly words came from but I just couldn’t control myself I was—“

“Jealous?” Tony interrupted him, his old habits coming to the surface, but Steve didn’t mind and simply nodded in exhaustion. “Trust me, more than anyone, I know horrible horrible moments that came out of jealousy. Truth is, when you’re jealous you’re at the utmost raw and honest you can ever be—although yes, it’s more often than not executed in a very volatile and harsh nature. So whatever you said to him, I’m certain you meant every word despite them being words you shouted. And given Stiles’ perceptive and incredibly intuitive nature, he knows that too.”

“Ah, God.” Steve buried his face in his hands, propped by his knees.

Crap. Tony bit his lips accompanying the wince he instantly had. He could hear Jarvis scolding him in a snarky yet composed quip—something about sensitivity and bullshit about truth hurting and stuff like that, as you can tell he’s not one to particularly take into consideration advice that he does not find to be of use or make any sense whatsoever.

But this is Cap. He’s an exception, as is all the other Avengers, in Tony’s world. “Steve, despite all that, you two will be fine. Trust me, I’m a genius, I should know.”

Scoffing at Tony’s attempt to cheer him up, Steve cracked a small pathetic smile of hope that maybe he was right. “How can you be so sure of that?”

The self-proclaimed and world assured genius laid his answer down like a testimony for the ages. “Because in a world that makes absolutely no sense and is falling apart at the seams—you and Stiles, together, are the only thing that makes sense.” Tony felt the smile creeping onto his face without his knowledge, it was a natural reaction towards the topic of the old capsicle and the young man’s bond. “You two are meant to be together. Your journey thus far only leads you back to each other and that—that simple fact is felt by everyone around you.”

Steve couldn’t respond to that because he still had doubts, who wouldn’t after a fight that condemning? But something about the confidence of Tony Stark imbued in that statement was just so overwhelmingly, well, Tony Stark-like, that Steve found himself starting to believe in it.

He wanted to, so badly.

So he did. With a grateful smile and a thankful pat, Steve stood up and gathered himself. “I’m
“Great, because that dead birdbrain managed to chew out the main circuit so we’ve got a whole lot of work cut out for us and I need you at a hundred percent here, Cap.”

Not long after they started working again, Steve piped up in their comfortable silence. “Tony?”

“Yes?” The genius replied without looking up from his assessment.

Steve fondly shook his head at the familiar act of response—or lack thereof—and softly spoke while ducking his face down. “Thanks.”

A moment passed before Tony let out a frustrated grunt, before popping his head out of the mess of a circuit. “What?”

Smiling exasperatedly, Steve shrugged. “Nothing. Just reminding you to do it properly this time.”

Ducking back into his workspace, Tony grumbled, “Jeez, you’re all bite and no bark.” And even though it was hidden by the many wires and possibly dangerous sharp ripped metal edges, if you look close enough, there was a genuine smile on his face.

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They weren’t sure exactly how much time has passed, since no one bothered looking at a clock because all it does is cause more anxiety, really. So the only inkling of time they had was the daylight—and boy, wasn’t that a blessing.

Stiles has rested through the remainder of darkness and woke up just in time of the sun to be fully out in the open. Ever since then it had just been a race against time, to see how much they could do within the blessed hours of the sun before they get plunged into the darkness again.

To be fair, their hospital staff has done tremendously well. They’ve gotten a significant amount of patients treated, and with the help of Tony’s Iron Legions, they now had the limited opportunity to operate on select, and very very few, patients that had the highest survival rate.

Sounds good right?

But in reality, it was only about 3 patients that they saved through operation—because the Iron Legion only had limited power and even less medicine supply. A pool of blood, sweat and about a lake’s size worth of tears later, the sun was coming to set the curtains on their impending doom once more.

Stiles scrambled around with the doctors and nurses, along with Bruce, to make the most of the rapidly enclosing window of opportunity. Even though things were still hectic, this was a controlled chaos compared to the beginning of the day. They had a system now, a clear plan and a calm mind-set (or, preferably that would be a nice asset to have but honestly they’re all just ticking time bombs that will explode in fits of ugly crying when the appropriate time arrives).

“I need bandages!”

“Anyone got anymore antisepsics?”
“Someone get me a cast, stat!”

“Needle here please!”

Shouts of supplies were just thrown over one another, repeating in the chaos. Stiles shouted a huge confirmation that he’ll get the supplies—wanting some peace and quiet in the storage room.

Once he shut the door to the medical supply room near the break room, Stiles leaned against it for a second. Dragging his hands down his face, he did his best to shake himself out of that miserable feeling bubbling in his heart.

Closing his eyes, all he could hear was the echo of the deep wound Steve left behind with his words.

_No. Not now._ Like hell he was going to break down. He won’t give Steve the satisfaction of being right. He can’t.

_Wake the fuck up, Stiles Stilinski. You got this._

Sucking in a lungful of shaky breaths, he slapped his face to rejuvenate his spirit and proceeded to rifle through the shelves to find all the things he was looking for and toss it in a basin.

As he felt his head getting more focused with every supply he remembered to take, Stiles slowly convinced himself that he could keep everything under control.

He’s fine. He’s got this.

Unless of course, someone knocks the concentration out of him and replaces it with a jumble of tangled negative emotions.

No one does that better than Derek Hale.

Which was obviously the exact person to barge into that supply room.

Being the paranoid little cookie he is, Stiles reacted violently to the sudden intrusion of the quiet space—jumping two feet off the air and throwing a roll of bandage at the newcomer (not that that would’ve done anything especially if the intruder was a hostile, it was a fucking bandage, great survival instincts there Stiles, Jesus).

Once he saw who it was that came ruining his Jenga of inner peace, Stiles immediately turned his back on Derek. “Leave.”

“Stiles, we need to talk.” Derek tried to start the conversation but no, nu-uh, Stiles wasn’t having none of that—he already had one of the most devastating fights he ever had in his life, he wasn’t about to put up with another.

Shrugging nonchalantly, Stiles checked the mental note of supplies he had to get in his mind. “Well, too bad, I’m all out of talk today, so please leave the same way you came in and fuck right off.”

“Stiles, them coming here has nothing to do with you, we didn’t even know where you were! They sent me first to recon, to make sure we’re going the right way.”

Scoffing, Stiles walked to a further shelf despite knowing Derek would follow him. “Well you certainly knew I was here when you confirmed your position and beckoned them here. To where I
Derek stressed his point. “This isn’t about you, Stiles.”

“I can’t do this right now!” Throwing his hands up in frustration, Stiles tried to focus back on his stocking task. “Please, just leave.”

“No.” Derek had the nerve to intrude on Stiles’ personal space and block him from actually leaving. “You owe me an explanation for what the hell is going on with you! What the hell happened since you left to end up here?”

Flabbergasted at the audacity this guy has, Stiles shoved the wolf back as hard as he can (or at least enough so that he could get away). “I don’t owe you shit, Derek. You don’t get to demand for an explanation of what I’m doing with my life because you’ve made it pretty damn clear you don’t want me in yours!”

However, Derek wasn’t really one to take a hint, or a neon board sign flashing right at him, so obviously he didn’t take Stiles’ words into consideration as he barreled on. “There was someone that came to Beacon Hills, looking for you. Was that Steve Rogers, the same guy that dragged you away? As in Captain America?”

“No, Bob Dylan, that Captain America.” Stiles rolled his eyes, giving up on escaping because he couldn’t win in a struggle with the werewolf. “Yes, Derek. Steve Rogers, the Captain America.”

“And you know him.” Derek crossed his arms now that he knew Stiles wasn’t going anywhere. “Like you know Tony Stark.”

“Very good observation skills, Derek, I’m very pleased to know that your supernatural eyes that comes with night vision is working adequately to sustain your ability to see.” Turning to face the shelf, Stiles randomly grabbed a few supplies of the racks and moved on to another shelf because he actually had a purpose to be in this supply room unlike Derek the wanderer over there.

“How? How are you here, with the Avengers?” Derek, thank god, chose to stay in his position and glare at Stiles at the very least, he wasn’t following him, so Stiles took that as a partial step towards getting rid of the furball. “How are you always in the center of every single bad thing that happens around everywhere. You’re not supposed to be here, living like this!”

The fact that Derek had the brains to say that, to accuse Stiles as if he actually wanted to end up in a situation as shitty as the whole world in shambles, was ridiculous. Especially because this whole mess was their fucking doing in the very beginning. He was beyond infuriated but if he pops a vein screaming at the douche, he doesn’t have the guarantee that he won’t lose all control of his emotions along with it so he just clenched his fist at his sides and gave up entirely.

“You know what?” Stiles set his tray down on a station table and exasperatedly place his hands on his waist, praying to whichever gods will listen to him to magically whisk Derek away back to Kansas with his red sparkling eyes blinking three times. “Why do you even care?”

Derek shut his mouth at that.

“Look, I seriously have nothing to say to you except for a whole lot of pent up anger and frustration at your stupid furry ass and your collective hormonal group of furries. And to be honest with you, I just don’t have the strength to bicker and fight with anyone right now, let alone you.” His voice trembled in exhaustion and he had to suck in oxygen far too much for his lung capacity to counter it. “So please, I’m begging you, Derek, if you ever cared for me at all even just a tiny bit,
you’ll leave me alone.”

Something in Stiles’ eyes prompted Derek to just let it be, to let it go. But his wolf was scratching at his insides, telling him to get answers, to do something, to tell Stiles the truth. His wolf was agitated, because this Stiles smells wildly different from his Stiles. His scent has changed, and there’s another scent attached to him, lingering more than just a friendly hug.

It was like a claim.

Derek’s eyes flashed without warning and that made Stiles flinch backwards.

“You’re with him, aren’t you.” He prompted. “Captain America, Steve Rogers, whatever you call him.”

Sighing, Stiles didn’t want to think about Steve, thus he evaded. “Even if I was, what does it matter to you?”

“Of course, it matters to me, Stiles, I—” Derek cut himself off before he could finish, leaving Stiles in the dust.

“You, what? Come on, I want to hear this.” Stiles folded his arms, desperate to get a real reason of why Derek’s changed so much, so drastically and to somehow explain what happened to them two years ago.

For a second there, it seemed like Derek was going to answer him, but guess not. “Nevermind.”

Stiles stood his ground. “No, you don’t get to ask questions without context anymore, I deserve to know why.”

He didn’t expect a reply, maybe just a brooding glare from those intimidating eyebrows but Stiles heard a reluctant mumble escape from the wolf.

“Okay, Derek, just because you have sensitive hearing doesn’t mean everyone else does to. Speak up, Charlie Chaplin!” Rolling his eyes, Stiles was about to give the guy a microphone until he heard him.

“Because I love you!”

There you go! Wasn’t that hard to use words now is it, mister—wait, what? Did he hear wrong or did he just hear Derek say—

“Stiles, I love you.”

Maybe the long silence after his words was as much as can be expected, but Derek certainly did not expect Stiles’ action.

By meaning which the boy slapped the wolf straight across his cheeks. Stiles heaved a breath, as if he was holding back even though he certainly wasn’t. Derek’s face turned by the direction of the slap, not so much due to the force but for the shock.

Slowly, Derek gained his movement back and directed his gaze back at the boy.

Stiles still had his hand hanging in the air, vibrating with the energy of the assault and red from the scraping of Derek’s salt and pepper stubble.

“Take that back.”
Derek blinked at his request.

“You take that back, Derek.”

Breathing out through his nose, Derek opened his mouth to say something before he seemingly bit back his tongue before trying again. “Stiles, I’m sorry but—”

“No!” The younger man intercepted him before he could go on any longer because he knows that look in his eyes, and it wasn’t fair. “Don’t apologize. I didn’t ask for an apology, I asked you to take your words back.”

Closing his eyes, Derek’s shoulders slumped before he opened them again. He tilted his head as if to catch Stiles’ avoiding one. He took a step closer to him, hands strictly by his side before moving them up slowly.

“Stiles.” Derek prompted the boy’s attention in hopes of getting him to look his way.

But Stiles adamantly kept his eyes on the ground, brimming with a turmoil of emotions and he was just so exhausted physically and emotionally.

Somehow, Stiles’ silence served as a sign for Derek to reach his hand to gently hold Stiles’ elbow. Feeling no resistance from the boy, Derek stepped closer to him at the same time he pulled on his grip to softly jerk the boy forwards.

Stiles kept shaking his head. It’s not that he doesn’t want to pull away, it’s that he can’t. For the longest time, for the painfully longest time, all he wanted to hear from Derek were those words. No, that was a lie. Maybe not those exact words, but something resembling that.

“I’m sorry, Stiles.” The wolf spoke softly, as if the sheer strength of his volume could break the fragile boy in front of him. “I’m sorry it took me this long to say it. I was scared, and a fool, I just assumed you always knew. I apologize for that. But I won’t apologize for how I feel.” His hands dragged downwards, fingers trailing his skin, drawing up memories as Stiles’ breath hitched without his consent. “Because I know you feel it too. You still remember us. Remember me. My touch.” Derek finally stopped at his fingers, catching it. “My promise.”

That was what broke the trance. That word. His Promise. Does Stiles remember his promise? Yes he fucking did—and it looks like Stiles was the only one who did.

“Yes.” Stiles chuckled, at first breathless, making the flower of hope bloom in Derek’s stomach, but then he continued. “Yes, I remember. Do you? Because you promised not to let me go.” This was the point where Derek’s eyes hardened, Stiles continued regardless. “I also remember you standing there, backing Scott and that fucking lunatic Theo. I remember you calling me a fucking liability—a burden.” Stiles brought his hand up, the one Derek’s was still clinging to, shaking it as if he was trying to prove it as evidence of something. “Is that what you remember too, or was all of that just in my head?”

Stiles thought Derek got the message and let go of his hand, only for it to resettle at both his elbows now, drawing him closer. “Stiles you don’t get it, I did it to protect you.”

The intense gaze the Alpha was pinning him with was incredulous, as was his reasoning.

“Protect me?” Stiles scoffed, shaking out of his hold once more, anger boiling in his stomach’s pit. “When the hell did I ask you to protect me? No, nevermind that, you actually thought that the best way to protect me was to cast me out?”
Derek took a step back, rightly so.

Stiles couldn’t help his abrasive laughter, so cynically loud that he couldn’t even recognize his voice. “You didn’t protect me, Derek.” His gaze turned stone cold. “You hurt me. You broke my heart and you let me go. You abandoned me—you did the exact opposite of protecting me so don’t you dare stand there acting like your actions were justified.”

Derek felt the words sink into his heart like stones in a bottomless swamp.

The venom in Stiles’ words were worse than any wolfsbane bullet could ever hurt him. “Don’t you dare make me feel bad for you.”

Red eyes were flashing in response to his words, but Stiles wasn’t scared. Not of Derek. Because despite everything, he knew the man wouldn’t hurt him—Derek wasn’t that big of an idiot to hurt him physically, even though he couldn’t tell the difference between protecting him and hurting him emotionally.

Still, that didn’t stop Derek from trying to reason with him. “Stiles. You have to understand. You’re human. You’re weak, thin and made of fragile bones. I don’t have to remind you that my life is dangerous—“

“Dangerous?” Stiles scoffed so hard he thinks he might've actually coughed up his lungs, the organ now stuck up somewhere in his throat. “Seriously that’s your best defense?”

Now it was Derek’s turn to look indignant and entitled. “Yes, Stiles. Dangerous. You were possessed by a demonic fox spirit for fuck’s sake—“

“Don’t you think I know that?!” Stiles screamed in his face, taking a brave step forwards. “I have a constant darkness around my heart as living proof of it!”

Derek flashed his eyes, trying his best to assert authority, like the bastard even deserved any. “Exactly! So you know where I’m coming from—“

“But look around, Derek! Look where we are, look outside—there’s bodies everywhere. Just hours ago you shoved your claws through a Necromancer who was controlling an army of the undead. I’m always in danger! With or without you, at the end of the day, no matter who wins or dies, trouble still comes around! Danger will always find its way to fuck up my life one way or the other!”

Stiles wanted to bang his head against the wall in sheer exasperation because this was his life. Reluctantly accepting the constant fact that he will constantly be in the dark, trying to be nonchalant about it.

“So, fuck it!” He shrugged dramatically, his hands flying up. “So what? Let death try and bury me to the ground. I don’t care, because I won’t have to face it alone.” His voice wavered at the end as his hands came together, cradling empty air and shaking it as if he was holding something precious. “As long as I’m not alone, I’m not scared of it and I won’t run from it.”

Once the last breath left him, Stiles felt the pull in his chest again. That ache, like something anchored in his heard and started pulling at it—the same breathtaking pain that he felt since before the Necromancer even struck disaster.

“All I ever needed was you by my side.” With the addition of the pain, Stiles nearly sobbed his words, tears glistening in his eyes—of hurt, fear and open honesty. “The pack by my side.”
Derek was overwhelmed by the sheer raw nature of his words. So much that even if he can’t smell the emotions in the air, he could still feel it from forced empathy in the face of such strong emotions emanating from the boy.

“I felt invincible, no matter how close we came to death, I always knew that somehow we’d pull out of it. But ever since—” Stiles took a deep breath, faltering because just mentioning its name was painful. As if he can still hear the voice creeping up his spine and destroying his sense of reality. But Derek understood what he was referring to, how could he not? “—all of you pushed me away. I don’t blame you for that, because it messed all of us up. Me, especially. What I do blame you for is burning that bridge down completely.”

As if he wasn’t clear enough, Stiles shoved Derek on his chest with his hand—to make sure the man knew where the blame lies because with these wolves you need to make your words crystal clear or they won’t understand shit. “That’s on you.”

Derek opened his mouth only to close it again, and again. He stood there with his hands clenched in a fist, blood dripping through his knuckles from claws digging into his palms, With his eyes in a pained slant and wrinkle between his brows, he just stood there, taking it in.

“So don’t stand there throwing words of love around like you actually mean it.” Stiles sees how much he’s hurting the man, the man who’s been the holder of his heart for so many years, for the most of his youth; this broken, broken soul who’s lost so much and suffered wholly for it, and he feels it stabbing into his gut like a scar reopening. And he hates it. After everything, he can’t force himself to hate the wolf. That it still kills him to see him in pain. “Like you actually believe you can do anything in the name of blind love—even if it means hurting me.”

Stiles grabbed his tray and basin full of medical supplies and equipments and barged out of the room without a second glance back at the wolf. Let him think for once in his goddamn life.

Lord knows he has to.

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The sun has set on them. A full day has passed in the aftermath of the darkness that is starting to suffocate them. Their perseverance has worn down to a thin, wavering line. No one knows how much more of this they could take. They’ve lit as many candles as it was necessary to provide light in assisting their duties, but with depleting energy and the Iron Legion running out of power to assist them, the hospital staff was at a cliff’s end.

Stiles ripped his medical gloves off and threw it at a trash bin, having experienced yet another table death with the last remaining working Iron Legion. He quickly washed his face before he set down the stairs to check on the lobby.

The exhaustion was starting to kick in like never before. It was clouding the edges of his vision, pounding a rhythm at his temples and shaking his hands in a minuscule speed. Can they get a break, please. Can they just get one break?

He avoided Derek, Steve and the rest of the Avengers like the plague. Why was he avoiding the entire group, you ask? Well that’s because he’s been in this long enough to know what a bunch of loose-lips every single member of the Avengers were and either Clint or Bruce would have
obviously told everyone about his outburst by now.

Dropping by one of the makeshift curtain-divided ‘rooms’ at one corner of the lobby to check up on the resting patients, Stiles finally took a second and sat down by a child, no more than 12 years old, with a gash three-inches wide running up the side of her waist. Her mother was one of the many who were labelled White, and left to die.

He held her hand and brought it up to just an inch away from his mouth, comfortably caressing it and whispered a soft apology.

And between the candles with the mixed scents they were emitting (they had to take all the candles they could and most of them were scented), the exhaustion and the stench of blood and other bodily fluids, everyone was at their last stretch. Resisting the urge to cry was now like trying to zip up your luggage that you seriously overpacked, sitting on it and jumping up and down to get it the fuck down.

When he felt that prickling twitch in the bridge of his nose and that swelling of moisture behind his eyes, Stiles bit his lips down as hard as he can when he heard the tattle tale of a whimper, promising a huge breakdown on its last syllable.

He could taste the blood from his lips but he didn't care. But maybe, since no one was watching, since his only witness would be a little girl unconscious from her own pain, maybe it would be okay for him to let go, for just a little bit.

“Stiles.”

The calling of his own name made him jerk from his seat, hurriedly wiping the stray tears that escaped his eyes along with the blood that stained his pale lips. “Yeah?”

Natasha closed the curtain behind her, slowly approaching the boy. “Are you okay?”

That question was starting to get a little bit old. Stiles composed himself with a deep breath before turning to face her with a steady smile. “Well, I’m still alive aren’t I?”

“Depends on who you ask.” The trained agent took a tentative step forward until she was standing next to the boy who had turned his head towards the bed-ridden girl, his hand still grasping hers.

Stiles could hear the questions in her brain forming, the hesitant mouth opening to close back again. Sighing, he decided to break the silence. “Nat.”

“Can I have a word?” She spoke almost immediately after he said her name, like it was something that took a lot of effort—sudden.

“Sure.” Stiles nodded with a confused but amused frown on his face due to the oddly formed question. “But let me warn you, if it’s anything intellectual related then don’t expect much, my brain is as dumb as rocks right now.”

“I don’t like beating around the bush so I’ll get straight to the point.” Natasha got her straightforward confidence back, settling down more naturally on the stool on the other side of the bed. “I overheard your quarrel with your friend in the supply room.”

*Great.* Privacy is a forgotten and impossible concept in his world.

She continued. “I wouldn’t pry about your past, I would be a hypocrite If I did, but I need to know if you’re going to break Steve’s heart.”
Now, that, Stiles was shocked about. “What—why would you—"

“Maybe not intentionally, but with all things considered—your fight with him, your hairy ex confessing his love to you, the stress of this job—I’m sure your emotions are a mess.” She fixed the edges of the blanket on the cot, distracting her hands. “And Steve, for all the overbearing-steady optimism and confident strength that he continuously exude, he’s surprisingly gentle and simple at heart. Sensitive. He’s my family. I have to look out for him. You’re my family too, I would do the same for you if the situation was reversed.”

Stiles looked genuinely hurt and confused, as if the sheer idea of what she was suggesting was absolutely ridiculous. “Natasha, I would never hurt him.”

“No, but it doesn’t mean you can’t.”

And that was it. That was the big truth. So simple, phrased in such a vaguely constricted sentence. It was clean, cut and straight to the point, exactly like the one who said it.

After a long consideration and thinking over the words in his mouth, Stiles licked his lips and tried to form an essay that will explain or guarantee her that what she feared was never going to happen. But it didn’t form, and all he could say was: “I can’t, uh, I can’t give you an answer that’ll fix anything. I just can’t think about it.”

Usually the agent would leave things well enough alone, that was her approach to most matters. But this one included not one but two members of her unconventional but extremely prized family, she was not going to leave this alone.

“Stiles, you’d have to be blind not to see that the man loves you. He looks at you like the sun shines out of your ass. And we can all see the love hearts darting out of your eyes whenever he walks into the room.” Natasha made small gag to brighten up the mood, but kept her serious composure. “I don’t know what you’re waiting for. You’re making the both of you miserable by dragging this out.”

Stiles wiped his eyes in exhaustion and frustration, the two emotions just come as a package deal now. “It’s just not the time to be thinking about this when we have about a million things to do!”

“There will always be a million of other things to do. Stiles if you keep looking for an excuse, you’ll find one at every corner.” She inched forward and laid a hand on top of Stiles’ hand that was still clutching the patient’s. “All that’s left to do is, well, to do it.”

“Did you ever stop to think that maybe I don’t know how to do this?” He flings his arms around gesturing to everything, because he meant everything. “Because I don’t! I am literally stumbling around in the dark, useless and desperate to grasp at every slither chance of hope. I can’t do anything with limited resources, I don’t have my magic, I may have just lost Steve and I—Jesus, at this point, I’d die from smoke inhalation by all these fucking candles before these patients get the operations they desperately need.”

Breathing haggardly, Stiles clutched at his hair and proceeded to drag down, dragging the entirety of his head along with the pull until he pillowed on the cot.

Natasha could barely keep her own tears at bay. Everyone’s morale was just so low. She absolutely hates doing this, even more so to Stiles. Because she has no idea what this boy did to deserve all this pain and responsibilities. All she can do is try and guide him, to help him.

“In all my years of handling high-risk missions and kill-target profiles, I’ve seen desperation in the
worst of the worse. You, although weary and worn-out, are not desperate. Because desperation requires giving up, to leave things up to fate. To beg without bargaining. You have not given up. And you most definitely are not useless.”

That prompted Stiles to lift his head up, to look at Natasha, properly.

“No one truly knows what they’re capable of until they’ve been pushed to their limits, and then more. This? This is not your limit, Stiles.”

He wanted to disagree. How can this not be his limit? He’s literally breaking down in front of an unconscious patient who’s 8 years younger than him, surrounded by scented candles in a makeshift hospital in a post-apocalyptic world after fighting off a horde of the undead. If this isn’t rock bottom, he doesn’t know what is.

Natasha could hear his doubt like a clear bell in church, the boy’s face was an open book. She ruffled his hair, fondly and in exasperation, which is her two default mood when dealing with Stiles.

“Come on, I’ll pour you a drink.” She slapped his head in support, standing up.

Stiles couldn’t help but laugh. “I don’t think getting me drunk will be very helpful when I’m stitching people up.”

Scoffing, the agent grabbed Stiles’ elbow to pull him up. “Then I’ll make you a Shirley Temple.”

He knew what she was doing. She was trying to cheer him up. To the average onlooker, this might’ve been very weird—the woman who just made him cry was now trying to cheer him up, makes total nonsense. But this was Natasha, she does things her own unique badass way.

And he’s so damn grateful for Natasha, because right now he desperately needed a bit of cheer in his life.

Natasha kept her grip on Stiles and dragged him out with her. “And after that drink, you have to go do something about this whole Steve situation because seeing you two fight is really not something anyone can take.”

Or maybe not. Stiles grumbled. “They’re the Avengers. You fought aliens, for heaven’s sake, they can handle a little dispute.”

“Really?” Natasha threw him one of her side-glances, which was always filled with some kind of judgement. “Because I was just with Bruce who was one bad shave away from being a total recluse after his talk with you. So before he hulks out in anger or overwhelming sadness, fix it.”

Hiding his smile, Stiles rolled his eyes. **What a bunch of babies.**

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Steve slammed the door to his flat way too hardly, so hard he was almost sure he heard something crack but he couldn’t care less. After multiple hours of helping Tony fix the generator, the results were not as bright as he intended it to be. They only managed to fix the outlet for the elevators while the other circuitry remained a mess. Tony can’t do anything about it until he scoured for
materials in his workshop and create a new circuit plan, which is something only Tony can do and it will take hours for him to complete it.

Thus why he’s currently back in his flat, chugging down a bottle of water. He felt utterly useless. Steve has always felt he was the most useless person in the Avengers when it comes to dealing with the aftermath of a disaster. Because the truth was, outside of the battlefield and the fight, he was just a regular man with super-strength and a penchant for motivational speeches.

Worst of all, he’s miserably guilty about Stiles. Maybe not for the content of his words, because what Tony said was true—he meant what he said—but for the execution of it. He knew, more than anyone, how incredibly stressed and dead-tired Stiles must be with all that he’s doing and Steve shouted at him.

*God, he’s a mess.*

Steve dropped onto his couch, sat upright for what felt like ten minutes before giving in to his own exhaustion and lying down fully on the furniture. Looking up at the blank ceiling with the lamp bulbs that did not work was reminding him of the horrors of this day, so he covered his eyes with his hands. Which wasn’t any better because now he was just contemplating and regretting in the dark, in complete eerie silence.

Until the door jerked open.

“You are one *hell* of a man, Steve Rogers.”

Steve shot up from his position, shocked. “Stiles—“

“You were an asshole.” Stiles banged the door behind him as he moved on further into Steve’s flat. “You were being a complete jerk, and I don’t know whether it’s the jealousy talking or something else, but that was completely uncalled for.”

Before Steve could say another word or even react to the well-deserved insult, Stiles barrels on as he always does, hands signaling him to keep sitting down for the on-slaught lecture he was undoubtedly going to receive.

“And I am a free man. I am strong and I am capable and I know my strengths and weaknesses—but it doesn’t mean you get to point them out in front of me like some kind of textbook lecture and degrade me and make me feel like shit whilst doing so.” The boy put his arms to good use by exaggerating his words with flailing limbs and excessive pointing.

It took all that Steve could do to just sit there and take it, without interrupting and denying that he thinks of him less than what he is—an amazingly brilliant human unlike any other in the world. But he knew how loud silence can be, sometimes even louder than words. And so he stayed silent.

“But you were right.” At that revelation, Steve stopped his silent nodding and jerked his head back. Stiles watched his reaction with a small huff of laughter, not quite as bright but just enough to show Steve that he wasn’t in any actual trouble. “Actually no, you’re wrong about one thing—I’m not breaking apart.”

Stiles could tell that Steve was starting to reel himself back into a state of confusion and he decided a little truth won’t hurt in a world like this.

“But I’m already absolutely broken inside.” It was as if this weight—the constant drag on his shoulder—shifted just a little bit as he admitted his state out loud, for the first time. And Stiles didn’t know what to make of it, so he just kept on going. “I was breaking apart, for the longest
time. And the truth is I was in so much pain for so long, that it just became normal to me.”

Steve didn’t know what to say in the face of brutal honesty, especially when it’s from Stiles. The Stiles, that wouldn’t even touch his own emotional baggage with a ten-foot pole, was voluntarily being honest and open. He knew just how important this moment was for the boy, how vulnerable he was by sharing. And he knew that the response to it will dictate his future honesty and openness, so he really doesn’t want to cross any lines.

Because the last time he did what he thought was ‘right’, he crossed all the lines and ended up in the biggest fight he had ever had with the boy.

“But I know people are relying on me.” Stiles heaved out, his eyes now facing away from Steve’s, his voice hovering and shaking in small breaths. “This hospital may have been some selfish desire so that I can be useful again, but I know now that people rely on me. They trust me.”

Stiles sat down on the coffee table in front of the couch that Steve had his body glued to. Mostly because he felt that if he didn’t, his body would override his brain and be tempted to bolt out of the room the first chance he got. The only saving grace of the decision was that the coffee table was quite the longer distance from the couch than a normal coffee table would be—bless Steve and his weird perk for his own style of interior design.

“With so many people relying on me to find answers, and to solve mysteries, and to put an end to otherworldly disasters, and now to save people—I had to keep it all together so that I won’t let anyone down. But I realized I kept it too much together to the point where I let myself down.”

He was fumbling with his fingers now, ducking his head down to focus on it. He doesn’t want to see the expression in Steve’s face. Because he’s afraid he’s going to find emotions that he doesn’t know how to deal with.

“And I’m scared. Steve, I’m terrified. Everyday. I’m haunted by our failures, as are all of us. I don’t know if my patients are going to make it through the next hours—I don’t know if you’re going to come back alive the next time you leave—I don’t know if we can fix this world back—I don’t know if I should trust Derek, I don’t know—“ Stiles roughly hitched in his breath, a stutter, a falter, shaky and raw like the truth. “I don’t know anything.”

He can feel something pilling up at his throat, something he can’t swallow. Frustrated, Stiles shoved his face into his hands, propped by his knees. But maybe more because he wasn’t sure what his eyes would do if he didn’t hide his entire face.

“I don’t have any answers and for the first time, I’m not gonna find them through hours of research—and that scares me. I can’t think straight, that’s why I lashed out at you. I’ve been drowning myself in the hospital because then I won’t have time to be preoccupied with everything else. I don’t want to catch a breath because it’s taking everything I have just to keep myself from falling apart completely. The tension of the hospital and the duty helps keep me together.”

When Steve saw the glisten of liquid dripping from Stiles’ chin, he didn’t need to see his face to know he was on the verge of breaking down. In an instant, the Captain dove down into the floor, on his knees and straight into Stiles’ personal space.

Stiles had lowered his hands just enough to see the man’s blue eyes—clear as the sky, bright as new hope and open as air. Steve always had that affect on him, on almost anyone he meets actually. He just makes you feel grounded. And if there was anyone who needed a strong tether to the ground, it was Stiles.
All at once, he felt emotions burst in his chest and his hands came down from his face and onto the broad chest of the super soldier.

Steve welcomed the touch but did not expect the short punch Stiles gave to it—a soft, yet meaningful one.

“You weren’t there.” Stiles croaked, painfully, his hand alternating softly bumping Steve in the chest without wanting the man to move away or get hurt. “You weren’t supposed to know because you weren’t there and yet you somehow knew. You’re right.”

Steve wanted to travel back in time and shout at his past-self to not get on that quinjet, to ignore Stiles’ constant reassurance that he was going to be fine, and to beg him to stay with the boy that was obviously not fine. But he can’t. So he gently grabbed the hands on his chest and held them, pulling at the hand a bit to pull Stiles towards him. “Of course I’d know.”

It was like he could finally take a breath, or more accurately, the breath forced into his lungs with Steve’s words. The man who was on his knees, cradled between his own legs, holding his fists and softly brushing against his knuckles—this man was Captain America, but to Stiles he was always Steve Rogers.

The last time they were in this position, Steve had admitted to him why he hid his identity from him. Now he truly understood why. It’s different. Cap and Steve—both the same person, but still, different.

Steve, the man who was now wiping the tear stain on his cheek with his thumb and Cap, the soldier who constantly tries to protect him.

“You’re right about everything.” Stiles tried to manage a smile. “But I’m still going to ask you to trust me.”

At that, Steve was kind of taken aback in disbelief. “Stiles, I do trust you.”

“No, trust me with myself.” Stiles clarified and he knew Steve knew what he meant when the man thinned his lips. “That I will come to you with everything I am, all my faults and broken pieces. That I will learn to try and reach for your hand and breakdown with a freedom to fall because I know you’ll catch me. That I know my limits and that I won’t hurt myself, because I see now that it hurts you too.”

Stiles could see how Steve was unsure. If he was anybody else, he would’ve been pissed at Steve’s reaction. But Stiles knew himself, and his track record with taking care of himself and trusting others was shit, at best. He knew that this would be hard for both of them—Stiles keeping up his end of the promise and Steve having to restrain himself from going too protective and invasive.

Sighing, Steve rested his hands on the boy’s thighs. “Stiles—I still don’t want you interacting with those people. They’re toxic.”

It was ironic how at any other point in time, literally any given point in time, he would’ve agreed and ban the Pack from coming so they can fuck off elsewhere. But this was bigger than his personal issues.

“I’m not gonna pretend that them being here is not gonna bother me—because it will, hell it already is! But I’ll be fine.” When Stiles saw the doubt in Steve’s eyes, Stiles placed his hand atop where Steve has his rested on his thigh, making the older man look up into his eyes. “As long as you’re there.”
“Yeah, but I can’t always be there.” Steve cursed at his own responsibilities but he couldn’t abandon them, because Stiles wouldn’t want or do that either. He turned his hand upwards so he can hold the boy’s in his. “They have an effect on you Stiles. I don’t like that. Because that makes them especially dangerous to you.”

Shaking his head, Stiles placed his free hand on Steve’s shoulder, gripping his hand with his other. “Don’t try to protect me, please, not like this.” Tightening his hold on both his shoulder and his hand, he desperately tried to get his point across. “You’ll only push me away like that, and I don’t want to run away from you.”

“Then what do you want me to do, Stiles?” This was frustrating him, no doubt. Steve wanted more than anything to trust Stiles wholeheartedly, but something was forcing him not to—and the worst part was that it wasn’t anything to do with Stiles himself. It was someone else. He knows what it was, and the ugly emotion that comes with it. But he’s scared of letting the boy know, especially after their fight. “Protecting you is my priority.”

There it is—that word. Protect you. For something so sentimentally brave and honorable, sweet and romantic, good-intentioned and kind—it’s rather a destructive thing. It’s a weird thing, that urge to protect someone. It makes you feel empowered to do anything, and most dangerously, it makes you feel as if you’re justified to do anything. All in the name of protecting someone. In the name of love.

But it doesn’t. It isn’t a viable excuse to do horrible hurtful things—in the name of love, in the name of all that is good, it doesn’t matter nor does it count. Just because you want to protect someone, doesn’t mean you know what’s best for them. And when you try to enforce it on them, the only result you’ll see is them going further and further away from you.

It’s a lesson Stiles learned personally, deeply.

It’s something the doesn’t want to repeat—especially not with Steve.

So he took a breath, he calmed his raging pit of impatience and annoyed irk. He reminded himself of how unfair it would be for him to lash out, because he needs to remind himself that Steve is different.

He listens to him, for one. And he wears his heart on his sleeve. Most importantly, with Steve, there’s no need for ulterior motives or slow calculating plans or stepping over fragile glass—all he needs to do is ask.

So he asked.

Both of his hands were now on Steve’s shoulder, inching closer to the curve of his neck, inclining his head and eyes to focus on him so he can know that Stiles is telling him the truth. “I want you to stand by me. To be my wall. I want you to be my source of strength when I’m too weak—which is going to be a lot in the next few, well, fuck knows how long a time.” He threw a little chuckle at the end of the absurdity making Steve break a small smile.

That was the moment he knew—that small smile—they were going to be okay. “And, more than anything, I want you to trust me. This is the one thing you have to let me do on my own. That’s the only way I’ll learn to grow, and be at peace with my demons.” His voice was shaky but strong, “I won’t promise anything—god knows all hell will break loose the moment they arrive—but I won’t run from you.”

Steve reached up and placed both his hands on top of Stiles’, guiding it to his face before dropping
down to latch on to his wrists to stroke the life thrumming in his vein. Feeling it move, and just *live*, calms him. Reminds him that Stiles is safe with him.

With those eyes looking at his, all glistening with tears and bright with cautious hope, Steve sighed. Gods help him, he can’t win against this boy. “One condition.”

“What?” Stiles gulped in excitement, ready to give anything so that this would work.

Steve stopped his finger movements and held onto Stiles’ wrist firmly. “I want Derek out.”

The hope in Stiles’ eyes dropped immediately. He would’ve agreed but now that Derek was an Alpha, he doesn’t know if that was an option. “Steve. That’s just not—“

“Stiles, I’m not blind. He still has a sway over you.” The Captain tried his best not to sound jealous or desperate, but his voice betrays him just a little. “He’s your first love, isn’t he? I can see why, he’s an attractive man.”

Steve was just about ready for Stiles to get all riled up and argue with him again, but this was the one thing he knew was going to bother him persistently. He can’t do this if Derek was lurking at every corner.

Except, Stiles didn’t shout. Or get angry. Or shocked.

In fact, he rolled his eyes.

And then Stiles pulled him by the collar and kissed him. The action was instant. Sudden and unprecedented. Steve’s reaction was slower. First he felt like he was punched in the lungs, all of his breath just gone from him. Then he felt his heart swell, so intensely and extensively that his mouth just formed the widest smile, and then even wider as he felt Stiles’ lips smile against his.

Before the soldier could reciprocate, however, Stiles pulled back and firmly grabbed Steve’s head in his hands.

“He may have been my first love. But he’s not the one I’m *in* love with.” Stiles bit his lips in an uncharacteristically shy way after such a bold gesture. But all Steve saw was how adorable and absolutely enticing he was. “Hasn’t been for a long time now.”

Finding no energy to hold back anymore, Steve dove back for Stiles’ lips and caught him in a captivating kiss. His hands falling from the younger’s wrist and instead latching onto his waist to pull him forward, so that he was completely flushed against him. Everything just fell into place. All his stress and all his worries was now a muted calm buzzing, and all he could focus on was Stiles. Catching the tiny breaths and noises that the boy made, racing to hear it again.

Needless to say, Steve’s brain was just not functioning. He didn’t even realize when he pulled Stiles forward and off the table, dragging him down to his lap in a sudden move. Apparently so sudden that he caught Stiles off-guard and caused him to stagger, less than graciously, and break the kiss with a laugh, his eyes wrinkled close in joy.

As the laughter subsided, Stiles looked down at Steve. And Steve was just looking at Stiles with the brightest smile he’s had in forever, like a kid tasting his first candy. Stiles wrapped his arms around the super-soldier’s neck, bringing himself closer until their noses touch.

“I’m yours.”
I’m sorry that you’re infuriated but unfortunately, I can’t do much about it. One of the main themes in this story is Morals and Ethics—doing what is right for the Greater Good despite what we feel individually. Another aspect I always try to incorporate is how to make this as “real” as possible, in terms of reactions, decisions, emotions and also the procedures, the disaster and how the plot connects. Because the reality is, shitty things happen all the time, and sometimes we don’t know why and most of the times we don’t have the time to get angry and assert blame because there simply isn’t enough time. Because by the time you’ve figured everything out, the damage left in the wake will be irrevocable and another trouble will be rearing its ugly face right the next second. Stiles, more than anything, wants to punish Scott and pack for causing this—but if he does, he’d be abandoning his duties of helping everyone else. He can’t up and leave everytime a disaster happens to berate Scott, but what he does is stay and handle the situation. He has a strong sense of justice, but above all else, he has a strong urge to do the right thing.

I admit right now “you can get away with doing bad things that effect a greater population negatively” is the message some of you might be receiving. But that’s not true. Even then, in reality, in real life, sometimes the bad guys win. There are moments when Evil trumps Good and get away with it. If you don’t understand that, then the world has been kind to shield you from such horrors.

Not punishing the bad guys doesn’t make Stiles weak, nor is it pathetic to not run off and go on a vengeance spree whilst leaving all his responsibility behind; It is the noble and yet most infuriating thing to do. It’s not your right to exact punishment to someone else, revenge is not a right of passage. That being said, the plot is still young and The Pack Arc is coming again so just hold your balls till then.

As for the romance part—welp, its Slow Burn what can I say lol. The thing with this romance is that it adapts the same formula; how to make it as realistic as possible. In a time where disaster happens like dominoes, and everyone’s feeling beaten down, guilty and just way too tired to do anything but their job—how in God’s green earth can someone can build a stable relationship? What is more important to me is that the backbone of the relationship is made clear, that the bond with Stiles and Steve is strong as a whip, their trust, their comfort and their home is with one another.

Also, I don’t decide on what the character does on my own, I take into great consideration what they would want to do. I am not writing with my own OC where I get to decide their personality and actions (except for Chase), I’m writing with borrowed characters. So in regards to the romance, I’m trying my best to leave it to their pace because guys. Honestly. These two characters, hmm lets see: Steve Rogers, the guy who lost the ‘love of his life’ Peggy Carter (in which he displays extremely bad flirting) and woke up 70 years later still abstaining from love, being extremely careful about approaching it with other people—all he does is work, sleep, train. And Stiles, the guy that has been through so much (possessed, brings a truckload of trust issues) and in this story, betrayed by everyone he loved (more by Derek), he will be exceedingly paranoid in relationship matters too. These two guys are not your typical jump then fall type of love birds are they now?

But, that’s okay. Because throughout the remaining of this fic, you will see the
breakdown of what it means to have love or be loved in a time where everything’s falling apart around you, quite literally; The nature of fragility in everything you have and the enduring bond of hardships and trust; Also, sadly, a lot more disasters and disappointments but also a lot of hope and bursts of warmth in our tiny family we have built right here.

I don’t mean to mislead you by making this such a Slow Burn to the point where you think nothing’s going to happen, i’m sorry if you do feel that way. I can’t give you what you want if all you want is a fast acting plot of disaster, revenge and whirlwind romance (if you want that, watch any of James Bond’s movies and you’re good). I tagged this a plot-heavy and Slow Burn fic. More than that I can’t write that because it would be like betraying the nature of this fic and the nature of these characters, and I would be betraying myself. I appreciate all of your feedback and amazing comments that you take out of your time to make for this fic and me and I can’t tell you how grateful and happy that makes me.

Thankyou so so so much for reading this, I hope this answers all of your questions regarding well, whatever this was. Also, I’m pretty sure this chapter gives you a lot of answers and clarifications and that ending am i rite ;)

NOT A NEW CHAPTER!!!!!!!!

This is not a new chapter! Sorry if your hopes were raised and dropped faster than your stomach in a roller coaster ride~ Anyways, back to the point, this is as is suggested: a POLLLLL~

So, if you haven’t read the newest chapter recently, I added a small section in the notes asking you to vote for a new story’s pairing. YES A NEW STORY!!!! Since right now I only have this little apocalyptic baby of mine. I realized, choosing a pairing without knowing the story might be a bit confusing so I’ll put the synopsis here~

[ Title Is Undecided ]

Tags: Human AU, SHIELD Agent AU

Characters: Stiles, Steve, Tony, Bucky, Derek, Allison, Lydia, Scott, Natasha, Clint (and more)

Agent Stiles Stilinski. The Level 6 young agent that succeeded STRIKE Team Delta, that was previously Blackwidow and Hawkeye’s unit before they were assigned to the Avengers Initiative. An expert in hand-to-hand combat, excellent marksmanship, exceptionally intelligent and quick on his feet. Highly regarded within the agency, he’s easy-going and is known for going off the books and doing things his own special way. A young prodigy recruited by none other than Nick Fury himself.

Who would’ve thought that he’d end up being the most wanted fugitive in the United States of America?

Now the only question that remains is, who do y’all prefer as the romantic main pairing:

A) Stiles x Steve
B) Stiles x Bucky
C) Stiles x Tony

I don’t know if I should reveal what their initial connection to Stiles is since that greatly affects the tone of their relationship. Right now I’m leading more to Stiles x Steve because gosh, I just love them so much. But I also love Stiles x Bucky, and Stiles x Tony. I don’t know if it helps but I’ve got a couple of other fic ideas for Stiles x Tony that I would also love to write but that’s not for a
This new fic is gonna be so different in a lot of ways, but it’s still going to be plot-heavy be i love me a plot-centric story~ I’m so excited to share it with you, I can’t wait for the first chapter’s release!!!

See you in the next disaster-bound adventure my lovessss~

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UPDATE!!!

New Fic is OUT!!! The results are in and this new one's going to be a Stiles x Bucky fic, and it's called "Danse Macabre"--foreboding, I know.

I'll leave the link here if you want to check it out:

https://archiveofourown.org/works/21893935/chapters/52257784

It's going to be a hell of a plot-whirlwind fic so I hope you like it!!!! Anyways!!! This long baby of mine will be updated very soon, since I'm now free of work be holidays babbyyyyy!!!

Now back to the regularly scheduled programme.
The Right of Forgiveness

Chapter Notes

SURPRISE! And no, it's not April fools. I've decided to do a 180 and actually update a real chapter instead of a fake one. Can't catch my drift can ya? ;)

Hello, my beautiful people, how are we doing. Before y'all bring your pitchforks at me to yell and shout about the extremely late update (yes, I’m aware, and yes I’m really sorry save me), I just wanted to again apologize. Because heck. Well, first off, this chapter was supposed to be wayyyyy longer, but I figured I’d rest easy and save you the headache of reading yet another 20k chapter—because that last one was a hit in the nutters wasn’t it. I genuinely wanted to drag some of it onwards—and there’s a lot I could focus on, in terms of depicting the scenes or feelings of each characters involved. So, I guess, in a way I'm not thoroughly satisfied with how this chapter ended up like, but we need to move on to the plot because time's a’ wasting!

ALSO! In light of recent events, I just genuinely wanted to ask how all of you are doing. Weirdly enough, writing this has somehow been a ridiculous thing in this moment? Because I’ve heard first-hand accounts of hospitals going into shortage, and I’ve comforted people who work in hospitals about their situation now—about prioritizing patients, running out of supplies, being ridiculously and even more overworked and stressed out—so, somehow, writing this ‘hospital arc’ in this timing was in a way offensive, might just be my weird thinking, but I just couldn't help it. I also thought it wasn’t the time to update, seeing that what I’m writing isn’t a fluff piece full of happiness and sweet romance that can elevate the mood, no no, I’m going full on dark mode here. And I just didn’t want to overload how much… stress we can all take in right now.

So, I hope all of you are doing well 😊 I hope you’re all safe, and I hope we can all find small bits of happiness in the mundane things, in the far and faded things, and even in this darkness please try and find hope.

With that, I leave you with this update (I tried my best to add in a bit of comedy here because well, the situation calls for it, I guess). Enjoy~~~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Absolute joy.

Stiles never thought he would feel it again ever since the whole world crashed and burned without giving anyone a warning. Fleeting moments of success, relief and bubbles of happiness remained, yes, but never joy.

Now, he held his joy in a human form in front of him. One that was in the middle of sticking his tongue down Stiles’ throat.

It didn’t help that his joy took the form of an extremely fit, well-carved and drop-dead gorgeous of a specimen that could bench press him with his finger.
And no, Stiles doesn’t feel shame in admitting that, or remotely guilty, because Steve was his. By god, that was a beautiful thought. Steve was his.

“Stiles.” Steve gasped his name into his mouth, dragging the boy closer to him by the small of his back. Kissing every inch of the delight that is Stiles’ plump lips, taking in every breath of his scent and loving every minute of it.

Stiles forgot his brain and ability to speak. He was moving on desire, and only desire, as his hands raked through Steve’s golden locks, mapping the muscles of his broad, broad back—squirming in his laps as he was caged in Steve’s arms.

With the atmospheric lighting of candles, flickering and wavering, bathing them in a golden amber hues and aromatic scents of Clint’s favourite jasmine & sandalwood candles (yes, Clint, as they had found out, much to his embarrassment, had an even worse obsession with scented candles than Natasha did, much to her amusement)—they were lost in desire. In the feeling of want—the want to touch, want to hold, want to claim.

Steve stood abruptly, taking Stiles who was straddling his lap up with him. Stiles instinctively wrapped his legs around the man’s waist, blushing up to his ears at how easily the man moved with his weight. “Jesus, warn a man will you.”

“It’s Steve.” The super-soldier grumbled hungrily as he latched on to the bottom of Stiles’ lips, his tone brightening with a hint of cheeky humor. “I don’t want you saying another man’s name when you’re in my arms.”

Gulping, Stiles cleared his throat. “Possessive. Surprisingly not a turn off.”

Steve let out a hearty laugh before kissing him, walking towards what Stiles assumed (more like hoped) was his bedroom. Because he needs action, damn it. He’s been starved for almost two damn years now and he needs, craves, wants, demands for release.

It was more than lust, more than the heat of the moment, it was inevitable. They’ve been treading around each other for so long, but the magnetic force of their affection was too strong.

Nothing can stop this.

Which of course, was the moment poor Clint Barton barged into Steve’s room.

“Steve! Where’s Stiles—oh God.” The archer, who entered with a panicked look on his face and a strong-will determination, promptly spun on his feet and covered his eyes. “My eyes!”

Stiles catapulted himself out of Steve’s arms, landing on the floor with a loud thud and a red flush on his, well, everywhere.

Clint flashed his hands towards them whilst still keeping his eyes shut. “Stop that! Steve, step away from the boy, Jesus, what are you doing, mauling him?”

Stiles never wanted to strangle someone so hard he would enjoy doing it, until one Clint Barton. On the other hand, Steve looked like he wanted the ground to swallow him, but with a hint of smugness.

“Haven’t you ever heard of knocking?” Stiles ate up his embarrassment and dusted himself off.

To infuriate him further, Clint stepped behind the door, knocked and then stepped back into the room, finishing his act with a grandiose wave of the hand as if to say ‘there, you happy?’.
Ah, right. Stiles rolled his eyes immensely, he forgot he was dealing with a child. An overgrown bastard demon of a child.

Clint grumbled. “If you didn’t want anyone to disturb you, you should’ve locked the door.” Stiles gave him the most incredulous look he could fester. “Are you serious—There’s no power, the doors can’t fucking lock!”

Steve cut their banter with a loud cough. “What did you want us for?”

As if Clint was hit with an invisible whiplash, his eyes widened as he remembered his initial goal for finding them. “They’re coming, your furry friend told us they were five minutes out.”

Like being drenched with cold water, all the happiness he felt drowned into a faded bliss. The world can’t even spare him an hour of absolute joy. What an absolute joke.

“Tell me that sooner!” Stiles snapped, running towards the door to leave.

Clint looked like he was wronged, gawking like a hawk. “Steve was swallowing you whole! You wouldn’t have heard me anyways!”

Stiles gave the man his best irritated glare before dragging him out to escort him.

_Demon child._

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There was no question about it, Stiles was royally pissed.

Not only was he forced to meet the pack, but he was also rudely interrupted from getting what he desperately needed ever since the day he met the hunk of a golden man in a bookstore all those months ago.

He didn’t know which one he was more upset about—but that question will be soon answered without his consent.

Derek stood quite far removed from him, what with Steve standing behind his shoulders like a protective guard dog and no, he’s not even going to bother with the dog jokes and the role reversals—he’s brain was pissed, tired and sexually frustrated.

Clint Barton just blue-balled him. More specifically blue-balled him from dancing the vertical tango with Captain America. _Jesus Christ_, what is his life?

They were stood in front of the hospital, they meaning Stiles, Steve, Clint and Natasha. And Derek, but really, no one wants him there. No one wants to be there at all, but here they are. They weren’t sure what they were going to do, more specifically Stiles doesn’t know what he’s going to do.

The ethic conduct of running a hospital means no turning patients away. But this was the pack, damn it.

Plus, Steve. Steve and his moral righteous goody-two-shoes self. _Ugh_. He’s lucky he’s cute.
Stiles sent a silent glare to Derek, knowing that their last encounter left the wolf in a bitter state. The emotionally stunted man-wolf even dared to send him a hurt expression back, which oh, the audacity.

He felt Steve grab his hand in a comforting manner, as if knowing he was just a second away from murdering the furry bastard. That didn’t help at all—because that just means he was being obvious about how affected he was by Derek’s presence.

And if that doesn’t scream weakness, Stiles would swallow a thousand nails. But it did.

Even now Derek still has an effect on him and that boils his blood like a lava.

Clint and Natasha was geared from head to toe, ready for combat whilst Steve had his iconic shield strapped to his arm. Stiles thought it was a bit of an overkill, because his single gun loaded with wolfsbane-bullets was enough to take every single one of them down.

Stiles’ train of thoughts halted to an immediate stop when he saw Derek move forward. Even without a single word, Stiles understood his actions. He looked back at his team, signaling them. “They’re here.”

The very nightmare that Stiles had run away from was now coming to haunt him. And that’s just how the world works, now isn’t it.

Scott came into view first, looking like he hadn’t slept in days. Then the rest filtered in, Lydia, Kira, Malia, Isaac, Cora, Liam, Peter and Jackson. Oh, and of course, who could forget the cherry on top, Theo Raeken.

They all looked worse for wear. Which infuriated Stiles even more because what was so fucking tiring about being in their bubble of blissful ignorance? They all looked worse than him, him. Stiles Stilinski, the picture boy of being overworked, underpaid, and stressed out of ten lifetimes.

It was like the world was asking him to bring about the second apocalypse. And with one more push, he might just reign down hellfire—the world be damned.

That push came in the form of Scott McCall. Because who else would it come from but the king of aggravating people to death.

“Stiles?” His voice was full of disbelief and, oh yes, a wonderful sprinkle of scepticism. “What the hell are you doing here?”

Before he could even answer, Theo stepped in adding oil to the flame. “Don’t tell me you followed us? Ruining our lives once wasn’t enough, now you’re going to hinder us?”

Stiles couldn’t choose what to do—laugh out loud maniacally because of the utter incredulous suggestion the slimy smirking jackass just made, or empty a magazine of wolfsbane bullet into his smug head.

He prefers option 2. Oh, his hands were itching to carry out option 2.

Lydia was the first to notice the people behind him, because even though she was still naively blind as fuck, she was still the smartest out of the pack. But considering the pack’s collective IQ was that of a goldfish, it wasn’t that much of a compliment.

“That’s—that’s Captain America.” Her red coated lips smacked in shock, her manicured hands point towards his shield. The pack followed her gaze and instantly received the same reaction. All
except for Jackson and Peter, who knew he was acquainted with the Avengers.

Isaac looked star-struck, as his mouth start to form ineligible words as he pointed towards Clint and Natasha. “Hawk—Hawkeye—Black Wid—Widow”

Stiles had half a mind to take his Stark Pad out to take a photo of this situation because god, their faces. Slack-jawed, wide eyes and absolutely rat faced. The only thing stopping him was when he noticed that his dad was there.

John Stilinski was there.

His dead-beat excuse of a loving father, who abandoned him, who ignored him, who didn’t look for him. Stiles took a step back when their eyes met.

Was it his dad who needed the help of a hospital? But he looked fine. And Stiles did his best to ignore the small betraying feeling of relief that flooded his veins. *Fuck his emotions.*

He looked away because he couldn’t stand it despite having Steve, a constant presence of warm support, on his back. But he looked in the wrong—perhaps right—direction, because that’s when he saw the person who needed his help.

Melissa McCall. On a make-shift stretcher held by Peter and Jackson.

And her stomach, round and heavy.

She was pregnant.

*Jesus,* she was pregnant. Like at least eight, maybe nine months pregnant.

As if that wasn’t enough of a shock, he saw her hands, intertwined with his dad’s.

His lower lip fell, his mouth open in a soft gasp.

*Oh my GOD.*

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Sometimes, well, no, *most of the damn time,* Stiles would think that after each ridiculous disaster happened, ‘nothing could be a bigger shock than this’. But time and time again, he was proven wrong. And if there’s one thing that shocked him even more, it was the surprising strength of his heart.

How he hasn’t experienced a heart attack or a stroke was beyond him. He has no idea how his organs became that resilient.

Because *what the actual fuck.*

Despite his brain being unable to process emotional thoughts and logic, his medical instincts kicked in. Having been a stressed out 24-hour Doctor, bouncing ER and trauma surgeon-duties, he rushed forward to check on the woman.

Before he could reach her, however, Scott flashed in front of him with his supernatural speed,
blocking his way. His red eyes flashed dangerously as he growled, “Stay the fuck away from my mom.”

Stiles could hear his patience snap as he out-maneuvered the Alpha’s hand that was harassing him behind his back and pulled his gun out in rapid succession, digging the muzzle under neath Scott’s ribcage. “No, you stay the fuck away. Keep your claws to yourself or I won’t hesitate to shoot you down like the rabid dog you are.” He unlocked the safety on his gun and then swiftly released Scott.

Keeping his gun on him, he turned his head to Derek. “Keep your Alpha in check or else I’m not going help.”

Lydia clicked her tongue, upset at the treatment as if Stiles was superior than them. “Your help? What makes you think we need help from a reject like you?”

Stiles turned his head to her, addressing the woman with an eerily calm smile. “Then feel free to get the fuck out of my hospital. There are hundreds of people who need help and I’m not going to waste my time or resources for someone who doesn’t even appreciate it.”

From his peripheral vision, he saw Isaac lose control and transform, lunging forward to grab Stiles. Instead of feeling fear or acting to defend himself, Stiles simply stood there and looked at the curly brunette with a pitiful look in his eyes. Because hell, if time couldn’t change the stupidity in their genes, what could?

Man, they really hadn’t changed—act-first-think-later mindset roaring at full power, driven by adrenaline and hyper-egos.

It’s almost sad, really.

Stiles didn’t move because well, he wasn’t at all worried. He was actually more worried for Isaac because he chose the wrong target. Within a second of Isaac’s movement, Steve flung his shield forward, hitting the werewolf square in the chest and suppressed him to the ground.

“If you hurt him.” Steve ended his sentence there, but everyone could hear the threat of the warning after it—‘I’ll kill you myself’.

With the Avengers on his back, Stiles moved without attention to the pack. He reached Melissa and consequently ignored his father’s and everyone’s gaze at him.

He didn’t have a problem with Melissa, has never had beef with the woman. She was relatively neutral—and there was a time in his life when he considered her as the closest thing to a maternal figure. And even though he knew she was afraid of him, she never treated him any differently.

That didn’t mean she spoke up for him, or stood up for him at all. But at the very least Melissa has never done anything to personally harm Stiles with intent.

Melissa was half-conscious. Her breath’s coming in short lapses and her body drenched in cold sweat. Stiles wasted no time to grab her hand, checking her pulse. It was a bit fast for a pregnant woman, which was never a good sign when they’re in their third trimester. Grabbing his small keychain torch from his back-pocket, Stiles checked Melissa’s pupil reactions. It was a sluggish response.

“Has she had any head injuries?” Stiles threw the question into the air for anyone to respond.

To his surprise, no one answered him. Oh, these slow fucking idiots.
“Hey!” Stiles shouted at them, his temper flaring. “Answer me!”

John Stilinski, stunned within an inch of his life, stuttered out an answer. “Yes—she, we found a tumor before the Darkening.” Great, the world-wide power outage had a name. “She had a stroke, and we heard there was a functioning hospital so we brought her here.”

There was something of a metaphorical click that went off in Stiles’ brain, but he hadn’t got the brainpower to figure out what his sub-conscious realized was important in that sentence other than the obvious diagnosis—so he left it alone.

Stiles bit his lips before nodding to himself, turning to Peter and patting his shoulder. “Get her inside.”

Peter and Jackson moved with his instruction, and Clint followed to keep an eye on them. Before the pack could filter in to move, Stiles stepped in their way, stopping them.

“Let me make something clear, you are not welcomed here.” Stiles’ words were steel-strong and cuts like a knife, unyielding. “By no means are you to exert any force in the premises of the hospital, or act like the uncultured savages that you are. When you’re in the hospital you are bound under common rules, and you are of no greater importance than the patients in there. The only thing keeping me from throwing you out completely is the moral conscience of the medical ethics. So I swear to God, if you act a hair out of line, I will condemn you.”

Without another word, Stiles turned on his back and went into the hospital.

The pack stood shocked still in their places, the majority of them silently fuming at the treatment. They looked to Derek, hoping he had any answers to satisfy them but all Derek did was walk with his tail between his legs, obediently following the order.

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With how much shit happening recently—scratch that, happening constantly—one would’ve thought Stiles would not get shocked, but as we’ve established before, yes, yes he continues to be shooketh to his ground. But like most things, one would’ve grown at least somewhat used to it and handle things better under pressure of the shitstorm, at least you would think. Like how your immune systems gets stronger after each encounter with a virus or sickness.

But no. Stiles’ brain decided to just skip over that process entirely and just start right back at square one. Ah, maturity is a process lost on him.

His mental state was in a panic overdrive. Well, he’s technically used to facing medical emergencies, and he’s had a trial run the whole of yesterday to figure out how to operate a hospital without electricity—if there’s a god out there, he’s still waiting on that miracle being answered, please and thank you.

Stiles saw Peter and Jackson with a cautious Clint standing by the entrance. He rushed over to the confused bunch and guided them in.

“Radio obstetric and neurosurgery wards, we need them here now.” Stiles called out to Amy as he passed the reception desk. From the corner of his eye, he could see her immediately dropping her tasks to fulfill his order.
“Jourdain! Lauren!” He called out over his shoulder as he simultaneously grabbed a medic tray full of general supplies and drugs to an empty bed, gesturing for the wolves to put Melissa down on it, reprimanding them when they moved with too much force. “Gently!”

With exercised precision he slid disposable rubber gloves on and placed his stethoscope on his ears before placing the head onto Melissa’s chest. Her vitals were dangerously excited, but her heartbeat wasn’t irregular so Stiles ruled out any ruptures from the stroke. Then he moved it to her protruding belly. The baby was safe—but not too patient.

Stiles was the last person anyone should ask about babies and pregnancies. Because he doesn’t care if it makes him look weak, he can’t handle childbirth—he can’t even imagine it without wanting to hurl or wince in metaphorical pain. Childbirth was a miracle of the woman body, but also hell on earth filled with massacre-worthy amounts of blood, weird fluids, ear-ripping screaming and abnormal stretching of skin and muscle that just shouldn’t be possible.

It’s scary. Okay, horrifyingly scary. He had nightmares for days after walking into that wrong lecture in his short university life. But one good thing that came out of that wonderfully scarring mistake is that he had somewhat of a bare basic knowledge of the world of obstetricians.

And this baby sounds like they can’t wait to meet the world.

Stiles felt a bitter pain and sorrow in the back of his mind. Thinking this child was going to have a rough start, that’s if they’d survive childbirth without the help of any electrical machines. He felt pity for a life that hasn’t been born, a life that hasn’t even started, knowing that they weren’t going to have a safe childhood, or even guaranteed survival.

It was wrong. It made his stomach turn in twists and tangles. But that’s just the way it is.

“Get and ETA on Tony, tell him that reactor better be working in half an hour.” Stiles pulled Clint aside, whispering in his ears before letting the man go. The archer set his brows in a frown, knowing full well the chances of the situation being resolved without a sacrifice or two was damn near impossible.

There were a lot of complications, it doesn’t take a doctor to figure that out. It was glaringly obvious, with the lack of electricity. If he had a penny for every single time he’s thought of that problem, he’d be swimming in El Dorado.

Jourdain and Lauren came running into his view, faces strict in preparation for whatever crazy sequence of events they always experience in the presence of one Stiles Stilinski. He can’t really blame them, if he had a choice, even he’d stay away from himself.

But that’s not physically possible, just yet.

And he has a compelling reason not to. That reason currently hovering behind his shoulders with his shield threateningly catching the light that bounced of its surface.

“Lauren, go check if there’s any Iron Legion left able to power a CT scan.” The woman left immediately to do so, while Stiles barked out another order. “Jourdain, put her on a warm saline drip, and monitor her BP and reaction.” The nurse wasted no time to carry out his orders, hooking the saline bag to the pole and inserting the needle in Melissa’s arm.

Stiles tried to wake Melissa from her half-conscious state. “Melissa, I need to assess the damage, so you need to respond as best as you can, okay?”

Jourdain nodded to him once when he saw Melissa’s head slightly nod. Stiles went down further
and pressed cluster of pain nerves in various locations of her limbs. Without having been told, Jourdain responded to each of Stiles actions, observing if Melissa’s features twitched in any sign of pain from the touch.

With each check, Jourdain nodded as he saw the pain reaction bloom. “Good.”

When Stiles reached her left leg, pressing down on a joint at her foot, Jourdain kept silent. After a moment he looked at Stiles and shook his head. “No reaction.”

Stiles cursed. He moved further up Melissa’s leg, and pressed multiple points, but there was no recognition of the pain in Melissa’s features. She did the same to her left arm. Still no reaction. Jourdain took the next initiative, his voice calm in a doctor’s mode. “Ma’am, can you move your left fingers or toes?”

There was no visible movement. Stiles sighed, regaining his composure. This was very very bad. He moved up and grabbed his keychain light, checking the dilation of her pupils once more. Clicking the light off, he placed a finger parallel to the bridge of her nose, moving it slowly. “Melissa, I need you to follow my finger okay?”

Only one of her pupils moved accordingly to his movements. Stiles gave a small nod to Jourdain, the intern immediately stopped his ministrations and grabbed a blank medical chart, a pen ready in his hand.

“Complete paralysis of left arm and leg, indicating damage sustained to right hemisphere of the brain. Pupil dilation is bilateral, 2 mm. The patient has undergone a stroke in the last 48 hours.”

Stiles slung his stethoscope around his neck, rummaging through the small bottles of drugs in his vicinity. “She has a brain tumor, but given her incompetent guardians and company, they can’t remember what type of tumor or where it is located. My best guess right now, considering everything, is that the patient had a hemorrhagic stroke, and the bleeding in the brain is major enough to cause paralysis and vision disarray.”

Stiles took a moment to grip the sides of the medical tray-trolley with sheer exhaustion, turning his head to face John, thinking he had the best information when it came to his—wife? Girlfriend? Baby mother? He stopped that train of thought before his head could combust.

“Did she receive any medical treatments following the stroke?”

John shook his head, still a bit disoriented. “No, none.”

Stiles blinked. That weird metaphorical click, as if a lightbulb going off, in his head was back. Before he had pushed it aside, but now he finally had an inkling of what it was. It started with a thought: *How did she survive the stroke without medication or treatment?*

Something was off.

Then Stiles thought of Deaton, he must’ve done something, worked his voodoo or whatever. He had no time to go down the rabbit hole of suspicion. He had two lives to save.

“We will be administering drugs to battle the damage done, including anticonvulsants to prevent recurrence of seizures, antihypertensives to reduce blood pressure, osmotic diuretics to decrease inter-cranial pressure and alleviate negative effects, and common painkillers and stabilizing agents. Please sign off on the chart for your consent.”

They all seemed shock with the professional front that Stiles was putting. Nobody from Beacon Hills would’ve expected Stiles to end up as a doctor in a post-apocalyptic hospital. John couldn’t
do anything but sign the form. Everyone was reeling from the shock.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.” Lydia slowly slurred the words. “You? A doctor?"

Scott finally found his voice after hearing Lydia jumpstart the barrage, his expression stern and harsh. “You don’t have the right to be a doctor after all those people you killed. No one in their right mind should let you handle lives.”

Jourdain frowned at the negative connotation in their words, confused by the unwarranted harsh treatment Stiles received when he was helping save their companion’s life. In his eyes, Stiles was a savior. He gave him purpose, when the world turned dark and his dreams were shattered, Stiles gave him light.

As someone who can’t handle watching people suffer, the drive of helping people was his motivation for the rigorous studying and training to become a surgeon. Stiles gave him a chance when he thought he would never be able to do that, when he surrendered to a life of watching people die continuously.

In their particularly harsh and tiring work environment, all the hospital employees were overworked to the bone. Their workload and stress load amplified in multiples of ten from before the Darkening, and Stiles was ruthless in his directing. But despite all that, they knew that Stiles was the one who was working the most out of all of them—knew that the burden he carries are tens of thousands times heavier than theirs. And they all love him for that.

Because they could see the good in him, so blinding and pure. But that doesn’t mean he was without fault—it’s the fact that he was so humanly imperfect that they all admired him. He was a speck of dust just like the rest of them. But he thrived under pressure. Dust pressed into a diamond by the weight of this world.

Now, seeing someone so blatantly and unabashedly insulting his savior, Jourdain threw a punch before he could realize what he was doing.

Scott, despite being a werewolf, got caught off guard and was dealt a blow across the jaw.

“Jourdain!” Stiles yelped in shock, to which the intern huffed out indignantly showing his absence of regret.

“I’ll treat you for any damage I’ve done, but for now, anyone who is not an immediate family member to this woman will leave the premises and wait in the lobby.” Jourdain stressed out each word with trained hospitality. Before he turned back to fill the syringes with the drugs Stiles prescribed, the intern sent a hostile glare at the bunch. “You should be grateful someone as brilliant as Stiles is willing to treat you.”

Stiles watched in silent shock, he’s never seen the man be so openly brash. The intern with a heart of gold just punched Scott McCall, hormonal failwolf poster boy. If pigs start flying out the window, he’s pretty sure his mind would just implode.

Well, at least there are no existing supernatural creatures resembling pigs that can fly that he knew of.

The pack was promptly escorted by a few SHIELD agents standing guard nearby, with the exemption of Scott and John. Dr. Choi from the neurosurgery department and Dr. Brooke from the obstetrician department arrived promptly after being radioed, and Stiles excused himself to talk to the two skilled doctors, briefing them on Melissa’s outlook.
He stepped back to let the two experts delve into their own examination. Maybe it was the hectic and panicked state of the moment, but Scott and John followed his steps like two lost puppies. Stiles wanted to scream at this situation.

Even though he knew the verdict, he was still holding out hope for—something. His hopes were crushed twice: once in the form of Lauren, coming back with a negative answer on that Iron Legion, and the next came through the sullen eyes of both Dr. Choi and Dr. Brooke. With dreading steps, he walked forwards and they briefed him on their professional opinion.

Fuck. Stiles bit his lips. Right, now how was he going to explain why he’s going to let their most beloved woman die?

Stiles surrendered himself to a shitty situation—because there was no avoiding it. Turning around, he prepared himself for the flood of criticism and blame and blind accusations he was bound to receive, because when has he ever escaped that?

“Unfortunately, due to extenuating circumstances,” a gross understatement, “the hospital is currently without power.”

“But—“ Scott started to interrupt, but Stiles knew how to hold his ground.

“We don’t have an official diagnosis because of our lack of resources, but these two are experts in their fields and are rarely ever wrong.” Stiles gestured to the two doctors, who are busying themselves with updating the medical chart, “Melissa’s tumor probably ruptured a blood vessel and thus led to her experiencing a hemorrhagic shock. Basically, there is an active bleeding site inside her brain, interrupting the oxygen flow and creating pressure inside her cranium.”

Scott and John’s face instantly paled.

“Optimally, we would perform a simple brain surgery to stem the bleeding by suturing the ruptured blood vessel and suction the blood to relieve pressure and swelling—and if possible, remove the tumor while we’re at it.” Stiles quickly and professionally delivered the verdict, his pace fast to not mislead them with false hope.

Before their frowns can take an uplift, Stiles continued with a grim expression of his own. “Having said that, without electricity, there’s nothing much we can do about her condition. We can’t use the CT scan to figure out where the bleeding is, and we don’t have the anaesthetic machines to put her under or the surgical tools to operate an intensive neurosurgery.”

Taking a deep breath, and without losing his momentum—because he’s not sure if he can act calm if he broke his streak—he led on. “Dr. Brooke suggested that we may be able to save the baby, through a caesarian section, but without all the resources at our disposal, there’s a good possibility that the baby would not make it and a guaranteed chance that Melissa won’t survive the procedure.”

For what felt like the longest 10 seconds, they were all so suffocatingly silent. Even in the chaos of the hospital, the three of them stood in a nerve war.

“Is this revenge?”

Scott blurted out.

“Of course. Of course this would happen.” The wolf spitted in anger. “I should’ve known, of course this is revenge, but why are you taking out on my mom?! You just can’t let us have the tiniest bit of happiness can you?”
Jesus, Stiles gaped. He can’t even say anything.

Does this self-absorbed maniac actually think the world revolves around him or something? Stiles couldn’t help the roll that came in his eyes, and that infuriated Scott even more. But honestly, he couldn’t care less. He’s been through this too many times to have a calm wave activated automatically in his mind.

At least, now his rage was burning mutedly and not fuck-out-of-the-way-lava-coming-through type of fury.

He’s calm. Stiles chanted like a mantra that would answer all his prayers.

“Say what you want. It’s not going to change anything.”

Maybe it was a sign. Or maybe it was something more fucked up, like the world trying to mess with him. Stiles swears it’s always the second one. But all of a sudden light flooded their vision—blinding with buzzing. It was not daylight because even if the world was fucked six ways to oblivion, daylight still comes in the day and not at the late sunset afternoons. It just has to be.

This was artificial light.

Stiles whipped his head up to see the lighting shine a halo on his soul, instantly washing him with a sense of comfort. He never thought he could feel bliss from seeing industrial lights turn on, but his life was always full of surprises.

He was pulled back from his surprise with pain stinging in his heart. It was fucking back. Stiles was starting to get the morbid dread that something was wrong with his heart—that maybe after all his supernatural dances with death, he’d die of a ridiculously human ailment. Won’t that be fucking ironic?

Then Tony came rushing in. “It’s fixed! I did it!” He stormed in, with oil stains and black smudges all over his crew-neck long sleeve, his hands outstretched in the air, thrusting his fist that was equipped with his suit’s compact multi-purpose arm piece upwards. “Where’s Bruce, I need a reward!”

Stiles wanted to smack the genius in the forehead so hard it would send him flying back into his mother’s womb. Seriously, what is with everyone’s timing today?! He dreadfully dragged a hand over his face.

Scott instantly jumped on the wagon Stiles was scared he was going to push. “It’s fixed. The power’s back.” He declared, as if trying to reassure himself before he glared at Stiles with authority that he really didn’t have. “Now help my mom. Do that CT thing, and save her.”

Stiles’s jaw dropped open. This guy was actually ordering him. He wanted to punch the guy, add a matching pair to the one Jourdain gave five minutes ago. He would’ve, but he was too busy restricting Steve Mr. Happy-Fists over here from concaving Scott’s head into the hospital floor.

The wolf flinched. And he would be lying If he didn’t take a bit of pleasure in seeing that.

“It doesn’t change anything.” Stiles stressed his point when he finally held Steve back. “Our power reserves aren’t strong enough to hold even a simple surgery, let alone a neurosurgery.”

John Stilinski, for the first time since Jourdain’s outburst, spoke up. “Stiles, I know you feel wronged, but please, don’t do this to Melissa, she has nothing to do with it.”
Wow. Even his own father believed that he was trying to somehow sabotage a life. Stiles tried to convince himself that it didn’t hurt—because he’s gone through this with numerous patients and their grieving family members, because it was easier to blame a person, because they can’t believe reality. He knows. He knows that. But—

But, what did these people see him as? What did his dad see him as? Satan, himself? A heartless slaughter demon with no morals or honour? Did they really think he was that petty—and if they did, for what fucking reason?

It’s human nature to doubt. Even if you know you did nothing wrong. You can never be too sure. Thus why he would always try and figure out why—try and figure out his part in the blame. And that always led to his downfall.

“I’m not doing this to rain on your fucking parade, it’s just the way it is! Everyone who came in with a brain injury are not getting any treatment either! You can check our hospital guidelines and ask any other fucking doctor here and see if they make a different choice!”

The pack had heard his outburst and came filtering in, standing on the sidelines due to Derek who was not budging an inch from his spot.

“Don’t bullshit yourself, Stiles. You can save her, you just don’t want to because you’re selfish, and you’re despicable, and you’re full of hatred.” Scott spat out at him.

“Oh my god.”

Stiles blinked, his eyebrows twitching. “I’m sorry if this doesn’t make sense in your bloated ego head, but one life doesn’t mean shit in the face of 4 billion.” He can’t believe he’s actually explaining this logic. “I don’t care if you think me cruel, heartless or monstrous. But that’s just common maths, Scott.”

Maybe his logic was starting to make sense in Scott’s head, because Stiles saw the flicker in his eyes. Maybe that’s why his next words cut deeper, not that it was ever gentle in the first place, but this time—it was almost desperate.

“You owe this to us!” Scott shouted, his red eyes flashing. “You owe it to us to save my mom.”

Stiles closed his eyes at how utterly absurd it was. “I owe you?” He nearly laughed at the conviction Scott has when he declared that. “You want to talk about debt? Fine. You owe me a debt far larger than I ever owed you anything. And you will never ever be able to repay that debt to me.” His eyes were glimmering with rage and despair, two emotions that come as a regular these days. “I don’t owe you shit, Scott McCall.”

Tony moved forwards to hold Stiles back, to calm him down. He spared a worried glance to Steve, who was barely resisting his urge to throw his shield and knock the pack of werewolves over like bowling pins. “Stiles, we’ll figure something out.”

Stiles blinked at him.

“Save her.”

Maybe the world was beyond saving if Tony Stark was saying this to him. This was the man who drafted the policies of the hospital with him—the one pushing for ‘necessary evils’, like the White List and the Recuperation Trial Act—and this man was currently suggesting to abandon the protocols they’ve rigorously put in place.
“No.” Stiles resolutely stood his ground.

John broke his silence, his eyes betrayed by the harsh rejection. “Stiles!”

“No.” He repeated, shaking his head with a stern gaze. “I’m not risking the lives of every patient in this hospital, and all our future ones, for one life that we’re not even sure will make it through the surgery.”

Before any of the strangers could barrel down a thorny road of insults and daggers thrown at Stiles, Steve held Stiles’ hand in his and whispered closely. “Stiles, you have to do this.”

The conflicted doctor shifted his young and scarred eyes towards his lover, finding determination and defeat in the stark blue eyes staring right back at him. “I don’t have to.”

“Yes, you do.” Steve smiled softly. “You won’t forgive yourself if you don’t.”

As valid as that would be, and it’s as true as the sky is blue, it doesn’t matter. “Forgiveness is something I’ve long stopped searching for.” Stiles tried to pull his hand out of the hold, unable to look at the supersoldier. “I don’t need it.”

“Everyone needs it.” Steve tightened his hold on his hand before letting him go completely and stepping back.

Stiles closed his eyes. Thinking. But he couldn’t. Because this was not a problem he can solve with logic, when all parties concerned are thinking with their hearts instead.

“I’ll save the baby.” Stiles concluded. “I’ll put as much resource as it needs to make sure that baby survives. That’s my promise to you.” There was a general relief painted in everyone’s features. “But Melissa will not be my top priority.” Then there was an instant grief. “Her death, if it comes, will be accepted.”

“So you’re giving up on her? You can’t do that.” Scott’s eyes was full of sorrow, maybe because the possibility was too real, and sneered at him. “After all the deaths you caused, you have no right to do that!”

And that was one thing that Stiles could not come to terms with. Because that was the truth.

“Maybe I don’t.”

The shocking confession shocked everyone in the vicinity. But by the dignity in Stiles’ eyes, hard, cold and unwavering, they knew he wasn’t done.

“But after everything you’ve done, you still think you have a right?”

Stiles’ words rang with conviction.

“After casting me out, you think you have the right to ask me of anything?”

Scott’s words were stuck in his throat, silenced by the declaration. Stiles took a step forward to the gob-slacken man, hands itching to harm him.

“How dare you ask me of help. How dare you expect to be given any help at all. How dare you take advantage the honour of good people.” Stiles gestured at the nurses and the doctors, and Steve, Tony and Natasha who were stood still, watching them with fury in their eyes. “Make no mistake, I’m not doing this for you, not out of pity, not out of lingering bond, not out of filial duty
because I don’t consider any of you my family.” Stiles shifted his piercing glare at John, who flinched in return, “I’m doing this for them.”

Something bloomed in Tony and Steve’s chest, both of them still in their combat-ready stance. There was something touching when they could immediately tell they were who Stiles was referring to. Unfiltered trust, unreserved and without doubt.

“Because they want me to do it, not even for their own sake but for mine.” Stiles had to keep his voice from faltering. “That’s family.”

“What you have here? A pack? No. You’re not a pack, you’re not a family, you’re just a bunch of wayward reckless hormonal creatures with a pension for trouble and a gross overestimation of self-worth.”

Scott took a step back. And Stiles took his win. He looked back to Jourdain and Dr. Brooke, nodding as a signal for them to proceed with the plan. The pack, who were silently watching as a third party, and John watched without complaint as the staff wheeled Melissa to the elevators.

Before Stiles could follow them however, he stopped in his steps and turned to Scott one last time. “You may be the Alpha Werewolf, but I’m in charge here.”

Even without his magic, his eyes still brimmed with authority. He hasn’t ever needed any powers to stand up to werewolves like Scott, and he certainly didn’t need it now.

“So sit down and shut your ass before I throw you out.”

~~~

Stiles sat out of the surgery for obvious reasons. He’s not trained in obstetrics or neurosurgery, thus he can’t really do anything even if he wanted to. So he attended to other duties, making sure patients receive their treatments now that they have a small reserve of power that will get even smaller once they’re done with all this nightmare.

He looked down at his blood-splattered hands, having just done a leg amputation off a 16 year old girl who was caught underneath rubble from a falling building. Without a word, he left his station to excuse himself to a private bathroom. He washed his hands, and as he did, he felt his vision cloud.

And he felt his heart grow heavy. And his pain reverberating inside his chest. First he thought it was just that familiar tug of pain he’d been feeling for three straight days now. It’s easier to allocate it to that.

Because the other reason would be admitting his weakness. His humanness. His vulnerability of being hurt by his past, of being affected by the people he once loved.

Of maybe admitting somewhere deep inside of him, he had wished they’d regret it. They’d see him here, now, as a savior instead of a monster. That they would realize they’re wrong, and apologize.

Stiles sniffled, holding back his tears as he bit his lips, furiously scrubbing at the red on his hands that won’t go away. Scratching at his skin until it was naked and pink from abuse, but the bloodstain stayed. Despite the constant scrubbing and the heaps of soap, the red bloomed more and
stuck with him.

He heard a whimper and a sob, and then he felt hot tears streaming down his cheek

No matter what he did, the red had stained his ledger. Stiles brought is trembling hands to his eyes, wiping away to stop the flow but he can’t.

His knees fell at his weakness, succumbing to the pull of gravity as he tried and catch himself on the rim of the sink, one hand holding his body upright as he sunk to the floor. And wept.

And wept.

And wept.

~~~

It was as to be expected, but also at the same time not. The c-section surgery was a success, surprisingly, and the baby was fine—for a lack of better word, maybe ‘breathing’ would be more suitable. So the baby was breathing, and quite alright for a prematurely born baby in an unequipped hospital from a mother with a profound head injury.

The hospital’s power reserve from the backup generator has been significantly drained, to say the least, and if it wasn’t already on its last legs, then it definitely is now. Tony’s stuck down there trying to figure out how to extend the lifetime of their saving grace for who knows how long. Clint has been standing on edge with the new hostile addition in their crowd, whilst Bruce was a mix of being mortified and scientifically buzzing to experiment on them. Natasha and Steve are off to God knows where, and Thor was still MIA despite however many times he had screamed and shouted his name into the sky and sent texts and emails to his contact number (which Stiles even doubts the god knows how to actually navigate).

All this he knew from just observing, as he made his rounds through all the wards of the hospital. Melissa’s surgery for her head injury was underway and he’d finally gotten the notification that it was done. Now he needed to get the final verdict from the surgeon, and he braced himself.

Dr. Choi greeted him outside the automatic doors blocking off the surgery ward, having just come out of it. He inclined his head as a greeting, to which Stiles did the same back.

“How did it go?” Stiles made a note of the neurosurgeon’s eyes and body language, to prepare himself for the worst possible outcome.

The neurosurgeon took a deep breath and settled his hands on his back, stretching out the kinks. “Well, never thought this was actually possible but, she survived.”

“What?”

“How did it go?” This made Stiles look like an ungrateful bastard who wanted her to die, but how in the world is that possible?

Daniel Choi was probably one of the most skilled neurosurgeons Stiles has ever seen. Granted he has not seen many in real life, but he’s seen videos on neurosurgery as part of his short university education programme, and he could tell that the man was indeed precisely skilled and relentlessly
good. Regardless of how amazingly skilled he is, this still could not have been possible.

“Well, I can’t really tell you how, I wasn’t sure myself. Although I said she survived, I meant it in
the most basic sense. For now the bleeding site has been sutured and suctioned, but I found some
erve damage and the time window-frame to repair that was well long and gone by the time she got
here.” Daniel stretched his back and threw his head backwards until a loud crackling of bones and
muscles settled into the silence, groaning in his aching muscles and drooping eyelids. “Currently,
she’s fallen into a coma.”

Stiles genuinely did not know how to react. “Uh, a coma?”

“Yes. We don’t know when, or even if, she’ll wake up. But I wouldn’t get my hopes up. She’s lost
far too much blood and her brain had suffered too many nerve damage. It wouldn’t be surprising if
we had to diagnose her as brain dead in the next few hours or days.”

“Wha—uh.” Stiles took a deep breath, confused. “Um, thank you. You must be dead tired, go and
get some rest, I’ll get Dr. Kedziera to fill in for you.”

“I’ll just pass along the patient’s condition to her family members and then I’ll get some rest.”
Daniel nodded his head and patted Stiles’ shoulders, meaning to leave the ward. But when he saw
the stunned expression on his face, the neurosurgeon turned back around.

“Um, I really didn’t know how she survived any of it, but she must’ve been one hell of a strong
woman. The bleeding in her brain was so extensive, normally someone would’ve been dead in
minutes if that happened. But she stuck it out for more than two days—that’s amazing.”

That gritting feeling in the back of his mind came in full force, like something inside of him was
begging to shout a question into his brain and warn him that something was off. Stiles knew Daniel
was only trying to help, but his words just validated his concerns even more.

“On top of sustaining the baby, and surviving it thus far, it’s really quite like nothing I’ve ever seen
before.”

Stiles wanted to shout at him to stop, because something ugly was unfurling in the pending
realization.

“It’s a miracle.”

No.

That’s wrong.

His brain protested. Sure, he did hope for a miracle and kept on praying for it every single chance
he had—but the world wasn’t kind enough to give him one. Or anyone, for that matter.

That’s not how this world works.

He knew it wasn’t a miracle.

That’s when it clicked.

That biting feeling, like he was on the edge of a revelation. The one he’s been constantly trying to
ignore since That light bulb going off in the back of his mind, that he tried to attribute to senseless
conclusions because he had a feeling the reality would be devastating? He knew what it was.
He knew why a chill ran down his spine every time his subconscious asked him, relentlessly, 'how the hell did she survive this?'

Because the truth is she didn’t.

Then it hit him like a train—Melissa’s survival, the Necromancer, the foreboding unsettling feeling and disbelief, and the constant and reoccurring pain that’s tugging at his heartstrings as if it was acting as a warning sign because it was.

It was disbelief and it was a warning.

Because it’s not possible.

Due to the very fact of its impossibility, there had to be something fundamentally wrong.

And there’s only one fundamental variable that was tying all those factors together.

Oh, he was going to murder Scott.

~~~

Scott and John felt a huge weight lift off their shoulders when the Korean doctor told them of the good and somber news. The baby was safe, but Melissa was in a coma. It was bittersweet—but if the pack of Beacon Hills excelled at anything, it was at holding out hope.

They profusely believed that everything was going to be fine, and if it wasn’t fine then there must’ve been something wrong. And wherever there’s something wrong, there has to be someone at fault. It’s a formula (not a very effective one, or rational one, but whatever).

The pack was now waiting for their chance to see the baby and Melissa, but they were in intensive care and wouldn’t be visitable for at least two days. Most of the members stayed in the waiting room, but Peter, Jackson, Cora and Liam couldn’t stand being in the same room as them and went off elsewhere—to be fair, Peter and Jackson couldn’t stand them, Cora didn’t care and Liam just wanted to follow them around instead of Scott.

Everyone was tired, and most of all confused. Stiles, in a hospital? None of them could believe it. John could technically see how it came about, because he knew how intelligent his son really is, but in the end even he couldn’t believe it. None of them could. It was too much of an irony.

But the matter of the day, was their new addition to the pack. A new baby girl. An actual baby. Who they all couldn’t wait to see. At the very least, there was a ray of hope somewhere in this ridiculous situation, and that hope shone brighter than anything they’ve ever felt.

Nothing could break the smile on their faces as they discussed about their new addition.

Nothing, except for maybe—

“You fucking bastard!” Stiles shouted the instant he slammed the door of the waiting room, leaped and tackled the Alpha to the ground, his training proving to be an asset as he successfully threw the man down. “What did you do?!”

“What the fuck, Stiles?!” Scott spouted, shocked and disgruntled from the sudden attack.
“Melissa was supposed to be long dead before she arrived here, so what the fuck did you do?”

Stiles knew he was right when Scott’s expression changed like a deer in the headlights.

“I saved my mom. And my baby sister.”

In truth, Stiles knew what happened, he knew what Scott must’ve done. But he just couldn’t accept it. After all, he didn’t think—would’ve never expected—this would happen. Stiles grabbed Scott by the collar, seething, his words escaping by the clenching of his teeth. “What did you do?”

With an upright chin and an entitlement that came out of nowhere, Scott answered him. “I asked the Nemeton to save her.”

Scott still had the nerve to lie to him. “The Nemeton’s not a genie in a fucking bottle, Scott.” Stiles tightened his hold at his neck. “You think I don’t know about your attempt to bring Allison back using the Nemeton?”

Getting caught in his lie, Scott decided that the best action was defending his high ground—because he truly believed he was out of the woods. “I wanted to save Allison, because she didn’t deserve to die like that.” Like the fair player he was, Scott attacked him with animosity. “You, her killer of all people, have no right to judge me.”

Stiles was done playing by the rules of ethics. He was done taking it. He doesn’t care if his words will crash the entire belief system Scott and his followers have built themselves upon.

“You think you’re the good guys?”

Scott pursed his lips. And that’s all it took for confirmation.

It was so unbelievably ridiculous that Stiles scoffed. Of course, Scott would think that. God forbid the day Scott actually becomes the bad guy. Because that would be too fucking impossible, wouldn’t it?

“You keep talking about my actions, my mistakes. But do you even know what you did? What your stupid reckless actions did?”

Having the tables turned on him, Scott’s eyes blinked with surprise. The indignant “Me?” was clear as day in his features.

“Why don’t you use your fucking brain for once in your goddamn life, and think about why we’re even in this situation in the first place?”

To his defense, Scott truly did look confused. But that just made him more pathetic.

“The Nemeton gives us balance, and you corrupted one with your amateur attempt at Necromancy—the darkest magic imaginable—for Allison and you killed it.” Stiles glared at him with a fury that was unrivaled. “I would’ve thought Deaton would be smart enough to stop you, but then again that guy was always useless at every turn.”

“And you didn’t even fucking learn from your mistakes and did it again to save your mom?” Stiles knew he was painting himself to be a heartless bastard with no filial duty. But even if the positions were switched, if it was him with his mother and the Nemeton to save her—he wouldn’t have done it.

Even if it meant leaving his mother—the person who brought him into this life, the person who
raised him and loved him unconditionally like nobody else would—to die at the hands of fate.

Such was the price of being noble. Such was the burden of being selfless.

Scott didn’t know those lessons—he claims himself to be everything righteous but nobility and selflessness isn’t something you claim like a throne, it’s something you earn through sacrifices and actions.

Which is why Stiles knew he was never going to win. He can’t lecture someone who’s dead-set on believing that he’s right.

“So you’re saying I should’ve let her die?! If you really believed that then you’re not even human.” The eyes that Scott looked at him with was one filled with downright disgust and detest—to be on the receiving side of such a gaze, even if you were completely innocent, would shake you to your core. “Besides, the Nemeton was fine!”

Stiles wanted to rip his hair out in frustration and scream endlessly to a black void. “Because I saved it, Scott!” He didn’t recognize his own voice—with the cracks and the broken pitch and the amount of desperate wailing. “Me! I had to sacrifice everything to save something that I didn’t even have anything to do with. That was me. So don’t you fucking dare disregard your own mistakes.”

Scott flashed his red eyes at him and, as if it was a get-out-of-jail free card, yelled, “I’m the True Alpha!”

“Then act like it!” Stiles screamed at the top of his lungs. “For fuck’s sake, don’t throw away your responsibilities especially when it gets too hard for you and too ethically compromising. The world’s not that easy, Scott! You can’t just expect things to always go your way.”

He felt his chest throbbing, and now it was in his head too. And now, that he knew what it technically was, where this pain came from—he knew that he didn’t have much time, so he didn’t bite any of his words back.

“And the fact is you messed up.” Stiles glared at Scott with a newfound purpose. “Your selfish longing and grief drove you to an action with a price too big for you to pay, and so the rest of the world had to pay it with condemnation with no regards of their innocence.”

“What—“ Scott tried to argue but Stiles had had enough.

“The Nemeton was the only thing keeping everything from crashing down, from the whole world to be swallowed into chaos.”

Stiles wanted to laugh. Hysterically, loudly and uncontrollably. He didn’t care that people were watching. He didn’t care if his staff thought him crazy. He’s lost control of his emotions, and he never had a proper filter to begin with, so really—he wasn’t at fault here.

“Everyone else keeps paying the price for you, Scott. You think you’re still alive and well and victorious, because you’re what? Lucky? No. It’s because you’re oblivious, you’re sheltered and you’re that fucking dumb not to realize that everyone else has been taking the brunt of the fall and the scars of the mistakes that you weren’t smart enough to predict or strong enough to bear.”

John stood in the sidelines, watching this rage tear through his son and he felt the need to speak up. “Son, please—“

“I am not your son!” Stiles shifted his fury, intense vindication in his eyes as he pinned it at the stranger who was once his father. “You don’t have the right to call me that, not after everything.”
The look, the utter look of hurt that flooded the old man’s expression—Stiles hated to admit that it killed him just a little bit more. He was sick of it. He was fucking sick and tired of all of this.

“You think that because your intentions were good, you can never do wrong?” Stiles glanced at every single person in that room, some of them even had the nerve to stare him back, before he glared right back at his former best-friend. “Nothing can absolve you from consequences, Scott—not even the most honorable of intention from the purest of heart.”

Jackson and Peter rushed back into the room at that moment, with Cora and Liam trailing at their feet. They spared a look at Scott and Stiles, and to the rest of the pack, and knew instantly what had occurred. Peter couldn’t even bear to look at Stiles. The shame and guilt were eating at him too much for that.

Stiles didn’t care, at this point. This group of uncultured barbarians need to fucking wake up from their fairy-tale scripts and if it was going to take a lashing and a half, he wouldn’t hold back. “You brought this apocalypse right onto our doorstep and you remain blissfully unaware. Ignorance will forever be your greatest sin and reckless righteousness will be your undoing.”

With a step back from the center of the room, Stiles tried his best to ignore the stares. He focused on Scott. He tried to ignore the history between them, the laughter, the years of bond, the pain. He felt it bite at his heart, weighing it down as he failed.

But that wasn’t going to stop it. Wasn’t going to stop his malicious words. Because despite their current stand-off, they were brothers. And with that title comes the knowledge of intimacy—how to hurt each other, deeply, personally. Stiles knew exactly what to say if he wanted to truly hurt him.

And at that moment, he truly did want to hurt him.

“I may not deserve forgiveness, but you?”

Scott looked up at him with something akin to fear in his eyes. That would’ve stopped the old Stiles from speaking, but, well. As he said before, he wasn’t playing by the rules of ethics anymore.

With that in mind, he delivered Scott’s eternal punishment before leaving them to wallow.

“You will never receive it.”

~~~

Stiles stormed through the hallways as fast as he can. Knowing he couldn’t take the elevators to preserve their energy reserves, he slammed the doors to the stairwell and took off. Bound and leaps at a time as he climbed the stairs with no specific floor to stop in.

He could feel the pain in his chest reverberate through his entire body, the constant pulling and throbbling like a strain was going to break. *Fuck*, now that he knew what it possibly could lead to, he tried to bear it. This can’t be happening.

Whilst preoccupied with his thoughts, Stiles—the ever so clumsy pile of limbs that he is—missed a step and could feel his body fall to the weight of gravity.
A flash of blonde crossed his eyes and the next thing he knew, he was being caught mid-air with thick arms enveloping his middle and turning his whole body around so he softly planted on the steps with a muscled body surrounding his vision.

With a gasp and several blinks, because hell, Stiles mind may not be working at 100% but his reflexes still are—or at least the ones to feel fear at the feeling of falling. Wasn’t that a fucking tongue-twister, why are you making this so hard for your own brain to comprehend, Stilinski, jeez.

“Are you okay?” Steve’s voice grounded him from above.

Stiles couldn’t bear to look at him, all he could do was stare at the soft blue of his shirt stretched across his broad chest and slump against him. Steve had caged Stiles against the steps, with his bigger body enveloping his like a blanket.

It felt safe.

And safe is in very low demand these days.

“No.” Stiles made good on his promise that he blurted out just a few hours ago. “No, I’m not.”

Steve didn’t say anything.

“I don’t know how to be okay, Steve.” Stiles let out a watery sigh, his intonation trembling as his hands caught Steve’s shirt in his clutches.

The super-soldier gave him a second to catch his breath before pressing a kiss to his forehead.

“You don’t need to be okay.” Steve pulled the boy into his embrace, kneeling one foot between Stiles’ legs and the other beside it. “You just have to want to be okay, someday.”

With a swift maneuver, Steve scooped Stiles up whilst switching their position so that the super-soldier was now sitting on the steps with the younger man in his lap. Stiles wanted to complain because he’s pretty sure he’s mentioned this a billion times but he still hasn’t found the answer so here it is for the billionth and one time—was he really that light as to be swept up so easily?

But he couldn’t deny this safety and warmth that cocooned him. So, he burrowed further into it, with his arms locking behind Steve’s back and his face pressed into the crook of his neck.

“Besides, no one expects you to be okay. Not with what you have to deal with right now on your plate.” Steve placed a reassuring hand on Stiles’ back and he placed the other on the younger’s head, patting it softly. “And I don’t know about anyone, but I’m personally waiting for your permission to kick those furry asses in our waiting room back to wherever they crawled from.”

Stiles couldn’t help the laughter that escaped his lips. And with that, somehow all the pain seemed to fade into the background. With that, all his sadness seemed to wash away as the block in his throat finally started to clear. With that, all his guilt and sorrow and burden became muted.

Pulling back from the embrace, Stiles stared at the gorgeous specimen he couldn’t believe was his boyfriend (queue the squealing like a 12 year old girl in a Justin Bieber concert) and felt his heart expand. All it took was a hug and a few comforting words.

All it took was the smile that he was giving him, all bright blue eyes and steady gaze.

All it took was Steve, for him to be able to breathe.
Well, Stiles surrendered to his fate with a smile of his own, *I’m screwed.*

Steve slid his hand from the top of Stiles’ head to caressing his cheek. “I’m right here for you, Stiles. All you need to do is ask for me.”

“Well, right now, all I need is you.” Stiles didn’t even register the words coming out of his mouth, but that seemed to be the right thing to say because Steve reeled him closer.

His heart was about to burst from their intimacy, beating a mile a minute until their lips met.

“NO!!!!!”

The shout echoed in the stairway as if it was broadcasted from stadium speakers, shocking them both out of their shells and away from each other.

“I knew this was bound to happen one of these days but no!” The perpetrator, a big-mouthed genius with grease stains on his work clothes came running down at them. “Not in my building you don’t.”

Stiles was ready to pop the mechanic’s brain like a fucking balloon and watch him fly around the room. First Clint, now Tony—are you kidding me? Will the world not let him have this? This delicious hunk of an American dream that he’s been desperately dreaming from the time he put up the man’s poster on his walls, with oogly-boogly eyes and mouthwatering jaw drops.

He was a very sexually frustrated teenager, and mind you, still is as a fully functional (very debatable) adult man. Stiles Stilinski has adult needs, will everyone *please* understand that and fuck out of the way so that he could get some fucks of his own.

Although the way things are going, he’s probably not going to give any fucks of his own and instead be in the receiving end of a lot of those fucks and he *can’t fucking wait for it.*

Is this maybe too obscene? No. Never. Pfft. Stiles, really? Why is he even asking himself this?

He blinked when he realized that the stairwell has been silent for a minute too long. To his surprise—which he really shouldn’t be doubting anymore—both pair of eyes were looking straight at him; Steve looking particularly fire-truck red from the neck up to his ears (who also avoided his stare after a few seconds too long) and Tony who just looks like he was in the middle of exasperated beyond all his years and looking about ready to die from the second-hand embarrassment that was painting his cheeks red.

Oh, for fuck’s sake.

“I said that all out loud didn’t I?”

Tony wanted to give the boy either the world’s biggest pity eyes or the world’s hardest slap across his head. “Yeah, yeah you did.”

“Right.” Stiles refused to acknowledge any shame—he’s already painted as a well-known shameless man, so he’s going to suck up on it. “Well, I mean, can you blame me—have you looked at him.”

Tony squinted his eyes in judgmental pity, as if trying to convey the message for the boy to shut his trap. “Yes, I have eyes, Stiles. And he’s right there.”

“You’re all lucky I have so much self-control, or else I’d be climbing him like a koala all day.”
Stiles’ trap just didn’t listen to anyone, doesn’t ever shut and loves attention; Tony should’ve known better than to expect otherwise. “And with that body, oh, I know he can carry me around like a sack of potatoes for days straight. I’d leave all my duties behind and stay stuck to him everyday if I could but then people would complain and—“

**Was that steam coming out of Steve’s ears?**

“Okay, stop, just stop. Any more and we’ll have to wipe Cap’s remnants off the wall from exploding in embarrassment.” Tony slapped a hand over Stiles’ mouth—which was a very effective way of shutting him up, which begs the question ‘how has no one tried that yet?’.

Before any of them could even say a word, another loud interruption occurred. This time in the form of electricity crackling along the walls and lightning thundering outside the windows. All three of them knew instantly what this was.

Or more importantly, who came with it.

~~~

Tony, Steve and Stiles were the first to arrive at the 12th floor of their Avenger’s quarters at the very top—which was a heck of a lot of stairs to run, Stiles felt like he’s just ran a marathon.

They barged through the locker room and headed straight to the open Quinjet station, where there were no ceilings to allow easy access and port for the jets, and there he was.

Lo and behold, what was waiting for them was no other than golden hair streaming in the winds, electricity licking the curves of his gear and smiling so brightly and innocently—like he hadn’t just disappeared for a good what? 8 months? that caused many a’ fights and frustration—Thor Odinson.

Thor looked *absolutely* thrilled to see his long missed companions. Which he wasn’t shy about showing, with a booming, “My friends! I’ve missed you so—“

“Excuse me, mister, where the *hell* have you been?!” Stiles shouted over the god’s resonant voice, effectively shutting him up. With Steve and Tony backing him up with their reprimanding faces and arms crossed, they must’ve looked like a set of parents catching their kid sneaking back in past curfew.

“You didn’t receive my message?” Thor frowned and tilted his head like the huge golden retriever he was, “I emailed you with that little metallic thing you gave me.”

Stiles blinked his eyes a couple of times, his head retreating and shaking like a confused machine—because hell, he was floored. Looking at Tony for support, the man looked just about as done with life as he was, judging by the ever-present hand he had glued to his forehead.

“Right, uh, Thor, God of Thunder, Mighty Hero of the Nine Realms, Pantene Covergirl,” Sarcasm dripped heavily on each and every word of praise. “Do you, perhaps, in wherever you’ve been these past 8 months, have access to either internet or wifi?“

Thor turned his head to face him whilst he kept on walking, “No, why would I need that?“

“Jesu—you know what, I give up.” Stiles rolled his eyes behind his lids, waving his arms in a
defeated movement. “I’ll just continue shouting updates and frantically scream your name for help to the sky from the top of the building in hopes that your magical sensitive ears will hear me across all realms.”

Tony gave him an amused glance, raising his eyebrows, his voice dripping with sarcasm. “Yeah, that totally works.”

Stiles narrowed his eyes at the genius. “It’s a lot easier and effective than teaching him the concept of internet and texting.”

Steve, being the voice of reason in this particular bunch—because that title will always be allocated to him whenever Natasha is not present in the room—, decided to ignore all forms of banter and useless conversations and dived straight into interrogation mode.

Because seriously, Thor—the innocent happy-go-lucky golden haired god he was, bless his soul—could not for the life of him get to explaining his plans or thoughts without the need of someone else prompting him to.

“Thor, where have you been all this time?” Steve frowned.

The god of thunder swung mjolnir in the air and caught it again. “An adventure, my friend. When I woke one day, this thing kept beeping and lighting up inside my cape pockets.” He pulled out a SHIELD branded circular transmitter and tracker. “Which I was shocked to find I had possession of —“

“Wait.” Stiles interrupted. “Your cape has pockets?”

Tony pinned him the most exasperated glare that had him shutting his questions back into his box.

“Right, not the time.” Smiling sheepishly at the mechanic, Stiles turned back to Thor. “Yes, this thing beeped and?”

“It showed a location and thus I felt the need to follow it.” The regal tone in his voice set the story up as an old legend of some sort, which was really interesting to listen to but they don’t really have the time for this shit. “It was very convenient, following this beeping noise—although it sounded a lot like a Yljormmun Bee’s mating call—“

“The point, please, Point Break.” Tony snapped at him.

But, Thor took it all in good stride with a smile. “Well, the beeping led me to Fury who led me on another adventure to track down this object and I’ve finally found its whereabouts and now everything’s going to be okay as soon as we go and get it.”

Wait. What?

“Hold up, Swayze, that’s, you’re missing a lot to get to the point.” Tony rewinded and closed his eyes before looking at Thor the way he would look at a 5 year old. “Fury told you to find this object?”

Thor confirmed with a nod. “Aye.”

Silence passed them for a good five seconds before the three mortal Avengers (Stiles has given up in this debate of claiming he wasn’t an Avenger, or at least in front of them) realized that the god wasn’t going to expand on his answer.
“And? What was the object?” Steve prodded.

“It’s an object of great power.” Thor claimed with pride. “Of which the name I couldn’t remember, but fear not, Fury’s on his way here with a document.”

Tony gave the most painful roll of his eyes that had Stiles wincing for the safety of his own eyeballs, but he had to share the genius’ sentiment. This took forever to pull the whole story out of the god of thunder.

“And?” Stiles nudged, yet again. “You said everything will be okay once we have this?” With a nod from Thor, and absolutely nothing else following it, Stiles sighed before continuing. “Why?”

“Oh.” Thor beamed his toothy smile at them. “This object is meant to be so powerful, Fury predicted that it could be the new base of a world-wide power grid.”

Stiles’ jaw dropped.

Tony’s did too, but his dropped with a question. “A world-wide power grid? You mean—”

“Aye, man of Iron.” Thor patted both of their shoulders—which also, ouch, someone needs to tell this god to tone it down with his monstrous strength—and confirmed their suspicions. “It’ll bring back our power.”

Chapter End Notes

cheeky mention of the title ;)

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